SCHOOL CHOICE-MAKING, MOTHERS’ INVOLVEMENT IN CHILDREN’S EDUCATION AND SOCIAL REPRODUCTION IN THE EDUCATION MARKET IN HONG KONG

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SCHOOL OF SOCIAL SCIENCES
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This study examines the mechanisms of class disadvantage in educational processes in Hong Kong by focusing on mothers’ secondary school choice-making and everyday educational involvement. My study is located within the context of local neoliberal education reforms in which parents are expected to rely on their own resources to support their children’s learning and all-round development and to exercise school choice. I have drawn upon cultural capital theory and applied to the local context in order to explore how patterns of persistent class differentials in educational outcomes despite expanded educational opportunities are produced in micro-level processes in the local school market. I have also drawn on the insights of the Western literature about how ‘ethnicity’ and gender complicate class processes, and used these to address these issues in the local Hong Kong context. To achieve this, I interviewed 34 local-born and mainland Chinese immigrant mothers, with children aged 11-15, who mostly come from working class and intermediate class backgrounds. My findings about mothers’ educational practices show that class mechanisms generate disadvantage by restricting the access of more disadvantaged mothers to the ‘right’ cultural capital as stipulated by the particular ‘rules of the game’ of the local educational ‘field’. At the same time, my study sheds light on the diversity of the structural and moral contexts in which cultural capital mobilization is embedded and the myriad ways that ‘ethnicity’ and gender interact to aggravate, mitigate, or ameliorate class disadvantage. I underline the need for local researchers to spell out and problematize the institutionalization of class privilege and disadvantage within the education system. At the same time, the study makes a novel contribution to the wider literature by offering an account of class reproduction in Hong Kong which is different in important respects to that found in many other generic accounts which take as their focus advanced ‘Western’ capitalist societies. My findings also highlight the importance of examining the contextual contingency of how cultural capital ‘works’ and so stress the indeterminacy of class processes.
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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

AAT  Academic Aptitude Test
CA   Central Allocation
CMI  Chinese as the medium of instruction
CSD  Census and Statistics Department, Hong Kong
DP   Discretionary Places
DSS  Direct Subsidy Scheme
EMI  English as the medium of instruction
HKALE Hong Kong Advanced Level Examination
HKCEE Hong Kong Certificate of Education Examination
HKDSE Hong Kong Diploma of Secondary Education
HKSAR Hong Kong Special Administrative Region
MOI  Medium of Instruction
NSS  New Senior Secondary (Curriculum)
PTAs Parent-Teacher Associations
SOCO Society for Community Organization
SSPA Secondary School Places Allocation
TSA  Territory-wide System Assessment
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CHAPTER ONE
INTRODUCTION

As in Western advanced economies, the introduction of mass education in Hong Kong has allowed more socially-disadvantaged students to go to senior secondary schools and universities. Despite this, class differentials in educational attainment have persisted. This study explores the mechanisms of class disadvantage in educational processes at the micro-level in order to enhance our understanding of macro-level patterns of stratification. To achieve this, I interviewed 34 local-born and new mainland Chinese immigrant mothers of children aged 11-15, recruited from the most disadvantaged areas in Hong Kong, to examine their routine educational involvement and secondary school choice-making. What the study has found is the resourcefulness of these mothers as they support their children’s education, but also the intransigent role of class which serves to discount the value of their practices and so helps to reproduce their disadvantage. Moreover, the study suggests that we cannot understand the underlying mechanisms of class disadvantage without also taking into account gender and ‘ethnicity’ – the ‘ethnicized’ cultural inferiority of new mainland Chinese immigrants – in the context of Hong Kong. ‘Ethnicity’ and gender interact with class and complicate the reproduction of disadvantage in a way specific to the workings of the educational system and to other local contextual factors. As a result the reproduction of class disadvantage is not straightforward and cannot be taken for granted.

In this chapter, I first describe the social and policy context of my study. I highlight how education reforms create increased expectations on parents to rely on their own resources to shape their children’s educational processes and outcomes. I then point to the dearth of research that examines the mechanisms of educational disadvantage in working-class and immigrant families in Hong Kong, and suggest how, despite critiques in the literature, Bourdieu’s cultural capital theory can be applied in a way that helps to fill this research gap. After this, I outline how I carried out my study and present a summary of the key findings of the study. Lastly, I reiterate my findings.
which suggest that persistent class disadvantage exists alongside indeterminacy in class processes in education, and discuss the implications of these findings.
I THE SOCIAL AND POLICY CONTEXT

In September 2000, the Education Commission submitted to the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region (HKSAR) Government the *Reform Proposal for the Education System in Hong Kong*. Similar to education reforms in Western developed economies, this reform was initiated at a time when the government was seeking a panacea for economic crisis. At a time when the Gini coefficient stands at a record high (0.537 in 2011)\(^1\) and when nearly 20% of the population live in poverty (as in 2006), ‘quality’ education is touted as being what local citizens need to compete in the knowledge economy and to achieve social mobility. This dovetails with government officials’ re-appropriation of the discourse of the ‘Hong Kong dream’ in calling for the public to strive, with spirit and perseverance, against the economic turmoil that befell the ex-colony in the years that followed China’s resumption of sovereignty in 1997\(^2\). These public narratives, in tandem with the education policy discourses, are couched in the terms of the neoliberal doctrine and construct a form of citizenry which emphasizes that individuals should take responsibility for their own welfare by exploiting the (educational) opportunities available (Chan AKW 2004; Choi 2005). The underlying assumption is that ‘collectivities’ such as class, alongside the ‘traditional’ institutions of family and religion, etc., no longer structure the order of life, providing its predictabilities and certainties. It is left to the individual, unfettered by social-structural constraints, to reflexively negotiate the unprecedented level of risks, alongside expanding opportunities, in producing their own biographies in today’s society (cf. sociological discourses of individualization, Beck 1992; Beck and Beck-Gernshein 2002; Giddens 1991).

As with reforms in Western education systems, education reforms in Hong Kong are geared towards enhancing educational standards to counter the mediocrity that mass education, introduced since the late 1970s, has allegedly generated (Chan AKW

\(^{1}\)Information provided by the Census and Statistics Department (CSD) reported in *Mingpao Daily*, 19-6-2012. The Gini coefficient of Hong Kong is higher when compared to most OECD members (except for Chile and Mexico).

\(^{2}\)As discussed in Chapter 4, the ‘Hong Kong Dream’ is a discourse which emerged in the late 1970s and 1980s, the heyday of the ex-colony’s economic development, which celebrates competitive individualism (see e.g. Lui and Wong 1995).
The quality of education provision is to be improved and monitored through outcome-based teaching and learning and the marketization of schooling. More elaborate assessment mechanisms are introduced in schools, which assess not only students’ academic performance but also a broad range of abilities and ‘personal qualities’ developed in out-of-classroom learning and extracurricular activities. This means a more demanding curriculum for students. Their parents are expected to draw on their own resources to support their children’s education, which is now considered a private investment for families for nurturing enterprising citizens to exploit the opportunities and manage the risks in the global economy (see e.g. Choi 2005). In addition, schools are encouraged to ‘opt out’ of the public sector for the development of a larger independent and private sector of education provision. It is believed that, if parents can exercise their choice as ‘rational’ consumers in the school market to secure ‘the best’ for their children, they can weed out substandard schools in the process (Ball 1993; Whitty and Edwards 1998).

What is sidestepped in these educational reforms is the unequal access of parents to the resources needed for exercising choice and for negotiating the demands of the reformed curriculum and assessment mechanisms. There is no doubt that, under educational expansion, more working-class students are now going to senior secondary schools and universities. In Hong Kong, 77% of the population aged 15 or above had attended secondary education by 2011 (Census and Statistics Department (CSD) 2012). According to Post (2004), the attainment rate at university level increased from 2% in 1971 to 17% in 2001, for the population aged 19-20. More working class members have achieved educational success and experienced social mobility (see e.g. Wong and Lui 1992). Class is by no means ‘dead’ or irrelevant in the distribution of advantage and disadvantage in educational processes (cf. Pahl 1989; Pakulski and Waters 1996), however. In the UK, enrollment in post-secondary and higher education remains skewed towards middle-class students (see e.g. Blandon et al. 2005 cited in Reay 2006). As for Hong Kong, Post (2004) observed that in 2001

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5As discussed in Chapter 4, free, universal and compulsory nine-year primary and junior secondary education was introduced in 1978 in Hong Kong.
children from families in the top income quarter are almost 30% more likely to have attained senior secondary schooling when compared to their counterparts from families in the bottom income quarter; the corresponding figure for university attainment is 100%. This suggests that the middle class are likely to have benefited disproportionately from educational expansion, which explains persistent class differentials in educational attainment in Hong Kong as in the West (c.f. Shavit and Blossfeld1993). These observations are hardly surprising, given that schooling is becoming more selective in terms of family resources under education reforms which demand that parents play a more pivotal role in shaping educational processes and outcomes (Brown 1990). Given that educational credentials play a more important role nowadays in shaping occupational outcomes and life-chances, social mobility patterns are likely to be differentiated along class lines in a way integral to class reproduction. This explains the persistent class gap in relative mobility chances, and why there remain real and significant barriers to long-ranged mobility for those at the bottom of the class structure in Hong Kong (Wong and Lui 1992; Lui 2009; cf. Erikson and Goldthorpe 1992).
II APPLYING CULTURAL CAPITAL THEORY TO THE LOCAL CONTEXT

Persistent educational inequalities cannot be explained solely at the level of the individual as Beck (1992) suggests. What we need to know more about are the mechanisms by which the middle class are able to capitalize upon the educational opportunities available and so can out-compete their less advantaged counterparts (see e.g. Halsey et al. 1980). In Hong Kong, research in educational inequalities is dominated by quantitative analyses that focus on examining specific patterns of correlations between indices of ‘family background’ (e.g. parents’ educational level) and variables of educational outcomes (e.g. students’ performance in Mathematics) (see Tse 1998 for a critical review). Family educational practices are not recognized as cohering around and being differentiated by class (see Lareau 2003). Since the studies of Mitchell (1972) and Salaff (1981), there has been a dearth of research examining the educational practices and mobility strategies of the working class, and it is seldom questioned why working class families continue to lose out educationally despite their high aspirations (e.g. Choi 1995). The same can be said about the families of new immigrants from mainland China\(^4\). According to Post (2004), by 2001, immigrant students arriving in Hong Kong in or after 1991 have only one-third and one-fourth as many chances as their native counterparts to have attained senior secondary and university education. Nonetheless, little is known about the processes underlying their disadvantage, and about how their disadvantage is implicated in working-class practices in schooling, given the over-representation of mainland immigrants at the bottom of the social structure (Chiu and Lui 2004; Chiu et al. 2005). The taken-for-grantedness of class disadvantage in the research literature on Hong Kong is particularly disquieting when we consider the substantial input of mothers’ labour into their children’s education (e.g. Choi 1995). More generally, there has been scant interest in how mothers’ experiences shape the mobilization of resources and factor in class processes in education (see Smith 1998; Stambach and David 2005). All this

\(^4\)There has been sustained entry of mainland Chinese immigrants into the territory since the 1950s. However, the increased economic and cultural exchanges between Hong Kong and China since the 1980s, and more so after 1997, has led to a surge in the number of intermarriages and the influx of mainland wives and children. See Chapter 4 for details.
suggests the need to examine the mechanisms of how class ‘works’, in interaction with
gender and the disadvantage associated with one’s immigrant status as addressed in
terms of ‘ethnicity’ (as I discuss further below), in generating disadvantage in
schooling in Hong Kong.

In Chapter 2, I discuss why it is productive to examine class disadvantage in
educational processes in Hong Kong from the perspective of cultural capital theory
(Bourdieu 1986; Bourdieu and Passeron 1990[77]) despite critiques of the theory in
the literature.\textsuperscript{5} Schooling can be understood as a ‘field’ that implicitly values and
explicitly rewards particular forms of cultural capital (Bourdieu 1973, 1984). In
particular, this thesis draws on Bourdieu to examine the context of the lack of ‘fit’
between the cultural capital of the socially-disadvantaged and that demanded by the
local educational system, and how this helps explain the mechanisms of class
disadvantage. The Western literature documents the advantaged access of the middle
class to the ‘right’ forms of cultural capital, which can be converted from their
holdings of economic and social capital. Thus, they can comply with the institutional
standards of the ‘field’ (cf. Lareau 1989) in terms of their proactive educational
involvement (e.g. as in ‘concerted cultivation’ (Lareau 2003)) and their ‘prudential’
choice-making in the school market (e.g. Ball 2003). These class dispositions and
assets in turn facilitate their children’s entry into privileged ‘circuits of schooling’
(Ball et al. 1995) where ‘quality’ education is provided. In contrast, the working class
is disadvantaged by their lack of access to ‘middle class’ cultural capital. The
mechanisms of disadvantage are more complicated than working class ‘lack’ or deficit,
however. Firstly, the literature highlights how there is a lack of symbolic recognition
of the meanings embedded in the racialized and gendered contexts of working-class
families in the ‘field’, and how this de-legitimates their cultural capital (see Bowe et al.
1994). This suggests the need to take into account how ‘ethnicity’ is intertwined with
class in generating disadvantage (see Byrne 2009) via mothers’ gendered educational

\textsuperscript{5}Critiques primarily concern Bourdieu’s overly-determinist model of social life and the lack of agency ascribed to
the working class. There is also a paucity of empirical evidence substantiating the theory. But following Lareau and
Weininger’s (2004) analysis, I discuss in detail in Chapter 2 and demonstrate in the empirical chapters how, when
the focus is on the interaction between parental practices and the institutional context (the educational ‘field’), the
theory proves productive for illuminating class processes in education despite its limitations.
labour (e.g. Griffith and Smith 1987; Reay 1998). This is also considering empirical evidence of high educational aspirations of immigrant groups, in particular those of Asian origin, when compared to the natives in Western contexts (e.g. Sue and Okazaki 1990). It is therefore essential for this study to consider how immigrants’ aspirations are implicated in working-class practices and strategies in education. Secondly, parents – read mothers - are held morally responsible for ‘getting it right’ in today’s school market (e.g. David et al 1993). Disadvantaged mothers’ struggles to provide the ‘right’ cultural capital for their children means they are vulnerable to being stigmatized as (morally) ‘inadequate’ (e.g. Gillies 2005; Cooper 2007). This suggests the need to address the felt injuries of these mothers as they play the educational ‘game’, in order to examine the way their affective experience shapes class and ethnic disadvantage (cf. Skeggs 2004). All this also suggests contingency in the way cultural capital is mobilized, so that educational outcomes cannot be understood as straightforwardly determined by class (Lareau 2003). These insights have however yet to be considered in local studies which examine class disadvantage from the perspective of cultural capital theory. Also, in some studies the understanding of cultural capital is de-contextualized from the educational field (e.g. Chan SW 1998; Lam KY 2006), and the arbitrary power of class in the field is glossed over (see e.g. Ho ESC 2006a). This is particularly problematic when considering that the ‘rules of the game’ of the local education system is different from that of its Western counterparts. This suggests that the mechanisms of class disadvantage in Hong Kong cannot simply be assumed to be the same as that documented in the generic accounts in the Western literature.

In Chapter 4, I discuss the particular institutional standards of the local educational field in Hong Kong. Hong Kong is similar to its Western counterparts in terms of coverage of free education, and I point out there are fewer selection points in the local

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6One exception is Wong YL’s study (2010), although her focus is on the middle class. Also, she does not consider the issue of ‘ethnicity’, and she is interested in how the gender of children rather than that of the parents shape cultural capital mobilization.

7This is evident in how cultural capital is pre-defined, for example, as high-brow cultural participation (as in Bourdieu’s study in France (1984)). See Chapter 2.

8This is in terms of the abolition of two standardized benchmarking examinations at the primary-secondary and the post-16 transition respectively. See Chapter 4.
academic structure compared to the English system. However, the local school market is characterized by a more complex and opaque symbolic order. Schools are hierarchized based on their ‘banding’, which indicates the ability level of their student intake, and their medium of instruction. ‘Band 1’ and EMI (English-as-the-medium-of-instruction) schools are the top of their respective but overlapping hierarchies, but information about schools’ banding is not publicly circulated. At the same time, an increasing number of public band 1 EMI schools are switching into fee-charging and more selective ‘DSS’ schools. The school market is also characterized by a convoluted secondary school places allocation system which involves multiple points of decision-making as parents undergo the choice process. These suggest that in Hong Kong there are contextual particularities to the ‘right’ cultural capital demanded of parents by the local ‘field’, and to the way class generates disadvantage via cultural capital in educational processes, which are different to that documented in the existing literature.

The distinctive features of the local institutional context aside, I also highlight the local contextual factors that shape cultural capital mobilization in schooling. First, in Hong Kong there is a society-wide celebration of the ethos of competitive individualism in which the instrumental value of education is inscribed. The value of education as a ‘capital’ is also buttressed in a socio-historical context in which the local population is beset with a sense of insecurity over the economic and political fate of the ex-colony before and after the handover in 1997. This helps explain the rich stock of cultural capital in local working-class families in terms of their high educational aspirations. In addition, mothers’ role in mobilizing the aforesaid aspirations is lauded as morally virtuous under the ethos of Chinese familism (see e.g. Chao 1994). Moreover, there have been an increasing number of mainland immigrant mothers arriving in Hong Kong after the 1990s for family reunion purposes. They lack the cultural capital of local-born mothers in the educational field, but their

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9 These quasi-private schools are introduced under the ‘Direct Subsidy Scheme’. They have increased in numbers since 2000. See Chapter 4.
10 As discussed in Chapter 4, the rise in the number of female mainland immigrants has to do with the increase in the number of cross-border marriages and changes in the immigration policy.
Migration is in part geared towards local educational (hence social mobility) opportunities; hence their strong drive to push for children’s schooling success. Yet, in a context where local/(mainland) immigrant differences are made visible as a dominant and normative local Hong Kong identity is articulated against the mainland ‘Other’ (cf. Chan E 2000; Lo 2007), immigrant mothers can be considered as an ‘ethnicized’ group who are deemed culturally inferior. This is more so because of their economic ‘unproductivity’ as they commit to their mothering role and become detached from (full-time) employment (cf. Wong WL 2004). Such ‘ethnicization’ is interlocked with their disadvantaged position in the economic structure, and should be understood as what shapes their access to capitals and respectability in the educational ‘field’ in ways that can potentially aggravate or ameliorate their class disadvantage. Lastly, the way mothers’ affective experiences shapes their educational practices are likely to be different from that of their Western counterparts, because of the particular normative ideals and moral commitments they are negotiating in the local context. Taken together, it is imperative to situate the specificity of the mechanisms of class disadvantage in local educational processes.

As I discuss in Chapter 3, I recruited local-born and new immigrant mothers with children aged 11-15 as informants for my study. They were accessed through school PTAs and community organizations in the most disadvantaged areas in Hong Kong. Qualitative, semi-structured interviews were conducted to allow mothers to produce narratives of their experience of choice-making and everyday educational involvement in their own terms. Their narratives facilitated my exploration of the micro-level interactions between them and the educational ‘field’. In particular, I could access the unthinking and tacit ‘practical knowledge’ (cf. Bourdieu 1984) they apply to the field in relation to how they make sense of their educational practices in their own particular social milieu. I could also capture their ambivalence, anxieties and how they judged themselves in relation to their role as (disadvantaged) mothers. This is critical

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11 It should be noted that it is controversial to address local-immigrant relations in ‘ethnic’ terms, considering their shared Han identity. I elaborate why immigrant mothers are addressed in ‘ethnic’ terms in this study in Chapter 4.
12 I included both married and single mothers in my study. The implications of my sample composition are discussed in Chapter 3.
for exploring how ‘ethnicity’ and gender shape the way cultural capital is (or is not) mobilized in the field, and to disentangle how class disadvantages can be generated, magnified, attenuated, or overcome under diverse circumstances. Based on the themes and patterns I identified in my thematic data analysis, I differentiate the mothers into two groups. Mothers either belong to the ‘(relatively) more advantaged’ or to the ‘(relatively) less advantaged’ group, depending on the extent of ‘fit’ between their cultural capital and that expected and valued by the education system.
III KEY EMPIRICAL FINDINGS

In Chapter 5, I explore mothers’ choice-making in the school market. New immigrant mothers are positioned in the ‘field’ at a distinct disadvantage in their access to the ‘right’ cultural capital. This pertains to their unfamiliarity with the ‘game’, which helps explain their sense of discomfort with the vagueness of the information available about the ‘banding’ of their children and of the schools in the market. But all mothers across the local/immigrant division can access ‘insider’ knowledge of school reputations and of how they can make choices strategically. Such cultural capital is generated in social networks at school, in community organizations, and in the neighbourhood as they go about their everyday mothering work (e.g. when taking children to school or doing the groceries). This would not have been possible had it been the fathers who took charge of choice. This exemplifies how gender shapes cultural capital mobilization in a way that can ameliorate the disadvantage associated with one’s position as an immigrant in the school market. Market information and knowledge of choice strategies are not always mobilized as cultural capital in a way geared towards what the market defines as ‘the best’ choices, i.e. top-ability band 1 and EMI schools, however. This is because the less-advantaged mothers, and in particular immigrant mothers, often lack the cultural capital necessary to help their children negotiate the written tests or interviews conducted in English in schools’ selection processes. They also lack the economic capital needed for the tuition fees and extracurricular activities expenses charged by those former public elite schools that have been privatized. Their expressed aversion to choices of ‘distinction’ (cf. Ball et al. 2002) exemplifies how their internalization of the objective structures of inequality in the field is implemented as ‘practical knowledge’ in choice (Bourdieu 1984).

What should be noted, however, is that this aversion to choices of ‘distinction’ is expressed by some of the more-advantaged mothers too. This can be attributed to mothers’ anxieties about the potential shame - in relation to their identity as mothers - that may be invited by a failure to get it ‘right’ in school choice. This attests to the
gendered nature of the extra hurdles that disadvantaged mothers have to negotiate in choice-making. Nonetheless, mothers’ choice-making cannot be dismissed as an act of resignation to the inevitable. Choices have to be worked at as mothers juggle risks and reflect on their decisions throughout the choice process. The convoluted nature of the choice process also means that there is some room for mothers to manoeuvre. This helps explain how a minority of less-advantaged mothers can make ambitious choices and have these risks backed up at later points of the choice process. Such ‘risky’ decisions depend on their ability to draw upon social capital accrued in friendships networks or in relationship with teachers for support for choices to which they do not feel entitled. Some also have sufficient economic capital for hiring tutors or enrolling their children in courses in preparation for schools’ selection processes. It must also be noted that a minority of the more-advantaged local intermediate class mothers and immigrant mothers from middle class backgrounds do sometimes make ‘middle-class choices’. Their sense of entitlement to choice is rooted in their relatively privileged educational backgrounds or in their rich stock of economic capital which can be mobilized to ameliorate the disadvantage associated with their class background and/or immigrant status. Overall, the findings reaffirm the influence of class in generating disadvantage in choice. Nonetheless, gender shapes how choice is negotiated. In the cases of less-advantaged immigrant mothers, the sense of disentitlement and the ambitious choice-making of a few should also be understood in the context of their migration and their resistance against their ‘ethnicized’ cultural inferiority. This becomes more obvious in my discussion in Chapter 7. Taken together, I show that the generation of class disadvantage in choice-making is not seamless and cannot be taken as automatic.

In Chapter 6, I examine mothers’ routine educational involvement. All mothers aspire to their children’s educational success, but for the more-disadvantaged local and immigrant mothers these aspirations cannot always be mobilized because of their disadvantaged access to the ‘right’ cultural capital. They cannot support their children’s English learning effectively. Also, they often either lack the economic capital, or consider it too risky to invest in sustained and accredited extracurricular
activities (e.g. piano learning) for their children (cf. Goldthorpe 1996). The activities in community organizations that they arrange for their children in support of their education are also less likely to be assessed and rewarded in schools and recognized by the more selective schools in choice mechanisms. As for new immigrant mothers across class backgrounds, their educational experience attained in China are often deemed the ‘wrong’ kind of cultural capital that cannot be converted in the local educational field. Problems with children English learning aside, they have trouble in adapting to the use of traditional Chinese characters in written Chinese in Hong Kong and the pedagogical styles adopted in schools. It should also be noted that even the ‘right’ cultural capital cannot be effectively mobilized if tension and conflicts with children are not properly managed in mothers’ educational involvement (cf. Lareau 1989). The more-advantaged local intermediate class mothers and new immigrant mothers from middle-class backgrounds can draw upon their educational or upbringing experiences to give them confidence in encouraging their children’s ‘self-directed’ learning. They can also bank on their economic capital to arrange tuition for their children. In contrast, the majority of the less-advantaged mothers rely on intensive homework supervision and the regulation of routine to ensure their children work hard in their studies. In the process they also need to negotiate the self-perceived inferiority of their cultural capital and a more palpable sense of shame and bitterness about their perceived inadequacy as mothers when compared to the more-advantaged mothers. This is intertwined with their ‘ethnicized’ cultural inferiority in the wider society in the case of the less-advantaged immigrant mothers. Less-advantaged mothers are therefore more liable to frustrations and conflicts with their children. This is an extra hurdle they experience in mobilizing their aspirations for their children. For this reason a minority of the more-disadvantaged mothers choose to distance themselves from educational work in defense against the shame that the exposure of their educational inadequacy may invite (cf. Walkerdine et al. 2001). Therefore gender conditions mothers’ affective experiences in educational involvement in a way that can reproduce class disadvantages. Nonetheless, mothers’ important role in accessing cultural capital in terms of information about (more economic options of) tuition or

\[1^3\] Simplified Chinese characters are adopted in written Chinese in China.
extracurricular activities in their social networks should be recognized. Overall, the findings show the need to situate processes of cultural capital mobilization in the educational field in concern. I also show the myriad ways gender interacts with immigrants’ educational disadvantage, which is conflated with the ‘ethnicized’ cultural inferiority ascribed to immigrant mothers in the local context, in disrupting the rigid relationship between cultural capital and class as is widely documented in the literature. Class disadvantage cannot be taken for granted.

In Chapter 7, I examine how class processes in education can be understood as embedded in the gendered lived social realities of mothers (David 1997). Firstly, I show that the availability of many mothers’ educational labour is only made possible by their disadvantage in the labour market. This is interlocked with cultural ideologies that valorize and moralize their responsibility as mothers to support their children’s education. Less-advantaged mothers have less freedom to choose whether to work or not. They are therefore more disadvantaged in their ability to help their children with their educational labour. But what emerges strongly from the narratives of mothers across all class backgrounds is the dilemma of negotiating competing discourses of motherhood and citizenship. Mothers’ commitment to unpaid educational labour diminishes the value they can accrue to their personhood through full-time paid work (cf. Skeggs 2004), whereas paid employment puts them at risk of being stigmatized as inadequate mothers. Mothers recognize both the shame and the injustice of their invidious position. This is especially true when considering what is at stake for less-advantaged mothers in committing themselves to their children’s education. Not only are they in greater need to work for an income, paid employment is also necessary for them to counter the ‘inferiorization’ of their class, immigrant status (which is ‘ethnicized’) and gender (especially when they are single mothers). An appreciation of the double-bind that mothers are negotiating is fundamental to our understanding of the emotionally-charged character of their educational involvement and how ‘affect’ can shape their cultural capital mobilization disadvantageously. How mothers negotiate this double-bind also hinges upon their negotiation of the division of educational labour with their husbands, a process which not only reproduces the
ideologies of motherhood but also the devaluation of unpaid mothering work. This also explains the inactivation of husbands’ cultural capital, which can be detrimental to less-advantaged children given that their mothers are more likely to lack the ‘right’ cultural capital for support of their children’s education. Moreover, mothers’ negotiation of their educational role is shaped by their networking activities. Gender shapes educational practices by naturalizing networking activities as everyday mothering work and facilitating the generation of cultural capital. But networking is not only about seeking educational advantage but also about the active monitoring and evaluation of the self and others (cf. Sayer 2002) in relation to one’s adequacy and ‘worthiness’ as a mother. This is evident in the normative ideals of motherhood that are propagated in the arenas where mothers form networks (e.g. schools and community organizations) and in the way mothers subject themselves to scrutiny against these ideals (cf. Walkerdine and Lucey 1989). This is an important source of shame and guilt in mothers’ engagement in education, which as shown in earlier chapters can hold back the cultural capital mobilization of more disadvantaged mothers. But the desire for respectability is precisely what underlies mothers’ involvement in networks, and in particular volunteering activities at school and in the community through which they can access cultural capital and accrue value for themselves independent of their children’s needs (cf. Skeggs 1997; Chan AKW 2012).

Overall, my findings shed light on the diversity of structural and moral contexts that condition the contingency in the way mothers mobilize cultural capital (cf. David et al. 1997; Duncan 2005). In particular, we must take into account mothers’ agency in their creation of value out of devalued educational labour in gendered, classed and ‘ethnicized’ contexts in order to more fully understand the generation of cultural capital, especially in disadvantaged families.
CONCLUSION

This is a study of secondary school-choice making and everyday educational involvement of socially-disadvantaged mothers in Hong Kong. My focus is on class disadvantages in educational processes, which have implications for the educational outcomes, mobility trajectories and life-chances of disadvantaged children. I show that intermediate and working class mothers in Hong Kong are committed to supporting their children’s education, but class shapes the extent to which the cultural capital they are able to mobilize ‘fits’ with what is valued by the local educational system. At the same time, I shed light on the way gender, ‘ethnicity’ – given the ‘ethniciization’ of mainland immigrant mothers for their ‘inferior’ culture vis-à-vis the locals, and what this implies for their access to capitals and respectability - interacts with class. Whereas class disadvantage is generated, the alignment between class and cultural capital, an alignment which is sometimes rather too neatly described in the literature, is disrupted. Class disadvantage cannot be taken for granted. While my findings are based upon a non-representative sample of a fraction of the socially-disadvantaged, the situatedness of particular manifestation of class inequalities can be specified in time and space (Devine 2004). I highlight the contextual factors that cut across class divisions and the way they can make a key difference in educational practices in Hong Kong (see Irwin 2009). We need to examine the indeterminacy of class processes at the micro-level, as this is vital for enhancing our understanding of macro-level patterns of persistent class differentials in education.

My study shows how cultural capital theory, despite its limitations, can be applied productively to illuminate the inequalities in the institutionalized class power in the educational field. Without interrogating the neoliberal principles of efficiency and productivity that underpins education reforms, we cannot push for a social justice agenda in education. Given that education is a positional good (Hirsch 1976), compensatory measures to support educational resources in disadvantaged families is not going to redress inequalities and inequity in education. The social mobility of enterprising citizens as envisioned in education reforms can only be enjoyed by the
advantaged groups. To address class as a central issue in education may be difficult in today’s political climate, but we can and must begin with research which focuses on and empathizes with the practices and experiences of the disadvantaged – in particular mothers. Recognition of the enabling rather than limiting character of their values and meanings can go a long way to challenging and eliminating the stereotypes of their deficiencies. Only by doing so can we break the silence on the ‘cliché’ of class inequalities in education and better understand both the educational disadvantage and success stories of such groups.
CHAPTER TWO
LITERATURE REVIEW

INTRODUCTION

This study examines the mechanisms of class disadvantage in educational processes in Hong Kong by focusing on mothers’ secondary school choice-making and routine educational involvement. My inquiry is located in the context of local education reforms in which parents are expected to rely on their own resources to proactively support children’s education and to exercise choice as ‘rational’ consumers in an increasingly privatized school market in order to secure ‘the best’ for their children (e.g. Whitty and Edwards 1998; Choi 2005). I am interested in exploring how unequal access to the parental resources needed for negotiating children’s schooling under education reforms helps to explain persistent class differentials in educational outcomes in Hong Kong (Post 2004; cf. Brown 1990; Smith 1998). This chapter examines the local literature on Hong Kong education and highlights its research lacuna in relation to the examination of class disadvantage in education. I also examine the issues raised in the Western literature and explore their relevance for studying class advantage in the local context. Lastly, I spell out the contributions of this study in the light of the issues highlighted in this literature review.

I first explore the literature on class disadvantage in education in Hong Kong. Existing studies portray a relatively rigid picture of class reproduction, with class disadvantage primarily explained in terms of the lack of resources or capitals (cf. Bourdieu 1986) of the working class. Despite the increasing presence of mainland Chinese immigrant students in local schooling, and research evidence of the substantial input of mothers’ labour into children’s education, there has been limited research considering how gender and ‘ethnicity’, which addresses the ‘ethnicized’ position of immigrant mothers in the wider society, factor into class processes in education. Moreover, class disadvantage tends to be taken for granted rather than understood as being generated in ways specific to the distinctive features of the local education system. I then turn to
explore how the Western literature can inform this study and help to fill the lacuna in the local Hong Kong literature. I first introduce Bourdieu’s cultural capital theory (Bourdieu 1986, 1973; Bourdieu and Passeron 1990[77]), which highlights the institutionalization of class privilege in education: The uneven distribution of cultural capital in the educational ‘field’, in which only the dominant group in the society can mobilize their cultural resources as cultural capital, explains class disparities in educational achievement. Critics challenge the theory for its over-determinism and the dearth of substantiating empirical evidence (e.g. Kingston 2001; Goldthorpe 2007). Despite this, following Lareau and Weininger’s (2004) analysis, I argue how, when focusing on the interaction between parental practices and the educational field, the theory proves productive for illuminating how resources become activated into cultural capital to generate advantage in a particular institutional context (cf. Lareau 1989). This is especially when considering the specificities of the research context of this study, which differs in important respects from that in Western education systems as documented in the literature. After reviewing the critical perspectives of cultural capital in the literature, I look at its application in existing research and their findings on school-choice making and parental educational involvement. Cultural capital theory is found to help explain why the middle class can more easily comply with institutional standards (cf. Lareau 1989) of parents’ choice-making and educational involvement, and why the working class, with their relative lack of the ‘right’ cultural capital, are disadvantaged. But at the same time, this literature emphasizes that the reproduction of class disadvantage is not automatic, as we need to be attuned to how the institutional context in concern shapes how cultural capital ‘works’ (Devine 2004; Yamamoto and Brinton 2010). This is, as aforementioned, highly relevant to the present study. The education system in Hong Kong differs from its Western counterparts in terms of the symbolic value of English language (cf. Bourdieu 1991), its symbolic order of ‘banding’ (which indicates the ability level of student intake of secondary schools), and the convoluted nature of choice mechanisms. Also, the Western literature highlights the need to take into account how ethnicity is intertwined with class in generating disadvantage (Byrne 2009) via mothers’ gendered educational labour (e.g. Griffith and Smith 1987). In relation to this is the literature that evidence
high educational aspirations of immigrant groups when compared to the natives in Western contexts (Sue and Okazaki 1990; Hao and Bonstead-Bruns 1998; Tseng et al. 2007). In understanding class processes in education, how immigrant aspirations complicate working class practices and strategies must be taken into account. Moreover, the Western literature sheds light on the way mothers’ affective experiences in the ‘field’ impinge upon cultural capital mobilization and class processes in indeterminate ways in gendered and ‘ethnicized’ contexts (Reay 1998; Skeggs 2004). This again is a theme highly relevant to this study. This is because of the strong socio-cultural construction of mothers’ moral role in educational involvement in Hong Kong (e.g. Chao 1994). This is also considering how disadvantaged mainland immigrant families are driven to seek social advancement in Hong Kong through children’s educational success (cf. So 2003); this, for immigrant mothers, is what allows them access to respectability (cf. Skeggs 1997) to counter the construction of their cultural inferiority in an ‘ethnicized’ context (cf. Pun and Wu 2004).

I conclude this chapter by indicating how this study contributes to the literature. By examining cultural capital mobilization as embedded in diverse classed, gendered, and ‘ethnicized’ contexts, this study can shed light on the diversity of meanings and practices within and across class groups. At the same time, the study shows how class processes play out in ways specific to the local institutional context. In this way, it can offer a more nuanced account of class reproduction processes, showing the endurance but at the same time the indeterminacy of class in generating disadvantage in education.
I UNDERSTANDING CLASS DISADVANTAGE IN EDUCATION IN HONG KONG

As in Western advanced economies, the introduction of mass education in Hong Kong since the late 1970s has allowed more socially-disadvantaged students to go to senior secondary schools and universities. Despite this, class differentials in educational attainment have persisted. According to Post (2004), in 2001 children from families in the top income quarter are almost 30% more likely to have attained senior secondary schooling when compared to their counterparts from families in the bottom income quarter; the corresponding figure for university attainment is 100%. Also, there has been persistent influence of mothers’ education on students’ senior secondary attainment between 1991 and 2001, whereas the same can be said of the influence of family income on students’ postsecondary attainment. Regarding university attainment, the gap between families in the top income quarter and those in the three lower income quarters has also widened substantially. All these suggest that the more-privileged classes have benefited disproportionately from educational expansion. These findings are not surprising when considering the local context of education reforms since the 1990s. As in Western education systems, Hong Kong parents are now expected to support the ‘concerted cultivation’ of their children in academic learning and extracurricular activities participation (see Choi 2005; cf. Lareau 2003). They are also expected to exercise choice as ‘rational’ consumers to secure ‘the best’ for their children in the school market (Ball 1993; Whitty and Edwards 1998). That parents have unequal access to the resources needed for shaping their children’s educational processes and outcomes has however been sidestepped in education policy-making. This suggests that class inequalities in education are likely to intensify (e.g. Tsang 2002; cf. Smith 1998). It is against this background that this study is formulated and carried out.

My focus on everyday educational involvement and secondary school choice-making in my examination of class disadvantage is grounded upon my observations of the class implications of reforms of curriculum and choice mechanisms in the local
context. These pertain to the emphasis on ‘whole-person development’, which is more demanding of the routine input of parental resources into children’s education (e.g. Tse 2004). These also relate to the increasing privatization of public schools via the Direct Subsidy Scheme (DSS)\(^\text{14}\), which restricts the access of the disadvantaged to ‘privileged circuits of schooling’ (e.g. Tsang 1998; cf. Ball et al. 1995). As in Western school markets, the privatization of local schooling is expected to encourage school segregation and further polarization of school resources and performance that deepens inequalities (Tse 2008; cf. Bourdon 1974; Ball 2003; van Zanten 2003; Denessen et al. 2005).

Nonetheless, since the study of Salaff (1981), there has been relatively limited research in Hong Kong that examines the mechanisms of class disadvantage. The literature on educational inequalities is dominated by quantitative analyses that examine specific patterns of educational differences, such as the correlation between the material or educational backgrounds of the family and children’s school achievement (e.g. Mok 1987; Yum 1996; see Tse (1998) for a critical review). This literature does not address differences and inequalities in terms of how they cohere into patterns recognizable as social class (Lareau 2003 p236). There has been an emerging interest among local researchers in examining class inequalities in education by employing the concepts of social and cultural capital. Nonetheless, both the quantitative (e.g. Chan SW 1998) and qualitative studies (e.g. Leung YL 1998; Hui et al. 2005) in this genre explain class disadvantage in terms of the ‘lack’ of resources or capitals of the working class, in such a way that the working class can be read as inferior (see e.g. Ho ESC 2006a). Also, it is not often questioned why the working class continue to lose out educationally despite their aspirations and the value they attach to the provision of parental educational support (e.g. Mitchell 1972; Choi 1995; Wong and Ng 1997; Lee MK 2001). The exception is Yu’s study (1994), which highlights the way working class cultural capital is de-legitimated by the specific standards of English language learning stipulated in the educational system (as I will

\(^{14}\)This was introduced to encourage public schools to ‘opt out’ and run as (quasi-)private schools with a government subsidy calculated on a per-capita basis. See Chapter 4.
revisit later). It should also be noted that Yu’s study, similar to the study of Wong YL (2007, 2009) on middle-class educational involvement and choice strategies, remain the only studies that examine how class disadvantage is generated via cultural capital in a way specific to the distinctive features of the educational system. Nonetheless, both studies were conducted before 2000 and did not address the class implications of education reforms and the privatization of schooling. Unlike the Western literature, the literature on reformed choice processes and class reproduction in Hong Kong remains underdeveloped. All this suggests the need to locate inquiries into class disadvantage in the specificity of the local educational context (see Lui 2010). This is especially when considering the empirical evidence of high educational aspirations of immigrant groups in Western contexts (e.g. Hao and Bonstead-Bruns 1998; Tseng et al. 2007; Raleigh and Kao 2010), and the increasing presence of mainland Chinese immigrant students in local schooling (see Chapter 4). These students are proportionately more-disadvantaged when compared to native Hong Kong students (Pong and Tsang 2010), but immigrant students’ strong drive for academic achievement has been noted in the literature (e.g. Leung BKP 2002). In the light of this, immigrants’ aspirations should be understood as implicated in the educational practices and choice strategies of socially-disadvantaged groups. In this sense, the potential for disadvantaged families to generate cultural capital that helps ameliorate their educational disadvantage should not be discounted. Notwithstanding this, Post (2004) observed that in 2001 mainland immigrant students arriving in or after 1991 have only one-third and one-fourth as many chances as their native counterparts in senior secondary and university attainment. Tang’s (2002) study highlights the importance of social capital to the assimilation of disadvantaged immigrant students into local schooling, whereas Leung YL’s (1998) study demonstrates the profound impact of class in shaping cultural capital mobilization in immigrant families. These findings aside, little remains known about the class processes underlying immigrant students’ disadvantage in educational attainment. Also, despite the research evidence of the substantial input of mothers’

15 But see the survey study of NFHKPA (2007) and the qualitative study of Hui et al. (2005), which shed light on class differences in the negotiation of the reformed choice mechanisms.
16 According to Pong and Tsang’s (2010) study of junior secondary students between 1999 and 2000, the socioeconomic status (SES) of Chinese immigrant students is approximately 45% of a standard deviation below that of native students.
labour into children’s education (e.g. Choi 1995), the literature does not consider the relevance of mothers’ educational involvement and their perspectives and experiences to class processes in education (see Smith 1998; Stambach and David 2005).

To fill the lacuna in the local literature, this study aims to explore micro-level processes of class disadvantage. This is by considering how education reforms, in particular the reformed choice mechanisms, as well as gender and ‘ethnicity’, in terms of the ‘ethnicized’ cultural inferiority ascribed to mainland immigrant mothers, shape cultural capital mobilization. It should be noted that cultural capital theory (Bourdieu 1973; Bourdieu and Passeron 1990[77]) is not the only analytical framework that we can employ in understanding class differentials in education. According to Goldthorpe (1996), the relative balance of costs and benefits associated with the same educational investment varies depending on one’s position in the class structure, and such costs have remained unchanged despite educational expansion. For such theorists, it is the rational choice made by families as they adapt to opportunities and constraints that explains their different educational choices made. This in turn explains class-differentiated educational trajectories and outcomes. Nonetheless, Goldthorpe’s account has been criticized for different reasons. Firstly, his focus on economic resources and de-emphasis on its conversion into cultural capital is questioned in Devine’s (2004) study (as I will revisit later). Secondly, his analysis is de-contextualized from time and space. Devine demonstrates that changes in the wider economic and political atmosphere and the particular institutional setup of the educational system in concern (e.g. the public/ private divide of schooling) can shape the ways capitals are mobilized. Others argue that educational choice-making cannot be understood as a rational calculation; rather, it can be intuitive, is fraught with ambivalence and emotions, and should be understood as embedded in racialized and gendered contexts (e.g. Bowe et al. 1994; Ball and Vincent 1998)\(^{17}\). As opposed to Goldthorpe, Bourdieu emphasizes the power of culture, in terms of everyday practices and institutional (e.g. educational) processes, in generating far-reaching inequality (Devine et al. 2005; Crompton 2008). In the next section, therefore, I discuss cultural

\(^{17}\)See also Hatcher (1998) for a critique of Goldthorpe’s Rational Action Theory.
capital theory and its relevance and application to my study.
II CULTURAL CAPITAL THEORY

From Bourdieu’s perspective, the education system can be understood as a stratified social space, the ‘field’. Power is distributed multi-dimensionally in the form of different forms of capital in the field, and this defines individuals’ social positions in the field. Economic capital pertains to economic resources, such as cash and assets. Cultural capital pertains to a repertoire of dispositions such as linguistic competencies, values, lifestyles, etc. In its embodied state, cultural capital is incorporated into the mind and body. It is expressed in, for example, how parents compose themselves, mobilize resources, and interact with other individuals in the school market. In its institutionalized state, cultural capital exists in institutionalized forms of educational credentials. In its objectified state, it exists as cultural goods, such as the musical instruments children play in extracurricular activities. Social capital are the resources generated through social networks and relationships, for example mothers’ networks formed in the community or on the school floor (Bourdieu 1986). Capital can be mobilized to maintain or improve one’s position in the field. When these capitals are mobilized and generate a profit (e.g. a place in an elite school) in the field, and when the profit is misperceived as earned courtesy of individual and personal qualities, such as talent and effort, they function as symbolic capital (see Bourdieu 1991 p238 cited in Weininger 2005).

Cultural capital is unevenly distributed in the educational field. According to Bourdieu (1973), it is the culture of the dominant group in control of the economic, social and political resources in the society that is embodied in and rewarded by schools. Only the dominant group’s cultural capital can be mobilized as an efficacious resource in the education system. In this sense, unequal educational achievement of children of different class backgrounds can be explained by their unequal access to the ‘right’ cultural capital in the educational field (Bourdieu 1986:243). A core aspect of Bourdieu’s analysis is the fungibility of capitals. Different forms of capital can be converted into one another in varying degrees (Bourdieu 1984). Also, cultural capital cannot be mobilized in isolation from other forms of capital in generating advantage.
In this sense, working-class disadvantage can be understood as this lack of the ‘right’ cultural capital as well as of economic and social capital that can be converted into such cultural capital in the educational field. As for the middle class, they have the ‘right’ cultural capital to generate educational profits to create ‘distinction’, and to differentiate themselves and maintain their social distance from other groups.

Parents’ position in the educational field corresponds to the particular conditions within which their habitus is formed. The habitus can be understood as the internalization and ‘embodiment’ of the objective social structures of the (unequal) distribution of capitals, and is implemented as practical knowledge (Bourdieu 1984). This is evident in the sense of entitlement to choices of ‘distinction’ (e.g. an elite school) of the middle class, a ‘feel for the game’ that is rooted in their advantaged access to the ‘right’ cultural capital in the school market. In contrast, it feels instinctual for the working class to avoid choosing elite schools. Underlying such ‘instinct’ is a tacit acceptance of inferior cultural capital under the illusion of meritocracy (see Swartz 1997 p125) when the advantaged conditions for middle class’ transmission and acquisition of cultural capital are ‘misrecognized’ as a matter of legitimate competence. In this process the conditions of cultural capital transmission and acquisition are more disguised than those of economic capital (Bourdieu 1986). Thus, cultural capital functions as a symbolic capital. It obscures class-based differences, to the disadvantage of the working class, as they reproduce their disadvantage through their practices in the educational field.

Taken together, cultural capital theory does not account merely for the unequal distribution of resources in the society, but also for the processes through which dominant classes appropriate these resources to their advantage and maintain their dominant position vis-à-vis subordinated classes. The importance of cultural capital is accentuated when the advantage gained in one field (e.g. elite university qualifications in the educational system) is transferred to another field (e.g. prestigious jobs in the labour market) and accrues advantage. In this sense, the theory should be located in the context of broader debates about mechanisms of class reproduction. In the context
of education, the theory helps explain persistent class differentials in educational outcomes despite the fall in educational material costs following the expansion of educational opportunities in Western developed economies (Sullivan 2003). Notwithstanding the insights of cultural capital theory, its limitations have been identified and critiqued in the literature. In the next section, I examine the critical perspectives of cultural capital theory. In the section that follows, I discuss the rationale of retaining the concept of cultural capital in this study, and how cultural capital theory can be applied in a productive way in relation to the research question of this study.
According to Bourdieu, cultural capital is monopolized and used by dominant classes to their exclusive benefits. The institutionalization of cultural capital in a particular 'field' is therefore a mechanism of cultural and social exclusion (cf. Lamont and Lareau 1988). In this sense, the working class, excluded from the dominant culture, are excluded from cultural capital, educational success and by extension middle-class jobs and mobility opportunities; hence the reproduction of their class position. But as Kingston (2001) argues, class-based exclusionary practices (and knowledge, skills, tastes etc.) are weak in pluralistic and democratized societies such as the U.S. Goldthorpe (2007) argues further that even the more disadvantaged classes celebrate values favouring education despite their lack of access to 'high culture' resources. A related point made by the critics is the problematic understanding of cultural capital as arbitrary in character, such that it is valued in a particular field for the sake of its exclusivity and exclusionary purpose (Bourdieu and Passeron 1977). As Sullivan (2003) argues, arbitrary education standards (e.g. the demands for ‘eloquence’ and ‘style’) are not likely to apply to science disciplines and in primary and secondary schools in which examinations are evaluated with clear and explicit criteria. Kingston (2001) also argues that not all resources that 'work' as cultural capital are arbitrary in nature. This undermines Bourdieu’s argument of the misrecognition of cultural capital as legitimate competence (rather than as what is valorized for the interests of dominant classes), which according to him obscures class differences and reproduces class disadvantage.

The relevance of cultural capital theory is also challenged by empirical evidence. It follows from the theory that, excluded from cultural capital, subordinated classes are always outcompeted by dominant classes, who always 'win'. This is confounded by evidence of substantial intergenerational mobility and predominantly upward education mobility (of offspring surpassing parents' educational attainment) following the expansion of secondary and tertiary education in Western developed economies (Halsey et al. 1980; Erickson and Goldthorpe 1992; Shavit and Blossfeld 1993).
suggests that dominant classes by no means monopolize cultural capital, and that the working class are far from being excluded from educational achievement\textsuperscript{18}. In other words, the degree of class reproduction is overstated in cultural capital theory. In addition, the literature that examines effects of cultural capital on educational outcomes shows equivocal evidence concerning the link between cultural capital and class origin, and between cultural capital and educational outcomes. As Kingston (2001) notes, in these studies cultural capital is not found to substantially reduce the net effects of class privilege on school achievement. Also, the relevance of cultural capital is found to be superseded by that of other educational resources and practices, such as reading behaviour (e.g. Sullivan 2001) and working hard (Farkas et al. 1990). Moreover, in the studies of DiMaggio (1982), De Graaf and colleagues (2000) and Barone (2006), cultural capital is found to generate educational advantage across class divisions and benefit the more disadvantaged disproportionately. These findings counter Bourdieu’s emphasis on the exclusivity and exclusionary nature of cultural capital in cultural capital theory.

Critiques of cultural capital theory for its emphasis on the exclusive and exclusionary nature of cultural capital are noted in this study, a point which I will return to later. The literature that produces inconclusive or countering evidence of the impact of cultural capital on educational outcomes should be subject to further scrutiny, however. As Lareau and Weininger (2004) argue, however cultural capital is operationalized in this literature, it is understood as a variable decontextualized from the educational field that governs what counts as (the ‘right’) cultural capital. With the application of statistics models, this literature assumes a simple cause-and-effect relationship between class and cultural capital, and between cultural capital and educational outcomes. In this sense, this literature is remiss of Bourdieu's emphasis that a resource becomes an efficacious cultural capital only when it is valued by the field in concern.

In the light of this, Lareau and Weininger (2004) advocate for an agenda for research

\textsuperscript{18} Goldthorpe (2007) further argues that empirical evidence of persistent class differentials in educational outcomes, which attests to the re-stratifying tendencies of schooling despite expanded opportunities, does not rescue cultural capital theory as a theory of social reproduction (see p9-11).
on cultural capital and education alternative to one that focuses on quantifying cultural capital’s educational impact. According to them, researchers should examine what resource counts as cultural capital and how it can be activated in such a way that generates class advantage in a particular institutional context (i.e. the 'field') before they can make claims about the educational 'effects' of cultural capital. This is illustrated in Lareau’s studies (1989, 2003) that shed light on the processes in which parental dispositions become activated into cultural capital. According to Lareau, this facilitates parents' compliance with the 'institutional standards' upheld by the school of how parents should interact with the school. Middle-class parents, better able to comply with the institutional standards, are thus better able to get school teachers to accede to their demands in their children's interests; hence the generation of advantage. Lareau’s studies are discussed in further detail later. The point here is that Lareau and Weininger demonstrate how cultural capital theory facilitates the examination of the interaction between parental practices and the educational field. Cultural capital is understood to ‘work’ in a dynamic (rather than deterministic) manner, and class reproduction is understood as less than automatic.
IV TOWARDS A CONTEXTUALIZED UNDERSTANDING OF CULTURAL CAPITAL

It is on the premise of Lareau and Weininger’s arguments that cultural capital theory is applied in this study, to the extent it facilitates our understanding of the mechanism of class reproduction in education. The emphasis is on the relevance of the ‘field’ to the understanding of what counts as cultural capital, and of why cultural resources cannot be mobilized into the ‘right’ cultural capital under particular circumstances. This is especially when considering that the education system, i.e. the ‘institutional context’ in Hong Kong differs from that in Western contexts in important respects (see Chapter 4). After all, how cultural capital ‘works’ to generate class advantage or disadvantage in educational processes should be understood as what varies across time and space (cf. Devine 2004). For example, the operationalization of cultural capital as knowledge or participation in high-brow aesthetic culture (e.g. visiting art galleries, attending operas) may apply to France (as in Bourdieu’s studies) but does not necessarily apply to the research contexts of some of the aforementioned studies (e.g. the U.S., as in DiMaggio 1982; the Netherlands, as in De Graff et al. 2000; and the U.K., as in Sullivan 2001). Yet some local researchers operationalize cultural capital in terms of participation in ‘high culture’, without justifying how this is relevant in the Hong Kong educational context (e.g. Chan SW 1998; Lam KY 2006). Cultural capital as a concept also appears as if it is an individual or family attribute when it is understood as decontextualized from the field, which in effect obscures institutionalized class power (see e.g. Ho ESC 2006a).

The emphasis that researchers should specify what counts as cultural capital in a particular field also helps researchers avoid including too many conceptually distinct variables under an expanded definition of cultural capital (cf. Kingston 2001, pp94-95). For example, in the aforementioned literature, cultural capital has been operationalized as habits of working hard (Farkas et al. 1990), and different dimensions of home climate that encourages ‘cultural’ behaviour such as reading (De Graaf et al. 2000; Sullivan 2001; Barone 2006) and family discussions of social and cultural issues (e.g.
Chan SW 1998), etc. But for cultural capital theory to be applied more meaningfully for understanding how class ‘works’ via cultural capital, especially in socially-disadvantaged settings, the focus should be on what facets of culture matters for educational outcomes under such circumstances in the educational field in concern. It should be noted that in emphasizing the dynamic interaction between parental practices and the field and the flexibility of cultural capital across time and space, it necessitates that my application of cultural capital theory departs from Bourdieu’s understanding of cultural capital. The exclusivity, exclusionary and arbitrary nature of cultural capital is not presupposed, but instead is open to empirical substantiation. In this sense, this approach to cultural capital invites the exploration of the contingency and instability in class reproduction.

Bourdieu has been criticized for his overly-determinist view of social life and for the lack of agency of the working class in his conceptual framework (e.g., see Jenkins 2002). However, when the spotlight is cast upon the interaction between (class) resources and the structures and dynamics of a particular field (cf. Swartz 1997, p141), the way a resource is mobilized and activated into cultural capital should be understood as more contingent, depending on the institutional and local settings in concern (cf. Lareau 2003). This suggests that the role of cultural capital in class reproduction should not be taken for granted. This is especially when considering that mothers’ gendered educational labour (e.g. Griffith and Smith 1987; Reay 1998), and the ‘ethnic capital’ (Shah et al. 2011) of highly aspirant immigrant groups (e.g. Louie 2001; Archer and Francis 2006), can interact with class and complicate cultural capital processes. The insights of the Western literature in this respect will be elaborated later. The point here is that gender and ‘ethnicity’ – to the extent it is relevant to the Hong Kong context, as I discuss in Chapter 4 - should be taken into consideration when investigating how cultural capital generates and reproduces class advantage and disadvantage. Bourdieu has been criticized for understanding race/ethnicity and gender as secondary to class processes (see Silva 2005; Byrne 2009). Nevertheless, as Weininger (2005) points out, Bourdieu, in his later work, actually considers that different classificatory principles structure practices independently, and that this
cannot be interpreted in predominantly class terms (Weininger 2005 pp154-156). In my analysis, I understand class processes as entwined with parents’ (mothers’) experiences of their position in the gender and the ‘ethnic’ order (see Chapter 4), with intersecting inequalities and social marginalization. That is, in the context of Hong Kong, class is understood as intertwined with ‘ethnicity’ and gender in generating disadvantage via cultural capital in educational processes.

Lastly, the work of Sayer (2002, 2005) and Skeggs (2004) illustrates the value of considering the moral and affective dimension of class in understanding processes of social stratification. Their work offers an alternative perspective that researchers should take into account for producing a more nuanced account of the contingency of cultural capital processes and social reproduction. For Sayer (2005), shame is endemic to the experience of class because it unevenly distributes the opportunities to access valued practices and respect. For Skeggs, playing a game with ‘inferior’ cultural capital that generates limited ‘exchange value’ (for example, the value generated in the exchange of cultural capital for educational credentials) imbues the self with a sense of unworthiness. These suggest class can be experienced as a felt injury (cf. Sennett and Cobb 1972). Such affective experience can inhibit the mobilization of cultural capital of the working class. But at the same time, the recognition of the injustice of class can generate resentment and anger (Sayer 2005: 201–2) that should be understood as ‘positive, affective, justifiable experiences’ (Skeggs 2004 p87). This suggests the need to understand working-class educational experience beyond accounts of resignation and inevitability and the potential of working-class agency in mobilizing cultural capital in the school market. Having highlighted the relevance of gender and ‘ethnicity’ to the understanding of cultural capital processes in the local context, the extent to which the ‘affect’ of class facilitates or incapacitates the mobilization of cultural capital should also be considered to be dependent on the gendered and ‘ethnicized’ context in concern.

Taken together, following Lareau and Weininger (2004), I argue for the application of cultural capital theory in this study for how it facilitates a contextualized
understanding of the mechanism of class disadvantage in educational processes in Hong Kong. As discussed in Chapter 3, qualitative methodologies are employed. This not only allows the examination of how educational practices interact with the field, which governs whose cultural capital and practices ‘fit’ its standards and can be efficacious in generating advantage (Lareau and Weinger 2004). This also allows the examination of the meanings attached to educational practices embedded in diverse contexts which are classed, gendered, and ‘ethnicized’. Reflective processes, involving a sense of what is natural, feelings of shame, and emotions such as anger can be explored. This enables a more rounded understanding of why cultural capital is (or is not) mobilized (or ‘activated’), and why its mobilization is (or is not) effective in particular settings (Lareau 2003 p361). In other words, qualitative approaches facilitate the examination of the contingency of cultural capital and the indeterminacy of class processes. Such an endeavour is much needed in view of the relatively limited literature on the educational practices of those occupying social locations in tension with cultural capital theory (Irwin 2009), such as intermediate-class families and middle-class ethnic minority families. This helps shed light on the way class influence is exaggerated or ameliorated by forms of parental involvement, which cut across classes and can make key differences in working-class educational outcomes (see Irwin 2009 pp1129-1130; see also Lee and Bowen 2006).

In the next two sections, I examine the application of cultural capital theory to school choice-making and then routine educational involvement in the literature. I then discuss how the examination of mothers’ gendered lived social realities informs our understanding of cultural capital processes in education.
V CULTURAL CAPITAL IN SCHOOL CHOICE-MAKING

In Hong Kong (as in advanced economies such as the UK and the US), education reforms are geared towards ‘empowering’ parents by allowing them the freedom to exercise choice in the school market. Nonetheless, the market privileges parents who can exercise a ‘rational’ choice which secures the ‘best’ head-start for their children in educational competition. The assumptions of the ‘ideal’ parent (Edwards and Whitty 1990 cited in Ball 1993) can be understood in terms of the ‘rule of the game’ – the institutional standards - of the educational ‘field’ (cf. Lareau 1989). As suggested in the literature, it is the middle class who can mobilize the ‘right’ cultural capital that ‘fits’ these institutional expectations.

The cultural capital of the middle class pertains to their familiarity with the intricacies of the schooling system and choice mechanisms. Years before choices are made, parents are already gathering market information, such as exam results from school inspection reports or school visits. Social capital accrued in social networks is converted into cultural capital in terms of personalized knowledge about school reputations and school ethos (e.g. Ball and Vincent 1998; Devine 2004; Hui et al. 2005). Economic capital is invested in private tutoring and extracurricular activities. These actions equip children with the dispositions required for meeting the criteria of ‘distinction’ of schools (e.g. Gewirtz et al. 1995; Wong YL 2007). Parents can thus work the screening and admission procedures to their advantage. Having the ‘right’ cultural capital at their disposal, it feels ‘natural’ and normal for these parents to opt for private schooling, backed up by economic capital invested in housing in ‘good’ catchment areas, if not selective schools (e.g. Holme 2002; Butler and Robson 2003; Byrne 2006; Lynch and Moran 2006; Goyette 2008). Most importantly, choice decisions which go awry can be atoned for. Assertions of their children’s exceptional ‘giftedness’ help them use the appeals system (in the UK context) to their advantage (e.g. Devine 2004). With economic capital and social connections to exploit, parents can find their children another school, buy into private schooling, or seek alternative educational options (e.g. sending children overseas, in the case of Hong Kong) (e.g.
It is in this sense that the middle class are said to have the inclination and capacity to choose skillfully (Gewirtz et al. 1995). They can put their children in privileged ‘circuits of schooling’ (Ball et al. 1995; van Zanten 2003) to maintain the boundary between them and the working class (and usually non-white) groups and therefore their ‘distinction’. They can circumvent setbacks and minimize chances of downward mobility at every school transition point, which, as Ball (2003) argues, is an important strategy of ‘risk management’ in a context of uncertainty. In contrast, the working class often lack the capitals of the middle class and are said to be oriented to the practical and the immediate in choosing what fits into the constraints they face (e.g. Ball et al. 1995). They do not have the time and social networks to generate cultural capital in terms of market knowledge (e.g. Gewirtz et al. 1995; Reay 1996; Hui et al. 2005). Market knowledge is confined to what they gather from networks in the locality, which limits their horizons of choice to schools in the proximity. Despite this, the literature shows that working-class parents share with their middle-class counterparts concerns about transportation and school ethos. Also, some working-class parents are aware of how the system works, and show strong inclination to exercise choice. They are however often held back by the ‘wrong currency’ of their cultural capital, in particular what they generate out of their networks, which are deemed irrelevant to the market (e.g. Ball et al. 1996; Ball and Vincent 1998; Reay 1998). The gendered nature of the contexts in which such cultural capital is embedded and the ‘affect’ of navigating the market with the ‘wrong’ capital (cf. Skeggs 2004) is under-emphasized in the literature, though. This undermines the potential of the literature to examine the indeterminate nature of how cultural capital is mobilized in choice. I elaborate this in the following.

Working-class parents engage in school choice as they implement their ‘practical knowledge’ of the education market, the ‘internalized, “embodied” social structures’ in which they are positioned at a disadvantage vis-à-vis the middle class (Bourdieu 1984). That they are playing a game that privileges the middle class necessitates their
discomfort. This helps explain why they channel their cultural capital into the familiar and the local. These are ‘wrong’ choices that do not align with the logic of the market. Nonetheless, to understand this as a choice of the ‘semi-skilled’ if not ‘disconnected’ (Gewirtz et al. 1995; Ball et al. 1996) downplays how the affective connection of the working class to the school market shapes the choices made (Reay 1998). Incorporating the ‘affect’ of choice into the analysis also necessitates a gender perspective. The literature recognizes that women do the bulk of work in choice-making, especially in gathering choice information (e.g. Ball and Vincent 1998). However, it is not often made explicit how these processes are shaped by gender dynamics (cf. Byrne and De Tona 2012). When the responsibility of mothers to get it ‘right’ in choice is emphasized in education policy discourses (David et al. 1993; Park 2007; see also Power 2006), the anxiety generated in the process is born by mothers disproportionately. The emotions the market is saturated with, and in particular the shame and guilt that besets the working class (given their ‘wrong’ cultural capital) should therefore be understood as gendered. Working-class mothers do harbour desires for choices of ‘distinction’ (cf. Ball et al. 2002). However, they are apprehensive of the risks of failure, psychological injury or even humiliation that their children could bear in school settings which are different from, if not alien to their life-worlds (Reay and Ball 1997; see also David et al. 1994, 1996). If choice backfires, their inability as mothers to generate ‘exchange value’ in terms of educational profits (by securing their children ‘the best’ choice) is likely to add insult to the injuries to their self-worth (cf. Skeggs 2004). They have to draw upon extra psychological resources to make ‘middle-class’ choices. From this perspective, that the working class tend to ‘play safe’ in choice should be understood as a defensive mechanism (cf. Walkerdine et al. 2001).

This highlights the need to understand the meaning of working-class choice in its own right beyond accounts of their resignation to the inevitable. Aside from shame about one’s ‘inferior’ cultural capital, choice can also prompt justifiable resentment about one’s disadvantaged position in the market (cf. Skeggs 2004; Sayer 2005), hence a refusal to play the game. Mothers, in particular, can be rightfully angry about the disproportionate burden they shoulder. Also, the need to reclaim a sense of worthiness
as a parent and mother can drive working class mothers to make middle-class choices (albeit undergoing very different processes when compared to the middle class) (e.g. Ball et al. 1996; Reay and Ball 1997). So taking into consideration the ‘affect’ of choice and incorporating a gender perspective enables a more nuanced understanding of how cultural capital is (or is not) mobilized in choice in working-class contexts.

As I discuss in Chapter 4, because of their disadvantaged access to the ‘right’ cultural capital for meeting the institutional standards in the local educational system, mainland Chinese immigrant families are at a disadvantage in the ‘field’. This is especially true when considering that EMI (English-as-the-medium-of-instruction) schools are ranked at the top of the symbolic hierarchy of the school market, the participation in which a symbolic capital (cf. Bourdieu 1991) in itself. Their disadvantage in meeting the institutional standard of English learning encourages their exclusion from these schools. But such disadvantaged access should also be understood from the perspective of the cultural ‘inferiorization’ of mainland Chinese new immigrants vis-à-vis locals. Such ‘inferiorization’ is premised upon local/immigrant cultural differences, including that in the level of English language competence. To the extent that this constitutes a form of ‘ethnicization’ that shapes immigrant families’ access to capitals and respectability (cf. Skeggs 1997) and hence their sense of entitlement to choice, ‘ethnicity’ should be considered, alongside gender, when examining class practices and strategies in local choice processes. The Western literature suggests that race/ethnicity (and migration) shapes class disadvantage in choice-making, although as Byrne (2009) argues this is under-emphasized in the literature (as in e.g. Butler and Robson 2003; Devine 2004). For immigrant parents, including those who occupy middle-class positions, the social expertise and educational knowledge accrued pre-migration can be rendered irrelevant as the ‘wrong’ cultural capital in the school market (e.g. Gewirtz et al. 1995; Reay 1998; Byrne and De Tona 2012). Also, cultural capital can be channeled into the ‘wrong’ choices when ethnic minority groups opt for schools where they are better represented in terms of their racial/ethnic (and class) profile (e.g. Saporito 2003; Denessen et al. 2005). This can be at odds with the desire for a good education, but is
important for the avoidance of racism and the psychological cost incurred in negotiating the boundaries of difference in the presence of the ‘classed’ and ‘raced’ other (e.g. Reay and Lucey 2003; cf. Ball et al. 2002b). Conversely, whiteness and class plays out as intertwined in generating advantage in (white) middle-class choice-making.

Nonetheless, according to the literature that examines school achievement of ethnic minority, immigrant groups exhibit high educational aspirations and/or strong emphasis on the value of education when compared to the natives in Western contexts (e.g. Fuligni 1997). As Hao and Bonstead-Bruns (1998) contend, being an immigrant positively shapes parental aspirations regardless of racial and ethnic background in the U.S. These findings can be understood in terms of immigrant families’ desire to exploit the opportunities of better education, otherwise unavailable pre-migration, in the host country for actualizing their aspirations of upward social mobility (Sue and Okazaki 1990; cf. Ogbru 1985). This is especially true for Asian immigrants (Tseng et al. 2007), for whom under the influence of Confucian values education is valued as a primary, instrumental means for social advancement when other avenues are blocked (Sue and Okazaki 1990). Simply put, migration itself signifies educational aspirations. This explains evidence of immigrants’ optimism and maintenance of consistently high aspirations in education compared to the natives in Western contexts (e.g. Kao and Tienda 1995; Raleigh and Kao 2010). In the context of choice-making, these aspirations, values and optimism, especially when circulating in ethnic networks in which choice information and strategies is also accessed, can be considered as an ‘ethnic capital’ (Shah et al. 2011). Such capital is critical for immigrant parents in making choice decisions against not only material and practical constraints but also the sense of disentitlement.

The mobilization of ‘ethnic capital’ embedded in ‘ethnicized’ contexts is backed up by the input of mothers’ labour. For example, Cooper (2007) shows how African-American mothers gather choice information in parental networks, persist in negotiating with school administrators, and scramble for economic resources needed
for tuition expenses and school fees to back up their choices of private elite schools. This is not only understood as a form of self-empowerment against racial marginalization but also as the actualization of their cultural tradition of black motherhood. This shows the role of gender in shaping how cultural capital is mobilized in choice-making\(^\text{19}\). It should be noted that the literature acknowledges the advantage that middle-class cultural, social and economic capital generates in ethnic minority families (e.g. Louie 2001; cf. Ball et al. 2002b) and the doubled disadvantage of working-class ethnic minority groups in the school market (e.g. Reay and Ball 1997; Shah et al. 2010). Race/ethnicity thus interact with class in the school market, and can shape the more contingent ways in which cultural capital can be mobilized in choice-making than the literature often suggests.

Class experience in choice-making is often described categorically: While middle-class parents are found to be ‘skilled’ and ‘embedded’ in the school market, working-class parents are more ‘contingent’ in, or even ‘disconnected’ from choice. Such categorizations lay the groundwork for understanding class disadvantage in choice-making (Gewirtz et al. 1995; Ball et al. 2002b; cf. Cornway 1997). Nonetheless, consideration of the ‘affect’ of choice and the way race/ethnicity and gender shape choice-making facilitates a more nuanced understanding of class processes in choice-making. This is especially true when considering those findings in the literature that are in tension with cultural capital theory. There are semi-skilled ‘mixed-class’ choosers (Gewirtz et al. 1995) and working-class parents who choose with middle-class orientations (Ball et al. 1996; Reay and Ball 1997; also see Reay and Lucey 2003). In other words, how cultural capital is mobilized cannot be straightforwardly read off from class. How choice mechanisms generate advantage and disadvantage and reproduce class divisions and inequalities cannot be taken for granted. What should also be born in mind is how cultural capital is mobilized in ways specific to, for example, the history of choice mechanisms (Denessen et al. 2005) and the basis on which education is funded (Devine 2004) in particular contexts. Studies on school

\(^{19}\)But gender can also inhibit the generation of cultural capital. For example, Byrne and De Tona (2012) show that the lack of confidence of marginalized Bangladeshi women (vis-à-vis their male counterparts) in the UK can hinder their interaction with schools and deny them the access to the knowledge of choice.
markets in East Asian societies also exemplify how cultural capital ‘works’ differently in institutional contexts of which the ‘rule of the game’ differs from that of Western education systems (e.g. Wu (2009); Yamamoto and Brinton (2010)). In the same vein, how cultural capital is mobilized in choice-making in Hong Kong cannot be assumed as the same as that documented in the generic accounts in the Western literature. This is considering the convoluted nature of the local choice mechanism and the distinctive symbolic order of the local school market in which schools are hierarchized based on ‘banding’ (which indicates the ability levels of schools’ student intake) and medium of instruction (see Chapter 4). In this regard, the study of Wong YL (2007, 2009) shows how middle-class cultural capital in terms of investment in enrichment programmes in English learning is privileged in a school market where top-ability EMI (English-as-the-medium-of-instruction) schools top the symbolic hierarchy. There has been a dearth of research conducted after 2000 that examine how reformed choice mechanisms and the increasing privatization of public elite schools (including EMI schools) is implicated in class disadvantage, however. It is one of the aims of this study to fill this lacuna in the local literature.
VI CULTURAL CAPITAL IN ROUTINE EDUCATIONAL INVOLVEMENT

In Hong Kong, the marketization of schooling has been introduced alongside curriculum reform. Parents are expected to invest in private tuition and extracurricular activities for children. This is geared towards ‘life-wide learning’ and ‘whole-person development’ of ‘multiple abilities’ (Tse 2004; Choi 2005). These can be understood as the ‘institutional standards’ of the local educational ‘field’ (cf. Lareau 1989), which bear resemblance to the expectations for ‘concerted cultivation’ (Lareau 2003) and ‘good’ parenting (Gillies 2005) in other institutional settings. As suggested in the literature, it is the middle class who are better able to mobilize the ‘right’ cultural capital to fit these institutional expectations.

The middle class can mobilize their experience in and knowledge of the education system as cultural capital to monitor children’s learning and articulate their needs to the school most effectively (e.g. Crozier 1997; Ball 2003; Gillies 2005; Hui et al. 2005). Social connections with educational experts or school governors facilitate access to advice and practical help (e.g. Reay 1998; Bagnall et al. 2003). Economic capital is invested in private tuition as well as extracurricular activities for children’s concerted development of talents and skills in sports, music, art etc. (e.g. Lareau 2003; Devine 2004; Wong YL 2007). As Vincent and Ball (2007) highlight, a ‘proven track record’ in extracurricular activities is particularly important for boosting competitiveness in today’s school and higher education market. The advantaged access to cultural capital also underlies parents’ conviction of their children’s ‘giftedness’ and potential. Parents are therefore not afraid to aggressively negotiate with schoolteachers as they seek to advance their children’s educational interests (e.g. Lucey and Reay 2002; Devine 2004; Gillies 2005; Byrne 2006). Taken together, the middle class can support children’s academic learning, invest in ‘concerted cultivation’, and therefore plan for an imagined future for their children. In contrast, working-class aspirations are less easily mobilized. Working class parents tend to have less knowledge of the education system or the skills to articulate their needs to the school, and cannot help with children’s schoolwork as effectively. They are less likely to have connections.
with educational professionals or school administrators. They cannot afford many extracurricular activities (e.g. Lareau 1989; Crozier 1997).

It is not that working-class parents are doing nothing in relation to children’s education, however. They do spend on educational resources (e.g. books recommended by the school) despite financial difficulties (e.g. Reay 1997; Gillies 2005). They are involved in networks with their extended families and in the neighbourhood (e.g. Reay 1998; Lareau 2003) where cultural capital can potentially be generated. Nonetheless, their resources can be understood as being channeled into the ‘wrong’ visions of child development. The ‘accomplishment of natural growth’ under conditions where children are protected and loved is emphasized (e.g. Lareau 2003; Gillies 2005, 2006). But parents are not paving the way for any specific visions of children’s future (e.g. just hoping children will get a ‘good job’) (cf. Ball et al. 2002). Such visions are embedded in parents’ experience of struggle and social marginalization, but are deemed unworthy by schooling institution. Parents also feel ineffectual and ‘out of place’ in their attempts to support children’s learning (e.g. Crozier 1997; Lareau 1989; Reay 1998; Walkerdine et al. 2001), and their beliefs that their children may not be ‘good’ or ‘clever’ enough can deter them from seeking learning support (e.g. Gillies 2005). Their negative experiences at school in the past, integrated into their embodied system of lasting dispositions, can function ‘as a matrix of perceptions, [and] appreciations’ that can hinder the mobilization of cultural capital even if this is available (Bourdieu 2000:82-3 cited in Skeggs 2004; see also Lareau 2003 p361). But as in choice-making, this literature under-emphasizes the gendered nature of the contexts in which cultural capital is embedded and the ‘affect’ of involving in children’s education with the ‘wrong’ capital (cf. Skeggs 2004). This undermines the ability of the literature to examine the indeterminate nature of how cultural capital is mobilized.

It is recognized in the literature that mothers shoulder the bulk of routine education work. This includes gathering relevant information in social networks and arranging children’s learning and enrichment activities (e.g. Lareau 2002 cited in Lareau 2003;
Vincent and Ball 2007). But what is often missed is that cultural capital can only be mobilized effectively when children do not feel coerced in the process (e.g. Lareau 1989; Tam and Chan 2010). This necessitates mothers’ negotiation of the normative ideals of parenthood/ motherhood, which prescribe how they should be involved in children’s education but also hold them responsible for children’s educational and emotional outcomes (Reay 1998; cf. Walkerdine and Lucey 1989; Hays 1996; Vincent and Ball 1998). The compulsion to evaluate themselves against these normative ideals may mean that anxiety and feelings of inadequacy are endemic to their educational involvement (cf. Chan et al. 2008). In particular, working-class mothers can find it difficult to negotiate motherhood with their ‘inferior’ cultural capital (Walkerdine et al. 2001). All this suggests that educational involvement is emotionally-charged for mothers. Mothers need to invest in emotional labour – the management of their and their children’s emotions – to make cultural capital ‘work’ (cf. Hochschild 1983), even if the outcome of such emotional investments is indeterminate (Reay 2004b; Gillies 2006). In this sense, working-class parents’ (mothers’) emphasis on ‘happiness’ should be understood helping them to avoid mother-child conflicts and shielding them from the psychological costs that can be incurred in relation to their identity as an (‘inadequate’) mother (cf. Reay 1997; Hui et al. 2005). The incorporation of a gender perspective facilitates our understanding of the contingency of cultural capital mobilization in working-class educational involvement beyond interpretations of working class parents’ ‘deficit’ and of their acceptance and resignation to their inferiority.

The role of gender and ‘affect’ in injecting indeterminacy into the mobilization of cultural capital in working-class families suggests that the ‘wrong’ visions and aspirations of the working class should be understood in its own right. Emphasis on happiness and love can be understood as an ethic of care alternative to the logic of the market. Parents, in particular mothers, can be understood as positively refusing to subject themselves (and their children) to the judgments imposed by an institution which ‘misrecognizes’ their values and labour (cf. Skeggs 2004)\(^20\). Also, the

\(^{20}\)For example, Evans (2006) shows the misfit between cultural capital of the working class and that of the middle-
experience of class and gender inequalities can drive working-class mothers to channel their own aspirations into supportive action for children’s education (cf. Finley 1992). Moreover, the need for recognition can drive the working class to seek access to respectable practices (cf. Sayer 2005), which suggests the need to examine working-class agency and its implications for the mechanisms of class disadvantage in education.

As in choice-making, what is not often made explicit in the literature is how ethnicity is implicated in class processes. In Western contexts, middle-class parents who enjoy educational advantage are essentially white middle-class parents (see Byrne 2009). But race/ethnicity can shape educational involvement in ways that can ‘amplify, twist, negate, deepen and complicate’ class (Connell et al. 1982: 182). It is well-documented that ethnic minority groups have cultural capital of the ‘wrong’ currency. They lack the competence in the ‘right’ language (English language), and their educational knowledge and experience accrued pre-migration does not always ‘fit’ the ‘white’ educational system (e.g. Reay 1998; Blacklege 2001; Louie 2001; Li 2010; Byrne and De Tona 2012; see also Tang 2002 for the case in Hong Kong). The ‘wrong’ cultural capital also invites (sometimes racist) stereotypes of being indifferent or deficient parents from the school. This in turn alienates parents from the school and deters them from seeking learning support (e.g. Lareau and Horvat 1999; Lareau 2003; Gillies 2005, 2006).

Nonetheless, as mentioned in the last section, high aspirations for social mobility, the strong emphasis on the value of education and one’s optimism for children’s educational prospects are engendered in the context of migration. Migration is geared towards exploiting the educational and occupational opportunities in the host society (otherwise not available in one’s native country), as the literature that examines educational practices of immigrant families testifies (e.g. Li 2010; Byrne and De Tona class classroom can be understood as integral to a local-based working-class identity. Motherhood is done primarily in relation to keeping the home respectable and holding the family together. This demonstrates how, in specific class contexts, positive meanings and notions of respectability can be made in relation to what is deemed as ‘wrong’ cultural capital by the schooling institution.
This can complicate class practices in schooling. In addition, ‘ethnic capital’ embedded in a context of social marginalization of racial/ethnic or immigrant groups also matters. For example, Cooper (2007) shows how African-American mothers see their assertive role as securing their children the best education as self-empowerment. Also, the particular values attached to learning nurtured pre-migration or asserted as a positive cultural identity can be mobilized as an effective resource even if it is not legitimated in the field (Archer and Francis 2006; Crozier and Davies 2007; Cheng and Koblinsky 2009)\textsuperscript{21}. Moreover, ethnic networks can generate cultural capital in terms of the aforementioned mobility norms, choice information, and access to alternative education options (e.g. Louie 2001; Shah et al. 2010). Nonetheless, the mobilization of such ‘ethnic capital’ (Shah et al. 2010) is contingent upon classed and gendered contexts. Middle-class advantage in arranging and planning children’s learning and extracurricular activities is evident (e.g. Lareau 2003; Vincent and Ball 2007). For working-class ethnic minorities, the hard labour and the sacrifices of the parents’ own mobility opportunities are needed for backing up their aspirations (e.g. Archer and Francis 2006; Cheng and Koblinsky 2009). The pressure on children to succeed and on parents to compensate for (or redeem) one’s struggles may generate potentially counter-productive anxiety (e.g. Louie 2001) that detracts from parents’ educational involvement and children’s school achievement.

Evidence of the diversity of middle-class and working-class experiences can be found in the literature on parental educational involvement. Middle-class parents can be imbued with anxiety in contexts of uncertainty, and they need to labour and improvise to maintain their class advantage through education (e.g. Brantlinger 2003; Power et al. 2003). Also, orientations towards how ‘pushy’ one should be in relation to ‘concerted cultivation’ vary across class fractions (e.g. Byrne 2006; Vincent and Ball 2007). So too, diverse constellations of cultural, social and economic capital can be found in working-class families (Vincent et al. 2007), which helps explain why some working-class parents can manoeuvre and purposefully engage in children’s education (cf.\textsuperscript{21} In Archer and Francis’ study, this pertains to the emphasis on hard work and discipline of the British Chinese, which is at odds with the doctrines of child development celebrated in the British context.)
Irwin and Elley 2011). Whilst class powerfully structures the distribution of advantages and disadvantages, class does not wholly determine educational practices, and class reproduction is not automatic. In the case of Hong Kong, its education system is similar to its Western counterparts in terms of how it privileges middle-class cultural capital in relation to parental educational involvement. But the particularities of the system also means that cultural capital ‘works’ in a way deviating from that documented in the literature in generating class disadvantage. The symbolic value of English language in the system is a case in point. It disadvantages mainland immigrant parents, as they do not have the ‘right’ cultural capital to support their children’s English learning (cf. Tang 2002), but as Yu (1994) shows, the emphasis on communicative rather than technical English can de-legitimize (local-born) working class’ cultural capital investments in English learning. In addition, both Lam KY (2006) and Wong YL (2007, 2009) attest to the ways the strong instrumental value attached to education in the local context shapes educational practices. This suggests the need to specify the context of class disadvantage in my application of cultural capital theory.
VII GENDERING CULTURAL CAPITAL PROCESSES

The literature shows that mothers are primarily responsible for mobilizing cultural capital in choice-making and routine educational involvement. Nonetheless, gender is often not problematized\(^2\) (see David et al. 1994, 1996, 1997). As Reay (1998) argues, the literature does not approach family-school relationships from the mothers’ perspective. It does not recognize how women, given their different economic and political location and lived social realities compared to men, shape educational processes in ways specific to their gender as well as their class and race/ethnicity (Smith 1987; David 1997; see also Luttrell 1997; Cooper 2007). The way in which mothering work is integral to the transmission and reproduction of class advantages and disadvantages is often rendered invisible (see e.g. Walkerdine and Lucey 1989; David 1998; Reay 1998). On the one hand, gender facilitates mothers’ access to and involvement in social networks in such a way that they can generate cultural capital, courtesy of their activities on the school floor (e.g. via PTA activities and volunteering) and in the neighbourhood (David et al. 1994; Crozier 1997; Ball and Vincent 1998; Bagnall et al. 2003). On the other hand, gender norms embedded in ethnic communities and/or self-perceived inferiority of one’s ethnicity and gender can inhibit mothers’ access to these networks (Crozier and Davies 2007; Byrne and De Tona 2012). The ‘affect’ of choice-making and educational involvement plays out in ways specific to women’s sense of adequacy or inferiority as mothers, which helps shape cultural capital mobilization across and within class (e.g. Reay 2004b; Gillies 2006). This indicates the importance of incorporating gender into our understanding of how class ‘works’ via cultural capital in educational processes.

An important but often taken-for-granted issue is how mothers make available their educational labour regardless of their employment status. As Byrne (2006) suggests,
mothers’ practices involve the negotiation of (sometimes competing) discourses and normative ideals and a repertoire of moral commitments embedded in their material circumstances, in their interpersonal relations and social networks, and in the actions of wider public institutions and state agencies (p1003; also see Duncan 2005). As I show as follows, this bears implications for mothers’ education labour in various ways that necessitates the contingency of cultural capital mobilization across diverse contexts.

Firstly, mothers’ employment status shapes their educational involvement, and vice versa. Across class backgrounds, mothers can be compelled to work part-time instead of full-time to allow for their educational involvement (e.g. Louie 2001; Reay 1998). But working-class and/or single mothers have less freedom to choose whether and how they should work (e.g. Standing 1999; Power 2005 cited in Vincent et al. 2008; Cooper 2007; cf. Crompton 2006). Less-advantaged mothers need to overcome more practical constraints in making their educational labour available. However, at the same time, less-advantaged mothers are more likely to have their educational labour available ‘by default’. This is because gender and racial/ethnic inequalities in the labour market often confine them to jobs which barely cover childcare expenses (cf. Leung VHT 2002; Lee WKM 2004; Duncan 2005), and paid employment can result in diminished welfare payments.

Additionally, the ideals of ‘parenting’, which in effect hold mothers responsible for ‘doing the right thing’ and engineering a head-start for children’s education, are promulgated by both education policy and market discourses (David et al. 1993; Ball and Vincent 1998; Vincent and Ball 2007; Chan et al. 2008). These are reproduced in mothers’ everyday involvement in education and in particular in their social networks (Reay 1998; Bagnall et al. 2003; cf. Ball 2003). These networks are where mothers compare amongst themselves and make social distinctions in relation to their adequacy as mothers (Vincent et al. 2007). In this sense, these networks – and the wider context of educational involvement – should be understood as a field where not only self-interest (in pursuing educational advantage) is at stake, but also where mothers actively
monitor and evaluate themselves and others in terms of judgments of worth (cf. Sayer 2002). This suggests that mothering is itself produced and regulated in education (cf. Walkerdine and Lucey 1989). This is one source of the anxiety, shame and guilt of mothers, in particular less-advantaged mothers with ‘inferior’ cultural capital. As mentioned earlier, the literature consistently under-emphasizes the way mothers’ affective connection to the educational field shapes cultural capital mobilization in specifically gendered, classed and ‘ethnicized’ contexts.

Moreover, (partnered) mothers’ involvement in education is shaped by their negotiation of the division of labour with their husbands. The literature suggests that fathers have limited educational involvement (Lareau 1992; David 1998; Reay 1998; also see Nichols 2009). Nonetheless, there is evidence that fathers often do have cultural capital to mobilize to support their children’s education. This pertains to their role in confirming choice decisions (e.g. David et al. 1994; Reay and Ball 1998; cf. Brooks 2004), but with their wives shouldering the labour. Fathers also turn up at school to seek support for children’s learning (or choice-making) when the school ignores mothers’ actions (Reay 1998). This suggests that fathers can play a crucial role in making up for the ‘inferior’ cultural capital of disadvantaged mothers. This calls for the need to explore the implications of the immobilization of fathers’ cultural capital for disadvantaged families. Furthermore, fathers are most often involved in ‘critical moments’ such as finalizing choice decisions or when mothers cannot mobilize their cultural capital effectively. What this suggests is the superiority attached to fathers’ educational role.23 The ‘affect’ of mothers as they carry out devalued educational labour (cf. Skeggs 2004) and its implications for cultural capital mobilization has however been under-explored in the literature.

Mothers are often expected to shoulder the burden of routine educational work at the expense of their paid employment and at the risk of being blamed and shamed. In contrast, fathers’ cultural capital is deemed as being of more value courtesy of its

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23This is also evident in accounts describing fathers’ expectations of mothers’ gratitude for fathers’ educational contribution (Reay 1998; cf. Groves and Lui 2012).
scarcity in the educational field. In contributing their unpaid and devalued educational labour, mothers mobilize cultural capital for their children rather than for accruing value to themselves (Reay 2004b p71; see also Silva 2005; cf. Skeggs 2004). This is especially true for those mothers who accommodate their paid employment to their childcare and educational responsibilities. Considering the fact that citizenship is often founded upon one’s involvement in (full-time) paid employment in Hong Kong as in Western societies (Power 2005 cited in Vincent et al. 2008; Newendorp 2010), mothers face a dilemma as they negotiate the competing discourses of motherhood and citizenship. In particular, mainland immigrant mothers are often expected to shoulder household and childcare duties – and likely educational labour - upon arrival in Hong Kong. This enforces their detachment from (full-time) paid employment, hence exclusion from full citizenship (Wong WL 2004). Worse, in the case of disadvantaged immigrant single mothers, their commitment to childcare and children’s education leaves them no choice but to live on Comprehensive Social Security Assistance (CSSA). This is a stigmatized status conflated with their gender, their immigrant status and their single-motherhood in the local context (cf. Standing 1997 cited in Standing 1999; Pun and Wu 2004). Simply put, respectability is at stake as mothers assume the primary responsibility for children’s education (cf. Skeggs 1997, 2004). But as Lee HL (2009) shows, the desire to seek respectability may reinforce disadvantaged mothers’ commitment to children’s education. This is considered as a ‘vocation’ that allows them to counter the cultural inferiority of their lack of value resulted from their detachment from paid employment and/or status as CSSA recipients. This reaffirms the importance to incorporate the gendered meanings attached to educational labour. Considering the ‘ethnicization’ of immigrant mothers for both their status as (uncultured) immigrants and their gender (as economically ‘unproductive’ mothers) (see Chapter 4) in Hong Kong, such gendered meanings should be understood as embedded in classed and ‘ethnicized’ contexts when one examines how class ‘works’ to generate disadvantage in educational processes.
CONCLUSION

This study examines class disadvantage in education in Hong Kong by focusing on mothers’ secondary school choice-making and routine educational involvement. I have located my inquiry in the context of local education reforms in which parents are expected to play an increasingly pivotal role in shaping children’s educational processes and outcomes, drawing increasingly upon their own resources through educational involvement and school choice-making (Brown 1990; Choi 2005). I am interested in exploring how unequal access to the parental resources needed for negotiating children’s education in an increasingly privatized school market helps to explain persistent class differentials in educational outcomes in Hong Kong (Post 2004; cf. Brown 1990; Smith 1998). In addition, I am concerned to challenge the rather rigid portrayal of processes of class reproduction in the local Hong Kong literature. In particular, the local literature does not address the relevance of mothers’ educational labour to class processes in the local context. How class is intertwined with the position of being a mainland immigrant in the wider society, which I argue is ‘ethnicized’, in the generation of class disadvantage is also underemphasized.

With reference to the issues raised in the Western literature, I have explored how Bourdieu’s cultural capital theory (1973, 1984, 1986; Bourdieu and Passeron 1990[77]), despite its critics, can be applied to the local context in order that we can better understand its mechanisms of class disadvantage. The Western literature shows how middle-class cultural capital is rewarded by institutional standards which assume parents’ choice-making (e.g. Ball 2003) and educational involvement (e.g. Lareau 1989, 2003) in the ‘field’ of the school market. It also emphasizes that cultural capital ‘works’ in ways specific to the ‘rules of the game’ of the institutional context in concern (Devine 2004). In this sense, the generation of class disadvantage in the Hong Kong school market cannot be assumed to be the same as in Western education systems. The local education system differs in a number of significant ways from its Western counterparts, in terms of the symbolic value accorded to English language (cf. Bourdieu 1991), its symbolic order of ‘banding’, and the convoluted nature of its
choice mechanisms. At the same time, the Western literature highlights the need for a more complex understanding of class reproduction through consideration of how gender and ethnicity interact with class to generate disadvantage (Griffith and Smith 1987; Byrne 2009). Moreover, it draws attention to the stigmatization of disadvantaged mothers in the ‘field’ and to the way mothers’ affective experiences shapes class processes in indeterminate ways (e.g. Reay 1998; cf. Skeggs 2004). These issues are highly relevant to this study. This is considering the moral burden that Hong Kong mothers shoulder with respect to their role in engineering children’s educational success (e.g. Chao 1994), and the ‘ethnicization’ of immigrant mothers who are positioned in the ‘field’ at a distinct disadvantage vis-à-vis their local counterparts (cf. Pun and Wu 2004; see Chapter 4).

To conclude, the Western literature exemplifies how cultural capital theory can be applied to the examination of micro-level educational processes in order that macro-level patterns of stratification can be better understood. The insights it offers into class reproduction suggest that we cannot understand class disadvantage in Hong Kong without also considering the issues of gender and ‘ethnicity’. Gender is not more significant than ethnicity in shaping class processes, (and vice versa), but rather gender and ethnicity interact in various ways with class. This shapes the generation of class disadvantage in ways specific to the institutional standards of the local education system (as well as to the local dynamics of gender and ethnicity). By drawing on the issues raised in the Western literature, this study can advance the insights of the local literature by shedding light on the embeddedness of educational practices and its meanings in contexts that are classed, gendered and ‘ethnicized’. This facilitates the examination of the contingency of cultural capital mobilization, and helps to enhance our understanding of the educational success of disadvantaged students (e.g. Lam KY 2006). By exploring the specificity of mechanisms of class disadvantage in the Hong Kong context, this study also contributes to the wider Western literature by showing how cultural capital can ‘work’ in ways conducive to inter-class diversity and serves to introduce indeterminacy into processes of class reproduction (Irwin 2009).
CHAPTER THREE
METHODOLOGY

INTRODUCTION

In this study, I examine the mechanism of class disadvantage in Hong Kong focusing on mothers’ experiences of secondary school choice-making and everyday educational involvement. To achieve this, I interviewed 34 local-born and mainland Chinese immigrant mothers with children aged 11-15, recruited through school PTAs and community groups in five of the most disadvantaged areas in the territory. In this chapter, I first discuss the rationale of adopting a qualitative approach to my research question. Then, I describe my sampling strategy and the achieved sample composition. After this, I discuss how I carried out qualitative interviews with the mothers. Lastly, I discuss how I conducted a thematic analysis of my data and reflect on the implication of my active role in the production of knowledge in the study.

This study contributes to the local literature by exploring how gender, ‘ethnicity’ and the distinctive features of the education system are implicated in the generation of class disadvantage. A qualitative approach is required to shed light on the embeddedness of educational practices in particular contexts, not only because educational practices often involve the implementation of tacit knowledge (cf. Bourdieu 1984), but also because the interactions between the cultural capital of mothers and the educational institution cannot easily be captured by a quantitative approach (see Lareau and Weininger 2004). I aimed to recruit socially-disadvantaged mothers with children aged 11-15 so as to access accounts of secondary school choice-making and routine educational involvement from a gender perspective. But by recruiting mothers through school PTAs and community groups, I was unable to access the most disadvantaged mothers, such as those with no time for educational labour or who lack the resources to support children’s education through such groups. Instead, my sample included working-class mothers and also some relatively more advantaged mothers. These include local-born intermediate-class mothers who are
senior secondary graduates, and immigrant mothers from more privileged backgrounds in China, who are characterized by their deployment of their educational experience as cultural capital in the field. This sample composition may therefore have important implications for the findings produced in this study, which highlights mothers’ substantial input of educational labour and their resourcefulness in generating cultural capital in social networks, as well as the misalignment between cultural capital and class.

Semi-structured in-depth interviews, which focused on mothers’ negotiation of the particular features of the local education system and in particular choice mechanisms, were carried out. Information about mothers’ involvement in social networks at school and in the community, and about the meanings they attach to their educational practices in relation to their mothering identity was also tapped. Two issues arose as I carried out the interviews, namely the difficulties in accessing taken-for-granted experiences, even within a qualitative research strategy, and my discomfort in probing disadvantaged mothers about their educational involvement, an area about which they often feel judged shamed. In what follows, I discuss how I teased out unspoken processes in choice-making and educational involvement during the interviews, and how this necessarily provoked feelings of shame in disadvantaged mothers, but I also emphasize that this did not obstruct my access to information. Also, accounts of shame offer important insights into the diverse contexts in which class disadvantage is generated or ameliorated. Lastly, I describe how I carried out my thematic data analysis and disentangled the myriad of ways class disadvantage is complicated by gender and ‘ethnicity’ in the local context. My findings - about the more contingent ways cultural capital is mobilized and generate class disadvantage - should always be understood in terms of my active role in conducting the interviews and analyzing the data generated.
I A QUALITATIVE APPROACH TO THE RESEARCH QUESTION

This study examines the mechanisms of class disadvantage in Hong Kong by looking at mothers’ secondary school choice-making and everyday educational involvement. My research interest stems from my observations of the relatively limited research that examines how structural patterns of persistent class differentials are produced in educational practices at the micro-level in the local context. Informed by cultural capital theory (Bourdieu 1986; Bourdieu and Passeron 1990[77]), the study focuses on how class shapes the interaction between the cultural capital of mothers and the institutional standards of the educational ‘field’ (Bourdieu 1973,1984). Gender and ‘ethnicity’ are also taken into consideration in understanding how class disadvantage is generated in cultural capital processes (see e.g. Byrne 2009). This is not only concerned with how gender conditions mothers’ educational labour (e.g. Griffith and Smith 1987) and how ‘ethnicity’ impinges on access to the ‘right’ cultural capital. It is also concerned with how the affective experience of choice and educational involvement in gendered and ‘ethnicized’ contexts shapes cultural capital mobilization in indeterminate ways (e.g. Reay 1998, 2004; cf. Skeggs 2004; Sayer 2005). As I discuss in Chapter 4, these issues are highly relevant to the Hong Kong context. This is considering the increasing presence of mainland immigrant students in local schooling (e.g. Pong 2009); the skewed gender division of (educational) labour in families (e.g. Choi 1995); the construction of the moral virtue of mothers’ role in educational involvement (e.g. Chao 1994); and the cultural ‘inferiorization’ of immigrant mothers (cf. Pun and Wu 2004) that amounts to ‘ethnicization’ as understood in Western contexts (see Chapter 4). Despite this, the few local qualitative studies that examine cultural capital mobilization in local schooling (Yu 1994; Wong YL 2007) do not examine how mothers’ educational labour factor in the generation of class advantage and disadvantage. The same can be said of qualitative studies that examine the mobilization of cultural capital in new immigrant families (Leung YL 1998; Tang 2002). This also means that these studies cannot shed light on how cultural capital mobilization is shaped by the meanings and ‘affect’ of mothers’ educational practices in their different classed and ‘ethnicized’ contexts.
To fill the research gap in the local literature requires this study to capture embodied parental practices and the embeddedness of class disadvantage in the educational field. Quantitative analyses are ill-suited for achieving my research aims, given that we cannot measure interactive processes at the family-school interface as specific and isolated practices and possessions. This is especially true when considering the nature of school choice-making and routine educational involvement. School choice-making is a ‘messy’ and negotiated process which involves no simple certainties (Bowe et al. 1994). Also, it can be understood as an ‘intuitive’ process, as mothers’ internalization of the objective structures of inequality in the ‘field’ functions as a matrix of perceptions and appreciations in shaping their horizons of choice (Bourdieu 2000:82–3 cited in Skeggs 2004). The same can be said of routine educational involvement, given that cultural capital is often transmitted and acquired in a ‘disguised’ manner in everyday socialization beyond reflexive consciousness (Bourdieu 1986). Also, measuring mothers’ level of educational involvement (e.g. by surveying the frequency of homework supervision) is meaningless if what is being done is deemed irrelevant in the ‘field’, as exemplified in disadvantaged mothers’ investment in extracurricular activities that are not recognized as ‘prestigious’ in the school market (see Chapter 6). Added to these is the ambivalence that infuses the experience of disadvantaged mothers as they try to support children’s learning (see e.g. Lareau 2003), which cannot be easily articulated and ‘quantified’. All these suggest that the use of questionnaire surveys or structured interviews, employed for quantitative analyses for the collection of primarily descriptive data, are ill-suited for my research purpose.

As I discuss later, in-depth semi-structured interviews were carried out in this study. Rather than asking pre-set questions that mothers do not necessarily find relevant, qualitative interviews gave me access to narratives of mothers’ experiences in their own terms. I could access information about their educational practices as well as the meanings they made of their practices (Miller and Glassner 1997; Fielding and Thomas 2001). With the design of my interview schedule (as I discuss later), I could also ensure that mothers could make connections between their everyday life
circumstances to the issues I was interested in during the interviews (Mason 2002). This facilitated my understanding of the embeddedness of their practices in their classed, ‘ethnicized’ and gendered contexts, and of the way the affective aspects of their position in the field shapes their cultural capital mobilization (Reay 1999).

By doing qualitative interviews rather than carrying out participant observation or ethnography, I could not get at ‘moments’ in which mothers’ cultural capital mobilization is thwarted or de-legitimated. This is when mothers clash with their children as they try to help with children’s learning, when their request for support go unheeded by school teachers, and when their choices are discouraged by ‘gatekeepers’ in the school market (e.g. Lareau and McHorvat 1999; Lareau 2003; Gillies 2005, 2006; Cooper 2007). But as I discuss later, I could still glean from the interview accounts how interpersonal dynamics at home (and to a lesser extent at school)\textsuperscript{24} shaped the way cultural capital was mobilized. Also, interview accounts were complemented my recorded observations in and outside of the interviews. Before I discuss how I conducted the interviews, I first discuss my sampling strategy and the characteristics of the sample in the next section.

\textsuperscript{24}Interview questions asked covered mothers’ interactions with schoolteachers on the school floor. However, mothers’ narratives of their activities on the school floor were dominated by accounts of their experiences in volunteering and socialising activities with fellow mothers rather than interactions with schoolteachers. The majority agreed that they as parents should not intervene in teachers’ work, and most reported initiating contact with teachers only when problems with children arose. These observations concurred with Ho ESC’s (2006b) findings.
II SAMPLING STRATEGY AND THE SAMPLED MOTHERS

As discussed earlier, class disadvantage in Hong Kong cannot be understood without taking into account gender and ‘ethnicity’ in this study. To access information about mothers’ educational labour and how their perspectives and affective experiences shapes cultural capital mobilization in gendered and ‘ethnicized’ contexts, I aimed to recruit socially-disadvantaged local-born and mainland immigrant mothers for interviews. This precluded access to the perspectives of children, husbands and schoolteachers, whose perspectives and actions are implicated in the way mothers mobilize cultural capital. But as I discuss later, these individuals were frequently brought up in interview conversations. This offered information of the real-life contexts and interpersonal dynamics in which mothers’ educational practices are embedded.

I recruited 34 mothers with children aged 11-15 (i.e. in school years six to ten in the English school system)\(^\text{25}\) for my study. These mothers were either going through the secondary school choice processes at the time of the interviews, or had such experience within four years prior to the interview. They could therefore give me access to accounts of their choice-making experiences. I recruited mothers from two school PTAs and eight community organizations or grassroots groups in the most disadvantaged areas in Hong Kong, considering that these were the arenas where I could access congregations of mothers of school-aged children. At the time when I met these mothers, they were attending PTA meetings; were participating in volunteering activities; were about to attend seminars or programmes; and were planning for impending petitions or demonstrations (for those in grassroots groups). This explains why the majority of the mothers recruited are full-time housewives and have access to social networks in which they can generate cultural capital. In other words, the most disadvantaged mothers, including those who must work and have less time to invest in educational labour, were excluded from the sample. I will return to

\(^{25}\)A normal child in Hong Kong leaves primary school for secondary school at the age of 11. I will discuss in detail the years of schooling and points of school transition in Hong Kong in Chapter 4.
the implication of my sampling strategy later.

The areas from which mothers were recruited include Sham Shui Po (SSP), Cheung Sha Wan (CSW) and Tai Kok Tsui in urban West Kowloon, as well as Tin Shui Wai (TSW) and Tuen Mun (TM) in North-West and Western New Territories respectively. Except for CSW, an industrial-commercial area, these areas are characterized by high levels of poverty and concentration of mainland Chinese immigrants. As I discuss in Chapter 4, the allocation of secondary school places is based upon the ‘school net’ in which a student’s primary school is located. It should be noted that students in CSW share the school net (the SSP net) with those in SSP, while students in TSW share the school net (the Yuen Long (YL) net) with those in the neighbouring district of Yuen Long. As for students in Tai Kok Tsui, they share the same school net (the Yau Tsim Mong (YTM) net) with those in two neighbouring commercial districts, i.e. Tsim Sha Tsui and Mongkok. It should be noted that most of the traditional elite schools, which have been increasingly privatized since 2000, are located in the urban area in Kowloon. This should be taken into account when understanding the expressed aversion to choices of ‘distinction’ (cf. Ball et al. 2002) of those mothers in the SSP, CSW and TKT areas (see Chapter 5). It should be noted that the geographical distribution of the sample should be understood as resulting from my pragmatic and opportunistic approach in recruiting mothers for my study (as I discuss below). I did not analyze my data from a geographical perspective. The map below presents the geographical locations from which the mothers were recruited:

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26 The median household monthly income in these areas is all below the population average (CSD 2011a) and amounts to half (as in TKT in the YTM district) or less than half (as in SSP/CSW, TSW/YL and TM) of that in the wealthiest district in the territory.

27 In the geography of district administration in Hong Kong, Cheung Sha Wan is considered as part of the Sham Shui Po district; Tin Shui Wai is considered as part of the Yuen Long district; and Tai Kok Tsui is considered as part of the Yau Tsim Mong district.

28 I discuss in detail in Chapter 4 the hierarchy and symbolic order of schools and the privatization of elite schools in Hong Kong. See also Tsang (1998) for a discussion on the unequal geographical distribution of ÉMI (English-as-the-medium-of-instruction) secondary schools.

29 It should be noted that observations of the classed and racialized imageries associated with schools differentiated along geographical lines in the Western literature (see e.g. Byrne 2009) did not emerge from my interview accounts.

30 See Appendix II.
I was introduced to the gate-keepers of the sites31 I accessed through the liaison of my ex-colleagues in the university. Through the liaison of three mothers I interviewed, I also met a social worker in a community centre, a person in charge of a church activity group, and a community organizer in another community centre. One mother was introduced to me by an ex-colleague, and three mothers were recruited by ‘snowballing’. Whilst the above used my networks, beyond this, I contacted more than ten community organizations and social service agencies, but the only site to which I successfully gained access was an immigrant grassroots group in TKT. All gatekeepers were informed that I would like to study how mothers helped with children’s education. Except for a community centre in TSW, I was granted instant access to

31 These included a secondary school principal, a teacher in charge of the PTA of a primary school, and two social workers from a grassroots group and a community centre in TSW respectively.
approval of my recruitment of mothers for my study. The minimal barriers I encountered should be attributed to my use of personal networks in accessing these sites, which was the source of trust the gatekeepers granted to me. The circumstances in which I was introduced to the mothers at different sites were similar. I was formally introduced by the gatekeeper. Some gatekeepers emphasized that I was a PhD student from an overseas university, highlighting that it was me who needed the mothers’ help, and this was also what I emphasized when I was communicating with the mothers on site. This assigned mothers the role as the ‘expert’ to help me with my ‘homework’, and helped reduce our social distance. Interested mothers approached me for the interviews on site, or contacted me after I had left the site to arrange for the interview.

As for the case of a community centre in TSW, I was asked if I could offer services in return for any mothers willing to participate in the interviews. Eventually I agreed to design and teach a six-week course in phonetics and English grammar. Classes, each two-hour long, were run once a week and were open to the enrolment of low-income mothers or those from families on Comprehensive Social Security Assistance (CSSA) only. Mothers agreed to do the interview upon their enrollment in the course. My interactions with the mothers during and outside the classes were friendly, and I had a lot of opportunities to talk more informally with them. Thus, my position as the course instructor did not seem to generate social distance in such a way that would hamper my access to information during the interviews.

In all but two sites (which serviced disadvantaged mothers), I was not introduced to mothers as interested in disadvantaged groups only. I could not tell the mothers I was only interested in interviewing disadvantaged groups, because class is not only a matter of material inequalities but also a source of embarrassment and stigma (Sayer 2002). This is especially true when considering the sensitive nature of the subject matter of maternal educational involvement. As discussed later, this is what mothers feel judged about in relation to their ‘adequacy’ as mothers. Because of this, not all mothers who volunteered to be interviewed were from working-class backgrounds.
The table below shows that I included into my sample intermediate class mothers, including three immigrant mothers coming from privileged backgrounds in mainland China\textsuperscript{32}, and three middle-class immigrant mothers. I will discuss the implications of the sample composition later. The class distribution of the mothers is as follows\textsuperscript{33}.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Class Description</th>
<th>Local-born mothers</th>
<th>Mainland new immigrant mothers</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Middle class</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Intermediate class but coming from a middle-class background</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Intermediate class</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Working class</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>10</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 1 Distribution of mothers by class and ‘ethnicity’ (national origin)

Given that at the time of the interview only 6 mothers were in full-time employment, the class position of married mothers was primarily determined by the occupational status of their husbands, whereas the class position of single mothers was determined by their own occupational status. It should be noted that over half of the husbands of the local mothers were in ‘intermediate’ (class IV and V) occupational positions, working as self-employed small proprietor or builder, supervisor at construction sites, etc. In contrast, for immigrant mothers, 17 out of their 22 husbands (or ex-husbands of single-mothers) were or had been in ‘working class’ (class VI and VII) occupational positions as construction workers, drivers, security guards etc.\textsuperscript{34}. 5 immigrant mothers

\textsuperscript{32}This is in terms of their family’s class and/or educational background and their class position before migration. See details in Appendix II.

\textsuperscript{33}For a detailed profile of the interviewees, see Appendix II.

\textsuperscript{34}I determined mothers’ class position with reference to the class schema devised by Wong and Lui (1992) (as in...
had to take up part-time work to support household finance. Another 5 who could not work because of their child-caring duties reported that they were living on CSSA. All this suggests the more disadvantaged economic position of the families of the immigrant mothers when compared to the local-born mothers in my study.

Mothers’ class position was modified by considerations of their parents’ class background, the recent history of their families’ downward mobility, and their housing condition. It should be noted that mothers’ cultural capital did not always align with their economic class position. In particular, as I show in the empirical chapters, local intermediate-class mothers who were senior secondary school graduates and new immigrant mothers from privileged backgrounds in China draw heavily upon their upbringing and/or educational experiences as cultural capital in their choice-making and everyday educational involvement. As I discuss later, this exemplifies the ‘ambivalent’ positions that some of the mothers occupy in the educational field, which have implications for our understanding of the mechanism of class disadvantage. It should be noted that I did not ask for mothers’ self-identified class position, although this could be inferred from their invocations of themselves being from low-income families, as CSSA recipients, and as being ‘uncultured’. Some also discussed their experience of shame in having their children being called a ‘beggar’ or as ‘belonging to the slavery class’ at school, whereas others drew boundaries between them and specific groups of mothers. On the one hand, these testify to how the ‘ethnicized’ cultural inferiority of disadvantaged mainland immigrant mothers is intertwined with class in shaping mothers’ self-identifications in the local context (see Chapter 4). On the other hand, these reaffirmed the fact that class is a moral discourse about ‘self-worthiness’, and were taken into consideration in my analysis as I explore

Appendix III).

35The actual number of mothers who were living on CSSA could not be ascertained, however, because of the stigma associated with CSSA. I did not ask any questions about it during the interviews, and it was likely that some mothers living on CSSA might have chosen not to talk about it.
36A dividing line can be drawn between those living in private or public housing estate, and those living in dilapidated private housing (in urban West Kowloon only) awaiting government’s allocation of a flat in public housing. Those who lived in dilapidated private housing were all single mothers in my sample, which also explains their grave economic disadvantage.
37These pertain to assertions that one is ‘unlike’ those ‘CSSA recipients’, ‘mainland immigrants’ or ‘single mothers’ who are considered morally dubious because of their lack of ‘self-reliance’, ‘their involvement in drug business’, and/or ‘their lack of politeness’ etc.
how ‘affect’ shapes mothers’ cultural capital mobilization (cf. Skeggs 2004).
III CARRYING OUT THE INTERVIEWS

As I discuss in Chapter 4, under education reforms, Hong Kong parents are expected to rely on their own resources to support their children’s ‘life-wide learning’ and to exercise ‘rational’ choice in the school market to secure ‘the best’ for their children. Thus, the interviews with mothers focused on the extent of ‘fit’ between the cultural capital assumed by these institutional standards (cf. Lareau 1989) and mothers’ cultural capital in their secondary school-choice making and routine educational involvement. Besides, I highlight in Chapter 4 that the local school market is characterized by the segregation of schools according to their ‘banding’ and their medium of instruction, whereby top-ability ‘band 1’ and EMI (English-as-the-medium-of-instruction) schools are ranked top on the symbolic order. I also draw attention to the vagueness of information about schools’ ‘banding’ in the system, the reliance on parents’ assessment of their children’s ability level (i.e. ‘banding’) in choice-making, and the room allowed in the two-staged choice process for parents to take risks and manoeuvre. During the interviews questions were therefore asked about how mothers accessed information about the banding of schools and of their children; why or why not they chose ‘band 1’ and EMI schools; and how they negotiated the convoluted choice mechanism. In addition, questions were asked about how they supported their children’s learning, especially English learning, and how they invested in extracurricular activities. This is considering that students’ English language performance and extracurricular activities participation serve as an important basis on which schools screen and select students in choice processes in the local context. In this way, I could explore how the features of the local educational ‘field’ shaped the mechanism of class disadvantage in ways distinctive from that documented in the Western literature (cf. Devine 2004). Moreover, questions were asked about mothers’ involvement in networking activities in schools and community organizations and how this facilitated their generation of cultural capital as widely documented in the literature (e.g. Ball and Vincent 1998). Lastly, questions were asked about the gender...
division of educational labour, as well as how mothers saw themselves and whether they felt pressured in relation to their assumption of their educational role. This facilitated my incorporation of mothers’ perspectives and affective experiences into my analysis.

Despite the specific issues that I sought to address, I began my interviews with simple, open-ended questions, such as ‘Why is this school the one you want?’ or ‘How do you think of your child’s school performance?’39. This allowed mothers to spontaneously elicit constructs they considered relevant as they responded to the questions asked (Fielding and Thomas 2001), ensuring that their accounts were grounded on their ‘lived realities’ outside the interview setting. More specific questions could then follow for me to probe the ‘how’s (the processes) and the ‘whys’ (the meanings) of mothers’ practices. In this way, I could access information about the perspectives and actions of children, husbands, schoolteachers and any other individuals that mattered and explore how they were implicated in cultural capital mobilization so long as mothers considered this relevant. Interviews were semi-structured, with questions asked according to no rigid sequence but contingent upon the context of my interactions with the mothers. I asked a set of questions probing family backgrounds and circumstances at the end of each interview, unless these had been brought about during the interview conversation40. Interviews lasted between 40 minutes to two and a half hours, and they took place in most instances one-to-one with the mothers at home, in the community centre, at school, or in restaurant. Mothers signed the informed consent form before the interviews began. They were assured of the confidentiality and anonymity of the names of themselves, their children and their schools in the writing-up of the study. Interviews were conducted in Cantonese and were recorded with a MP3 player41.

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39See Appendix I.
40 These pertain to their (and their husbands’) occupational status, and their (for immigrant mothers) length of stay in Hong Kong, etc. See Appendix I.
41 None of the immigrant mothers had problems in conversing with me in Cantonese (the mother tongue in Hong Kong).
In all interviews I managed to establish rapport with the mothers, which helped the interviews run as smoothly as possible. The knowledge generated out of these interviews should be considered as situated and co-produced (Holstein and Gubrium 1997; Miller and Glassner 1997), delimited by the interactions between myself and the mothers. As I discuss as follows, this concerns: how I teased out tacit knowledge and unspoken processes in the interviews; the implications of mothers’ self-perception of ‘inadequacy’ in their educational role for the information I could access; my ‘privileged’ perspective as the researcher and how this shaped the interview conversation; and the implications of my focus on mothers’ experiences with one single child for those who had more than one children.

Firstly, mothers’ internalization of the objectives structures of inequality in the educational field is implemented as practical knowledge in choice-making (cf. Bourdieu 1984). Choice is accomplished through a ‘feel’ for the game, and cannot be easily articulated. This explains why mothers tended not to see the need to explain their option of or aversion to choices of ‘distinction’, i.e. ‘band 1’ and EMI schools (cf. Ball et al. 2002a). This is especially true for the more-advantaged mothers who took for granted their choices of ‘band 1’ EMI schools. But as I pushed for explanations for how such choices were made, by for example asking how they could avoid risks in their decision-making, I could elicit accounts of how they drew upon cultural capital (and economic capital) in their choice-making. This could refer to mothers’ familiarity with the choice mechanism and the strategies undertaken to minimize risks, or in terms of the economic and social capital that could be exploited should their risky choices go awry. This was what underpinned the unspoken sense of entitlement of these mothers. For the more disadvantaged mothers, they often readily dismissed their children’s ability to ‘fit in’ top-ability EMI schools. By probing the reasons why, I could elicit accounts of their disadvantaged access to cultural capital, such as the lack of competence to support their children’ learning, especially in English language. This underlay their perception of their inability to support their children’s studies in an elite setting, and in turn constrained their horizons of choice. Tacit knowledge is applied to everyday educational involvement as well. Better-
resourced mothers tended to see themselves as ‘un-involved’ in children’s education. But when I probed how they monitored their children’s learning progress, I elicited accounts of their emotional investments as they tried to make their cultural capital ‘work’ and how they endeavoured to avoid conflicts with their children by staying ‘hands-off’. In this way, I could access accounts that showed that the generation of class advantage cannot be assumed as straightforward (see Lareau 2003).

It should be noted that, as I pushed for answers about disadvantaged mothers’ aversion to choices of ‘distinction’, I was at risk of making these mothers uncomfortable or irritating them. It is because this amounted to pushing them to explain to me their ‘inferiority’ in relation to their educational role, which they felt they were judged about by the entitled middle class (as I appeared to be) and (for immigrant mothers) by the ‘ethnic’ other (given that I am local-born). In other words, my attempts to tease out the tacit processes underlying these mothers’ choice-making – and other educational practices – necessitated my provocation of shame. This is considering the way mothers are held morally responsible for children’s education in today’s school market (e.g. David et al. 1993; cf. Wong and Chan 2006). This is also considering the lack of value attached to ‘incompetent’ mothers (cf. Skeggs 2004), especially to ‘uncultured’ immigrant mothers. The sense of unease engendered was particularly evident in my interviews with highly-educated immigrant mothers who felt embittered about the irrelevance of their cultural capital in local schooling. They showed their impatience as I asked how they dealt with the difficulties in supporting their children’s English learning, and it appeared that they did not want to make a fuss about what they had been through. But it was precisely the unraveling of their experiences that highlighted how the ‘emotive intimacies’ of class (Reay 1999) and the ‘affect’ of navigating the field with a ‘wrong’ currency could shape cultural capital mobilization in indeterminate ways. As I show in Chapter 6, this could force the mother to accept her ‘inferiority’ as a ‘failing’ parent and distance herself from education work, or compel the mother to put up with the feelings of inefficacy and frustrations in the hope that her perseverance could pay off. Nonetheless, talk of inferiority and shame was often produced alongside accounts of positive meanings and hopeful action (I will return to
this point later). That the issue of stigma did not obstruct my access to information could be attributed to the fact that these mothers, assuming the role of ‘experts’ in their children’s development (if not education per se), did not see the presence of a young student researcher as threatening to their identity. More important was the fact that they were recruited from PTAs and community or grassroots groups and had the cultural capital to present themselves confidently in public (see Chapter 7; I will return to this point later). This attests to how my sampling strategy is implicated in the production of knowledge in this study.

Other than the issues of tacit knowledge and stigma, my background and middle-class upbringing is also implicated in the knowledge produced out of the interviews. This is considering the strong resonance I found between my own experience and the accounts of how the more-advantaged mothers socialized their children into self-direction. To avoid taking these accounts for granted, I kept myself alert to inconsistencies or contradictions in these mothers’ accounts. It was when I probed about these inconsistencies or contradictions that I learnt of the practical and emotional investments that these mothers expended on maintaining their ‘un-involvement’ in children’s education. At the same time, I kept reminding myself during the interviews that I had to clarify the nature and context of class disadvantage and cannot take this for granted. This was how I came up with accounts that showed that aversion to choices of ‘distinction’ did not always translate into choices made, and that class disadvantage can be generated in diverse contexts. For example, while a minority of the disadvantaged mothers chose to distance themselves from education work to spare themselves the feelings of inadequacy and anxiety, the majority relied on intensive supervision of their children’s learning. The latter were not necessarily ‘advantaged’ because of their sheer input of labour but rather because the intensity of their educational work could make them vulnerable to conflicts with their children, and could work to the detriment of their cultural capital mobilization.

My pro-feminist values also impacted upon the way I did the interviews, in terms of my inclination to push for (married) mothers’ elucidation of their apparent consent to
the unequal gender division of educational labour. In doing so I needed to guard against producing remarks that could be taken by mothers as a devaluation of mothering work. This is a particularly pertinent issue in my interviews with immigrant single mothers, given that it is exactly their assumption of their mothering role that invites the ‘ethnicized’ and gendered stigmatization of them as a group in ways different from immigrant men. It was also for this reason that these mothers’ accounts of their educational role were characterized by strong defensiveness about their worthiness to the society. It also engendered more discomfort for me to probe about whether they sought others’ (including their ex-partners’) help in sharing their educational burden. This took into account their difficulties in speaking about the antecedents of their single-motherhood. Thus, I needed to be more tactful in phrasing my questions. For example, I could ask them whether they had always been shouldering such onerous educational labour since they had arrived in Hong Kong when discussing their condition of migration without mentioning their divorce or ex-husbands. Whether for married or single mothers, the important issue was not to foreclose narratives of positive meanings attached to educational labour. This is because these gendered meanings are central to mothers’ assumption of primary responsibility for their children’s education, and to the way gender factor in class processes.

Lastly, it should be noted that 23 mothers in my sample had two or more children. To ensure I could achieve a focus in the data I yielded, I discussed educational practices in relation to one child only in each interview with these mothers. The child that I focused on was the one whose transition from primary to secondary school took place most recently or would take place the soonest. The focus on one child in the interviews means that I could lose sight of the ways class shapes educational practices in relation to different children within the same family because of changes across different stages of one’s life-course. For example, mothers’ negative experiences in

42 For example, when I suggested that mothers could have had better opportunities to develop a full-fledged career had they not been ‘stranded’ at home by their children (although this was often how they spoke about their mothering role).

43 As I discuss in Chapter 4, the cultural inferiority associated with the immigrant status can be compounded by that associated with the alleged ‘unproductivity’ of single mothers who often cannot but live on CSSA.
their intensive educational involvement with their elder children could result in a reorientation to a ‘hands-off’ approach to their younger children’s education. Another example is that the more disadvantaged immigrant mothers often experienced frequent relocation and had depleted resources when they had just settled in Hong Kong, which detracted from their choice-making for their elder children. But when it came to the choice-making for their younger children, they could benefit from the experiences they had accumulated. Lastly, for those mothers who had limited schooling experience and could not help with their children’s schoolwork, their apparent ‘disengagement’ from children’s education and choice-making could be contextualized. This was when I learnt how they could rely on the cultural capital of their elder children to manage school choice and provide learning support for their younger children. All these factors reaffirm the importance to consider contextual factors that cut across class in understanding the generation of class disadvantage.

44In this regard, Wong YL’s (2005) study showed considerable difference in families’ mobility strategies for different children in the same family differentiated along gender lines. It should be noted that I did not strive for a gender balance (in terms of the gender of children of the mothers) as I recruited the mothers for my study and I did not analyze the data from the perspective of how children’s gender makes a difference. Subtle differences were noted during the data analysis process, but the relevant findings were not presented in this thesis.
IV DATA ANALYSIS

Except for 6 interviews, I transcribed the recorded interviews verbatim and translated the texts from Cantonese to English on my own. Minimum efforts were spent on tidying up the language and grammar of the interview conversation, although this was unavoidable in the translation process. A thematic analysis was conducted without the use of coding software. I developed coding categories based on the domain of inquiry in concern. A common index which established a uniform set of principles guiding how segments of interview texts should be identified and classified as falling under particular coding categories was applied consistently across the data set. Interview segments were coded not only on the basis of the substance of what reportedly happened but also of how such experiences were made sense of. As more coding was done, I started making connections among text segments of different interviews. Some coded domains of inquiry were found to overlap with one another. It became easier for me to explore the antecedents and consequences of what was happening locally. For example, from the overlapping between the domains of ‘constructions of education’, ‘learning support and supervision’ and ‘identity as mother’, I discerned the centrality of educational labour to motherhood. From the overlapping between ‘learning support and supervision’, ‘mothers’ employment’, ‘household division of labour’, as well as ‘conditions of migration’, I discerned how mothers’ access to the capital needed for living up to the motherhood ideal was contingent upon class and ‘ethnicity’, which interacted with gender dynamics at home.

I began to develop themes using the analytical devices of cultural capital theory. The interview data was juxtaposed against the theoretical assumptions in the literature. These primarily concern how (a) the working class and immigrants have disadvantaged access to the cultural capital needed for exercising ‘the best’ choice for their children and proactively involving themselves in their children’s education as expected by the educational field; (b) class disadvantages (advantages) can be

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45 These are: Constructions of Education; Aspirations; Construction and Making of Choice; Mothers’ Upbringing and Schooling Experience; Household Division of Labour; Learning Support and Supervision; Home-School Activities; Identity as Mothers; and Conditions of Migration.
ameliorated (attenuated) by immigrant aspirations or ‘ethnic’ capital (or disadvantages associated with being an ‘ethnicized’ immigrant); (c) these class processes are gendered in specific ways depending on class and ‘ethnicity’. I observed similarities across backgrounds of class and ‘ethnicity’ in terms of mothers’ assumption of primary responsibility for education, their aspirations, and their aversion to choices of ‘distinction’; as well as how they generated cultural capital out of their social networks. These align with the observations in the literature. But at the same time, I found that mothers’ level of comfort with ‘choice’ varied along the local/ immigrant division rather than by class, and the expressed aversion to choices of ‘distinction’ of some of the mothers was inconsistent with their choices made. Also, some mothers reported being ‘uninvolved’ in children’s education, others reported intensive labour in supervising children’s learning, whereas a minority distanced from education work.

I proceeded with narrower readings and re-readings of interview segments assembled under emerging themes, and began to see a dividing line between two groups of mothers, whom I refer to throughout the thesis as ‘the (relatively) more advantaged (or privileged)’ and ‘the (relatively) less advantaged (or privileged)’. This facilitated a categorical analysis, which allowed me to spell out the pertinence of one’s class position, educational experience, and the ‘ethnic’ status of being an immigrant mother to the volume and convertibility of their cultural capital in the education system without sacrificing the complexities of the processes under examination. Within each group, mothers’ educational dispositions and practices align with one another to a great extent.
### Table 2 Distribution of more-advantaged and less-advantaged mothers

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Local-born mothers</th>
<th>Local-born mothers</th>
<th>Mainland new immigrant mothers</th>
<th>Mainland new immigrant mothers</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The more advantaged</td>
<td>Lara</td>
<td>Linda, Clara, Nicole, Rosa</td>
<td>Andrea, Sara, Connie, IC/High</td>
<td>Helena, Haley, Carmen, MC/High</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>IC/High (downwardly mobile from a MC position)</td>
<td>IC/High</td>
<td>IC/High</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The less advantaged</td>
<td>Irene</td>
<td>Brenda, Faye, Lucy, Ivy, Jennifer, Jade, Kit, Penny, Susie, Veronica, Ocean</td>
<td>Molly, Tina, WC/High</td>
<td>Flora, Liz, S, WC/High</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>WC/High</td>
<td>IC/Low</td>
<td>WC/High</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The less advantaged</td>
<td>Nancy, Mary</td>
<td>Kay, Yvonne, Pam, S</td>
<td>May, IC/Low</td>
<td>Hazel, S, WC/Low</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>WC/Low</td>
<td>WC/Low</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Legend:** MC = middle class, IC = intermediate class, WC = working class; High = with an educational attainment level at or above senior secondary schooling, in HK or in China; and Low = with an educational attainment level at or below junior secondary schooling, in HK or China; S = single mothers

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46 Irene can be understood as occupying an ‘ambivalent’ position in the field. A local matriculation graduate, she has abundant cultural capital to support her son’s learning and navigate the school market. Her cultural capital mobilization is however held back by severe financial difficulties and her sense of shame about the lowly occupational positions of herself and her husband, as exemplified in her choice-making (see Chapter 5).

47 Hazel represents another case of ‘ambivalent’ position. She has not finished primary school, is a full-time housewife, but is financially better-off than many mothers because of her investment in property. She is ashamed of her status as a single immigrant mother, but her boyfriend provides important cultural and economical capital in support of her daughter’s education and in particular Hazel’s ambitious choice-making (see Chapter 5).
As I demonstrate in the empirical chapters, for the more advantaged group, local educational experience entitles mothers to the familiarity with the school market, and to the proficiency in both Chinese and English languages, etc., which are cultural capital needed for their choice-making and routine educational involvement. As for middle-class immigrant mothers, they have economic capital to invest in tuition and extracurricular activities, which ameliorates their ‘ethnic’ disadvantage. For the more disadvantaged group, the ability to convert economic and social capital into cultural capital could make a difference in their negotiation of the choice mechanism, such that ambitious choices could be made in such a way that defied their aversion to choices of ‘distinction’. Their affective experiences in negotiating their perceived inferiority in relation to the convertibility of their cultural capital in the field and their ‘adequacy’ as mothers also shaped their cultural capital mobilization in indeterminate ways. My analysis enabled the clarification of how class manifests in ways systematically gendered and differentiated across the local/immigrant division, and how class disadvantages can be exaggerated or ameliorated. I began to transform these themes into analytical arguments, with the help of concepts such as sense of the ‘field’ and convertibility of cultural capital. To highlight how gender complicated class processes, I made use of the concept of emotional labour. Theorisations of respectability and shame allowed me to shed light on the way ‘affect’ injected indeterminacy into cultural capital processes. This is how I conjured up a narrative of class disadvantage, the generation of which was embedded in diverse contexts and specific to the ‘rule of the game’ of the local education system. My observations of the misalignment between class and cultural capital should always be understood in terms of the characteristics of my sample, however, as I elaborate below.

Firstly, my sample is an eclectic mix of local-born and immigrant mothers. The number of local mothers is only half of that of immigrants, and as shown in the above table, within the local group, there is only a small and heterogeneous group of ‘the more disadvantaged’ mothers, none of them being single mothers. My key arguments were therefore primarily constructed upon the themes emerging from the interviews of the immigrant mothers and those of the more advantaged local-born mothers. Despite
this, I did my best to show, as in the empirical chapters, the different resources the more disadvantaged local mothers could or could not draw upon\(^{48}\), and how they could be understood as occupying a more advantaged position vis-à-vis their immigrant counterparts in the educational field. Besides, there were no comparable findings about single-motherhood in the local sample. My analysis of how single-motherhood shapes educational practices depends therefore primarily on the way it is intertwined with a working-class position and the immigrant status.

Also, mothers were recruited from school PTAs and community groups. On the one hand, this means the mothers, with their involvement in social networks outside home, have social capital that they could convert into cultural capital in their educational practices. On the other hand, participation in these networks requires the availability of time and labour, and this explains why the majority of mothers are full-time housewives. In other words, the bottom rung of the socially-disadvantaged, deprived of capital of any sort, consisting of mothers who cannot be available for educational labour, was excluded from the sample. My observations of the substantial practical and emotional investments of mothers in education and the important role their networking activities play in facilitating the generation of cultural capital should be understood in context. These are the specific circumstances on which I base my arguments about the more contingent ways in which class disadvantage is generated in educational processes.

Moreover, only when I am fully sensitized to the implications of my privileged position in the interpretation of data can I make grounded claims of knowledge out of the findings of the study (Mason 2002). As discussed earlier, the resonance between my upbringing experience and the accounts of the more advantaged mothers was integral to my understanding of the apparent ‘un-involvement’ of these mothers in their children’s education. Whereas this could be understood as an expression of these mothers’ sense of entitlement rooted in the cultural capital they had, the fact that some

\(^{48}\) This is in terms of the diversity in the educational backgrounds, occupational status and availability of financial resources and family support (in childcare and education) of the mothers.
of these mothers did not occupy conventional middle-class positions as conceived in cultural capital theory necessitated the interrogation of the nature and context of their advantage in the field. In this way, I could clarify how senior secondary schooling experience in the local context can be mobilized as an efficacious resource in the field, as exemplified by the more-advantaged local-born intermediate class mothers. The same can be said of how immigrant mothers from privileged backgrounds in China draw upon their upbringing experience as cultural capital, which ameliorates their disadvantage in the field, as in the case of middle-class immigrant mothers, who can invest in their rich stock of economic capital in tuition and extracurricular activities.

Staying alert in interviews to inconsistencies and contradictions in these mothers’ accounts allowed me to make important qualifications about their ‘un-involvement’. This was aided by my observations of mothers’ practical and emotional labour expended ‘behind the scenes’. Class advantage was not taken for granted. Similarly, in my analysis of class disadvantage, I kept reminding myself of the need to elucidate the nature and context of class disadvantage and how this was implicated in the particular workings of the local educational field. These pertain to the ‘banding’ system, the symbolic value of English language (cf. Bourdieu 1991), and the room allowed for manoeuvre in the convoluted choice mechanism. As noted earlier, I also needed to pay attention to the indeterminate ways that ‘affect’ shaped cultural capital mobilization and complicated the generation of class disadvantage.

Moreover, I needed to guard against taking for granted the 'ontological complicity' (Bourdieu 1981:306 cited in Reay 1998) of the gendered habitus of mothers. As they invest in children’s education, they actively perform a mothering identity that is devalued in the society, and reproduce gender inequalities in the process. But it is precisely the narratives of their dilemmas in negotiating competing discourses of motherhood and citizenship that called for my attention to the contradictory experiences and inherent ambivalence of mothers’ educational involvement (see Ng 2004). This is what pushed me to ascertain the relevance of shame in relation to mothers’ economic ‘unproductivity’ (courtesy of their detachment from full-time paid work) to their investments in children’s education. Involvement in children’s education,
as I show in Chapter 7, is very much a personal project of the mothers themselves, the accomplishment of which is central to their cultural capital mobilization in education and class processes. Thus, knowledge can be produced to illuminate and critique the structural inequalities and cultural ideologies to which mothers are subject to without having their agency silenced (see Ho PSY 2007).

It should be noted that my recorded observations in and outside of interviews were taken into consideration in my data analysis. These did not only pertain to my observations of mothers’ impatience or dumfounded looks in response to my questions of their tacit knowledge and ‘common sense’ implemented in their educational practices. These also pertained to my observations of the assertiveness of the more-advantaged mothers in how they presented themselves in the PTA meetings, in contrast to the trepidation of some of the less-advantaged mothers as they whispered to me about their low educational attainment level and their lack of involvement in their children’s education. Other observations included the choice reference guides and dictionary that two working-class local mothers brought to the interview respectively; the (secret) mockery of the less-advantaged local mothers of the ‘babbling’ of their middle-class immigrant counterparts in the PTA meetings; working-class immigrant mothers’ apologies for the shameful ‘messiness’ of their home as I paid my visit; etc. These provided information on the embodied aspects of class, which are gendered and ‘ethnicized’, enriching my ‘feel’ for each of the interview accounts. These enhanced my understanding of the meanings of educational practices to mothers and its implication for their cultural capital mobilization.
CONCLUSION

This study examines class disadvantage in education in Hong Kong, focusing on the experiences of mothers’ secondary school choice-making and everyday educational involvement. A qualitative approach is needed for addressing the research question when considering the particular aspects of class reproduction that I aim to shed light on. Firstly, I have focused on the interaction between the cultural capital of mothers and that demanded by the educational field, and how cultural capital is mobilized in ways specific to the workings of the local school market. Secondly, I have focused on secondary school choice-making and everyday educational involvement, considering the institutional expectations on parents to make ‘rational’ choices in an increasingly privatized secondary school market, and to support children’s negotiation of a more demanding curriculum and their ‘life-wide learning’. These educational processes are negotiated, and involve the implementation of tacit knowledge. Thirdly, disadvantages in educational processes in Hong Kong cannot be understood without considering the issues of gender and the ‘ethnicity’ of mainland immigrant mothers, which interact with class in shaping access to the ‘right’ cultural capital and the perspectives and the affective experiences of parents’ educational practices. By adopting a qualitative approach, I have produced accounts of these micro-level processes of cultural capital mobilization that help to illuminate the ‘lived realities’ behind structural patterns of class differentials in educational outcomes.

I relied on qualitative interviews to access information about educational practices and their underlying meanings. Interviews elicited mothers’ narratives in their own terms as they discussed how they negotiated the educational system, and in particular the symbolic value of English language, the operation of ‘banding’ and the convoluted choice mechanism in the local school market. Their accounts allowed me to examine the embeddedness of educational practices in diverse contexts, but without ethnographical data I could not get at the interpersonal dynamics at the family-school interface and the instances in which cultural capital mobilized was thwarted or de-legitimated.
Mothers were targeted for this study to access information on the gendered meanings underlying educational practices and how these shaped cultural capital mobilization. Both local-born and mainland Chinese mothers were recruited to the sample in order to tease out how class and ‘ethnicity’ generate distinctive disadvantages that interact with and complicate class processes. I recruited mothers through school PTAs and community groups, which limited access to the most disadvantaged mothers. But by including more-advantaged intermediate class and a minority of middle-class immigrant mothers, I achieved a diverse sample composition that had important implications for the findings produced. The majority of the mothers in the sample shoulder substantial educational labour, and can generate cultural capital in their social networks. The more-advantaged mothers could also draw upon their educational or upbringing experiences as cultural capital. These characteristics of the sample are implicated in the production of my findings of the myriad of ways in which disadvantages associated with class and/or one’s immigrant status are generated or ameliorated and of the misalignment between cultural capital and class.

My findings of the contingency of cultural capital should also be understood in terms of how I conducted my interviews, where two issues arose. Firstly, there were difficulties in accessing the taking-for-granted aspects of mothers’ choice making and everyday educational involvement. While it was precisely the flexible nature of semi-structured interviews that allowed me to rephrase my questions or ask probing questions to tease out unspoken processes, this necessitated the provocation of shame in interviews with the more disadvantaged mothers. This is because mothers located themselves in the moral discourse of maternal educational involvement and often felt inadequate and stigmatized because of their disadvantaged access to cultural capital. Nonetheless, the fact that mothers were recruited from PTAs and community groups means that they were equipped with at least some of the necessary cultural capital to help them present themselves confidently during the interviews. The issue of stigma was a poignant one in their accounts, therefore, but it did not obstruct my access to information. In fact, accounts of shame provided important insights into the different
contexts of class disadvantage and in particular the indeterminate ways the affective experiences of choice and educational involvement shape cultural capital mobilization.

Mothers often asked ‘I don’t know if I can help?’; and they wanted to be assured that what they said matters. This reminded me of my responsibility to give meaning to their stories (Weitz 1987:21 cited in Miller and Glassner 1997) in writing up this study. I am aware too that mothers may not necessarily share my understanding of their educational practices. By being reflective about the implication of my active role in the production of my findings, I hope to avoid ‘over-sanitizing’ my data and fitting my interpretations too neatly into the framework of cultural capital theory. Thus, rather than producing one-sided accounts of mothers’ vulnerability and subjugation to an all-conquering gender order that deepens the disadvantage associated with their class and position as an immigrant in the wider society, I have tried to arrive at a rigorous account about class disadvantages in education that does justice to the values and meanings of the mothers.
CHAPTER FOUR
CONTEXT OF RESEARCH

INTRODUCTION

This study examines the mechanisms of class disadvantage in educational processes in Hong Kong by focusing on mothers’ secondary school choice-making and routine educational involvement. My research interest stems from my observations of persistent class differentials in educational attainment in Hong Kong, despite expanded educational opportunities. By 2011, 77% and 16% of the local population aged 15 or above had attended secondary or higher education and had completed a university degree course respectively (CSD 2012). Despite this, the class gap in access to university education has widened, and mainland Chinese immigrant students continue to be disadvantaged vis-à-vis their local-born counterparts in accessing post-compulsory secondary and university education (Post 2004). In order to better understand these structural patterns of inequalities, I locate my inquiry into micro-level processes of cultural capital mobilization in the context of local education reforms, which, as in education reforms in the West, are said to intensify class inequalities (e.g. Brown 1990; Smith 1998; Choi 2005).

I first describe the development of education provision in post-war Hong Kong and the education reforms since the 1990. Local education reforms are similar to reforms in Western education systems in terms of their underpinning neo-liberal principles, the marketization of schooling, and the emphasis on parents to rely on their own resources in supporting children’s education. But as I argue in the following section, class processes in local education reforms should be understood as different from that in Western education systems. This is considering the distinctive features of the local education system, namely the symbolic value it accords to English language (cf. Bourdieu 1991), the hierarchization of schools in terms of ‘banding’ (which indicates the ability levels of schools’ students intake), and its convoluted choice mechanism. These suggest different ‘rules of the game’, different ways in which cultural capital is
mobilized and hence a different mechanism of class disadvantage in the local school market when compared to its Western counterparts (Devine 2004; Yamamoto and Brinton 2010). I further this argument by highlighting the society-wide celebration of the instrumental value of education in the local context, which explains the high aspirations of the local working class. I also draw attention to mothers’ role in mobilizing these aspirations, which is constructed as morally virtuous in the local context (e.g. Chao 1994). Lastly, I discuss why it is essential to take into account ‘ethnicity’ in understanding class processes in education in Hong Kong. I first point out that the articulation of a dominant, normative and distinctive identity of the locals, premised upon the construction of Chinese immigrants as the ‘Other’, amounts to the ethnicization of the latter (cf. Chan E 2000; Lo 2007). The contentious nature in the use of the term ‘ethnicity’ in the local context is acknowledged. Despite this, to the extent that local-immigrant relations make visible ‘differences’ in terms of values and norms, language and lifestyle, immigrant mothers should be addressed in ‘ethnic’ terms. Since their ‘ethnicization’ is primarily premised upon their alleged cultural inferiority, their ‘ethnicity’ shapes their access to capitals and respectability in the ‘field’ and matters in their educational aspirations and practices. Then, I elucidate how immigrant mothers are at a disadvantage vis-à-vis the locals in the school market. Nonetheless, they boast a strong drive to push for their children’s educational success. This is embedded in the context of their migration, and in their desire to seek recognition in resistance against their ‘ethnicized’ cultural inferiority. All these suggest the potential for less-advantaged groups to generate cultural capital, which can potentially ameliorate their class disadvantage in a school market that privileges middle class cultural capital. I conclude by highlighting how the study contributes to the literature by shedding light on the way educational practices are shaped by contextual factors that cut across class and illuminating the manifestation of class inequalities in a particular context (Irwin 2009).
I EDUCATION IN HONG KONG

Hong Kong is a former British colony on the southern coast of China that served as an entrèpot throughout the pre-war period until 1949. At that time there was a massive influx of refugees from China fleeing from the rule of the Chinese Community Party following the establishment of the People’s Republic of China. With the inflow of labour as well as capital from China, the territory embarked on its export-oriented industrialization in the 1950s. Despite this, the majority of the Chinese population in the colony remained in poverty with meagre provision of social services and welfare, including education. Free school places, provided mostly in aided (i.e. government-subsidized) schools in the public sector, were only slowly expanding. Families relied on their own resource-pooling to finance their children’s (usually their sons’) education, hoping that the latter’s educational success and upward mobility would bring about the family’s social advancement (see e.g. Salaff 1981). After the 1970s, the colonial government began investing in infrastructure, housing, health and education in the light of a legitimacy crisis following the riots in 1967. Free, compulsory and universal six-year (primary) education and nine-year (primary and junior secondary) education was provided in 1971 and 1978 respectively. The highly selective Secondary School Entrance Examination at the stage of primary-secondary transition was abolished. This signaled the commencement of mass education in Hong Kong.

Primary and secondary education in Hong Kong is primarily provided by government and aided (i.e. government-subsidized) schools in the public sector, which are similar to ‘comprehensive’ schools in the English system. It is also similar in its structure of school years to state-funded schooling in England. Hong Kong children aged 3 enter kindergarten at K1 and finish at K3. They begin primary school normally at the age of 6 at P1 and finish at P6 at the age 11, the same age as their English counterparts making the primary-secondary transition. Children aged 12 begin their junior

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49The private sector, except for its fraction of international schools and English Schools Foundation (ESF) schools which used to cater for British expatriates, had been unpopular and in decline from the 1950s onwards until the 2000s when the Direct Subsidy Scheme (DSS) was introduced, as I discuss further later.
secondary schooling at S1, and finish at S3 normally at the age of 15. Before 2009, internal assessments determined whether they could proceed to the two-year senior secondary schooling (i.e. S4 and S5). Results in the Hong Kong Certificate of Education Examination (HKCEE) at S5 determined whether they proceeded to matriculation (i.e. S6 and S7), which is similar to ‘sixth-form’ in the English system. Results in the Hong Kong Advanced Level Examination (HKALE) at S7 determined whether they went to university. After 2009, however, the New Senior Secondary (NSS) curriculum was introduced. All students are now given the opportunity to enroll in three-year senior secondary education on top of the nine years of compulsory education. Both HKCEE and HKALE were abolished. They were replaced by the Hong Kong Diploma of Secondary Education (HKDSE), which now determines students’ transition to the university.

Over the last three decades, the number of standardized benchmarking examinations has been reduced in a normal schooling trajectory. There has never been any territory-wide standardized examination before children go to primary school. Between 1978 and 2000, P6 students needed to sit the Academic Aptitude Test (AAT), similar to the National Curriculum Tests in the English system. AAT results determined students’ allocation ‘band’ on which their secondary school place allocation was based. From 2001, AAT was abolished. Students’ internal assessment results became the basis of school allocation (I will return to the issue of ‘banding’ and secondary school places allocation later). Also, under the NSS academic structure, students have only one selection point (i.e. the HKDSE) at S7 (normally at the age of 17) to negotiate before going to university, compared to their predecessors and their English counterparts (who sit for the GCSE at year 10-11 and the A-level at sixth form). The reduction of the number of points of selection aside, the introduction of the NSS means free education is extended from 9 to 12 years. Before 2009, only one-third of S5 leavers had the opportunity to enroll in S6. Now, all students have the opportunity to study, for free, for three instead of two years of senior secondary schooling (i.e. S4-S6, with S7

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50The majority of schools in Hong Kong are ‘grammar schools’. Nonetheless, beginning from the 2008/2009 school year, S3 leavers can enroll in the Institute of Vocational Education (IVE) or other institutions with full government subsidy for doing technical or craft level courses before they can proceed to post-secondary level courses.
abolished and an extra year added to university education\textsuperscript{51}. In this sense, education provision in Hong Kong embodies norms of ‘contest mobility’ (Wong and Ng 1997; cf. Turner 1960) and allows as many children as possible to stay in schooling until the final competition point. This has allowed those from disadvantaged backgrounds to achieve educational success and experience upward mobility. This is evident in the 1980s and early 1990s when the expansion of the service industry opened up the ‘room at the top’ of the occupational structure for those upwardly mobile to capitalize upon (Wong and Lui 1992). Such experience has been and is still narrated as the ‘Hong Kong Dream’ (Wong and Lui 1995) realized in a ‘land of abundant opportunities’.

Nonetheless, Wong and Lui’s study (1992) also attests to class differentials in relative mobility chances, with those at the bottom of the class structure confronting strong barriers to long-ranged upward mobility\textsuperscript{52}. Such class patterns, as evidenced in Lui’s (2009) more recent mobility study, have hardly changed over the last twenty years. Lui’s findings are hardly surprising, considering evidence of persistent class disparities in educational attainment. According to Post’s analysis of census data (2004), in 2001, children from families in the top income quarter are 30\% and 100\% (i.e. twice) more likely when compared to their bottom income quarter counterparts to attain senior secondary and university education respectively. Also, whereas the influence of mothers’ education and family income on students’ educational attainment has diminished between 1981 and 1991, since 1991 the influence of mothers’ education on students’ attainment at senior secondary and postsecondary levels has shown no signs of diminishment. The same can be said of the influence of family income on senior secondary attainment. Post further highlighted that the gap between the university attainment of children with families in the top income quarter and those in the lower three quarters has widened substantially. The implication of Post’s findings is that class inequality in education, which first diminished during the decade that follows the introduction of mass education in the 1970s, has reverted nearly back to the level of

\textsuperscript{51}This is similar to the current English system in which free (state-funded) education is provided for children aged 3-18.

\textsuperscript{52}Similar observations can be found in Tsang (1992) and Chan TW (1995).
inequality prevalent in 1981 (p1254). It appears that, despite continual educational expansion and the introduction of measures geared towards ‘contest mobility’, disadvantaged groups have actually found it increasingly difficult to take advantage of expanded opportunities. To understand this, we need to examine education reforms since the 1990s.

As Chan AKW (2004) observes, into the mid-1980s, there were increasing concerns about students’ declining educational standards as a result of mass education. This called for measures to boost the efficiency and effectiveness of education provision to enhance the territory’s competitiveness amid global economic restructuring. Proposals for improving the quality of primary and secondary education were put forward in the early 1990s. This was in line with education reforms implemented under a neoliberal doctrine in advanced economies such as the UK: A high level of formal education is constructed as fundamental to the competitiveness of the labour force, the panacea for national economic crises under economic globalization. In 2000, the government put forward the education reform proposal *Learning for Life, Learning through Life* (Education Commission 2000), where it was stated that ‘quality education’ equips individuals with the capabilities of taking up economic opportunities in an increasingly competitive global market (see Ng 2003; Tse 2004). What ensues is an increasing emphasis on ‘quality assurance’, facilitated by outcome-based teaching and learning. This is evident in the introduction of the Territory-wide System Assessment (TSA) since 2004 and of the Pre-S1 Attainment Test since 2005. Both involve assessments in major subjects (i.e. Chinese and English language, and Mathematics). TSA takes place at P3, P6 and S3, which are comparable to internal assessments at year 2 and 9 in the English system. Assessment results are not published in public (as in the English system) and bear no implications for student selection at school transition points, but they affect how the schools are evaluated by the Education Bureau. Students’ results in the Pre-S1 Attainment Test are sampled every two years for scaling the allocation ‘banding’ of their juniors. While it does not directly affect students’ school places allocation, it affects the banding of the schools as assessed by the Education Bureau. In an increasingly competitive school market, schools are likely
to treat the TSA and the Pre-S1 Attainment Test as a high-stakes test as they were in the case of the AAT before 2000 (see Choi 2003; Tse 2004). In addition, internal assessment of students now takes into account a broad range of ‘personal qualities’ and ‘multiple abilities’ recorded in student portfolios (Choi 2005; Poon and Wong 2008). It is expected that these attributes can be nurtured under ‘life-wide learning’ ‘beyond the classroom’ (Curriculum Development Council 2000: 45-46). Parents are expected to provide ‘human and financial resources’ not only for ‘private tuition’ but also for ‘dance and music classes’ etc. (Education Commission 2000 141-142, 145). These measures align with the call for increased parental educational involvement and active ‘partnership’ with schools in education reforms in the UK (see e.g. Reay 2004a). Taken together, despite the clearance of some of the hurdles at school transition points and the extension of free education, a more demanding curriculum has been put in place for students and parents. This takes for granted families’ input of resources for negotiating the TSA, the Attainment Test, and more ‘broad-based assessments’ under curriculum reforms. It is the middle class that is more likely to have the ‘right’ cultural capital to comply with more challenging ‘rules of the game’ in today’s educational field.

It is also envisioned that ‘quality education’ can be achieved through the marketization of schooling, aside from reforms of curriculum and assessment mechanisms. The Direct Subsidy Scheme (DSS), which encouraged schools to ‘go private’, was first introduced in 1988. This was meant to diversify education provision, to allow parents to exercise choice in the school market, and to create competition between schools. It is assumed that parents act as rational consumers to choose in their best interest. As they exercise choice, low quality schools can be screened and weeded out (Ball 1993; Whitty and Edwards 1998). Standards and the efficiency of education provision can therefore be raised. In this sense, DSS is similar to the introduction of ‘charter schools’ in the US (e.g. Wells et al. 1999) and of grant-maintained schools that ‘opt out’ of the public sector in the UK. Nonetheless, it was not until the fifth phase of DSS, 53

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53This refers to independent tutors’ provision of services of schoolwork supervision and/ or coaching which usually takes place at the clients’ home. It is also popular for students in Hong Kong to attend tutorial (or ‘cram’) schools.
introduced in 2000, that it began making an impact on the school market (see Tsang 2002; Tse 2008). DSS schools run as private schools with a government subsidy calculated on a per capita basis. They enjoy autonomy in curriculum design and in the school fees they charge. Compared with public schools, they are granted a higher quota (30%) of discretionary places for selecting students in the Secondary School Places Allocation system (SSPA). When students’ allocation bands were broadened from 5 bands to 3 bands in 2001\(^54\), DSS became an option for an increasing number of traditional ‘elite’ public schools as they sought to maintain the quality of their student intake and educational standards (Poon and Wong 2008). By the school year 2011/2012, up to 11% of the secondary school student population attend DSS schools (with 17% attending private schools in total) (Education Bureau 2012)\(^55\). This represents the increasing privatization of formerly public cultural capital (in terms of goodwill and legacy) and social capital (in terms of alumni networks) in elite schools (Tsang 2002; Poon and Wong 2008). Only those who can afford the school fees and have the cultural capital for competing for the discretionary places (I discuss the selection mechanisms further in the next section) can access the ‘quality education’ in DSS schools. Also, DSS schools can consolidate their exclusivity by taking in students from their ‘through-train’, feeder or nominated primary schools. They must admit whoever applies for a school place from the through-train primary school. They can reserve up to 85% and 25% of school places (excluding repeater and discretionary places) for admitting students from their feeder and nominated primary schools respectively. Moreover, it is becoming popular for DSS schools to design their curriculum in preparation for students’ taking the International Baccalaureate rather than the HKSDE to accentuate their ‘distinction’. In this sense, DSS represents a mechanism that encourages the creation of privileged ‘circuits of schooling’ (Ball et al. 1995) for the middle class, who are likely to have the ‘right’ cultural capital to embrace the increasingly privatized school market. Given its extension to kindergartens and primary schools, DSS also represents a mechanism that embodies

\(^{54}\)This is intended to encourage mixed-ability intake in schools and to reduce the ‘labeling effect’ resulting from the assignment of banding to students and schools. See Poon and Wong (2008).

\(^{55}\)The corresponding figures for primary school attendance are 4.4% and 18% respectively. This represents a higher proportion of student attendance in the private sector when compared to the English system (with 7% attending schools outside the state-funded sector).
‘sponsored mobility’ (cf. Turner 1960) which restricts students’ entry to privileged ‘circuits’ at an early point of school trajectory. This offsets the egalitarian intentions of the measures introduced to allow as many children as possible to stay in schooling until the final competition point.

As in education systems in the West, education reforms in Hong Kong promote parentocracy (Brown 1990). Parents are expected to rely on their own resources to cover their children’s educational process and outcomes. What is sidestepped in education policy-making is the fact that parents are positioned in the educational field in such a way that they have unequal access to the cultural capital that ‘fits’ the ‘rule of the game’. But while Hong Kong shares with its Western counterparts the fundamental class bias in education reforms, they differ in the micro-level processes of how cultural capital is mobilized to one’s advantage or disadvantage in the school market. I will discuss how so in the sections that follow. I first examine the distinctiveness of the local school market and choice mechanisms, before I explore the issues of local working-class aspirations and the interaction between class, gender and ‘ethnicity’ in local educational processes.
II THE DISTINCTIVE INSTITUTIONAL CONTEXT OF HONG KONG SCHOOLING

The ‘field’ of schooling in Hong Kong shares with its Western counterparts the neo-liberal principles that underpin education reforms. But as Wu (2009) and Yamamoto and Brinton (2010) show, the ‘rules’ of the educational game and the cultural capital demanded by the field varies across societies and cultures. There are two distinctive features of local school choice mechanisms (and their implications for the mechanism of class disadvantage in cultural capital processes), which differs from that documented in Western education systems.

Firstly, the local secondary school market is characterized by a symbolic order founded upon the segregation between CMI (Chinese-as-the-medium-of-instruction) schools, which uses Chinese language as the medium of instruction, and EMI (English-as-the-medium-of-instruction) schools, which uses English as the medium of instruction (except for the subjects of Chinese language and Chinese history). This symbolic order was institutionalized by the introduction of the medium-of-instruction (MOI) policy in 1997. It was made clear that only the best secondary schools could teach in English, and only the best students could go to EMI schools, and all the schools that qualified as EMI schools in 1997 were top-ability ‘band 1’ schools (I will return to the issue of banding later). According to Choi (2003), the MOI policy signaled the government’s determination to implement an elitist language selection policy that was first proposed in 1989 rather than its commitment to mother tongue (i.e. CMI) education in the post-colonial era. That only a selected few are entitled to English language learning attests to the symbolic value of the language in the society (cf. Bourdieu 1991), the construction of which originated in the colonial context. According to Lin (1996), the mastery of English language was a prerequisite for one’s selection into elite Chinese circles in the early colonial era when English-medium

56 The segregation covers both public and private sectors. It should be noted that the ‘official’ bifurcation was enforced between the 1997/1998 and the 2010/2011 school years only, although the symbolic order of distinction based upon medium of instruction had been established long before 1997. See Lin (1996).

57 It was designated that only the best 30% of (secondary school) students could go to EMI schools. See Choi (2003) for details on the criteria for schools to qualify as EMI schools.
education was the prerogatives of those from privileged backgrounds. Only after 1949 had Anglo-Chinese secondary schools become more accessible to the wider public. The symbolic value of English language has continued to be upheld by the English-medium higher education policy and by the English language perquisite in the accreditation of professional qualifications and in the recruitment of high-ranked civil servants. English language competence achieved in senior secondary schooling is also recognized as vital for occupational and intergenerational mobility (see Chan TW 1995). Indeed, according to Tsang’s analysis (2011) of secondary students of the 1998/1999 and 1999/2000 cohort, students in EMI schools enjoy a significantly greater chance than their CMI counterparts in achieving better results in the HKCE and the HKALE. This implies the greater probabilities for EMI students to enter matriculation and secure admission to university. The handover in 1997 augments the symbolic value of English further, given the recognition of its centrality to competitiveness in the global economy and to the sustenance of the ex-colony’s status as an international financial centre. This explains the popularity of EMI schools among local parents (alongside the rising demand for expensive international schools).

The MOI policy represents a distinctive mechanism of cultural reproduction that privileges the cultural capital of the middle class. Families are positioned in the school market with unequal access to the cultural capital needed for facilitating children’s learning in an EMI environment. Those from disadvantaged backgrounds are unlikely to read English newspapers or socialize with expatriates regularly. They have limited exposure to the language in their life-world. EMI choice is therefore something ‘unnatural’ to which they do not feel entitled (see Lin 1996). There may not be ready exposure to the language in some middle-class families (see Yu 1994), but they can afford language programmes instructed by native speakers (see Wong YL 2007). In other words, it is middle-class parents who are likely to have the ‘right’ cultural capital

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58 Currently, only one of the eight universities in Hong Kong adopts a CMI policy.
59 Tsang also highlighted that CMI students are disadvantaged vis-à-vis EMI students in achievement in the subject Use of English in the HKALE, a core criteria in the evaluation process in university admission. This critically explains their much lower chance of being admitted to first degree programmes in higher education.
60 Lin (1996) also suggests that English language competence is often asserted as what differentiates the local Hongkonger from the mainland Chinese. Such identity politics assumes increasing importance after 1997.
for choosing an EMI school and securing for their children an elitist education that
takes up around 25% of the school market (as in 2009/2010; AMISS 2009). In this
way, class inequality in symbolic capital is reproduced (Lin 1996). These reproductive
tendencies are aggravated by the unequal distribution of EMI schools across the 18
school nets (i.e. catchment areas) on which Secondary School Places Allocation
(SSPA) were based (Tsang 1998). These tendencies are also aggravated by the
introduction of the Direct Subsidy Scheme, since those traditional ‘elite’ schools
switching into DSS schools are likely to be EMI schools. DSS schools charge
expensive school fees and enjoy higher autonomy compared to public schools in
admitting students through their own selection mechanisms in SSPA. This necessitates
greater familial investments in economic and cultural capital in choosing an EMI
school, and amounts to extra obstacles for those from disadvantaged backgrounds in
gaining access to EMI schooling.

Secondly, SSPA, the local choice mechanism, is distinctive in its operation of
allocation ‘bands’ and its convoluted nature. P6 students and secondary schools are
ranked on a hierarchy of ‘banding’ in the school market. As discussed earlier, banding
has been broadened from 5 bands to 3 bands since 2001. The lower the banding, the
higher one’s academic level. Since 2000, students’ banding is determined on the basis
of their internal assessment results in P5 and P6, which are scaled by the sampled
results of their seniors in the previous 2 years in the pre-S1 Attainment Test. The SSPA
comprises two stages. The first stage, Discretionary Places Allocation (DP), is
voluntary, and takes place in January when parents apply directly to no more than 2
schools within or outside their school nets (the school net to which a student belongs
is determined by the physical location of the primary school he/ she attends). The
second stage, Central Allocation (CA), takes place in May when parents submit a list
of no more than 3 schools outside their school net and no more than 30 schools within
their school net ranked in order of preference respectively. At the DP stage, schools

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61It should be noted that the MOI policy was subject to ‘fine-tuning’ beginning from the 2010/11 year. MOI
teaching modes become more diversified between and within schools. However, because this had not been
implemented at the time when the interviews were done (in late 2009/early 2010), this was found to be irrelevant
to the choice-making of the mothers in my study.
select students based on students’ performance in interviews (which sometimes involve parents as well), written tests, or other forms of assessment (e.g. through assessing one’s performance in individual presentation or group discussion). The form of assessment adopted by schools varies, although popular schools tagged with the ‘distinction’ of being ‘band 1’, ‘EMI’, ‘DSS’ or simply ‘brand-name’ (cf. Ball et al. 2002) are likely to adopt more elaborate assessment mechanisms. At the CA stage, each student is assigned a computer-generated random number. School places will first be allocated to band 1 students according to their order of preference of school choices. If the demand for school places of a certain secondary school exceeds the supply, the student possessing a smaller random number will be allocated a place first. After screening the school choices of band 1 students, the same procedure are run for band 2 and finally band 3 students. The allocation results are released in July. Those unsatisfied with the results can apply to schools directly in the post-allocation period, a process known colloquially as ‘knocking the (school’s) door’.

The way SSPA operates is similar to choice mechanisms in Western educational systems in the taken-for-grantedness of parents’ cultural capital. Cultural capital is needed for parents to familiarize themselves with choice procedures and to decipher the symbolic order in the school market. What is distinctive about Hong Kong is that the information about students’ banding provided by the school is not always precise, which means parents’ own assessment of their children’s ability levels plays a particularly important role in choice. As we have learned from Bourdieu (1984), disadvantaged parents’ internalization of the objective structures of inequality is likely to be implemented as ‘practical knowledge’ in choice. This is in terms of their aversion to choices of ‘distinction’, such as band 1 (and EMI) schools (cf. Ball et al. 2002). It can feel ‘instinctual’ for them to consider that their children cannot ‘fit in’. In addition, while school performance indicators are made public in the UK, public circulation of information about schools’ banding is prohibited in Hong Kong. In this sense, the differential access to the kind of social networks that can generate ‘insider knowledge’ about schools’ banding makes a key difference in choice-making (cf. Ball and Vincent 1998). Moreover, parents have to negotiate the varied implications of
choosing different types of schools at different stages. Choosing a band 1, EMI school at the stage of DP means they have to prepare their children for attending an interview and/or doing an individual presentation in English in the chosen school. They also have to have their children’s portfolio of certifications of participation and achievement in extracurricular activities ready. Choosing the same school at the stage of CA could be risky, because the demand for its school places is likely to exceed supply, but it is unlikely that parents can ascertain the level of competition for each of the schools they pick. Any ‘wrong’ ordering of school preferences can result in the allocation of a school not listed for CA.

All this suggests that how class ‘works’ in choice via cultural capital in Hong Kong is different compared to choice mechanisms in Western educational systems. But the implications are the same: it is the middle class that is likely to have advantaged access to the ‘right’ cultural capital for ‘rational’, informed choice-making. This pertains to the knowledge of mastering the strategies to manoeuvre in choice, and to the resources invested in the negotiation of the screening and selection mechanisms in the process (see e.g. Wong YL 2007). The middle classes’ sense of entitlement to securing the ‘best’ for their children is also important for them in the post-allocation period in order to atone for choices that go awry (cf. Devine 2004). But unlike their Western counterparts, it is common for local middle-class parents to send their children onto the ‘global circuit’ of schooling for education overseas as an extra option (cf. Waters 2005). This suggests the extra room the local middle class have for manoeuvre in choice compared to their less-advantaged counterparts.

Nonetheless, the SSPA should not be understood as just another example of how the field of choice privileges ‘skilled’ middle-class choosers and penalizes the semi-skilled or ‘disconnected’ working class (as in e.g. Gewirtz et al. 1995). The convoluted nature of the SSPA suggests that there is still room for manoeuvre for less-advantaged parents who may not feel entitled to choices of ‘distinction’. There are many points

62 According to the Census and Statistics Department (2011b), 2.8% of local domestic households, with a median household income of HKD35,000 (when compared to the HKD20,500 average in 2011) have their children (under the age of 25) pursuing secondary and post-secondary education overseas.
across the two stages of the SSPA at which parents can calculate and take risks. The risk can be backed up by decisions made at later points of the choice process. These instances involve decisions about whether to go through DP and whether cross-net choices should be picked for DP; without knowing the results of the DP, whether the choice in DP should be repeated in CA; how schools should be ranked in CA and whether cross-net schools should be chosen for CA; and many more. The decisions made at one stage and the estimated outcome of the decision made (e.g. whether the child is selected by the school picked at DP) influence the decision-making at the next stage. It is a process negotiated continuously. Thus, the way class resources determine choice outcome cannot be overstated. This is especially true when considering that mothers across class backgrounds are primarily responsible for choice-making, and even disadvantaged mothers are likely to have access to knowledge of choice strategies in their social networks. The application of such knowledge is vital to capitalize upon the indeterminacy built into the local choice mechanism. There is contingency in the way cultural capital works in choice, which depends upon the institutional context and on gender. This is what I turn to in the next section.
Parents across class backgrounds in Hong Kong value education and place importance on their own role as parents in supporting children’s education with the best resources (e.g. Mitchell 1972; Choi 1995; Lee MK 2001). This can partly be explained by the legacy of the pragmatic Chinese cultural value of education as a channel for social mobility (Wong YL 2010). This was buttressed by the materialistic ethos of the early post-war Hong Kong society where instrumental pursuits – such as educational achievement and the subsequent achievement of success in society – was prioritized for the family’s collective interest (Lau 1982). With the introduction of mass education, education is celebrated as a meritocratic competition allowing equality of opportunity for everyone to ‘get ahead’ (Wong and Ng 1997). Such a belief is inscribed in the ethos of competitive individualism nurtured in the heyday of Hong Kong’s economic development. All this helps explain why family-based educational involvement has always been considered as important (see Ho ESC 2006). In addition, the society’s education ethos should be understood in a socio-historical context in which the population can be considered as migration-sensitive and migration-prone (Wong and Ng 1997): Whereas in the early post-war period there was an influx of mainland immigrants looking for refuge from communism and economic security (as I discuss further later), the late 1980s and 1990s witnessed the exodus of the upper and middle classes seeking ‘political insurance’ via emigration prior to the ex-colony’s reversion of sovereignty to China in 1997 (see e.g. Salaff and Wong 1994). Under such circumstances, education is valued as a mobile, ‘liquid’ capital.

All these explain the consent of the wider public to education reform and its emphasis on the economic imperative of schooling and on the self-‘value-adding’ of the individual. This is especially true when we consider that the reform measures were introduced at a time when Hong Kong society was permeated with a general sense of unease (Ng 2003), in the aftermath of the Asian Financial Crisis that followed the

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63In contrast, parental involvement at school in the form of intervention in school management (e.g. being parent representatives at the school board) is uncommon and not widely accepted among schools in Hong Kong.
handover in 1997. Also, the ex-colony was perceived to be under increasing threat in economic competition from rising Chinese cities such as Shanghai. These sentiments have lingered on throughout the post-colonial era. In this sense, the way the handover reshapes the local educational landscape lies not so much in the reform measures implemented as in the way it strikes the nerves of Hong Kongers and compels them to seize the opportunity in educational competition for a sense of security if not advantage. This shapes parental educational practices in a way that upholds the legitimacy of the educational field and raises the stakes in the game. This is best exemplified by the local middle class, whose anxiety about ‘downward mobility’ and manoeuvrings in the school market is well-documented in academic and popular discourses (see e.g. Lui 2005; cf. Ball 2003).

Considering the socio-cultural and historical context of Hong Kong as an ex-colony, it is not surprising that local working-class parents, unlike their (white) counterparts in Western societies, are not constructed as being plagued with ‘cultural deficit’ in educational aspirations. It is unlikely that their mobility strategies are primarily geared towards maintaining their class position (if not securing an intermediate class position) as Goldthorpe (2000) describes. The benign environment facilitative of upward mobility as in the 1980s and early 1990s may have long gone, and the working class has in fact suffered more when compared to the middle class in economic restructuring and in today’s increasingly polarizing occupational structure (see Chiu and Lee 1997; Chiu and Lui 2004). However, despite this, the value they attach to

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64 This is considering the economic recession in the early 2000s (which was aggravated by the outbreak of the SARS (severe acute respiratory syndrome) in 2003) and the repercussions of the financial meltdown in the US in 2008.
65 As I discussed earlier, reform measures were formulated and proposed long before the handover. See e.g. Choi (2003).
66 The anxiety of the middle class can be understood from the perspective of their experience of ‘reversal of fortunes’ in the early post-colonial era when they suffered amid the slump of the property and stock market and organizational restructuring and downsizing (see e.g. Lui and Wong 2003). Ng (2003) also suggests that a substantial proportion of the middle class find their interests threatened by some of the education reform measures (e.g. the MOI policy).
67 This is exemplified in the overwhelming focus on the middle class in media discourses on education in terms of their lavish investments in extracurricular activities and relocation to ‘good’ school nets etc.
68 The construction of working-class ‘deficit’ in Hong Kong is more in terms of their lack of material (e.g. computer) and cultural resources (e.g. participation in extracurricular activities). See Chapter 2.
69 This is in terms of the displacement of manufacturing (especially female) workers since the 1990s, many of whom failing to reintegrate into the knowledge economy (also see Leung VHT 2002; Pun and Wu 2004). Even if the service economy has absorbed a large number of skilled, middle-class workers, at a faster rate the number of
education does not seem to have wavered, unlike the increasingly skeptical and cynical middle class (Lui 2005). It is in this sense that the local working class should be understood as having a rich stock of cultural capital at their disposal in the educational field. But as I emphasize in earlier chapters, little is known about how they mobilize their cultural capital and why such mobilization may not be as effective as that of their middle-class counterparts. Also, the role of working-class women in mobilizing such cultural capital is seldom questioned, with their labour in preparing their children for an increasingly competitive educational race taken for granted (cf. Stambach and David 2005; Chan et al. 2008). The role of gender in educational processes in Hong Kong should be understood as constructed in a particular socio-cultural context that normalizes and moralizes women’s educational involvement. How gender shapes cultural capital mobilization (and the implications for the mechanism of class disadvantage in education) must be understood as specific to the local context.

Under mass education, women in Hong Kong have achieved parity with men in terms of their educational attainment levels (Choi 2004; Mak 2009; see also Post 2004) and have increased their labour market participation\(^70\). Despite this, gender inequality in terms of occupational status and attainment persist. Women remain under-represented in professional and managerial jobs, and less-educated women, together with new immigrant women, are over-represented in low-status, low-paid and casualized jobs at the bottom of the occupational structure (e.g. Mak and Chung 1997; Chan and Cheung 2001; Chiu and Lui 2004). This can be attributed to the absence of a fundamental ideological shift towards gender egalitarianism, as exemplified in the entrenched cultural association of women with household and child-caring responsibilities which encourages an unequal gender division of labour (e.g. Choi and Lee 1997; Equal Opportunities Commission 1997; Lee WKM 2002). This explains why women’s labour force participation tends to drop upon childbirth and further declines when

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\(^70\)Female labour force participation rate has increased from 48.9% in 1986 to 53.4% in 2011 (CSD 2012).
children reach school age (Lau et al. 2006). The dominance of women in part-time employment can also be explained by women’s inclination to accommodate their paid employment to domestic responsibilities (see CSD 2010). Gender therefore conditions the availability of mothers’ educational labour. In particular, working-class women’s confinement to short-term jobs with low security makes it unsustainable for them to be the family’s breadwinner (Leung VHT 2002). The availability of their educational labour can therefore be understood as constructed ‘by default’.

The availability of women’s educational labour is rooted in structural inequalities in the economy, but these inequalities are interlocked with cultural ideologies specific to the local context. Wong and Chan (2006) document how motherhood in Hong Kong is constructed as founded upon women’s ‘god-given mission’ in overseeing their children’s socialization and education for their nurturance as future citizens. But implicit in this discourse is the legacy of Chinese patriarchy of which the moral code is founded upon the continuity of the male line (Ng 2004), which necessitates the subordination of women’s interests to the family. Chandra (2003) also suggests that women’s pursuit of gender equality (e.g. in occupational status) is perceived as detrimental to the harmony valued in Chinese familialism. In addition, the value that Chinese culture attaches to education means that a high level of parental – read maternal - involvement in ‘training’ (i.e. ‘educating’) children for educational success is emphasized (Chao 1994). What I am suggesting is not that Hong Kong women, in shouldering primary responsibility for their children’s education, are indoctrinated by an overarching gender ideology (see Ng 2004 for a critique for this position). What I want to highlight instead is their negotiation of the gender norms implicit in education and child development discourses, as well as the specific cultural ideals that construct the subordination of their personal pursuits to the needs of the family (and children) as morally ‘virtuous’ (see Lee WKM 2002). These cultural ideologies are also inscribed in the local institutional context. Mothers are expected to be responsible for childcare and to rely on family networks to help out if needed. This explains the severe lack of

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71The corresponding trend in the UK goes in the reverse direction, however. This suggests the particular importance attached to parental (maternal) educational involvement in the local context.
affordable childcare services in the community. Whereas middle-class women can always hire a domestic helper to help out (see e.g. Chan AHN 2006)\textsuperscript{72}, as SoCO (2011, 2012) reports this profoundly restricts disadvantaged women’s availability for paid employment and hence the source of income for their families\textsuperscript{73}. This aside, parents leaving children under the age of 16 unattended at home can be charged for criminal offence. This heightens the risks for mothers who cannot secure childcare services to go to work after school hours. The local institutional context shapes the availability of educational labour of women, especially working-class women.

Gender shapes cultural capital mobilization and how class ‘works’ in educational processes because it conditions the availability of women’s educational labour. This is important for working-class women, because this makes their labour available for generating cultural capital (e.g. information about extracurricular activities and choice strategies) they otherwise might lack in social networks. That women’s educational experiences can make a difference in intermediate and working class families also suggests the need to examine indeterminacy in class processes. But gender also matters in the way it shapes the affective experiences of mothers’ educational involvement and the emotional labour (cf. Hochschild 1983) they invest in the process. This, as I discuss in Chapter 2, can facilitate or incapacitate cultural capital mobilization in different class and ‘ethnicized’ contexts. Mothers in Hong Kong are similar to their Western counterparts in the dilemmas and stresses they encounter as they negotiate competing discourses of motherhood and citizenship (see e.g. Newendorp 2010). But in the Hong Kong context, mothers shoulder the additional burden of living up to the ideals of Chinese familism. This must be taken into account in our understanding of why some mothers distance themselves from educational work in defense against the shame that their ‘inferior’ cultural capital may invite, whilst others bid to seek recognition for their self-worthiness through ambitious choice-making, etc.

\textsuperscript{72} But hiring a domestic helper can mean additional burden on women, and they may also be expected to concentrate on children’s learning having their labour in domestic chores relieved. See also Lee WKM (2002) and Groves and Lui (2012).

\textsuperscript{73} See SoCO (2011, 2012) for a detailed discussion of the limitations of local childcare services and the difficulties for disadvantaged families to apply for fee exemption or subsidies for using these services.
Local working-class aspirations and mothers’ involvement in children’s education can be understood from the perspective of the socio-cultural and historical context of Hong Kong society. This highlights the need to explore how cultural capital mobilization is contingent upon specific institutional contexts and to understand the implications of such contextual factors for understanding the indeterminacy in class processes in education. In the two sections that follow, I first point out the sustained entry of mainland immigrants into the territory since its early colonial years, and describe how they should be considered to have been ‘ethnicized’ vis-à-vis the locals. I then argue further why we cannot understand the mechanism of class disadvantage in Hong Kong schooling without taking into account the position of mainland Chinese immigrants in the ‘field’, addressed in terms of ‘ethnicity’, and its interaction with class and gender.
IV ‘ETHNICITY’ IN HONG KONG

Hong Kong has always been an ‘immigrant society’. Between 1842 and 1950, people trying to escape from political unrest in China were free to migrate to the colony. In the early colonial period, Hong Kong society was clearly divided along racial lines between British and European government officials and merchants and the Chinese population, whereby the Chinese were deemed racially inferior. But with the rise of Chinese merchants, who merged with their British counterparts into a capitalist class and then established their power in the social and political structure, racial divisions were superseded by class relations (Chan WK 1991). With the massive influx of refugees from China into the territory looking for political stability, economic opportunity and refuge from communism during and after the World War II, Britain and China agreed to restrict the entry of immigrants in 1950. China began issuing One-Way Permits (OWP) that granted the entry of a maximum of 75 immigrants into the territory per day. Despite this, there was continual entry of illegal immigrants escaping from impoverishment and starvation in China in the late 1950s, and from the Cultural Revolution in the 1960s and 1970s. According to Ku (2004), to prevent onward emigration and repatriation on a large scale, the 'ethnic' uniformity of the Chinese immigrants with the local (Chinese) residents was emphasized by Britain. Then, in 1971, the immigration category of 'the Hong Kong belonger' was introduced into law. As Ku suggests, this should be understood in terms of Britain's intent to regulate ethnic migration and restrict the scope of British citizenship as its former colonies became decolonized. What is more relevant for our discussion here is how this triggered the first discourse of local belonging among the Chinese population in Hong Kong74, and the ensuing ascendency of the local Hong Kong identity.

The above shows how the 'ethnicity' of the Chinese population in Hong Kong, presumably a homogenous entity, was constructed and manoeuvred as the British

74 The rise of the discourse of Hong Kong identity should also be considered in a context in which (i) the British colonial government actively promoted a sense of belonging to the local community as it confronted a legitimacy crisis in the 1960s; and (ii) local popular culture, with its vivid portrayal of the style of life of the typical ‘self-made’ Hongkonger, became a dominant cultural force. See for example Ng (1998).
colonial government reacted against the influx of Chinese immigrants in the early post-war period. The colonial government did not impose tighter control of entry of illegal immigrants until the late 1970s. By then, refugees entering the territory between the 1950s and the 1970s had become the backbone of the industrialization of the local economy. They become the protagonists in the ‘Hong Kong Dream’, who personify the Hong Kong identity with their work ethic and enterprise (cf. Lui and Wong 1995). Nowadays, they are unlikely to identify themselves as ‘immigrants’. But for those new Chinese immigrants (pronounced and addressed as san yi man in Cantonese, where ‘san’ means ‘new’) entering the territory after the 1980s, they have become one of the most discriminated groups in the society. Despite that they share with the locals their ethnic Han Chinese identity, in a society where 94% of its population are Chinese (CSD 2012) they are treated as a minority group as in the case of Filipinos, Indonesians and other South- or Central- Asians (Sautman 2004). In particular, their differentiation from the presumably culturally superior locals, frequently portrayed and hyperbolized in popular culture, is considered as what serves as the basis on which a unique, hybrid and cosmopolitan (local) Hong Kong identity is founded and consolidated (e.g. Ma EKW 1999; Lo 2007). Arguably, to differentiate from Chinese immigrants is of higher urgency to the locals in post-colonial Hong Kong. This is considering that it is China rather than the Hong Kong Special Administration Region (HKSAR) government that controls the flow of legal immigrants into the territory, who, as I elaborate below, are perceived as threatening to the wellbeing of the local community.

In this sense, local Hong Kong Chinese can be considered to have 'ethnicized' new Chinese immigrants as the 'Other' as they 'constitute themselves as a “fictive ethnic unity”' (Lo 2007, p432) in articulating their distinctive identity as the ('ethnic') majority. Such 'ethnicization' becomes obvious in two controversies that arose in 2011 and 2012 respectively. In 2011, the government's decision to dispatch a sum of social

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75 See Law and Lee (2006) for a detailed discussion of policies on entry of mainland immigrants in post-war Hong Kong.
76 It should be noted that mainland immigrants entering the territory after 1997 are sometimes addressed as 'new arrivals' by local researchers.
benefits (HKD6,000) to every Hong Kong citizen (i.e. permanent resident, including new immigrants who have attained permanent residency) triggered debates concerning whether new immigrants deserved their entitlement to such benefits. In 2012, mainland Chinese parents without permanent residency who had their children born in Hong Kong were accused of eating up local medical resources. They were also accused of 'purchasing' (via the purchase of local medical services) Hong Kong citizenship for their ‘anchor babies’, who, being born in the territory, are entitled to permanent residency. These controversies instigated debates around the ‘ethnic’ politics between locals and new immigrants or mainlanders in general. What transpires is the political mobilization of an increasingly essentialized Hong Kong identity or culture (e.g. Chin 2011), against undeserved welfare-dependent immigrants or amoral, unscrupulous mainland parents. Some critics allude to ‘racism’ (e.g. On To 2011), or make comparisons with ethnic conflicts in Tibet or Xianjiang (where the indigenous population are not from an ethnic Han origin) in China (e.g. Lam PW 2011). Arguably, the political mobilization of a Hong Kong identity distinct from and superior to that of the mainland had already surfaced back in 1999. Then, the Hong Kong Court of Final Appeal ruled that children born to permanent residents of Hong Kong, including those whose mainland-born parents had yet attained permanent residency at the time of their birth, should be entitled to the right of abode in the territory. The government’s estimate of an influx of 1.67 million of mainland immigrants as a result of the ruling led to widespread panic. As Chan E (2000) argues, mainland immigrants were then constructed as a 'significant Other' that threatened the well-being of the local economy and society. This sowed the seeds of the political mobilization of a unified local Hong Kong identity.

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77 Hong Kong SAR is not a nation-state and does not claim an exclusive national citizenship of its own. According to its mini-constitution, the Basic Law, people having ordinarily resided in Hong Kong for at least seven years are granted the right of abode and are deemed ‘permanent residents’, a legal category which bears the status of local citizenship.

78 According to Article 24(3) of the Basic Law, the spouses and children of Hong Kong permanent residents are entitled to the right of abode in Hong Kong after 1997. The ruling of the CFA followed a judicial review initiated by a parent of his mainland child deemed to have smuggled into and illegally stayed in Hong Kong according to the Immigration Ordinance. The SAR government eventually asked the Standing Committee of the People’s National Congress in Beijing to clarify the meaning of the laws involved in the ruling, but in the end CFA's ruling was upheld.
The above shows that 'ethnic' relations and politics have always been part and parcel of life in post-war Hong Kong, even if these have not been officially recognized\textsuperscript{79}. To be true, from the perspective of the Beijing government, to construct and 'ethnicize' an independent and ideologically coherent Hong Kong cultural identity against a mainland Chinese identity when both groups share an ethnic \textit{Han} Chinese identity\textsuperscript{80} is politically incorrect. Nonetheless, the fact that 'old' and 'new' Chinese immigrants in Hong Kong have been constructed with divergent, almost antagonistic cultural meanings testifies to the contested nature of their immigrant identity or 'ethnicity'. The instability of 'ethnic' boundaries is also evident in the exclusion of mainland immigrants, considered as 'identifiable minorities' by the British colonial government, from the protection of the Race Discrimination Ordinance in the SAR\textsuperscript{81}.

To ‘ethnicize’ locals and new Chinese immigrants can also be considered as problematic on an analytical level. New immigrants are often described in 'ethnic' terms by local academics (e.g. Lee KM 2004; Sautman 2004). Nevertheless, in Western contexts, 'ethnicity' as a collective identity is often mobilized when minority groups demand recognition in identity politics, whereas in Hong Kong, as Lo (2007) contends, it is the majority, the local-born (or self-identified 'local' as in the case of the 'old' immigrants) who actively construct their distinctive cultural identity as normative and dominant. But in a way similar to ethnic relations in Western contexts, local-immigrant relations do make visible 'differences' in terms of values and norms (e.g. in understandings of 'civic-mindedness'\textsuperscript{82}), language (e.g. in competence in Cantonese and English language)\textsuperscript{83} as well as clothes and food (which signify 'taste'). It is

\textsuperscript{79} According to Ku and Chan (2011), ‘racial’ discrimination was considered an issue too politically sensitive to address by the British colonial government. Since 2009, the Race Discrimination Ordinance has come into full effect, but it excludes mainland Chinese immigrants (except for those from a non-\textit{Han} ethnic origin) from its protection (see Lo 2007).

\textsuperscript{80} It should be noted, however, that ‘ethnicity’ is a highly contentious issue in China, as exemplified by the conflicts in the Autonomous Regions of Xianjiang and Tibet. In fact, how ‘ethnicity’ is understood in China does not necessarily accord with that in the Western literature. See for example Barabantseva (2008).

\textsuperscript{81} See Ku and Chan (2011).

\textsuperscript{82} For example, mainlanders are often said to lack civic-mindedness because of their spitting behaviour and habits of jumping queues.

\textsuperscript{83} In China, Putonghua is the official language, although people speak different dialect in different regions. It should be noted that while Cantonese is considered as the mother tongue of Hong Kong natives, there exist ‘indigenous’ population in the territory whose mother tongue is not Cantonese (for example, those who speak the Hakka dialect).
commonplace for these cultural signifiers to be caricatured in such a way that create feelings of the inferiorized 'otherness' of new immigrants\textsuperscript{84} (cf. Goodhart 2004 cited in Alexander et al. 2007). It is in this sense that, in this study, I address immigrant mothers in ‘ethnic’ terms. Their ‘ethnicization’, interlocked with their disadvantaged position in the economic structure and social marginalization, is integral to their (lack of) access to capitals and respectability in the ‘field’, hence implicated in their educational aspirations and practices. I elaborate this in the next and final section.

\textsuperscript{84} Examples of these cultural signifiers include the ‘misdemeanour’ of eating on the Mass Transit Railway (which signify ‘lack of civic-mindedness’), or the preference for knee-length transparent stockings (which signify poor ‘taste’).
When compared to the local working class, the economic position of new immigrants is more disadvantaged. They lack the cultural capital recognized by the labour market, namely the competence in Cantonese and English languages, and the basic knowledge of the local society. This helps explain their overrepresentation in the least skilled and least protected positions in the labour market (Wong H 2000; Chiu and Lui 2004), and their much lower median monthly household income (HKD8,000 in 2011) compared to the average of the population (HKD20,500 in 2011) (CSD 2012). This holds back their occupational attainment and social mobility (Chiu et al. 2005). This suggests how class is implicated in the cultural ‘inferiorization’ and social marginalization of new immigrants, considering how their disadvantage in the economic structure necessarily excludes them from a Hong Kong way of life and cultural identity that celebrates competitive individualism and materialism (Lo 2007). This is more obvious when we consider those mainland mothers who entered the territory after the 1990s, whose disadvantaged economic position and perceived cultural inferiority bears upon their educational involvement in a way that is ‘ethnicized’, as well as gendered and classed.

Since the Open Door Policy in economic development of China in 1979, an increasing number of people have begun travelling to and from China for investment, work and consumption. This has resulted in a surge in the number of intermarriages. The number of immigrants granted entry into the territory via OWPs was increased to 150 per day in 1995. 60 of the quota were designated for children born in the mainland to Hong Kong permanent residents, and 30 for mainland residents separated from their spouses (usually husbands) in Hong Kong. Mainland immigrants arriving in the recent two decades are therefore primarily children and women whose entry is granted for family reunion purposes. Similar to the mainland immigrants arriving before the 1990s,

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85 This is despite the similarity in the average educational attainment levels between the natives and new mainland immigrants (CSD 2011b).
86 Between 1986 and 2006, there was an almost 80% increase in the number of Hong Kong men marrying mainland women (from 15 776 to 28145) (CSD 2010).
the ‘new’ female immigrants lack the recognized cultural capital necessary to compete in the labour market. Academic and professional qualifications (e.g. in teaching and accounting) are not recognized. Also, these women are expected to shoulder household and child-caring duties upon arrival. This interlocks with their disadvantage in the labour market in enforcing their detachment from (full-time) paid employment and their financial dependence on their husbands (Lee WKM 2004; Wong WL 2004). For those married to local men from disadvantaged backgrounds, it is likely that they have to engage in low-status, low-paid part-time work to make ends meet and to accommodate their domestic duties (e.g. Leung HC 2004).

The above explains why, when compared to their spouses, immigrant mothers find it more difficult to embrace the ethos of competitive individualism in the mainstream society. Their assumption of unpaid domestic labour is however rendered invisible in the construction of their cultural inferiority, in terms of their lack of initiative to ‘upgrade’ themselves for competing in the knowledge economy and of how they have become a liability to the society at a time when public expenditure, including that on social welfare, has to be kept at a minimum (Pun and Wu 2004; also see Li HL 2009). Also invisible is their disadvantaged access to local citizenship that valorises the local, bourgeois, enterprising male subject (cf. Lo 2007; also see Leung LC 2004; Wong WL 2004; Newendorp 2010). All new immigrants have to reside in Hong Kong for at least 7 years before they can apply for permanent residency (the lack of which is a source of discrimination in the labour market) and for Comprehensive Social Security Assistance (CSSA)\(^\text{87}\). And when compared to local working-class mothers, disadvantaged immigrant mothers find it more difficult to strike the balance between earning an income for the family through paid work and tending to their children. They are thus more constrained in making their educational labour available.

Moreover, across class backgrounds new immigrant mothers are disadvantaged in the local educational field vis-à-vis local-born mothers. They lack the familiarity with and

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\(^{87}\) Before 2004, adult immigrants only had to reside in Hong Kong for 1 year before they could apply for CSSA. This represents one of the measures of the government to cut down on public expenditure. Children under 18 are exempted from this rule.
knowledge of the education system and its choice mechanisms. Their educational experience in China is also deemed as the ‘wrong’ cultural capital that cannot be converted in the field in relation to their support for their children’s education. They learn and write Chinese language in simplified characters in China, and it takes time for them to adapt to the use of traditional Chinese characters in children’s schooling (and in the mainstream society) in Hong Kong. More importantly, these mothers are likely to find it difficult to engage in children’s English learning effectively. As Hu (2005) suggests, English learning was not provided in basic education in China until the late 1970s. Regional disparities in English language education have persisted as a result of the concentration of resources in more developed regions, and only until recently has English been made a compulsory subject in secondary schools. Thus, even the most-educated mothers are likely to have learned the language at a rudimentary level only. They are particularly disadvantaged in a school market where English language competence is recognized as a symbolic capital that needs to be mobilized by parents for choices of elite EMI schools. This is also likely one of the reasons for the disadvantage of immigrant secondary students in English language achievement and the struggles they encounter in EMI and/ or higher-banding schools (Pong and Tsang 2010). These observations are consistent with Post’s (2004) observations that immigrant students who arrived in or after 1991 have only one-third and one-fourth as many chances as their native counterparts to attain senior secondary and university education.

Nonetheless, similar to immigrant groups in Western contexts (e.g. Sue and Okazaki 1990; Hao and Bonstead-Bruns 1998; Tseng et al. 2007), mainland immigrant families are strongly driven for children’s educational success. As So (2003) suggests, for local disadvantaged men who are deemed ‘less marriageable’ in the local marriage market, marriage with mainland women should be understood as their ‘project’ to reproduce

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88 Pong (2009) highlighted the ‘redshirting’ phenomenon among immigrant students who enter at any school level at an age older than native students normally do as a way to ‘compensate’ for their disadvantage. This is likely to explain why immigrant students are more likely to finish senior secondary schooling later than their native counterparts normally do (Post 2004). Unfortunately, whether the children of the immigrant mothers have gone through the ‘redshirting’ process was not a theme addressed during the interviews, and there was insufficient data that can be subject to a systematic analysis in this respect.
their male descent line and to achieve social advancement via their children’s educational achievement and upward mobility (see also Wong WL 2004). As for mainland mothers, educational qualifications attained in Hong Kong promise their children better economic prospects in the global economy. Also, education in Hong Kong is considered more ‘affordable’ compared to that in China. On paper, the school trajectory that a child normally goes through in China is similar to that in Hong Kong. But the state’s commitment to society-wide market reforms since the early 1990s has contributed to an extremely competitive education market in urban areas. As Crabb (2010) suggests, the education market is characterized by a ‘you get what you pay for’ culture that normalizes ‘frantic’ educational investments. Such investments include supplementary lessons and examination preparatory courses etc. provided in public and private schools in after-school hours (including holidays) that aim at boosting students’ performance and generating income for the schools themselves. Junior middle (i.e. junior secondary) school choice mechanisms share similarities with that in Hong Kong and in Western societies. Nonetheless, as Wu (2009) observes, it is common for parents to offer ‘donation’ (of money and materials) as a ‘choice fee’ to schools in order to secure their children a school place. This is condoned by under-resourced governments which struggle to finance local schooling. It is also common for parents to use their social connections, i.e. ‘guanxi’, to secure a school place, because ‘guanxi’ (relational networks built for facilitating reciprocal exchanges of favours) is widely accepted in Chinese culture. These suggest the different and more elaborate (and expensive) ways that economic, cultural and social capital is mobilized in the education market in China compared to Hong Kong, which helps explain the strong drive of immigrant parents to capitalize upon local educational opportunities. Taken together, the high educational aspirations of mainland immigrants should be recognized as what can be mobilized as cultural capital that can compensate for the disadvantage associated with their class background and immigrant status in the ‘field’. Nonetheless, whether such capital can be mobilized effectively remains contingent upon class contexts (Leung YL 1998; cf. Shah et al. 2010). The point here

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89 The great urban-rural disparities in education provision and attainment levels in China should be noted.
90 This is in terms of the allocation of school places based on catchment areas; the ‘opting out’ of ‘key’ (i.e. elite) schools, which become quasi-private selective ‘converted’ schools (similar to DSS schools in Hong Kong).
is that cultural capital mobilization cannot be presupposed from families’ class position.

It should also be noted that immigrant mothers are primarily responsible for mobilizing resources for their children’s schooling. The drive for educational success aside, cultural capital in terms of knowledge of the school market or tangible assistance for their children’s learning (e.g. loan of books or free tutoring) can be generated in community and immigrant or ethnic networks (cf. Tang 2002; Shah et al. 2010). This is made possible by the availability of their labour, which is constructed by their disadvantaged economic position, interlocked with cultural ideologies of motherhood. But this strong drive for children’s educational success should also be understood in a context where immigrant mothers have to make distinctively gendered sacrifices in making themselves available for their children’s education. Unlike the selected few granted OWPs via the Quality Migrant Admission Scheme, immigrant mothers often wait for 10 or more years before their OWP is granted (So 2003), and their occupational trajectory is likely to be disrupted post-migration or even before their migration as they travel back and forth to visit their families in Hong Kong (cf. Wong WL 2004). For those coming from more privileged backgrounds, their qualifications and work experiences are rendered irrelevant upon arrival, necessitating occupational downward mobility. Besides, they need to endure the cultural inferiority stacked against them by the locals: not only because of their status as immigrants, but also because of their economic ‘unproductivity’ as they commit to their mothering role (cf. Newendorp 2010). The ‘affect’ of migration is particularly profound for those working-class immigrant mothers who divorce their husbands post-migration, since they often cannot but live on CSSA (see Pun and Wu 2004), which is heavily stigmatized in Hong Kong (Chan KW 2004). In addition, under Chinese familialism, single-motherhood is considered an outcome of their failure to uphold the harmony of

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91 Immigrants entering the territory via this scheme have their OWP granted much more promptly. The scheme aims to attract the immigration of persons overseas with cultural capital in terms of professional qualifications, entrepreneurship, or talent in specific areas (e.g. acting).

92 According to CSD (2010), around 45% of single mother population in 2006 were out of paid employment (with the corresponding figure for single fathers being 8.3%). This partly explains why the number of single mothers on CSSA was almost 70% more than that of single fathers in 2009.
the family. In view of this, the high aspirations of immigrant mothers and the other forms of cultural capital that they can generate for their children’s education should be understood as embedded in the context of their migration and ‘ethnicization’, and is mobilized when they seek positive recognition through ‘respectable’ educational practices (cf. Sayer 2005).

To conclude, we cannot understand the mechanisms of class disadvantage in education in Hong Kong without taking into account how class processes are shaped by gender and ‘ethnicity’. Being a mainland immigrant incurs distinct disadvantages in the educational field that can diminish class advantage. But ‘ethnic capital’, including but not limited to the high educational aspirations of immigrant mothers, can potentially ameliorate class disadvantage. Immigrant mothers should therefore be understood as occupying an ‘ambivalent’ position in local schooling. How cultural capital is mobilized in classed and ‘ethnicized’ context is also shaped by gender. Families should therefore be understood as positioned in a field of intersecting social divisions and inequalities. This illuminates the need to examine how cultural capital ‘works’ in a way specific to the Hong Kong context that is more contingent and less determined by class.
CONCLUSION

This study examines the mechanisms of class disadvantage in education in Hong Kong by focusing on mothers’ secondary school choice-making and routine educational involvement. This is to enable better understanding of persistent class differentials in educational attainment in Hong Kong despite expanded educational opportunities (Post 2004) from the perspective of micro-level processes of cultural capital mobilization. I locate my inquiry in the context of local education reforms, which, as in neoliberal education systems in Western contexts, are said to intensify class inequalities (e.g. Brown 1990; Smith 1998; Choi 2005). Nonetheless, given that the ‘rules of the game’ of the local school market differs from that in its Western counterparts, how class disadvantage is generated under local education reforms should not be assumed as the same as that in Western contexts (Devine 2004; Yamamoto and Brinton 2010).

The local school market is characterized by a complex and opaque symbolic order in which top-ability ‘band 1’ and ‘EMI’ schools occupy the top of their respective but overlapping hierarchies. Information provided about students’ ‘banding’ is often imprecise, whereas information on schools’ banding is not publicly circulated. ‘EMI’ schools, which are mostly ‘band 1’ schools, assume parental resources for supporting children’s English language learning in their student selection mechanisms. At the same time, an increasing number of these schools are running as quasi-private ‘DSS’ schools which charge expensive school fees. All these suggest middle class economic, cultural and social capital are privileged in the school market (cf. Ball 2003). Also, the reliance on parents’ assessment of their children’s banding in choice-making means that it is more likely for less-advantaged parents to avert ‘privileged circuits of schooling’ (cf. Ball et al. 1995) as a result of their internalization of the objective structures of inequality in local schooling and hence their acceptance of their children’s ‘inferiority’ (cf. Bourdieu 1984). Nonetheless, there is room for parents to manoeuvre and take risks in the convoluted choice process, which even less-advantaged parents can capitalize on in making ambitious choices. In other words, the
school market exhibits tendencies that exaggerate and at the same time mitigate class disadvantages.

I further my argument on the indeterminacy in class processes in the school market by looking at the society-wide celebrated instrumental value attached to education. This suggests a rich stock of cultural capital in the local working class in terms of aspirations, which, in a context where maternal educational involvement is lauded as morally virtuous, are actively mobilized by mothers (cf. Wong and Chan 2006). I also highlight how ‘ethnicity’ complicates class process. I draw attention to the disadvantaged position of immigrants in the educational field vis-à-vis the locals. At the same time, I underline the importance of the high educational aspirations embedded in the context of migration as a source of cultural capital. I further argue that these aspirations are engendered in the context of the ‘ethnicization’ of immigrant mothers in Hong Kong. Such capital is mobilized as these mothers seek to exploit local educational opportunities and counter the construction of their cultural ‘inferiority’ (cf. Pun and Wu 2004). All these suggest circumstances that encourage the generation of cultural capital in disadvantaged families, which can potentially ameliorate their class disadvantage in the school market.

This chapter shows how cultural capital theory can be applied to Hong Kong in such a way that helps shed light on the ways structural patterns of inequalities are produced in micro-level class processes under education reforms. The study can also contribute to the wider literature by illuminating how contextual factors that cut across class shapes cultural capital mobilization (see Irwin 2009) and the mechanism of class disadvantage, in a way specific to the local institutional standards and more contingent than that documented in generic accounts of class reproduction.
CHAPTER FIVE
SECONDARY SCHOOL CHOICE-MAKING

INTRODUCTION

This chapter examines class disadvantage in education by focusing on mothers’ secondary school choice-making. My inquiry is located in a context in which parents are expected to rely on their own resources to exercise ‘rational’ choices in securing their children ‘the best’ in an increasingly privatized school market (Ball 1993; Whitty and Edwards 1998). The underdeveloped local literature on choice-making echoes with findings in the Western literature about the disadvantaged access of the working class to the ‘right’ cultural capital needed for choice (Hui et al. 2005; cf. Gewirtz et al. 1995). This study fills a gap in the local literature by considering several other issues that the Western literature sheds light on. These pertain to the role of unspoken processes and how the internalization of objective structures of inequality is implemented as tacit, practical knowledge in choice-making (cf. Bourdieu 1984; Ball et al. 2002). I also examine how gender interacts with ‘ethnicity’ in complicating class process (Bowe et al. 1994; Stambach and David 2005; Byrne 2009). As I discuss in Chapter 4, these issues are highly relevant to the Hong Kong context, not least when considering the operation of the system of ‘banding’ in choice mechanisms which relies on parents’ assessment of children’s ‘banding’ in choice-making and amplifies the way class delimits their horizons of choice. But as I show later, the distinctive features of the local school market, especially the convoluted nature of its choice mechanisms, shapes cultural capital mobilization in ways different from that documented in Western education systems, and in such a way that injects indeterminacy into class processes. This aside, I highlight the relevance of the affective experiences of choice-making, which is gendered, and how its implications for cultural capital mobilization are magnified in disadvantaged and ‘ethnicized’ contexts (e.g. Reay 1998).
I first examine how mothers acquire knowledge about the ‘banding’ of their children and schools when such information is vaguely circulated in the ‘field’ of the school market. Mothers’ networking activities, naturalized as their everyday mothering work, facilitates their access to such market information but also to knowledge of choice strategies. This is particularly important in helping immigrant mothers ameliorate their disadvantage in terms of their unfamiliarity with the system. However, this cannot always be mobilized as the ‘right’ cultural capital geared towards the ‘best’ choices of top-ability ‘band 1’ EMI schools (cf. Gewirtz et al. 1995). As I examine mothers’ horizons of choice next, I show that market information and choice strategies cannot be mobilized as cultural capital in the absence of other forms of cultural capital needed for negotiating the selection mechanisms of schools, especially when considering how these mechanisms prioritize children’s English language competence. Mothers also lack the economic capital to choose these elite schools, which are increasingly privatized. Also, the reliance on parents’ own assessment of their children’s ability level (i.e. ‘banding’) in choice-making encourages mothers’ aversion to these choices of ‘distinction’ (cf. Ball et al. 2002), especially considering their fears that getting it ‘wrong’ will shame them as mothers (cf. Reay 1996). Nonetheless, in examining how choices are made, I show that even ‘local’ choices have to be worked at in a convoluted choice process. Moreover, horizons of choice do not seamlessly translate into choice decisions. It is precisely the indeterminacy built into the convoluted choice mechanism that allows room for even the less-advantaged mothers to manoeuvre as they make ambitious but risky choices. My findings affirm that class powerfully shapes and generates disadvantage in choice-making. Nonetheless, I show that class processes play out in a way different from that documented in Western education systems where the rules of the game are different from that of the local institutional context. I also emphasize the contingency of cultural capital within diverse classed, gendered and ‘ethnicized’ contexts (cf. Bowe et al 1994). In this sense, the choices of the more-disadvantaged cannot simply be dismissed as adapted to constraints and to the inevitable. Cultural capital cannot be read off straightforwardly from class, and class disadvantage in choice cannot be assumed as automatic.
I SETTING FOOT IN THE FIELD

Mothers’ narratives of how they set foot in the ‘field’ of the local school market displays a sense of discomfort - expressed by a minority of the more-disadvantaged immigrant mothers - as well as the extensive use of personal and parental networks in generating valuable information for choice-making by mothers across class backgrounds and the local/immigrant division. From these narratives I develop two major arguments. First, local-born mothers across class backgrounds draw upon their familiarity and experience with the education system as cultural capital in preparing themselves for choice. The inherent vagueness of information circulating in the field is considered problematic only by a minority of the less-advantaged immigrant mothers as they try to decipher the symbolic order of the field. Second, mothers’ networks serve as an important source of hands-on knowledge that mothers put into practice in their choice-making. This is most relied on by immigrant mothers, because this is almost the only source of the cultural capital needed for playing the game of choice in the local context. In the following, I first examine how mothers access information about children’s banding and explore choice options via various sources. Then, I look at how everyday mothering work facilitates their access to ‘hot knowledge’ about choices (Ball and Vincent 1998).

According to the majority of mothers, teachers are the primary source of knowledge about students’ banding. Teachers cannot always tell the precise banding of students, however: Students are said to belong to the ‘best’, the ‘middle’ or the ‘worst’ within a band, or they are ‘marginally’ band 1, 2 or 3. This was considered problematic by some of the more disadvantaged immigrant mothers who either are not conversant with the language of ‘banding’ or are not convinced by teachers’ assessment of their children’s banding. This suggests the sense of discomfort experienced by these mothers because of their lack of familiarity with the field. In contrast, two more-

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93 These mothers, when asked about their children’s banding, were more inclined to cite their children’s ‘mediocrity’, being ‘middle’, and what teachers had said about children’s school results or homework performance, etc. One mother (working-class Jennifer) was unconvinced that ‘a paper’ handed to her by the teacher could ‘prove’ her son’s banding.
advantaged intermediate-class local-born mothers (who finished senior secondary schooling in Hong Kong) discussed how they determined their children’s banding in the interview. Their familiarity with how the ‘game’ works was mobilized as cultural capital as they prepared for choice-making. As Lara exemplifies:

I do the calculation myself. After that I confirm with the school the banding [……..] [I] look at the results in [the subjects of] Chinese language, English language, Math and General Studies. If I am correct… 10% of [the results of] General Studies and 30% of [the results of] each of the subjects of Chinese language, English language and Math will be taken into account… [so as] the results of three exams …including the exams in the second semester of P5, and the first and second semesters of P6.

As I discuss later, the ability to draw upon her experience in the local education system as cultural capital is also what underlies Lara’s sense of entitlement to choice.

Other than children’s banding, mothers also need to learn about the choice options available in the market. As discussed in Chapter 4, mothers have a lot to learn as they explore a field where schools are hierarchized in terms of their banding and medium of instruction; where parents enjoy preferential consideration in choice by certain secondary schools should their children study in the feeder or nominated primary schools; where children are granted direct ‘promotion’ to the secondary section of a ‘through-train’ school should they study in the primary section of this school⁹⁴; and where they find an increasing number of top-ability band 1, EMI (English-as-the-medium-of-instruction) schools switching into DSS (Direct Subsidy Scheme) schools that charge a school fee much more expensive than public schools do. Information can be accessed in school websites and reference guides (published officially or by newspapers and magazines), but mothers can also access information by attending talks or schools’ Open Days. However, it turns out that very few mothers in my sample

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⁹⁴ This is on the condition that students forgo their participation in the two-staged choice process (the Secondary School Places Allocation). The through-train option was considered by some mothers as a mechanism which relieved them of the toil of choice-making, as I discuss later.
use school websites and reference guides to seek choice information. Almost half of
the mothers reported attending talks or schools’ Open Days, but again local mothers’
familiarity with how the system works was evident. Local-born mothers, across class
backgrounds, reported having attended talks organized by regional PTAs, trade unions
or political parties etc. aside from talks or visits organized by their children’s primary
schools. They were aware that they could only learn about what secondary schools
choose to introduce to parents or put on display in talks and Open Days, and so were
keen to learn more from disinterested parties. In contrast, immigrant mothers, across
class backgrounds, tend to draw more exclusively on talks or visits recommended by
their children’s primary school. This means they were less likely to attend talks or
visits according to their assessment of how well the schools ‘matched’ with their
children in terms of banding, ethos, etc. This explains why some of these mothers
reported that they did not find the information they obtained from the talks or visits
useful, given that the secondary schools introduced in talks or visited were often
limited to ‘brand-name’, top-performing schools or school(s) to which their children’s
primary schools were linked as a feeder or nominated school.

Moreover, the public circulation of the information on the ‘real’ banding of schools is
prohibited in the local school market. Mothers cannot access such information via
school websites, reference guides, talks, Open Days, or in their consultation with
primary school teachers about choice options. More than half of the mothers reported
having consulted with school teachers about their choice-making, and more than half
within this group do not find this useful, because teachers cannot tell them the ‘real’
banding of schools. What mothers learn from teachers instead is a range of ‘okay’
schools and a list of ‘infamous’ schools that they must avoid. Local mothers’
familiarity with how the system works is again evident. Intermediate-class local
mothers Rosa and Clara displayed a sense of comfort in the face of this lack of
concrete information. They acknowledged what teachers said was too ‘implicit’ and
‘conservative’, but they knew this was expected. The same cannot be said of working-

95 Secondary schools usually hold talks on their own campus or delegate administrators to primary schools to do talks.
class immigrant (single) mother Yvonne:

I asked the teachers which schools are classified as band 2, and which are band 3. ‘Look, we can’t label schools as such’, they said. A waste of time… How can we parents know? We’ve never been through this… Why bother talking about band 1, 2 and 3…it’s so hard to know the boundaries [……] they said, ‘These [secondary schools]… are [linked to our primary school, which is the] nominated school, but these are top schools.’ …I don’t need to be told about this.

Local-born mothers had the edge over immigrant mothers in the field in terms of their ‘feel for the game’. However, immigrant mothers can generate cultural capital for choice-making through the resources they accrue in social networks when doing everyday mothering work. All mothers, including the minority who appear ‘disengaged’ from choice (as I will discuss later), mentioned how they had learnt about choice from people they knew, such as fellow parents (mothers) and friends; neighbours and the folks in the community; as well as relatives, church-mates, and clients or colleagues (for working mothers). These networks facilitate access to ‘hot’ knowledge of ‘insider’ information (Ball and Vincent 1998) useful for them to navigate a school market:

…it’s prohibited for people to have very clear classifications [of different schools]. So […] I can only listen to what other parents say. [Liz, immigrant working-class single mother]

Mothers learn about what others say about schools’ ‘real’ banding, and more importantly, how to play the field strategically. They learn about how competitive student enrolment is in particular schools, how competitive it is in different school networks, the criterion (e.g. students’ achievement in extracurricular activities) for selection in different schools, etc. These serve as the basis on which they calculate risks and determine the room they have to manoeuvre in choice processes, as I discuss
Information acquired from social networks is important for all mothers but is particularly important for immigrant mothers, given their unfamiliarity with how the system works. In particular for the less-advantaged immigrant mothers, by simply going about their everyday mothering work (e.g. taking children to school or to go swimming) they can acquire the much-needed information without leaving their comfort zone. Half of the immigrant mothers gave vivid accounts about how aggressive they were in acquiring choice information. Working-class immigrant mother Jennifer, a member of the PTA, reported how she asked fellow parents about choice regardless of whether they were familiar with one another, and it did not matter if she was acting like a ‘nosy bitch’. As for Sara (intermediate class immigrant mother from a middle-class background in China):

All the information was gained through gossiping… I deliberately started asking his [the son’s] schoolmates’ mums and [whoever] in the parks [when I took the younger son there]… It must be someone [whose children were] studying there [in the secondary schools], and you asked … how their kids were doing, how they felt [about the secondary school]. That’s concrete, practical experiences.

The above shows that mothers’ ‘networks’ can be formed via fortuitous encounters. Mothers can make friends with pretty much anyone they bump into and ‘sniff around’ (in working-class immigrant mother Tina’s words) about choice.

Lastly, it should be noted that a minority of mothers, across class backgrounds and the local/immigrant division, reported having done observations of the students and the

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96 Nonetheless, immigrant mothers had much greater problems in their children’s primary school choice-making when compared to secondary school choice-making. It is because primary school choices were often made at a time when they had just arrived in Hong Kong and were confronting issues such as frequent relocation and severe financial deprivation. Also to be noted is that some immigrant mothers, as in local-born mothers, can benefit from their past experience in secondary school choice-making for their elder children when making choices for their younger children. This suggests differences in the ways cultural capital is mobilized and choices are made for different children in the same family (cf. Wong YL 2005).
surroundings of the schools they were considering choosing (cf. Reay and Ball 1997). They did this when they were on their way to the primary school or to the market. This is another example showing how doing everyday mothering work facilitates access to choice information.

To summarize, everyday mothering work facilitates much-needed access to choice information for immigrant mothers, which helps ameliorate their disadvantage vis-à-vis the locals in the ‘field’ because of their lack of familiarity with the local school market. This is especially true when considering that the networks through which they can generate cultural capital for choice are also where they can seek local knowledge, tangible support and friendships that are important for facilitating their adaptation to life in Hong Kong in the early years following their arrival (cf. Ryan 2007)\(^7\). Had it been the fathers who took charge of choice, it would have been less likely for choice information to be acquired in this way. This is because fathers are less likely to be involved in these kinds of networks (see Chapter 7). This suggests that gender can shape educational processes in a way that helps ameliorate class disadvantage, and more importantly, the disadvantage associated with one’s position as an immigrant in the school market. Nonetheless, choice information acquired in social networks by local-born and immigrant mothers is not necessarily mobilized as cultural capital geared towards ‘the best’ choices, i.e. band 1 and EMI schools, as defined by the ethic of the market. Rather, this cultural capital is often mobilized in such a way that encourages the reproduction of mothers’ disadvantaged position in the field, as I will show in the next section.

\(^7\) The same can be said of how these networks facilitate immigrant mothers’ access to information about private tuition and extracurricular activities, as I discuss in the next chapter.
II HORIZONS OF CHOICE

As discussed in Chapter 6, all the mothers in the sample have high educational aspirations. However, the majority of mothers (including the more-advantaged intermediate class mothers) accept the school’s judgment of their children’s banding (however imprecise it is). They also produce designations of children’s ability that help shape their aversion to choices of ‘distinction’ (Ball et al. 2002a) – schools culturally coded as ‘brand-name’, band 1 and EMI schools – in the ‘field’. Class manifests not only in terms of capital but also in the ways these mothers see themselves and their children (and in ways different for local and immigrant mothers). As they negotiate choice, the majority of the mothers are at the same time negotiating a sense of inferiority emanating from a disadvantaged position in the field as well as the anxiety about their ‘adequacy’ as mothers who can make the ‘right’ choice. This underlies the psychosocial dynamic that disposes mothers towards an aversion to choices of ‘distinction’, which encourages the reproduction of their position in the field (cf. Walkerdine et al. 2001).

For the more-disadvantaged mothers, the fear that their children may find it ‘too hard’ if they go to a ‘good’ secondary school featured prominently in the interviews. For example, working-class immigrant mothers Ocean, Veronica and Kit were convinced that their children could not manage learning in a band 1 EMI school. For Ocean, this was because other parents ‘are [were] spending over a thousand a month on [private] tuition (or tutorial schools)’, and this was not the kind of money she could afford to support her daughter’s studies in an elite setting. This attests to how cultural capital in terms of choice information cannot be mobilized in a way geared towards ‘the best’ choice in the absence of economic capital. Nonetheless, the horizons of choice of the more disadvantaged mothers should not be understood as a mere ‘rational’ adaptation to the opportunities and constraints associated with their class position (cf. Goldthorpe 1996). It should also be understood as a reflection of the way mothers’ internalization of the objective structures of inequality in the educational field is implemented as ‘practical knowledge’ (cf. Bourdieu 1984). In this sense, designations of children’s
ability indicate mothers’ acceptance of the inferiority of their class and of their ‘sense of one’s place’ (cf. Ball et al. 2002b). For example, Kay (working-class immigrant single mother) did not pick the more competitive schools recommended by teachers. For her, if her son had entered one of these schools, she would not have been able to

...bear with the pressure. Everyone is going to school by their private cars while I am walking to the school. Also, I think my son has not reached their [the schools’] [academic] level.

This illustrates how a mother’s judgment of her child’s ability is conflated with the ‘inferiority’ of her own class, which is in danger of exposure in an environment of ‘distinction’. This psychosocial dynamic makes it difficult for more-disadvantaged mothers to overcome the disadvantages associated with their class, and arguably, in the case of more-disadvantaged immigrant mothers, ‘ethnicity’, in choice making. As we shall see later and in the forthcoming chapters, the ‘sense of place’ of Kay and her fellow immigrant mothers in the educational field is not only classed but should always be understood in a context in which they are ‘ethnicized’ as culturally inferior.

Even if the more-disadvantaged mothers have been generating cultural capital in order to support their children’s education, such psychosocial dynamic is still at work. For example, Faye (intermediate class local-born mother), who did not finish junior secondary school, enrolled her daughter in a tutorial school where students mostly come from ‘EMI primary schools’ ‘in Kowloon’. Mixing her daughter with these students is believed to ‘make a difference’. But when asked about her choice decision, she lamented ‘no one speaks the [English] language’ at home and that her daughter was not ‘up to that level’ expected at EMI schools. The same can be said of Irene

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98 As we shall see in the forthcoming chapters, the sense of one’s cultural inferiority is much less discernible (but not completely absent) in the accounts of the more-advantaged immigrant mothers. In this sense, the ‘felt injury’ (cf. Sennett and Cobb 1972) of ‘ethnicity’ can be considered to be mitigated by class advantage. The ‘sense of place’ of the more-advantaged immigrant mothers in the ‘field’ thus differs from that of their more disadvantaged counterparts, as we shall see later in this chapter.

99 It is in Kowloon rather than in the New Territories areas such as TSW – where Faye comes from – where the traditional elite ‘brand-name’ schools can be found. Faye was emphasizing the distinction of the tutorial school lessons arranged for her daughter by emphasizing that the students of this tutorial school came from EMI schools from Kowloon, of which students were presumably better than those from EMI schools in TSW.
(working-class local-born mother). As a matriculation graduate, unlike most of the other more-disadvantaged mothers she can channel the ‘right’ cultural capital into her son’s education despite severe financial constraints. She is also able to prepare her son for the school interviews at the discretionary phase, for example training him to present himself in English. But when discussing why she did not choose the more competitive schools recommended by friends, she suggested that she could not afford expenses on extracurricular activities demanded by these schools, and that these schools were ‘not that suitable’ for ‘ordinary low-income families’ like hers. This testifies to how her cultural capital, in terms of choice information and of her ability to help her son negotiate the school selection mechanisms in the choice process, cannot be mobilized for securing ‘the best’ choice in the field. This is not only because of the absence of the economical capital needed for ‘purchasing’ education provided in an elite setting, but also because of the extra barrier of Irene’s acceptance of the inferiority of her class in the field.

Mothers’ aversion of choices of ‘distinction’ does not only stem from their fears of the ‘suffering’ of their children but also their own suffering should they send their children to study in elite settings. After May (intermediate-class immigrant mother) learned about the ‘hard time’ her friend’s children experienced in one of her targeted schools, she decided to pick another lower-banding school instead. In this way, she could ensure that her son could ‘study more comfortably’, and there would not be ‘trouble for the mother’. This testifies to mothers’ gendered affective connection to the school market (cf. Reay and Lucey 2003), in terms of their anxiety that they may not get it ‘right’ should they go for choices of ‘distinction’. They fear they will be made responsible for their children’s ensuing suffering should a choice go wrong, and will be judged, and shamed, as a failing mother (see David et al. 1993). May’s account also suggests that social networks can normalize mothers’ anxiety – regardless of their children’s banding – and their aversion to choices of ‘distinction’. It is through these gendered processes that the networks of these less-advantaged mothers function to limit their horizons of choice (cf. Ball and Vincent 1998). This also explains the ambivalence, rather than confidence, that imbues some of the more-advantaged
mothers in their choice-making (cf. Park 2007), as I show below.

For example, Carmen (middle class immigrant mother) and Sara (intermediate class immigrant mother from a middle-class background in China) suggested that picking ‘brand-name’ schools implied that they would need to ‘keep pushing’ their children in case their children ‘cannot catch up’, and they did not want to see this happen. This is despite that, for Sara, there was no doubt that she wanted her son to attend a brand-name school. Sara emphasized that she would not know ‘whether I [she] should cry and laugh’ if she ‘failed’ in case her choice decisions went wrong – more precisely, in case her son was allocated a school not listed in her preferences submitted for central allocation and one which she knew nothing about. This helps explain her choice of a band 2 through-train secondary school, which offered her son direct ‘promotion’ from the primary school. Similarly, her counterpart Andrea saw the need to secure a ‘death-free medal’ by picking the same through-train school. This was despite her confidence that her son was up to band 1 level. Also, the through-train option could spare her the toil of going through the choice process. These accounts show how cultural capital mobilization geared towards ‘the best’ choices can be held back by the gendered affective experiences of the more-advantaged mothers in the school market. This suggests the indeterminacy in class processes in the school market.

Lastly, it should not be assumed that the more-disadvantaged mothers always tamely conform to the fate of their class in avoiding choices of ‘distinction’. Working-class immigrant mother Tina’s son is a high achiever, and they are located in a school net (i.e. the SSP net) with a good number of traditional elite schools. Despite this, Tina was at pains when explaining why she picked a non-brand-name band 1 school ranked much lower on the symbolic order of distinction when compared to the traditional elite schools. The school she was thinking of choosing had switched into the DSS mode and began to charge expensive school fees just one year prior to her choice-making.

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100 This happens when popular schools are picked as top preferences. Lower-banding and less popular schools ranked lower on the preference order cannot always back up the risks of picking a popular school as the top preference. It is because students who rank a particular school higher on their preference order are screened first for allocation before the same procedure applies to those who pick the same school but rank them lower on the preference order. See Chapter 4 for details.
and she could not afford the school fees and the expenses on the wide-ranging extracurricular activities demanded in this school. This testifies to the extra hurdles erected for disadvantaged mothers to realize their aspirations in an increasingly privatized school market\textsuperscript{101}. The sense of injustice about the unequal playing field is evident in the accounts of two mothers whose children were allocated to an ‘unwanted’ school. Despite Rosa’s (local intermediate class mother) ability to draw upon her educational experience as cultural capital to support her daughter’s learning (see Chapter 6), she, like working-class immigrant mother Jennifer, could not find another school for her child in the post-allocation period. When the two mothers were asked why they did not consider the option of a DSS school as a last resort, Jennifer asked why she should pay for her son to study in a school when her son had the ability for a better option, whilst Rosa suggested that:

If DSS schools admit students as long as their parents pay, then basically its students are naturally money-oriented […] [they] are bound to be from favourable backgrounds. It is likely that the kids emphasize more on materialistic fulfillment.

The accounts of Jennifer and Rosa suggest that not opting for a DSS school as the last resort is not only an issue about the lack of middle class capital needed for atoning for an undesirable choice outcome (cf. Devine 2004; Wong YL 2007). It is also what they constructed as a moral advantage vis-à-vis their more privileged counterparts who can send their children to these schools simply because they can pay (cf. Lehmann 2009). These accounts reaffirm the importance to take into account the ‘affect’ of the school market in understanding the choice-making of the more-disadvantaged. The fact that Rosa had the cultural capital to work at choices strategically and reflectively (as I discuss in next section) but was short of the economic capital needed for atoning for a ‘wrong’ choice outcome also attests to the fact that her class advantage (vis-à-vis the more-disadvantaged working-class mothers) does not determine choice outcome. This

\textsuperscript{101} In fact, private schools or quasi-private DSS schools hardly figure in narratives of the mothers, including the more-advantaged middle-class immigrant mothers.
also attests to the ambivalent position of the more-advantaged local-born intermediate class mothers in the field. This again suggests the indeterminacy in class processes in the school market.

How mothers envisage choices is shaped by a ‘very complex psychosocial dynamic’ (Walkerdine et al. 2001). By eschewing choices of ‘distinction’, mothers defend against the shame of their class (which, for more-disadvantaged immigrant mothers, is intertwined with that of their ‘ethnicity’) and avoid having their ‘inadequacy’ as mothers exposed in case they ‘get it wrong’ in choice. This helps explain the ‘wrong’ currency of the cultural capital (in terms of choice information) they mobilize in choice-making, given that it is not geared to ‘the best’ choices in the market (cf. Gewirtz et al. 1995). The acceptance of inferiority can also help explain the apparent ‘disengagement’ from choice of a minority of the more-disadvantaged mothers. For example, working-class immigrant mother Penny suggested that people like her ‘were too lazy to consider anything else’ other than the ‘convenient’ option of a band 2 through-train school in her choice-making. As for her counterparts Ivy and Jade, they left choice decisions to their sons, as they saw no point ‘interfering’ with choice, given their limited cultural capital in terms of educational experience (which is also what holds them back from routine educational involvement; see Chapter 6). Their ‘disengagement’ should also be understood as what defends against shame in case choice goes awry; as Ivy suggested, her ‘interference’ with choice would only lead her children to blame her should things go wrong. Nevertheless, it is important to take into account of other contextual factors against which their ‘disengagement’ should be understood. Firstly, both Ivy and Jade rely on the cultural capital of their elder children to support their younger children’s education, and it makes sense for them to rely on their elder children to manage their younger children’s choice-making as well. Secondly, the availability of an affordable through-train option in the school net102 should be understood as what simply obviates the need for Jade, as well as Penny, to

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102 Through-train schools have a very small market share (4.4% in 2011/12), but 5 out of the 23 through-train schools are in the YL net, which was where Jade and Penny were located. It should be noted that an increasing number of private or DSS schools are operating in the through-train mode to consolidate the exclusivity of their student intake. This means that through-train schools are not always considered affordable by less-advantaged mothers.
be ‘engaged’ in choice\(^{103}\).

Although I show that class profoundly shapes mothers’ horizons of choice in a way that encourages the reproduction of one’s disadvantaged position in the field\(^{104}\), it needs to be emphasized that this is embedded in gendered processes and the specific contextual circumstances in which choices are made. As I discuss in the next section, expressed aversion to choices of ‘distinction’ does not equate ‘disengagement’ and does not seamlessly translate into choices made. In fact, because of the convoluted nature of the local choice mechanism, some of the less-advantaged mothers can overcome their class barrier in making ambitious choices as they manoeuvre across the different stages of the choice process.

\(^{103}\) The same can be said of the choice-making of Sara and Andrea, the two immediate class immigrant mothers from middle-class backgrounds. But as I demonstrated earlier, their choice-making was deeply infused with ambivalence and could by no means be understood as ‘convenient’.

\(^{104}\) While class emerges strongly as a profound influence in shaping horizons of choice, it should be understood as intertwined with the ‘ethnic’ disadvantage of the immigrant mothers, even if this does not come out strongly in the narratives. Also to be noted is that, unlike the Western literature, issues of ‘ethnic mix’ do not feature in mothers’ narratives of choice (see e.g. Byrne and De Tona 2012; cf. Ball et al. 2002b).
III WORKING AT CHOICE AND MAKING AMBITIOUS CHOICES

As I demonstrated in the last section, class manifests strongly in shaping and delimiting mothers’ horizons of choice. Nonetheless, as I discuss in Chapter 4, the local choice mechanism is characterized by its convoluted nature. This means that even for choices that are not geared towards ‘the best’, mothers need to make decisions at different stages of the choice process. There is a need to be reflective about decisions made during the earlier stages before mothers can make decisions at the later stages in the process. In this sense, despite the aversion to choices of ‘distinction’ and the ‘local’ horizons of choice expressed by the majority of the disadvantaged mothers and a minority of the more-advantaged mothers, their choices can by no means be dismissed as adapted to the ‘inevitable’ (cf. Gewirtz et al. 1995; Ball et al. 1996; Ball et al. 2002). In addition, a minority of the more-disadvantaged mothers showed how they could capitalize upon the indeterminacy built into the choice mechanism to manoeuvre and make ambitious choices, and have their risks taken backed up at later stages of the choice process. This was provided that they could have their ambitions backed up by the support from teachers or friends and by stretching their labour and resources to the limit. I begin my discussion by looking at how mothers negotiate risks and work at choices. Then, I examine how a minority can overcome their class barrier by going for ambitious choices. Lastly, I look at the strong sense of entitlement to choice exhibited by a minority of mothers from more advantaged backgrounds, and how they draw upon economic and cultural capital to compensate for the disadvantages associated with their class and/or immigrant status in the process.

Let us first examine how mothers work at choices even if these are not what the market defines as ‘the best’ choices. The convolutedness of the local choice process means that, at different stages of choice-making, mothers need to ponder a number of issues: whether they should skip the discretionary phase or not; what schools they should choose for the discretionary phase, and whether they should stick to their choice in the discretionary phase when picking the top preferred choice for central
allocation; how they should rank the schools on the order of preference for central allocation, and what they can do (such as crossing school networks) to minimize the risks of having their children allocated to a school that is bottom of or not listed in their order of preference, etc.

For intermediate-class local mothers Rosa and Clara, they first needed to decide whether or not to go through the discretionary phase, and both did. At this point, Rosa calculated the minimum requirement for school results in different subjects that her daughter must meet for the schools picked. This ensured the ‘right’ schools were picked, and the chances of an interview opportunity could be maximized. Second, when it came to the stage of central allocation, both needed to decide whether to stick with the schools picked earlier or not, and both did not. Clara considered that her daughter would not be selected by the school picked at the discretionary phase, because her daughter reported that she performed poorly in the interview. As for Rosa, her daughter was not granted an interview opportunity at all. For Rosa, this suggested her daughter was simply not up to the standard of the targeted school. To minimize the chance of her daughter being allocated to a school ranked bottom of or not listed in the order of preference, Clara decided to pick a secondary school to which her daughter’s primary school was linked as a nominated school as top preference. Overall, both mothers demonstrated how they put into practice a complex knowledge of ‘playing’ the field to minimize the risks incurred in their decisions.

Like Rosa, intermediate class mothers Brenda (local-born) and May (immigrant) have children belonging to band 3. Unlike Rosa, who is a local senior secondary school graduate, they have had limited schooling experience. They did not have the cultural capital to prepare their sons for negotiating the interviews at the discretionary phase, which, as May suggested, was a practice for those who pick band 1 or ‘brand-name’ schools rather than by ‘people like us [them]’. This signifies a sense of disentitlement.

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105 As I discuss in Chapter 4, 25% of school places are reserved in secondary schools to be allocated to students in their nominated primary schools. Clara’s choice was therefore intended to maximize the chance for her daughter to be allocated a place in the school ranked top in the order of preference.

106 Interviews often require students to do individual presentations, and/or to participate in group discussion using both Chinese and English language.
not evident in Rosa’s (and Clara’s) account, and helps explain why both May and Brenda stuck to their choices made at the discretionary phase when deciding the top preference for central allocation. For them, this was what maximized the chance that their sons would be allocated to their preferred school. A comparison between Rosa’s account and those of Brenda and May show how local senior secondary school experience can be drawn upon as cultural capital, which, ‘unspoken’ in Rosa’s and Clara’s accounts, makes a difference in how mothers work at choices. Despite this, Brenda and May can hardly be described as ‘onlookers’ or as ‘disconnected’ choosers (cf Gewirtz et al. 1995; Ball et al. 2002e) in their choice-making. Choices are simply worked at differently depending on the context. In fact, as I show below, under circumstances where economic, cultural and social capital can be amassed, even the less-advantaged mothers can work at choices in such a way that defies their expressed aversion to choices of ‘distinction’.

For Liz (working-class immigrant single mother), she had a friend who offered to help prepare her son for interviews at the discretionary phase, and Mary (local-born working class mother) chose to pay a private tutor to prepare her son for the interviews. Thus, unlike their intermediate-class counterparts Brenda and May, Liz and Mary had the confidence to make riskier choices and manoeuvre across the two-staged choice process and put their market information and knowledge of choice strategies they had acquired into practice. In the case of Mary, having learnt that the level of competition in a neighbouring school net (where student population had been dwindling) was lower than that of her own school net, she applied to a school in that neighbouring school net at the discretionary phase. For her, this gave her son a better chance to be selected by the targeted school when compared to the case of picking a school of a similar banding in her own school net. Similarly for working-class immigrant mothers Kit and Yvonne (a single mother), it was under the encouragement of teachers and advice of friends that they mobilized their market information and knowledge of choice strategies as cultural capital for choices of more competitive schools at the discretionary phase. As Kit recalled,
The teachers said … I should not waste the opportunity… [otherwise] later we might regret [……]. If I put this [a band one CMI (Chinese-as-the-medium-of-instruction) school] as the top choice for central allocation, she [the daughter] will definitely be allocated to the school [because of her banding (band 1)], so why not bet for a chance [to see if the daughter can be selected by an EMI school during the discretionary phase].

Kit exemplifies how a risky choice in terms of a (band 1) EMI school picked at the discretionary phase can be backed up by the ‘safe’ choice of a band 1 CMI school\(^{107}\) as the top-ranked school in the list submitted for central allocation. Her choice-making, as well as that of Yvonne and Mary, testifies to the fact that cultural capital generated in locally-bound networks can be mobilized for ‘getting ahead’ rather than merely for ‘getting by’ (cf. Bagnall et al. 2003). Their choice-making also demonstrates that even less-advantaged mothers can make informed and skilled choice (cf. Gewirtz et al. 1995).

Nonetheless, for these less-advantaged mothers, to make ambitious choices is not only about putting their market knowledge into practice. Their ambitions must be backed up by hard labour and personal sacrifices, as exemplified in the cases of the immigrant single mothers Liz and Hazel (cf. Archer and Francis 2006; Cooper 2007). Both mothers put their labour into mortgage: Liz gave up full-time paid employment for one year to drill her son hard in his studies to boost his banding from band 3 to band 2. With her son’s improved competitiveness, her efforts to go through the selective discretionary phase could be justified. As for her counterpart Hazel, to justify her choice of a traditional elite school, she needs to ensure that she can continue her intensive educational involvement (as I discuss in Chapter 6) after her daughter enters secondary school (assuming that her choice materializes) to ensure the maintenance of the latter’s level of school performance. Thus, she plans to keep herself out of paid employment and is prepared to ‘follow through’ the years of her daughter’s junior and

\(^{107}\) But for a few exceptions, band 1 CMI schools are ranked lower on the symbolic hierarchy in the school market in Hong Kong when compared to band 1 EMI schools.
secondary schooling. She can afford to do so courtesy of the economic capital she has accumulated in her property investments and of the financial support her boyfriend provides her and her daughter with. It should be noted that the sacrifices of paid employment makes sense for Liz and Hazel when considering how they are excluded from the labour market, where their immigrant status and their gender is discriminated against (see Chapter 7). That they, the aforementioned Yvonne as well as another working-class immigrant single mother Flora (as I will return to later) all make ambitious choices can also be understood as what reflects the high stakes they have in their children’s education. As I discuss in Chapter 7, these mothers pay a heavy price in availing their children with their educational labour by migrating to Hong Kong. In doing so, they put up with the ‘ethnicized’ and gendered cultural inferiority – which is compounded by their single-mother status – that they are imbued with in the local context. In this sense, their drive to realize their aspirations through ambitious choices can be understood as what offers them a chance to redeem their respectability (cf. Skeggs 1997). This shows how gender shapes cultural capital mobilization in ‘ethnicized’ contexts in such a way that it disrupts the neat relationship between cultural capital and class, as is widely-documented in the literature, in choice-making in the local context.

Mothers need to do ‘psychic work’ in negotiating the risks of having the ‘inferiority’ of their class and immigrant status exposed by ‘choosing against the grain’ (Lucey and Reay 2002). For example Hazel, who claimed to be someone ‘who knows nothing’ not having finished primary school, felt the need to apologize for being ‘thick-skinned’ in choosing a school she felt she was not entitled to:

I handed in the application with my thick skin…her [the daughter’s] results are so bad [re: the daughter is classified as ‘marginally’ band 1] and I still apply to such a good school, which demands all [grade] As […] Sigh! I am really sorry.

This testifies to the psychological investments that these less-advantaged mothers have
to make in making ambitious choices (Reay and Ball 1997). This amounts to an extra hurdle they need to surmount in the school market, which makes it harder for them to capitalize on the room for manoeuvring in the local choice mechanism when compared to their more-advantaged counterparts. In fact, for some of their more-advantaged counterparts, they reported that they made choices almost effortlessly in the same way that (white) middle class do as is evidenced in the literature, as I show below.

For Connie (intermediate-class immigrant mother from a middle-class background in China), a former teacher in China, her upbringing experience in a privileged family, integrated into her 'system of lasting, transposable dispositions' (Bourdieu 2000:82-3 cited in Skeggs 2004), underpinned her taken-for-grantedness in choice-making. This helps explain why she was baffled when she was asked to explain her choice of a band 1 EMI school during the interview. As for Lara (intermediate class local-born mother), her strong sense of entitlement to choice was underpinned by the way she can draw upon her familiarity with the educational field (given her experience in local senior secondary schooling) in playing the game of choice strategically. This is reflected in her detailed account of how she decided what choice would give her daughter the best chance at the discretionary phase. She established that the student population in her TSW (YL) school net showed a strong preference for staying in the net. This implies a higher level of competition in this net when compared to the neighbouring TM net. According to her, the TM net has a fast-aging population and a low student/school ratio, thus offering opportunities for her to capitalize on. This explains why she picked a band 1 school in the TM net at the discretionary phase, and exemplifies how she is as skilled and informed as the privileged middle-class choosers as is evidenced in the literature (e.g. Gewirtz et al. 1995). But experience in local senior secondary schooling is not the only cultural capital that local intermediate class mothers can draw upon in making ‘middle-class’ choices. Similar to Lara, local intermediate class mother Linda (also a senior secondary school graduate) had abundant cultural capital, but this cultural capital was drawn from the choice information offered by her nieces and
nephews, who grew up with her son\textsuperscript{108} and who were all studying in brand-name schools. This underpinned her sense of entitlement to choice, as indicated in her remark that she could afford not to be ‘bothered’ by choice.

While having top-ability band 1 children could have made the choice-making of the mothers easier, this did not apply to middle-class immigrant mother Helena, whose son hovered around the boundary between band 2 and 3. Her unflappability in choice-making was backed up by the ‘insurance’ she had in case her choice decision went wrong:

Even if the school [allocated] is not good… I am prepared to take him [the son] to study overseas … There’s somewhere for him to stay over there [i.e. the U.S.]. His aunt has a flat for us […… ] he can always leave and I can always go with him…because the sons and daughters of my elder sister are all over there.

With her economic capital, Helena could afford to do ‘nothing special’ in choice-making. Like other local middle-class parents, sending her son overseas was a last resort in choice-making in a highly competitive system (Wong YL 2007). This ‘insurance’ that Helena has in choice-making is particularly an important observation. It shows how middle-class mothers are better-equipped to circumvent setbacks in choice. This contrasts with the narratives of those less-advantaged mothers whose choices went awry. Nancy (working-class local mother) reported the ‘glaring’ difference between her son’s ‘small pile’ of records of extracurricular activities participation and the ‘big, big pile of documents’ of the others when she and her son attended school interviews during the post-allocation period. For her, the ‘glaring’ difference explained her failure to secure her son a school place in an alternative school in the aftermath of a disastrous choice allocation result. Her son was simply screened out on the basis of his lack of ‘distinctions’ achieved in extracurricular

\textsuperscript{108}Linda is one of the few full-time working mothers in the study, and she has always left her son to be taken care of by her mother, who lives together with Linda’s nieces and nephews.
activities participation (cf. Wong YL 2007). Disadvantaged access to the ‘right’ cultural capital for circumventing setbacks in choice also underlies the ready acceptance of one’s inferiority in the aftermath of a disastrous choice result. For Flora (working-class immigrant single mother), whose choice of a brand-name EMI school\(^{109}\) backfired, she could only be left rueing that she, as an ‘uncultured’ person, ‘should have looked at our [their] own situation’ before making the school choice. This reaffirms the hazards of disappointment and costly psychological investments in the choice-making of less-advantaged mothers (cf. Reay and Ball 1997). The sense of inferiority that ensues can only be deepened when mothers assume responsibility and accept their own ‘inadequacy’ as mothers. This is exemplified by Jennifer (working-class immigrant mother), who has been struggling to come to terms with the way her son blames her for her ‘failure’ in choice years after the choice was made. These accounts how the extra hurdle that less-advantaged mothers have to surmount in the school market, something that the more-advantaged mothers like Helena do not need to negotiate\(^{110}\).

I have shown in this section the indeterminacy in class processes in the local school market which features a convoluted choice mechanism. Even if mothers are not opting for ‘the best’ choices, choices need to be worked at, in different ways depending on the cultural capital they have at their disposal, which does not necessarily align with their class. A minority of mothers can capitalize upon the room for manoeuvre in the choice processes, but this is always harder for the more-disadvantaged when compared to their more-advantaged counterparts. As the more-disadvantaged mothers mobilize their market information and choice strategies as cultural capital, this must be backed up by the mobilization of other forms of cultural capital as well as social and economic capital. In addition, they need to be prepared for the psychological consequences that choosing ‘against the grain’ at a disadvantaged position could entail.

\(^{109}\)Flora seized the opportunity to pick a brand-name EMI school when a friend offered to give her daughter’s school results and portfolio to the supervisor of this school (a friend of Flora’s friend) for consideration. This was thought to be what gave her daughter a better chance at the time when Flora made the choice decision.

\(^{110}\)This is not to suggest that the middle class do not need to negotiate their anxiety and do ‘psychic work’ in choice-making, but why and how they do so is likely to be different from that of their more-disadvantaged counterparts. At the very least, the middle class are unlikely to imbue themselves with sense of self-unworthiness in relation to their class when choices go wrong.
Taken together, my findings offer a more nuanced account of why the socially-disadvantaged are rendered ‘unskilled’ in, ‘disconnected’ from, or ‘contingent’ in school choice-making (cf. Gewirtz et al. 1995; Ball et al. 2002b). On the one hand, for the majority of mothers, they can be considered as ‘embedded’ in choice: They can acquire cultural capital from the social capital accrued in their networking activities; they can acquire the confidence they need to make ambitious choices from their relationships with their relatives, friends and teachers and from their experience in (senior secondary) local schooling. Even if the horizons of choice of the majority of mothers are ‘local’, schools’ proximity to home does not feature as a prominent concern in their choice-making\(^{111}\). But on the other hand, these mothers can also be considered as ‘contingent’ in the ‘field’: They are averse to choices of ‘distinction’, and they lack the economic capital needed for supporting choices of distinguished schools, including private (including DSS) schools. Lastly, the apparent ‘disconnectedness’ of a minority of the more-disadvantaged mothers from choice belies their deployment of resources in their children (such as choice knowledge of elder children) and their defensiveness against the shame ascribed to them should they ‘interfere’ in choice. A contextualized understanding of choice is needed for our understanding of how cultural capital is mobilized in choice-making, a process which cannot be straightforwardly read off from class.

\(^{111}\) In fact, more than a few mothers emphasized that commuting between home and school was not a problem. Even if the schools they pick are in their locality, an orientation to proximity should not be automatically assumed as what determines their choice decision (cf. Ball et al.1995).
CONCLUSION

In this chapter, I examine class disadvantages in education in Hong Kong by focusing on mothers’ secondary school choice-making. I show that mothers’ networking activities, naturalized as their everyday mothering work, facilitates their access to market information and knowledge of choice strategies in their social networks regardless of their class background and immigrant status. This is important for immigrant mothers, who lack the familiarity with a system characterized by the vagueness of information about the ‘banding’ of schools and students. This exemplifies how gender facilitates the generation of cultural capital, and how this helps ameliorate the disadvantage of immigrant mothers in the school market. However, this cultural capital is not necessarily mobilized as the ‘right’ cultural capital geared towards the ‘best’ choices, i.e. top ability ‘band 1’ EMI choices (cf. Gewirtz et al. 1995). This is because less-advantaged mothers have disadvantaged access to the cultural capital needed for helping their children negotiate the screening and selection mechanisms in the school market, especially because these prioritize children’s English language competence. The same can be said of the economic capital needed for extracurricular activities expenses demanded by these schools, a disadvantage that is compounded by the privatization of these schools, which then begin to charge expensive school fees.

Nonetheless, I emphasize that the ‘local’ horizons of choice of the more-disadvantaged mothers are constructed in a way specific to the local choice mechanism and relies on parents’ assessment of their children’s ability level in choice-making. Firstly, given these mothers’ tendency to accept their disadvantaged position in the educational ‘field’, this system augments the impact of class in constraining mothers’ horizons of choice (cf. Bourdieu 1984; Ball et al. 2002). I also highlight how this extra hurdle to choices of ‘distinction’ should be understood as gendered. That is, mothers’ anxiety about the shame – in relation to their ‘adequacy’ as mothers - that the making of a ‘wrong’ choice may invite (cf. Reay 1996) encourages their aversion to choices of ‘distinction’. In the case of more-disadvantaged immigrant mothers, the
acceptance of their class ‘inferiority’ and the anxiety about their (in)adequacy as mothers should also be understood in a context where they are ‘ethnicized’ as culturally inferior immigrant mothers. Moreover, given the convoluted nature of local choice mechanisms, even ‘local’ choices need to be worked at as mothers apply their choice knowledge and reflect on their decisions made throughout the choice process. Furthermore, it is precisely the indeterminacy built into the convoluted process that allows the room for even the less-advantaged mothers to manoeuvre as they make ambitious but risky choices as long as they can back these up by stretching their resources and labour to the limit.

My findings affirm how class powerfully shapes and generates disadvantage in choice-making. The more-disadvantaged mothers lack the cultural and economic capital of the middle class to put their children into ‘privileged circuits of schooling’ (Ball et al. 1995) and to circumvent setbacks at points of school transition (e.g. Ball 2003; Devine 2004; Wong YL 2007). Despite this, I emphasize that, in an institutional context where the rule of the game is different form that in Western educational systems, class processes also play out differently. The majority of the mothers cannot but be active and reflective choosers, and their choice-making can be equally strategic and calculated compared to that of the ‘rational’ choosers as defined by the ethic of the market. But whether the cultural resources they generate can be mobilized into cultural capital geared towards ‘the best’ choices is less than certain. This renders them less ‘skilled’, less ‘connected’ (cf. Gewirtz et al. 1995), and more ‘contingent’ (cf. Ball et al. 2002b) in the school market. At the same time, I stress the need to consider the affective connection to the school market (Reay and Lucey 2003) in understanding choice-making in a context where the onus is on the mothers to ‘get it right’ in choice (c.f. David et al. 1993; Park 2007). I show how ‘affect’ (cf. Skeggs 2004) can compound the hidden psychological costs that the more-disadvantaged need to negotiate (cf. Reay and Ball 1997), and how the gendered burden of mothers can inhibit the mobilization of cultural capital of the more-advantaged mothers. Taking this into consideration, it does not do justice to the more-disadvantaged mothers to dismiss their choice-making as adapted to the practical and the inevitable, or to see
this as complicity in their self-elimination from educational competition (cf. Bourdieu and Passeron 1990/77). Cultural capital is contingent upon diverse classed, gendered and ‘ethnicized’ contexts in which choices are constructed and made (cf. Bowe et al 1994). Less-advantaged mothers, as well as the more-advantaged intermediate class and/or immigrant mothers, can make ‘middle-class choices’, albeit undergoing different processes from that of the (white) middle class as is documented in the Western literature (see Ball et al. 1996). Cultural capital cannot be read off straightforwardly from class, and class disadvantage in choice cannot be assumed as automatic.
CHAPTER SIX
ROUTINE EDUCATIONAL INVOLVEMENT

INTRODUCTION

This chapter examines class disadvantage in education by focusing on mothers’ routine educational involvement. My inquiry is located in a context in which parents are expected to rely on their own resources to negotiate a demanding primary and secondary curriculum that champions ‘life-wide learning’ other than academic excellence (Tse 2004; Choi 2005). The local literature echoes the findings in the Western literature about the disadvantaged access of the working class to the cultural capital needed for parents to involve in children’s education in the ‘right’ way (cf. Lareau 1989), in particular in terms of support for children’s English language learning and extracurricular activities participation (Yu 1994; cf. Wong YL 2007). The Hong Kong literature also shows this disadvantage can be aggravated by one’s ‘ethnic’ immigrant status (e.g. Tang 2002). Nonetheless, when class differentials in education are understood as resulted from the lack of cultural capital of disadvantaged groups (Leung YL 1998; Ho ESC2006a), the educational success evidenced by these groups cannot be explained by applications of cultural capital theory (e.g. Lam KY 2006). This study contributes to these debates by considering several other issues that the Western literature sheds light on, namely the gendered nature of educational labour and how ethnicity interacts with gender in a way conducive to more contingent mobilizations of cultural capital (e.g. Griffith and Smith 1987; Archer and Francis 2006). The affective experiences of educational involvement should be taken into consideration as well, given that mothers are burdened with the responsibility for children’s success in today’s education market and in the socio-cultural environment of the local context (Chao 1994; cf. Reay 1998; Park 2007). Such experiences entail investments in emotional labour, which can shape cultural capital in indeterminate ways (cf. Reay 2004b) and prove an extra hurdle for the more-disadvantaged mothers to surmount as they try to mobilize aspirations in their educational involvement.
I first examine mothers’ aspirations. All mothers aspire to their children’s educational success. But as I show in the next section, these aspirations cannot always be mobilized by less-advantaged mothers because of their disadvantaged access to the ‘right’ cultural capital demanded in the educational ‘field’. This is primarily in terms of their inability to support their children’s English learning, personally or through investment of economic capital in private tuition. That the cultural capital attained in schooling in China is rendered inconvertible also incurs a distinctive disadvantage for all immigrant mothers in the ‘field’. Nonetheless, class disadvantage is not automatically generated. Whether mothers encourage children’s ‘self-directed’ learning (as in the more-advantaged mothers) or are intensively involved in homework supervision and regulation of children’s activities (as in the more-disadvantaged mothers), cultural capital transmission requires investments of emotional labour (cf. Hochschild 1983). But less-advantaged mothers are more susceptible to feelings of inefficacy and shame about their inadequacy as mothers in their educational role, so their investment of emotional labour is more likely to inhibit their cultural capital mobilization. This amounts to an extra obstacle to their mobilization of their educational aspirations (cf. David et al. 1997; Reay 1998; Lareau 2003), and is what encourages a minority of the more-disadvantaged to distance themselves from educational work (cf. Walkerdine et al. 2001). In the last section, I examine less-advantaged mothers’ investments in extracurricular activities and explain why the cultural capital accrued for their children is likely to be de-legitimated in the school market. My findings confirm the profound and enduring influence of class in generating disadvantage in mothers’ routine educational involvement. However, I also emphasize the importance of gender in facilitating cultural capital mobilization in disadvantaged settings, especially in terms of how mothers can generate cultural capital in their social networks (cf. Reay 1998; Cooper 2007). Moreover, high educational aspirations embedded in the context of migration of immigrant mothers and (particularly for those more-disadvantaged) in their ethnicization vis-à-vis locals should be considered. Gender should be understood as what interacts with ‘ethnicity’ in driving these mothers to stretch themselves to the limit as they try to capitalize upon the educational opportunities for their children in Hong Kong (cf. Shah et al. 2010). In
other words, cultural capital should be understood as mobilized in diverse contexts that are gendered and ‘ethnicized’ in Hong Kong, which necessarily complicates class reproduction.
I ASPIRATIONS

All mothers in the sample embrace a meritocratic view of schooling. Going to university, studying ‘more’, studying ‘better’, or merely working hard at school is considered vital for one’s future prospects in terms of competitiveness in the labour market. This is what makes it easier for one to secure a ‘comfortable’ job – white-collar work at an office as opposed to jobs demanding physical labour, such as being a salesperson or working in traditional working-class jobs on construction sites – in the future. This is particularly so for those more disadvantaged mothers who used to work in (mostly garment) factories. ‘Tough jobs’ are what they want their children to avoid by achieving at school:

I need to tell them [the children] that it’s hard for me when I was working…because I didn’t work hard at school. ‘If you do not work hard now, you have no choice in your future but to do tough jobs.’ [Faye, local-born intermediate class mother who did not finish junior secondary education]

For new immigrant mothers, their aspirations are grounded in their experience in mainland China and in migration as well. These mothers may have different views about whether the education system in China is better than that in Hong Kong, but are convinced that educational qualifications attained in Hong Kong guarantee their children better economic prospects. Similar to Asian or Chinese immigrant parents in Western contexts, children’s education prospects is central to their migration; it is through migration that they can capitalize upon education (and hence social mobility) opportunities otherwise not available in China\textsuperscript{112} (e.g. Louie 2001; Tseng et al. 2007; see also So 2003; cf. Ogbu 1985; Sue and Okazaki 1990). This justifies the personal sacrifices made as a result of their migration, which is itself an expression of their educational aspirations.

\textsuperscript{112} This is considering that quality, ‘elite’ secondary schooling in China is not as affordable as in Hong Kong where over 80% of students go to public schools, not least when considering the grave urban-rural and regional disparities in educational standards and the low quality of English language education. See Chapter 4.
Aspirations are also grounded upon class contexts. Working-class immigrant mothers’ upbringings were characterized by poverty and deprivation of educational opportunities (especially to girls). Thus, they want to do as much as they can to provide their children with the best education. Also, education is seen as helping them and their children assert a positive cultural identity in the local context (Archer and Francis 2006; Crozier and Davies 2007) where they are made to feel inferior as being of ‘low culture’ (as Lucy suggested) or ‘uncultured’ (as Flora suggested) because they cannot speak and talk properly (as Kay and Pam suggested) and ‘knows [know] nothing’ (as Hazel suggested). Such cultural inferiority is intertwined with class inferiority: Tina’s son was said to belong to the ‘despicable slavery class’ by schoolmates, whereas Ocean and her daughter have been bullied by taunts of ‘beggar’ at school. Achieving at school helps these mothers and their children rid themselves of such inferiority, which is what ‘ethnicizes’ them in the local context. As Kit suggests, ‘no one will say that you’re from mainland China, that you’re a new immigrant’. The class and ‘ethnicized’ nature of working-class immigrant mothers’ aspirations is vividly illustrated by single mother Kay, a janitor living on CSSA:

For people like us, it’s already very good for him [the son] to get [academic] results like these\textsuperscript{113}. Don’t you agree? How to put it? We are stupid. People can’t teach us. We are uncultured…… At our time we couldn’t complain. It’s the Cultural Revolution and none of us could study at school\textsuperscript{114}. I said [to my son], ‘Had you mum had a chance to study at school, she wouldn’t have ended up in such a lowly position now’. You can see it from the way I speak and how slow I think. It’s all right …if you can’t study [well], but at the end of the day, studying [well, i.e. up to postgraduate level, as referred to elsewhere] allows you to become successful and wealthy. You will stand out among your peers.

\textsuperscript{113} Kay’s son was classified as hovering around band 1 and 2 and was studying in a band 1 school at the time during the interview. He excels in sports though and has won numerous awards in sports competition.

\textsuperscript{114} During the Cultural Revolution, the structure of traditional (‘grammar’) schooling was demolished. School-aged children were made to do, for example, agricultural labour at that time.
Children’s educational success is also considered as what compensates for working-class immigrant mothers’ struggles and helps ‘redeem’ respectability (cf. Skeggs 1997; see chapter 7). As discussed in Chapter 4 and 7, immigrant mothers’ household and childcare duties – and likely educational labour - enforce their detachment from (full-time) employment, interlocked with their labour market disadvantage\(^\text{115}\) (cf. Wong WL 2004). This necessitates their exclusion from local citizenship, which celebrates economic productivity and competitiveness; hence their cultural ‘inferiority’, the lack of value ascribed to them, and their ‘ethnicization’. Being single mothers means further stigmatization\(^\text{116}\). This is exemplified by Flora, who has been out of work for a long time and lives on CSSA. She recounted how her senior educational qualifications attained in China had been ‘wasted’; how wrong it was for her to migrate to Hong Kong, which had gained her nothing but ‘hard labour’ and stripped her of her pension entitlements in China\(^\text{117}\). Most importantly, having failed in her marriage (with men in Hong Kong) twice has made life ‘very miserable’ for her. Therefore:

All I want is for her [the daughter] to study well. I lead such a hard life as a mother and what is this for? For her to study well so that she can find a job in the future, so she does not have to lead a life as hard as her mother’s.

The sentiments expressed by Kay and Flora contrast with the aspirations expressed by the intermediate-class immigrant mothers from middle-class backgrounds or those currently occupying a middle class position. In the first place, these mothers seldom referred to their immigrant status when discussing their educational aspirations. A sense of cultural inferiority was absent in their accounts. As exemplified by Andrea, education is what guarantees her children an ‘enriched life with diverse interests’ outside one’s ‘profession’ (as opposed to ‘job’). Their children’s educational success is

\(^{115}\) As discussed in Chapter 7, immigrant mothers, lacking cultural capital, are disadvantaged in the labour market because of discrimination (perceived and real) against their gender and their ‘ethnicized’ immigrant status.

\(^{116}\) This is primarily because disadvantaged immigrant single mothers often have no choice but to live on CSSA, which is heavily stigmatized in Hong Kong.

\(^{117}\) Similar sentiments were expressed by working-class immigrant mothers Ocean and Kay (single mother). Disentitlement to pension entitlements in China is a result of their relinquishment of their citizenship in mainland China.
taken for granted, and their concerns are about which university to go to rather than whether their children can go to university. This attests to the way the ‘felt injury’ (cf. Sennett and Cobb 1972) that the ‘ethnicization’ of immigrants inflicts in the local context can be mitigated by class advantage. As I show in the next section, it is easier for the more-advantaged immigrant mothers like Andrea to mobilize their cultural capital for actualizing their educational aspirations when compared to their less-advantaged counterparts. In contrast, the more-disadvantaged immigrant mothers are uncertain of whether their aspirations are realizable. This explains why they expressed their aspirations in highly generic terms (as in ‘studying well’ and ‘finding a job’) and geared towards an unplanned future (cf. Ball et al. 2002b). Their ambivalence can be discerned in the inconsistencies revealed in their accounts, as exemplified by that of May (intermediate class mother, with limited schooling experience):

Of course I want that [her son’s going to university]. It’s all right if he continues upward to get a master degree.

[IF] he [the son] … stops there [at S6]… What can he do? … As a mother, of course I want him to have a comfortable job … But if he cannot study much, if his level is low, what jobs can he have?

There must be somebody who works as a butcher, as a plumber, or as a street-sweeper. These people do exist…[He can settle in these jobs] As long as he likes the job [if he cannot study much]. The two of us [she and husband] have no expectations.

The ambivalence and readjusted educational expectations of these less-advantaged immigrant mothers can be understood as adapted to the opportunities and constraints associated with their class position. In Goldthorpe’s (1996) terms, it is more costly for them to invest in the same aspirations their more-advantaged counterparts embrace. As Ocean (working-class immigrant mother) suggested:
If we have the money, she [the daughter] can go to university. If we don’t have any, then she won’t need university… I will try my best… but if I really can’t do it, we have to forget about it.

Nonetheless, Susie (working-class immigrant mother) attested to the fact it is not only economic capital that matters:

I don’t think [the daughter] can make it [to the university]…It’s fine if we have financial difficulties because I will think of ways to finance her studies in the university. The most important thing is [whether] she can make it.

Given that her daughter is a top-ability band 1 student, Susie’s sentiments testify to the tendency for the working class to internalize the objective structures of inequality in the educational ‘field’, and hence their acceptance of their inferiority (cf. Bourdieu 1984). The structures of inequality pertain to their disadvantaged access to the ‘right’ cultural capital in the educational field to support their children’s learning. This is the extra hurdle beyond rational calculation of opportunities and constraints (as conceived in Goldthorpe’s framework) that suppresses the mobilization of aspirations and engenders ambivalence. As I show in Chapter 5, and later in this chapter, this extra hurdle also inhibits cultural capital mobilization in choice-making and in mothers’ everyday educational involvement.

Taken together, immigrant mothers exhibit high educational aspirations in a way consistent with empirical evidence in Western contexts. Such aspirations should be understood as embedded in the context of migration and ‘ethnicization’ which is at the same time inherently gendered. Nonetheless, whether such aspirations can be effectively mobilized as cultural capital in the educational field is contingent upon the class context (cf. Shah et al. 2011), as I discuss further in the next section. What should be highlighted here is that, for the less-advantaged immigrant mothers, their aspirations are implicated in their class practices and strategies in schooling. This helps illuminate how migration and ‘ethnicity’ can complicate class disadvantage, as I
illustrate later in this Chapter and in Chapter 7.

For the less-advantaged local mothers, their ambivalence emerges much less strongly in their accounts of educational expectations as in their accounts of choice (see Chapter 5) and routine educational involvement (as discussed later). This is probably because of my small and heterogeneous sample of this group of mothers. This can also be understood in terms of their (unconscious) assumption of a dominant, normative ‘ethnic’ local Hong Kong identity (cf. Lo 2007). Unlike their immigrant counterparts, they need not emphasize how their desire for their children’s educational achievement is central to their resistance against any cultural ‘inferiority’ ascribed to them. Rather, they are likely to have taken for granted the value of education inscribed in the ethos of competitive individualism in the local context. Thus, they saw no need to reemphasize (to a local-born researcher) what they expected of their children educationally.

While all mothers show high educational aspirations, what they realistically expect of their children educationally differs, reflecting how different class contexts shape how well their cultural capital ‘fits’ with the institutional expectations of the ‘field’. The convertibility of their aspirations is not automatic. This is not only in terms of their choice-making, but also in terms of their everyday educational involvement, as I discuss in the next section.
II ROUTINE EDUCATIONAL INVOLVEMENT

Let us first look at mothers’ accounts of how they are involved in children’s education in everyday life. All the more advantaged mothers claimed to be ‘un-involved’. They reported that they did not supervise their children’s schoolwork or help with their dictation and revision, unless their children asked for help. They do not think they need to control their children’s routines. They emphasize their children’s self-initiative; this is what they learnt in their upbringing and schooling experience in which their own parents (in particular mothers) left it to them to manage their studies on their own (cf. Reay 1998). In this sense, their upbringing and/or schooling experience can be understood as what they draw upon as cultural capital in terms of the confidence they have in encouraging their children’s ‘self-directed’ learning. For example, local-born intermediate-class Rosa suggested that she had shared with her daughter (a band 3 student) how she had managed to survive the competition at her workplace (she was once working in the entertainment industry). She believed this was what her daughter, whose ability had always been undone by her nerves in school exams, could learn from. Her sense of entitlement, as evident in her belief in her daughter’s potential despite the latter’s ‘low’ banding, can be understood as grounded upon the confidence she derived in being a senior secondary school graduate at a time when educational opportunities were just opening up in Hong Kong.\textsuperscript{118} The same can be said of the more-advantaged immigrant mothers, whose confidence was grounded upon their schooling experience in China. As Andrea (intermediate class immigrant mother from a privileged family background in China, and senior secondary school graduate) suggested:

\begin{quote}
I knew how to be a good student …I enjoyed school… my life nowadays is an extension of what happened in the past […] I teach him [the son] [that] whether he can study well or not depends on your [his] own efforts but not
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{118} Attainment in senior secondary schooling could make a big difference in one’s occupational and intergenerational mobility trajectory in the 1980s and early 1990s (see e.g. Chan TW 1995) and was what enabled the upward mobility to middle-class positions of many from humble backgrounds (see e.g. Wong and Lui 1992). This is probably where the confidence of Rosa and her counterparts comes from.
your [his] mum’s.

It should be noted, however, that there are inconsistencies and contradictions in the accounts of the ‘un-involvement’ of these mothers. Middle-class immigrant mother Carmen reported that she was sometimes ‘lax’ and sometimes ‘strict’ in monitoring her daughter’s schoolwork and after-school activities. Local intermediate class mother Nicole switched from full-time to part-time employment to keep an eye on her son when she noticed problems in the latter’s learning progress. That these evidences of ‘concerted cultivation’ (cf. Lareau 2003) were presented as secondary to the emphasis on children’s ‘self-direction’ in these mothers’ accounts testifies to their taken-for-grantedness of their cultural capital transmitted in the process. This primarily pertains to their educational experience, and, in the case of local-born mothers, their English language competence that is drawn upon as they assist their children’s English learning. This also pertains to their investment of economic capital in private tuition or other learning classes, which for the immigrant mothers are particularly important for ameliorating their disadvantage in supporting their children’s English learning. What is also important to note about these mothers’ accounts of their educational ‘un-involvement’ is the fact that cultural capital can be drawn upon by intermediate class (local or immigrant) mothers or mothers occupying ‘ambivalent’ positions, as in the case of middle-class immigrant mothers. These testify to the misalignment between cultural capital and class, and to how class helps ameliorate the disadvantages of the immigrant mothers in the educational ‘field’. Class advantage is evident, as it is documented in both the Western and the local literature (e.g. Lareau 1989; Crozier 1997; Chan SW 1998; Hui et al. 2005). Nonetheless, the generation of class advantage and disadvantage in cultural capital mobilization (as the intermediate-class mothers show) is less than automatic.

Unlike the more-advantaged mothers, the accounts of the majority of the less-advantaged mothers are characterized by their emphasis on the intensiveness of their schoolwork supervision and regulation of children’s routines, even if they are in full-time paid employment. The emphasis on their labour expended reflects their
discomfort in the educational ‘field’. This is rooted in their disadvantaged access to the ‘right’ cultural capital, in particular their ability to support their children’s English learning in an institutional context where English language competence is valued as a symbolic capital (cf. Bourdieu 1991). Faye (local intermediate class mother), who did not finish junior secondary school, cannot help with her daughter’s English work and cannot tell if her daughter is pronouncing the language correctly. Her immigrant counterparts have similar problems with their children’s English learning, but this is not the only problem they have, as Lucy suggests:

I think I’m very much disadvantaged… When people arrive from mainland China, the different aspects of their culture fare worse… [citing the son] ‘Mum, you always write me some mainland [Chinese] characters that I don’t understand!’ As for English language, [learning about] the 26 alphabets [in China]… [is] different from what it’s like [in English learning] in Hong Kong…‘Mum, the Math you teach, compared with what the teacher teaches, is wrong!’

Lucy exemplifies how educational experience attained in China is rendered inconvertible in the local context. As I discuss in Chapter 4, English learning had only been reintroduced to schooling in China in the late 1970s in the wake of the destruction that the Cultural Revolution caused to the institution of schooling (see Hu 2005). It is therefore not surprising to hear immigrant mothers suggesting that they had only learnt English at a rudimentary level regardless of their educational backgrounds and could not help with their children’s English learning. Besides, the discrepancies in the pedagogical styles adopted in schools and in the way Chinese is written119 aggravate these mothers’ disadvantage, positioning them more unfavourably when compared to the less-advantaged local mothers. While the more-advantaged immigrant mothers can ameliorate their disadvantage by arranging their children private tuition or learning classes, the same cannot be said of their more disadvantaged

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119 While simplified Chinese characters are adopted in written Chinese in mainland China, traditional Chinese characters are adopted in written Chinese in Hong Kong.
counterparts.

The disadvantaged access to the ‘right’ cultural capital means the less-advantaged mothers (local-born or immigrant) must make the most of what they do have at their disposal; hence the intensity of their labour. To ensure that their children can concentrate on studying, the norm is for these mothers to sit by their children when they are doing homework or revision, and control their children’s time spent on the TV, computer games, or the phone. Examination periods often leave these mothers stranded at home. These less-advantaged mothers are also proactive in seeking information about options of private tuition (especially in English language) or tutorial schools in their social networks. This is made convenient by their everyday mothering work as they take their children to school and socialize with fellow mothers at the school entrance or in PTA activities or as they take their children to community organizations where the latter attend programmes or participate in activities. Acquiring information about options of private tuition is also common among the more-advantaged mothers, but it is particularly important for the less advantaged mothers, because this is how they can find affordable options of extra learning support to compensate for their disadvantaged access to the ‘right’ cultural capital. For example, after Susie (working-class immigrant mother) met a volunteer during a meeting in the grassroots group of which she was a member, she arranged for this volunteer to do one-to-four tuition for her daughter and the children of three other mothers in the same grassroots group. In this way, Susie could arrange tuition for her daughter at a relatively low price (when compared to one-to-one tuition). Considering that their husbands would not have accessed such information in their social networks (see Chapter 7), this shows how gender facilitates the generation of cultural capital in mothers’ social networks in such a way that can ameliorate their class disadvantage and the disadvantage of being an immigrant in the educational field.

Aside from their social networks, the less-advantaged mothers also make an effort to

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120 This is provided by private tutorials schools, private tutors (one to one or in a small group), homework help services in community centres, or remedial classes at school etc.
generate cultural capital from other sources. Two mothers reported they made their children and themselves watch English language programmes on TV to boost their children’s exposure to more ‘authentic’ English-speaking settings (cf. Yu 1994). Several mothers reported they had attended English language classes to equip themselves with the cultural capital needed for supporting children’s English learning.

It should be noted that a minority (four) of the less-advantaged immigrant mothers reported to be ‘un-involved’ in their children’s education, as opposed to the intensive labour reported in the accounts of their counterparts. Unlike their more-advantaged counterparts, it is the distance these mothers keep from children’s schoolwork and their permissiveness towards children’s routines that defines their ‘un-involvement’. These mothers have received the least education (no more than attainment at S1) in the sample. For them, ‘interfering’ in their children’s learning simply does not make sense. Despite this, their gendered labour expended on accessing information on options of private tuition (or tutorial schools) in their social networks must be acknowledged. Their ‘un-involvement’ should also be understood in a context in which they can rely on their elder children to support their younger children’s learning.

Taken together, the accounts presented in this section affirm the power of class in shaping the ‘fit’ between mothers’ cultural capital and that demanded in the educational field (cf. Lareau 2003). However, when compared to Lareau’s findings (2003), these accounts illuminate the diversity within working-class experience in schooling. The more-disadvantaged mothers lack the ‘right’ cultural capital for ‘concerted cultivation’ in terms of the provision of effective everyday learning support. However, their intensive educational labour suggests that they are not necessarily content with the accomplishment of their children’s natural growth through the provision of love and protection. Gender plays an important role in facilitating their generation of cultural capital in their social networks. There is also a strong emphasis on accruing cultural capital for children’s English learning, attesting to a distinctive way how class plays out in a context where competence in a second language functions as symbolic capital (cf. Bourdieu 1991; see Chapter 4). Besides, the
accounts of the more-advantaged mothers suggest the contingency in the ways cultural
capital is mobilized in intermediate-class settings, and in middle-class settings where
the disadvantage of being an immigrant in the educational field can be ameliorated by
class advantages. Overall, my findings shed light on the indeterminacy in how class
‘works’ via cultural capital in educational processes. In the next section, I illuminate
this under-emphasized dimension of class disadvantage further by looking at mothers’
investments in emotional labour in their everyday educational involvement.
III EMOTIONAL LABOUR AND CULTURAL CAPITAL PROCESSES

In this section, I examine how cultural capital mobilization should be understood as contingent upon mothers’ management of their interactions with their children, and of the potential tension and conflicts that ensue in their everyday educational involvement. I argue that mothers need to invest in emotional labour (cf. Hochschild 1983) in the management of their (and their children’s) emotions in making cultural capital ‘work’. This necessitates indeterminacy in the way class generates advantage or disadvantage via cultural capital in educational processes (cf. Reay 2004b).

Let us begin with the more-advantaged mothers. I discussed earlier how they presented themselves as educationally ‘un-involved’ during the interviews. This can be understood as reflecting the application of their tacit ‘practical knowledge’ (cf. Bourdieu 1984) as they mobilize their cultural capital in a way that is naturalized and ‘disguised’ in everyday family socialization (Bourdieu 1986). Nonetheless, as I explore the inconsistencies and contradictions in their accounts, what emerge are the difficulties that some of these mothers have encountered in the past as they tried to mobilize their cultural capital in their everyday educational involvement. As local intermediate class Clara (a senior secondary school graduate) exemplifies:

I find myself [a] very bad [mum]. Maybe I am nervous… she [the daughter] doesn’t even know how to do the simple [home]work. What’s going on with her?

I always scolded her very fiercely whenever she did not know how to do something, and I would sweep all the books…off the desk to the floor. She would be crying then. I regretted a lot…when I was sleeping at night. I asked myself, ‘Why so angry?’… [on] every night. Eventually I thought this did not work and I needed to look for private tuition. Had I kept on facing her this way, our relationship would have been destroyed.
Clara only becomes ‘un-involved’ after she has spent almost five years seeking the best private tuition service for her daughter. Her account shows that cultural capital – and by extension ‘concerted cultivation’ (Lareau 2003) - cannot ‘work’ when mothers cannot keep their emotions under control in their educational involvement, and that class advantage (vis-à-vis the more-disadvantaged mothers) cannot be taken for granted. Also important to note in her account is her anxiety and feelings of guilt. This testifies to the pressure that mothers are under as they negotiate a repertoire of normative ideals that prescribe how they should interact with their children in their educational involvement (cf. Reay 1998; Lareau 2003). Clara was blaming herself for being an ‘inadequate’ mother for how she had failed to control her anger and harmed her daughter emotionally. Emotional labour should therefore be understood as gendered in this context. That Clara can now stay ‘hands-off’ from her daughter’s schoolwork and encourage her daughter’s ‘self-direction’ in learning can be understood as her practice of ‘sensitive mothering’ (Vincent and Warren 1998), which emphasizes children’s autonomy (Walkerdine and Lucey 1989) through ‘open communication’ as an ‘invisible’ form of control (Solomon et al. 2002). Clara also attests to how she needs to invest in economic capital in private tuition in order for her ‘invisible’ ‘un-involvement’ to be upheld, but to do so also requires the learning of skills and acquisition of knowledge and mothers’ self-reflection over their experiences (O’Brien 2008). This is evident in the accounts of Rosa (local intermediate class mother, senior secondary school graduate) and Sara (intermediate class immigrant mother from a privileged background in China), who reported having attended talks and courses and read books to learn how to manage the moments when they were ‘driven mad’ in their attempts to intervene in their children’s education121 (see Chapter 7). Most importantly, as I discussed earlier, mothers need confidence to be ‘uninvolved’. While the more-advantaged mothers can draw upon their upbringing and/ or schooling experience for the confidence to encourage their children’s ‘self-directed’ learning, the same cannot be said of their less-advantaged counterparts. Similar to their more-advantaged counterparts, the less-advantaged mothers reported

121 Sara and another more-advantaged mother Haley (middle-class immigrant mother) also reported that they made themselves learn to become ‘un-involved’ in their younger children’s education, having had negative experience with their elder children in the past when they were more ‘involved’ and controlling mothers.
how they were often left on their own to manage their studies when they were young. However, it is more difficult for them to draw upon their past experience for confidence to be ‘uninvolved’ when they have disadvantaged access to the ‘right’ cultural capital or to the economic capital needed for investing in private tuition or learning classes. Under such circumstances, they can only make the most of their time and energy and invest in intensive educational labour. This, as I show below, makes them vulnerable to tensions and conflicts with their children and to anxiety and feelings of guilt, to the detriment of their cultural capital mobilization.

Firstly, as in what Clara experienced in the past, the intensive educational labour of the less-advantaged mothers often engenders negative emotions. For Liz (working-class immigrant single mother), scolding her son makes it more likely for her son to listen to her, and thus makes it easier for her to do revision with him. Similarly, Nancy (working-class local mother) reported how she had to ‘make a big fuss’ and ‘throw temper tantrums’ when her son persisted in playing game machines when he was supposed to do revision with her. These accounts show the role of mothers’ emotional labour in facilitating their educational involvement and hence transmission of cultural capital (e.g. in terms of their educational aspirations) (cf. Reay 2004b). However, when compared to the more-advantaged mothers, these less-advantaged mothers find it more difficult to practice ‘sensitive mothering’, even if they are aware of the perils of their intensive involvement and their employment of negative emotions in the process. Their attempts to stay ‘hands-off’ are often botched. For example, Veronica once cut off the electricity supply to the computer to make her son stop playing computer games and concentrate on his schoolwork. As her son grew up, she decided that she should stay ‘hands-off’. Yet, when her son spends the whole day playing with his mobile phone and watching TV rather than studying, she ‘cannot but get angry’ and starts shouting at her son. This evolves into a vicious cycle of destructive episodes of mother-son conflicts that makes it increasingly difficult for Veronica to intervene in her son’s studies, whether in the ‘intensive’ or ‘invisible’ way. This attests to her

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122This is reflected in how these mothers reflected on how their emotional investments undermined their children’s self-esteem and encouraged their children to be more dependent on their mothers in their studies.
disadvantaged access to the ‘right’ cultural capital in the ‘field’, which disables her from mobilizing cultural capital in a way that comes naturally in everyday family socialization, as in the experiences of her more-advantaged counterparts (e.g. Rosa and Andrea, as mentioned earlier). Added to this is the fact that she cannot afford to invest economic capital in private tuition or tutorial school lessons to provide her son with learning support without the need to directly confront him about his learning problems. This exemplifies how the cultural capital mobilization of the less-advantaged mothers is more liable to be inhibited by mothers’ investment in emotional labour in the process.

Secondly, the susceptibility of these mothers to be caught up in tension and conflicts with their children is reinforced by their feelings of inefficacy, frustrations and acceptance of their inadequacy as mothers in their educational involvement (cf. Lareay 1989, 2003; Reay 1996, 1998). For Molly (working-class immigrant mother), a former Math teacher in China, the inconvertibility of her cultural capital in the local ‘field’ has left her ‘clueless’. Embittered about the irrelevance of her educational and teaching experience, she reluctantly invested a large sum of money into private tuition for her son, but having seen her son failing to improve his progress in English learning or his concentration in his studies, she began to shout at her son. This however had only deepened her feelings of inadequacy as a mother, as she felt guilty about the way she treated her son, which was something she did not endorse in her teaching experience. This explains why she feels that she had better stay away from education work, because:

I have been exhausted. I want to spare myself the hassle […….] I think I am a failing parent by the standards in Hong Kong. I am a failing parent.

This illuminates how immigrant mothers invest in emotional labour as they try to reconcile their aspirations with the ‘inferiority’ of their cultural capital in an unequal ‘field’. In Molly’s case, such ‘psychic work’ proves to be an extra obstacle to her mobilization of aspirations and of the economic capital she invested (cf. Louie 2001;
Archer and Francis 2006), as her son eventually chose to drop out before S3 to her chagrin. Similar sentiments about the inconvertibility of cultural capital and the futility of educational labour were also evident in Liz’s (working-class immigrant single mother) account. This helps explain why, when asked what made her feel the worst in her parenting experiences, Liz suggested that this had to do with:

Anything about his [the son’s] studies…I find it difficult to follow him through… ultimately it’s useless.

Nonetheless, Liz’s aspirations for her son to ‘get ahead’ through ambitious choice-making (as discussed in Chapter 5) made her leave full-time employment and persist with her ‘useless’ labour:

I don’t really know English language but I have to make myself do revision with him […] Every day I need to do revision on one sentence or two sentences to make him remember that in his brain.

That Liz’s effort pays off in terms of how she managed to boost her son’s banding from 3 to 2 within a year suggests that class (intertwined with ‘ethnic’) disadvantage can be overcome under circumstances in which mothers are short of the ‘right’ cultural capital. The important point to note here is the extra emotional labour that less-advantaged mothers like Liz need to invest in as they negotiate the difficult and unpalatable experience in making their ‘inferior’ cultural capital ‘work’ (cf. Lareau 2003). This is one of the reasons why the less-advantaged mothers find it more difficult when compared to their more-advantaged counterparts in the mobilization of aspirations in educational processes. This allows a more nuanced perspective of the educational ‘un-involvement’ of a minority of less-advantaged mothers. By keeping themselves at a distance from children’s schoolwork, these mothers can be spared the negative ‘affect’ (cf. Skeggs 2004) that educational involvement entails, as Jade (working-class immigrant mother) attested to:
I am not like the others [the fellow mothers] who complain it’s too hard [to be a mother] … I am not like, ‘… It is driving me mad!’

At the same time, these mothers can also keep themselves shielded from the feelings of shame in relation to their identity as mothers that their ‘interferences’ in their children’s education and the ensuing exposure of their educational inadequacy may invite (cf. Walkerdine et al. 2001).

Taken together, I have shown in this section that cultural capital mobilization is contingent upon mothers’ investment of emotional labour in their educational involvement. More-advantaged mothers are better-able to avert the adverse implications of their emotional labour for their cultural capital mobilization. This is because they can access the ‘right’ cultural capital and economic capital, and have the confidence to be ‘uninvolved’ in their children’s education as they transmit their cultural capital. The opposite is true for their less-advantaged counterparts whose emotional labour is at the same time invested in negotiating their own perceived inferiority as mothers. Such inferiority is not only classed but should also be understood as (for immigrant mothers) ‘ethnicized’. Whereas Molly accepts her failure as a parent (by ‘Hong Kong standards’), Liz perseveres in putting up with the difficult experience in teaching her son a foreign language of which the symbolic value in the local context is unmistakably recognized. Their experiences can be interpreted in terms of immigrant mothers’ frustrations with and resistance against their ‘ethnicized’ inferiority. The point here is that less-advantaged mothers must shoulder extra labour in mobilizing their aspirations in educational processes. In the next and last section, I will examine mothers’ arrangement of extracurricular activities. I focus on the disadvantaged access to the ‘right’ cultural capital of the more-disadvantaged; the interaction between gender, ‘ethnicity’ and class; emotional labour and the relevance of ‘affect’; and the indeterminacy in the way class disadvantage is generated via cultural capital across diverse contexts.
IV EXTRACURRICULAR ACTIVITIES ARRANGEMENT

Across the sample, mothers are unanimous about the instrumental value of extracurricular activities participation as what boosts their children’s competitiveness in the local context of school choice-making. Similarly, across class backgrounds and the local/immigrant division, mothers discussed how their children had participated in different kinds of activities since they were young. Information about the extracurricular activities is acquired as mothers take their children to school, participate in PTA activities, enroll in programmes in community organizations, or socialize in their neighbourhood, and is taken for granted as part of their everyday mothering work. The more-disadvantaged mothers appear to emphasize more than the ‘accomplishment of natural growth’ in their children (cf. Lareau 2003). Nonetheless, whether their extracurricular activities arrangement is geared towards the kind of ‘concerted cultivation’ that counts in the local education ‘field’ is open to question (cf. Wong YL 2007). This is because it is primarily sustained participation in accredited extracurricular activities, which requires the sustained input of economic capital, which is most valued in the symbolic order of the school market. In this sense, how class shapes mothers’ arrangement of extracurricular activities has profound implications for the extent to which the cultural capital accrued for children via extracurricular activities participation is recognized (and rewarded) in the school market.

For the more advantaged mothers, their children participate in activities at school, in private institutions and in community organizations. Whereas arranging for children to play musical instruments is popular among the mothers across the sample, piano learning, one of the more (but not the most) esteemed extracurricular activities in the school market, is restricted to the more advantaged in the sample (cf. Wong YL 2007). More-advantaged mothers are able to, and find it worthwhile, to invest their

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123 Achievements in prestigious and accredited extracurricular activities, such as piano learning (but see below), serve as an important basis on which students are screened and selected at the discretionary phase and in the post-allocation period in local choice mechanisms (see Chapter 5).
124 In fact, in the case of schools at the top of the symbolic hierarchy in the ‘field’, qualifications in piano learning may not suffice to serve as a cultural capital. This is considering its popularity, hence the lack of exclusivity; and
economic capital in their children’s piano learning classes as well as the associated examinations that their children need to sit for to achieve accredited qualifications. The investment made often lasts throughout and extends beyond their children’s primary schooling. Financial concerns do not figure as an issue for their extracurricular activities arrangement, although they more than welcome opportunities for value-for-money activities in community organizations or public facilities\(^\text{125}\).

When compared to their more advantaged counterparts, the less advantaged mothers’ extracurricular activities arrangement is characterized by a heavier reliance on opportunities available at school and in community organizations, which offer them cheaper options when compared to private institutions. This is particularly true for the less advantaged immigrant mothers, given that schools and community organizations are usually where they first build their social networks for accessing local knowledge, tangible support and friendships following their arrival in Hong Kong (cf. Ryan 2007), as Kit illustrated:

[Visiting the community centre for the first time] I get to know another group of parents [other than those met at school] and they can also tell you about those activities that are suitable for kids that are available in other [community] centres. Then I go to another centre … Gradually I know more people and have more friends, and whenever there are some activities for kids available, the parents will call up each other to discuss not only the activities that suit kids, but also those that suit the parents ourselves.

Kit shows how social capital accrued in parents’ (more precisely, mothers’) networks facilitates the generation of cultural capital in terms of information about options of extracurricular activities. Nonetheless, the important role that ‘local’ networks (cf. Bagnall et al. 2003) play in the everyday life of these less-advantaged mothers also

\(^{125}\)One example is the Leisure and Cultural Services Department of the Hong Kong SAR Government, which administers programmes open to public enrolment and operate sports grounds or concert halls etc. for public booking.
restricts the kind of activities they arrange for their children. A minority of these mothers can afford to support their children’s sustained participation in dancing or martial arts, even in private institutions. But for the majority, the popular musical instrument their children play is the recorder, which is hardly recognized as a musical instrument of distinction in the local school market. Their children also design models and participate in Sudoku competition at school; outside school, they participate in one-off activities such as outings, visits, funfairs and volunteering activities. Again, the activities arranged are much less likely to award their children the certificates or honours recognized and rewarded in the school market. In this sense, the cultural capital accrued for their children is the ‘wrong’ cultural capital by institutional standards. It should be noted that some schools do offer opportunities for children to play more expensive musical instruments, such as the violin or saxophone, at a price much less than private institutions. Participation in boy scouts or girl guides at school also offers children recognized qualifications in the school market. But as these mothers suggested, to take up these opportunities they first needed to figure out where the money for the purchase of the musical instrument and the scouts’ uniform (and the extra costs associated with outings and trainings) could come from (cf. Vincent and Ball 2007).

Also worth noting is the ambivalence towards such extracurricular activities evident in the accounts of the less-advantaged immigrant mothers, with a tendency to prioritize schoolwork and academic performance over extracurricular activities. Their ambivalence should be understood in the (gendered) context of migration in which mothers carry the expectations of making the most of what Hong Kong offers for driving their children’s educational success (cf. So 2003; Wong WL 2004). Such ambivalence is also compounded by the financial deprivation of the families of these immigrant mothers, given that over half of these mothers reported how they spent most time at home and had to minimize the need to go out for the sake of minimizing transportation and other unnecessary expenses. This helps explain why they find it more difficult to accept that their children may drop out of any activity arranged whenever they wish (when compared to local mothers and the more-advantaged
immigrant mothers). They are also inclined to spend only when they can be assured that their children’s participation in the extracurricular activity will be sustained in the long term, and that their investments will count in the school market. In the words of Goldthorpe (1996), it is more costly for these mothers to invest in the same extracurricular activities as that of the local-born and the more-advantaged immigrant mothers. The following illustrates how Ocean’s (working-class immigrant mother) ambivalence constrains her investment of economic capital in those extracurricular activities that ‘count’ in the ‘field’:

I am asking her [the daughter] to stop playing the flute next year […] How could she have the opportunity to learn [playing the flute] outside school? … We can’t even afford [private] tuition.

This shows how Ocean prioritizes academic-oriented investments in tuition. Thus, under circumstances of financial deprivation, even if the music teacher at school had lent her daughter a flute, Ocean encouraged her daughter to learn the basics of how to play the flute using online resources rather than investing economic capital in private lessons when opportunities were no longer available at school. This means that even if her daughter successfully masters the technique in playing the flute, this is unlikely to be recognized in the school market. The same can be said of those other mothers who would rather invest in one-off or short-term activities (such as summer courses). However, investments in extracurricular activities cannot be understood as simply a rational choice based upon calculation of costs and benefits. Less-advantaged mothers such as Kay (working-class immigrant mother) and Irene (working-class local mother) are both actively involved in volunteering activities in community organizations together with their children. As Irene suggests,

I have sold charity flags together with them [the children] to serve the society […] Even if they grow up in a poor family, they should not be down and dejected.
We don’t have much money. We make use of the limited resources we have and make use of resources of the society to help ourselves.

Irene exemplifies how the investments of more-disadvantaged mothers in these ‘wrong’ extracurricular activities can be reconstructed as what helps assert their and their children’s positive identity in defence against their class and (for immigrant mothers) ‘ethnicized’ inferiority. This attests to the situated meanings of extracurricular activities in disadvantaged contexts that are de-legitimated by institutional standards (cf. Gillies 2006). This also attests to the role of the ‘affect’ of class and ‘ethnicity’ (cf. Skeggs 2004) in shaping investments in extracurricular activities in such a way that can reproduce one’s disadvantaged position in the ‘field’.

Nonetheless, the generation of class disadvantage should not be assumed as automatic. Let us return to the case of Ocean. She managed to borrow a saxophone from an acquaintance for her daughter when the latter was admitted to the orchestra at school – a sign of ‘distinction’ – thanks to the recommendation given by a former teacher. This suggests the indeterminacy in how class ‘works’ (in interaction with ‘ethnicity’) in generating class disadvantage. Whereas the (objectified) cultural capital in the form of the flute could not be mobilized for accruing for Ocean’s daughter the ‘right’ cultural capital, the opposite was true for Ocean’s mobilization of the (objectified) cultural capital in the form of the saxophone. In both scenarios social capital accrued in interpersonal relationships was mobilized, but to different consequences under different circumstances.

The role of gender in shaping the more contingent ways in which cultural capital is mobilized in coordination with social capital should be acknowledged. Gender not only facilitates the generation of cultural capital in terms of information about options of extracurricular activities through social networks, a process naturalized as everyday mothering work. Gender also facilitates the generation of cultural capital in terms of the labour mothers expend on securing objectified cultural capital through social networks, as Ocean exemplifies. Moreover, mothers’ labour can be expended on
facilitating children’s access to elite settings of extracurricular activities, even if this involves a more tortuous process when compared to the experience of their more-advantaged counterparts. Yvonne (working-class immigrant single mother) arranged her son to train for a speech and verse competition at school (which was free of charge). When she was attending the competition, she met the administrators of an esteemed private institution that employed native English speakers126 as instructors of its programmes. It was then that she persuaded these administrators to enroll her son in a drama class at a concessionary price, presumably on the basis of the administrators’ positive assessment of her son’s performance in the competition. Yvonne could assert herself in securing the ‘deal’, because she could draw upon her experiences in diverse social networks127 and in volunteering activities for the confidence needed as she amassed the ‘right’ cultural capital for her son. That she can overcome the disadvantage associated with her class and immigrant status is contingent upon the availability of her labour, which hinges upon her detachment from full-time employment (she has never worked full-time in Hong Kong; see Chapter 7). It is in this sense that her mobilization of the ‘right’ cultural capital should be understood as gendered.

Just as how class ‘works’ to generate disadvantage is not automatic, the class advantage (vis-à-vis the less-advantaged) of the more-advantaged mothers should not be taken for granted either. Their children may resist their investments in ‘concerted cultivation’ (Lareau 2003). Emotional labour has to be invested to manage such resistance and the ensuing tension and conflicts that can arise if cultural capital is to be accrued for their children successfully. For example, middle-class immigrant mother Helena suggested that she arranged piano learning for her son to ‘have some fun’. But what happened was that she had been constantly ‘driven mad’ and had ‘produced a lot of reasons trying to convince my [her] son’ to take piano learning seriously over the years:

126The employment of native English speakers rather than non-native English speakers is widely considered as a sign of distinction that helps parents differentiate the quality of instruction among schools, learning centres and tutorial schools.

127These pertain to her participation in programmes run by a community centre in her neighbourhood, her volunteering activities and her involvement in a religious group.
I have never made him [the son] practice too much. … [but] I have scolded him. I have been harsh to him. I have also tried to tone down my words. I have tried everything… to force him to do better … ‘Are you going to practice? Are you? I am getting angry’

Helena’s experience resonates with the experience of the other more-advantaged mothers in their transmission of cultural capital in everyday educational involvement. This is in terms of their defensiveness and feelings of guilt as they reflect on their experiences against normative ideals of ‘sensitive mothering’ (Vincent and Warren 1998; see also Walkerdine and Lucey 1989) and the emotional labour invested in making their cultural capital ‘work’. Without the input of such persistent gendered labour, Helena’s investments would not have paid off (in terms of her son’s eventual achievement of level eight in his piano learning).

I have presented mothers’ accounts of extracurricular activities arrangement that affirms, but at the same time complicates Lareau’s (2003) observation of class advantage and disadvantage in parental practices of ‘concerted cultivation’. The more-disadvantaged mothers are proactive in arranging extracurricular activities for their children; only that, under circumstances in which they are short of economic capital, they are less likely to accrue the ‘right’ cultural capital for their children via the kind of extracurricular activities they arrange. But how class ‘works’ to generate advantage and disadvantage is more indeterminate than it appears. In diverse contexts mothers across class backgrounds and the local/immigrant divide can draw upon social and economic capital in different ways to generate the cultural capital needed for arranging the ‘right’ activities for their children, via the input of gendered labour. Thus, class disadvantage cannot be taken for granted.
CONCLUSION

In this chapter, I examine class disadvantage in education in Hong Kong by focusing on mothers’ routine educational involvement. I show that all mothers aspire to their children’s educational success. Immigrant mothers are particularly vocal about their aspirations. This testifies to the centrality of their aspirations for their children’s education prospects to their migration (cf. Sue and Okazaki 1990; Tseng et al. 2007). This also signifies, for the more-disadvantaged, their resistance against their ‘ethnicized’ cultural inferiority. Nonetheless, the less-advantaged local and new immigrant mothers cannot always mobilize their aspirations. This is due to their disadvantaged access to the ‘right’ kinds of cultural capital, which, for new immigrant mothers across class backgrounds, renders the cultural capital attained in schooling in China inconvertible in the ‘field’. The more-disadvantaged local and immigrant mothers have difficulties in supporting their children’s English learning. They are proactive in arranging their children extracurricular activities in community organizations or at school, but either lack economic capital, or consider it too risky to invest in sustained and accredited extracurricular activities (e.g. piano learning) for their children (cf. Goldthorpe 1996). These disadvantages have profound implications for their choice-making in a school market which privileges EMI schools, English language competence, and students’ participation in prestigious and/or competitive extracurricular activities (cf. Wong YL 2007).

Nonetheless, I argue that class disadvantage is not automatically generated. For all mothers, emotional labour must be invested to minimize tension and conflicts with children for the smooth transmission of cultural capital (cf. Hochschild 1983; Lareau 1989). The more-advantaged local intermediate-class mothers and new immigrant mothers from middle-class backgrounds are not immune to this, but are in a better position to minimize the potentially detrimental consequences of emotional labour. They can draw upon their relatively privileged educational or upbringing experiences for confidence to encourage their children’s ‘self-directed’ learning. They can also bank on their economic capital to arrange tuition for their children, which for new
immigrant mothers is particularly important for ameliorating ‘ethnic’ disadvantage in relation to their children’s English learning. In contrast, the majority of the less-advantaged mothers rely on intensive homework supervision and regulation of routine to ensure their children work hard in their studies. They also need to negotiate the self-perceived inferiority of their cultural capital and a more palpable sense of shame about their inadequacy as mothers when compared to the more-advantaged mothers. This is especially true for highly-educated new immigrant mothers; their difficult experience in coming to terms with the irrelevance of their cultural capital can be understood as intertwined with their ‘ethnicized’ cultural inferiority in the local context. Less-advantaged mothers are therefore more liable to frustrations and conflicts with their children, which represents an extra hurdle as they try to mobilize their aspirations (cf. David et al. 1997; Reay 1998; Lareau 2003). For this reason a minority of the less-advantaged mothers choose to distance themselves from educational work in defense of the shame that the exposure of their educational inadequacy may invite (cf. Walkerdine et al. 2001). Gender conditions mothers’ affective experience of educational involvement in such a way that can reproduce class disadvantages.

Despite this, my findings affirm the importance of gender in facilitating cultural capital mobilization in disadvantaged settings (cf. Reay 1998; Cooper 2007). Everyday mothering work facilitates mothers’ generation of cultural capital in social networks in terms of information about tuition or extracurricular activities. The centrality of educational labour to one’s mothering identity also explains mothers’ commitment to children’s education. This, in the case for immigrant mothers, is intertwined with their strong drive to capitalize upon educational opportunities in Hong Kong, embedded in the context of their migration and ‘ethnicization’. While the mobilization of their aspirations is constrained by class (cf. Shah et al. 2010), such aspirations are necessarily implicated in their class practices in schooling. This explains why the more-disadvantaged immigrant mothers can stretch their personal time and energy to the limit to amass the cultural capital needed to offer the educational best for their children. This shows how migration and ‘ethnicity’ can complicate our understanding of working class disadvantage in education.
My findings confirm the profound influence of class in generating disadvantage in mothers’ routine educational involvement. These findings concur with findings in the Western literature that the educational commitments of the more-disadvantaged mothers count less than that of their middle-class counterparts in the ‘field’ (cf. Lareau 1989; Reay 1998; Gillies 2005). Nonetheless, I emphasize that class disadvantage cannot be taken for granted. In particular, I highlight the symbolic violence that afflicts all mothers with the gendered burden to engineer the best for their children’s education. The emotional labour this entails shapes cultural capital mobilization in indeterminate ways, only that the more-advantaged mothers are better-resourced to avert its adverse implications. In this way, I emphasize the myriad of ways that gender interacts with migration and ‘ethnicity’ in complicating class processes.
CHAPTER SEVEN
GENDERING EDUCATIONAL PRACTICES

INTRODUCTION

This chapter examines class disadvantage in education by exploring how cultural capital mobilization is embedded in the gendered lived realities of mothers (David 1997). The Western literature highlights the importance to incorporate mothers’ educational labour and their perspectives into our understanding of class processes in education (e.g. David 1998; Reay 1998). This is highly relevant to this study, considering research evidence of the substantial input of mothers’ labour into children’s education (Choi 1995) and the construction of maternal educational involvement as morally virtuous in Hong Kong (Chao 1994; Wong and Chan 2006). Having demonstrated how mothers are primarily responsible for generating and mobilizing cultural capital in Chapters 5 and 6, in this chapter I explore how mothers’ practices should be understood as contingent in a diversity of structural and moral contexts (cf. David et al. 1997; Duncan 2005).

I first examine mothers’ negotiation of paid work and motherhood. Mothers’ educational labour can be understood as constructed in a context where structural inequalities in the labour market are interlocked with mothers’ emphasis on their responsibility for children’s education. I also draw attention to the dilemma that mothers must negotiate as they commit themselves to their children’s education, for this denies them access to the respectability that comes with (full-time) paid employment in the local context (cf. Skeggs 1997, 2004; Newendorp 2010). The lack of value attached to unpaid educational labour is reinforced in (partnered) mothers’ negotiation of the gender division of (educational) labour with their husbands, as I examine in the following section. The implications of the devaluation of educational work, for which mothers are held responsible, are evident in mothers’ affective experiences of their educational practices, as I discussed in Chapters 5 and 6. These implications are magnified in mothers’ networking activities, as I examine in the last
section. While these activities facilitate mothers’ generation of cultural capital, they also expose mothers to scrutiny against the normative ideals of motherhood that circulate in schools and community organizations in which their networking takes place. This normalizes their anxiety and feelings of inadequacy, which, as I show in Chapters 5 and 6, can inhibit their cultural capital mobilization. Yet, it is also through these activities that mothers seek the respectability denied to them in their class position and because of their ‘ethnicized’ inferiority (cf. Skeggs 1997, 2004). I conclude by spelling out how my findings contribute to the local literature by enriching our understanding of the centrality of gender to the generation and reproduction of class inequalities in local educational processes (cf. Griffith and Smith 1987; Reay 1998; Walkerdine and Lucey 1989). At the same time, having demonstrated how mothers make meaning of their educational work across diverse classed and ‘ethnicized’ contexts (cf. Luttrell 1997; Cooper 2007), I highlight how my findings contribute to our understanding of the contingency in cultural capital mobilization and of the indeterminacy in class processes in education.
In this section, I examine mothers’ negotiation of paid work and motherhood. Real and perceived inequalities in the labour market push the majority of mothers out of paid work. This is interlocked with their emphasis on their responsibility as mothers for children’s education in encouraging them to prioritize children’s education over paid employment. Less-advantaged mothers are under more pressure to work, but find it more difficult to negotiate practical constraints when trying to make available their educational labour. These practical constraints aside, I argue that all mothers are negotiating a double-bind: Commitment to children’s education diminishes the value they can accrue to their personhood through paid work (cf. Skeggs 2004), whereas working full-time puts them at risk of being stigmatized as inadequate mothers (cf. Griffith and Smith 1987). Less-advantaged mothers have more at stake by committing to children’s education, because they are in greater need of paid work, and also need to redress the lack of value attached to their class, immigrant status and/or single-motherhood. This is fundamental to our understanding of how their affective experience can shape their mobilization of cultural capital.

The majority of mothers in my sample are full-time housewives. This makes possible the availability of their educational labour. They used to be in full-time paid employment, and they left work once they got married, (for immigrants) arrived in Hong Kong, or after the birth of their first or second child (cf. Lau et al. 2006). Only six mothers were in full-time employment at the time of the interviews.

Full-time housewives did not contemplate returning to paid work because of real and perceived inequalities in the labour market (cf. Leung VHT 2002). They believe their competitiveness in the labour market had diminished. Mothers from more

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128 The percentage of economically inactive homemakers of female population aged over 15 and over in Hong Kong is around 20% in 2009 (CSD 2010). The overrepresentation of full-time housewives in my sample reflects the circumstances in which they were recruited, i.e. through PTAs and community organizations. See Chapter 3.

129 A few intermediate class local mothers and working-class immigrant mothers used to be garment workers. They could not return to paid employment because of the decline of the manufacturing sector in Hong Kong (cf. Chiu and Lee 1997; Leung VHT 2002).
privileged educational or class backgrounds believed they were unable to find work commensurate with their past work experience and paying well enough to make it worth abandoning full-time mothering (cf. Hays 2003; Duncan 2005; Crompton 2006). The evidence of persistent gender inequalities in the labour market despite women’s achievement of educational parity with men in Hong Kong (see e.g. Chan and Cheung 2001; see chapter 4) suggests that mothers’ perceptions of their inferiority in the labour market are not groundless. However, immigrant mothers are at a real and distinct disadvantage vis-à-vis local-born mothers in the labour market because of their limited competence in English language and the lack of recognition of their work experience and qualifications attained in mainland China. Their lack of ‘recognized’ cultural capital also means they are discriminated against. This helps to explain their acceptance of their inferiority in the labour market and their commitment to mothering. This is illustrated by Jade (working-class) when asked whether she had considered doing courses to equip herself with skills for paid work:

I do not have a very high [standard of] culture. If you work outside, people will look at your experience and also judge your appearance to see if you’re a cultured person. I feel that I should only learn cooking skills to make food for the kids and that’s it.

Structural constraints in the labour market aside, mothers also emphasized that it was their responsibility to prioritize their children’s needs, especially educational needs (cf. Chao 1994). This necessitated their withdrawal from paid employment, whereas their husbands remained at work. This can be understood as a strategic deployment of family resources geared towards safeguarding their children’s future at times of uncertainty as a result of social and economic changes (see Ng et al. 2009; Chan AKW 2012). But as I discuss further in the next two sections, this can also be understood as resulting from cultural ideals of motherhood which hold mothers morally responsible for their children’s development and education (cf. Walkerdine and Lucey 1989; Gewirtz 2001; Gillies 2005). More-advantaged mothers such as Helena (middle-class immigrant mother) and Nicole (intermediate class local mother) reported having
stopped working and switching from full-time to part-time work respectively when they saw the need to take firmer control of their children’s educational progress. Helena can afford not to work because her husband (an engineer) can support the family financially alone. Nicole used to arrange for her son to stay in the tutorial school after school until she was off work; since starting working part-time, she hired two new private tutors, and her son no longer went to the tutorial school. In contrast, more than half of the working-class mothers are under pressure to work to finance their household and children’s educational expenses but cannot afford the educational resources that mothers like Nicole have. Nancy (local working-class mother) works one part-time job in the morning and another in the afternoon to allow a gap for her to deliver lunch to her son and socialize with other mothers at school during lunch hour, whereas her counterpart Mary simply lets her mother-in-law, nephews and nieces take care of her son’s education so she can continue working. Some working-class immigrant mothers opted to work part-time in low-paid, low-status jobs, such as working as a waitress and a domestic helper, mostly irregularly. But Liz (immigrant single mother) had to stop working when she saw the need to do ‘tuition’ for her son on her own. She decided to live on savings until her son goes to secondary school. These show that less-advantaged mothers have more practical constraints to negotiate in making their educational labour available\textsuperscript{130}. Despite this, the majority of less-advantaged mothers reported intensive routine educational involvement, as discussed in Chapter 6. This suggests that their mobilization of cultural capital for children’s education is not held back primarily by these practical constraints. Rather, it is held back by their lack of the ‘right’ cultural capital, and their difficulty in mobilizing the cultural capital they have because of their affective experience of the process. This is not only about their acceptance of their educational inadequacy associated with their class and/ or immigrant background. We also need to understand the emotionally-charged character of these mothers’ – indeed all mothers’ – educational involvement from the perspective of the dilemmas they confront in negotiating paid work and motherhood.

\textsuperscript{130} The constraints that less-advantaged mothers face should also be understood in a context in which affordable childcare services are in shortage (SOCO 2011, 2012), and in which parents leaving children under the age of 16 unattended at home can be charged for criminal offence.
As Newendorp (2010) suggests, in Hong Kong culture, the importance to be productive workers and ‘entrepreneurial’ citizens and of having an idealized family life is emphasized. For full-time housewives, their commitment to children’s education, an emblem of an ideal family life, denies them access to respectability. This comes with the accrual of value to one’s personhood through paid employment (cf. Skeggs 2004). But for working mothers, their less-than-full-time commitment to children’s education means they are at risk of being labelled as inadequate mothers (cf. Griffith and Smith 1987). This shows the double-bind that mothers are negotiating (see also Power 2005 cited in Vincent et al. 2008). Whether working or not, mothers bemoan how full-time commitment to their children entails their ‘detachment from the society’, is a ‘waste’ of talent, and denies them the opportunity to ‘upgrade’ themselves. It makes them feel ‘idle’ and ‘useless’. But paradoxically, working and earning is also considered ‘useless’ if a mother ‘cannot teach the kid’. This shows how mothers both want to refuse the existing criteria of judgment imposed on them as a citizen and as a mother, and to measure up to these criteria at the same time (cf. Sayer 2002). Such ‘painful inner turmoil’ is especially palpable for less-advantaged mothers (cf. Skeggs 1997), because they have less freedom to choose to work or not (cf. Crompton 2006). Haley (middle-class immigrant mother) exemplifies the inherently contradictory nature of motherhood. She is proud of her success at work in a well-established firm in the past. When asked how she felt when she gave up working, she lamented:

I felt it’s a waste of time spending the whole day at home taking care of the kids.

But when probed about her mothering experience, she suggested:

[By withdrawing from paid work] you can observe the stages of growth of the kids…. you didn’t really do anything […….] sometimes I enjoy it much. Sometimes you’re very frustrated and mad at them [emphasis added].
Haley considers doing motherhood as not really doing anything, presumably because it is unpaid labour and accrues no financial and exchange value, but at the same time talks about the need to keep track of children’s development and to invest in emotional labour. This explains why, even if the majority of mothers are full-time housewives, their experience of their commitment to children’s education is necessarily interlaced with a sense of shame and indignation. Mothers are putting their respectability at stake in the school market. More-advantaged mothers are in a better position to not work and can better justify their withdrawal from paid employment. The same cannot be said of less-advantaged mothers, and in particular immigrant and/ or single mothers, who have more at stake in assuming primary responsibility for children’s education. Not only are they under real pressure to work, there is also extra urgency for them to accrue value to their personhood, given how they are culturally ‘inferiorized’ in the local context for being poor, mainland immigrants, and/ or single mothers (which may also mean they have to live on CSSA, heavily stigmatized in Hong Kong). Moreover, for immigrant mothers, commitment to their children entails their abandonment of citizenship in China. Immigrant mothers who are relatively-highly-educated also must accept their occupational downward mobility post-migration\(^\text{131}\). It is no wonder that less-advantaged immigrant mothers like Tina (working-class), a senior secondary school graduate, finds herself

really useless … having worked so hard and learned so much, and [now] I have to give it all up for the sake of the family… it’s difficult to let go. It did hurt.

Tina’s sentiments echo with research evidence of disadvantaged mothers’ experience of ‘submerged aspirations’ (see Ng 2004) and ‘denial of the self’ (Li HL 2009) in doing motherhood in Hong Kong. Tina’s quote illustrates mothers’ recognition of injustice. This is not only classed (cf. Sayer 2002) but also ‘ethnicized’ and gendered, and prompts their resentment as well as defensiveness about their value as a citizen

\(^{131}\) This has to do with their enforced financial dependence on their husbands given the expectations of them to shoulder childcare and domestic duties post-migration (Wong WL 2004). The lack of recognition of their educational and professional qualifications in the labour market also explains their (for those working mothers) confinement to low-status, low-paid jobs, and hence occupational downward mobility for mothers from more privileged backgrounds in China.
and as a mother. This is important for our understanding of mothers’ emotional turmoil in their educational involvement, and why it may be particularly difficult for less-advantaged mothers to mobilize their cultural capital. This is exemplified in the case of Pam (working-class immigrant single mother). Against her ex-husband’s wish, she settled in Hong Kong for her children’s education’s sake. Once working in farms and garment factories, she could only find work as a janitor in Hong Kong and was forced to stop working after she divorced her husband. Her acceptance of and bitterness about her ‘inferiority’ underlies her conflicts with her daughter, and she finds it difficult to mobilize her aspirations (for her children to enter university) as cultural capital:

They [Pam’s parents] had no money … [so I] stopped studying [……] I myself didn’t learn much and I cannot teach my kids [……] I needed to work…[but] as a mother I always ask them [the children] to read more and do more revision.

It’s as if they don’t hear what I say… [my daughter] is almost saying, ‘Shut up if you know nothing’[……] [I said,] ‘[Without the two of you] I don’t have to lead such a hard life…’ … Is the responsibility solely mine? … It’s impossible for me to abandon them … ‘Okay! I am an uncultured person…’ [The daughter]… bullies me knowing that I am an uncultured person.

Pam and her fellow less-advantaged mothers can be understood as having internalized the class and gender inequalities they confront and their social marginalization and ‘ethnicization’ as immigrant (single) mothers (cf. Bourdieu 1984). They act out their gendered habitus (cf. Reay 1998) in a way that can reproduce the very conditions of which they are ashamed and resent. But past and current experiences of inequalities and marginalization can also spur less-advantaged mothers to push for their children’s educational achievements and upward mobility (e.g. Archer and Francis 2006; cf. Finely 1992). In this case, the affective experience of educational involvement facilitates mothers’ mobilization of cultural capital (see Reay (2004)’s discussion on ‘emotional capital’), even if these mothers are only a minority. For example, for the sake of her daughter, Hazel (working-class immigrant single mother) had to stay in
Hong Kong after she was ‘dumped’ by her ex-husband. She believed this made her a ‘laughing stock’. The following illustrates her resentment about her inability to accrue value to herself having committed herself to her daughter’s education:

I was so unhappy. Her [The daughter’s] exam results were so poor. I said, ‘This is not worth it’. Had I been at work, I could at least make several thousand dollars a month, but [by keeping company] with you [the daughter], I can’t earn even a cent.

However, precisely because she has invested so much hard labour in her daughter – with whom she has had a turbulent relationship but ‘can never give up on’ - and put up with the experience of inferiority in the process, Hazel is convinced that only by getting her daughter into a traditional elite school and actualizing her educational aspirations can redeem herself. This is especially true when considering that, when compared with her counterparts, she can afford to back up her ambitions. Her investments in property and the support of her boyfriend (a university graduate) provide the financial and cultural capital needed for her daughter’s studies in a school of ‘distinction’. This reaffirms my argument in Chapters 5 and 6 that cultural capital mobilization needs to be understood in context which is classed and gendered; and, in the case of immigrant mothers, in the context of their migration and ‘ethnicization’ as well.

As for the minority of full-time working mothers, they are aware that they are at risk of being labelled as inadequate mothers. They are acutely aware that they are ‘different’ and ‘unconventional’, and are defensive about this. However, when compared to their less-advantaged counterparts, more-advantaged working mothers can rationalize their educational ‘un-involvement’ as what nurtures their children’s independence, something they actually take pride in. They undoubtedly need to invest in their fair share of emotional labour to make their relatively abundant stock of cultural capital work, as I discuss in Chapter 6. But their cultural capital can be mobilized tacitly in everyday family dynamics, and they are less likely to feel exposed
as inadequate mothers when engaging in children’s education. Thus, the affective experience engendered in their negotiation of paid work and motherhood is less likely to undermine their mobilization of cultural capital in the way it does for less-advantaged working mothers.

I have argued that mothers’ negotiation of paid work and motherhood bears upon their availability of educational labour and their mobilization of cultural capital. This is contingent upon a diversity of contexts which are both structural and moral (cf. David et al. 1997), depending on mothers’ class background, and whether they are immigrants and/ or single mothers. But as I show in the next two sections, mothers’ negotiation of their values and moral commitments are also shaped by their relations with their husbands (for married mothers) and their participation in social networks (cf. Duncan 2005). In the next section, I examine their negotiation of the gender division of educational labour with their husbands. Not only does this reproduce ideologies of motherhood and the devaluation of mothers’ educational work. This also explains the inactivation of husbands’ cultural capital, which can be particularly disadvantageous for less-advantaged mothers.
II GENDER DIVISION OF EDUCATIONAL LABOUR

In this section, I examine the gender division of educational labour. Husbands often have cultural capital, but this is not frequently mobilized because of the unavailability of their educational labour. This results from their structural position in the labour market as well as the influence of cultural ideologies which celebrate a rigid gender division of labour. Fathers are less amenable to generating cultural capital in social networks and to investing in the emotional labour needed in routine educational involvement. The result is that men and women relate to their children’s education differently. In particular, intermediate and working class fathers are more inclined to what Lareau (2003) terms the ‘accomplishment of natural growth’ when it comes to children’s education. That husbands’ cultural capital is left unused can be socially-reproductive for less-advantaged mothers, because they are more likely to have disadvantaged access to the ‘right’ cultural capital to support children’s education. Lastly, despite my emphasis on how mothers are subject to structural and cultural forces in negotiating children’s education with their husbands, I argue that mothers’ assumption of their educational role can also be understood as an exercise of agency. This allows mothers to reclaim value, denied to them because of their withdrawal from paid work, to their personhood.

Echoing findings in the Western literature (Lareau 1992; David 1998; Reay 1998), mothers reported that their husbands are minimally involved in children’s education. In particular, for working-class mothers - especially immigrant mothers who have reached senior secondary school or beyond in China, and whose husbands have not finished junior secondary schooling, they consider their husbands as being ‘of very low standard’ and ‘uncultured’ for doing educational work with children.

Because of the (perceived) discrepancy in living standards between Hong Kong and mainland China, ‘less-marryable’ lower-class men from Hong Kong have the capital to marry women from more privileged class and educational backgrounds in China (see So 2003).

The gender division of domestic and childcare labour is more fluid in some of the families of immigrant mothers. These mothers did not arrive in Hong Kong with their children or arrived prior to their children’s arrival (or birth). They were separated from their children (who were born in Hong Kong, or succeeded in their application for the right of abode in Hong Kong earlier when compared to the mothers) across the border, before they succeeded in their application for the right of abode in Hong Kong (see Chapter 4). It was when mothers and children were separated across the border that the fathers took up primary responsibility for domestic and childcare duties.
Nonetheless, a minority of mothers whose husbands have finished junior secondary school or beyond in Hong Kong and/or have been living in Hong Kong for a longer period of time compared with their wives\textsuperscript{134} reported that their husbands sometimes help with children’s schoolwork and revision, mostly in Math, Chinese language and (for local-born husbands) English language\textsuperscript{135}. Husbands also have cultural capital for choice-making, in particular primary school choice-making, which immigrant mothers particularly rely on. Their husbands have knowledge of the local school market in terms of the symbolic order of distinction (e.g. the knowledge that government schools are more resourceful compared to aided schools) and school location. They are more likely to be directly involved in taking children to school visits. Two mothers also reported the importance of their husbands’ networks for choice-making when they had just arrived in Hong Kong: in Susie’s case, her husband did interior furnishing work for primary schools, and that was how he met a primary school principal and made enquiries about choice. All these suggest the potential for a higher level of fathers’ involvement in cultural capital processes, but such cultural capital tends not to be mobilized in the majority of the families. Fathers are not structurally positioned in the ‘field’ in such a way to facilitate the mobilization of their cultural capital. This is interlocked with the influence of the cultural ideologies of modern domestic ideals (cf. Davidoff and Hall 1987; also see Ng 2004) in encouraging the pattern of skewed gender division of educational labour.

It is husbands’ commitment to paid work which is mostly cited by mothers as explaining and justifying their minimal educational role. This applies to husbands working in middle-class positions as engineers or businessmen, intermediate-class positions as small proprietors (e.g. of a metal shop) or supervisors at construction sites, and working-class positions as constructions workers, builders or security guards. In particular, husbands in working-class positions are said to work long hours of physical,

\textsuperscript{134}The husbands of some immigrant mothers are not Hong Kong natives but are immigrants who arrived in Hong Kong prior to the 1990s or earlier.

\textsuperscript{135}It should be noted that for all the three middle-class immigrant mothers, their husbands have received at least bachelor-degree level education and reportedly are more ready to help with children’s schoolwork when available.
'tough' work. They usually return home ‘completely exhausted’ and spend most time sleeping, making it less impossible for them to engage in children’s education. Mothers’ take-up of educational responsibility can therefore be understood as a strategic compromise to circumstantial constraints (see Ng et al. 2009; Chan AKW 2012). But as I argue earlier, mothers’ commitment to educational work is also a result of their emphasis on their responsibility as mothers. What emerges strongly in married mothers’ accounts is that, however difficult it is to give up paid work, staying home and tending to their children is always preferred when their husbands’ earning power allows. There is an explicit endorsement of the Chinese old saying of ‘men in charge of the outside (i.e. the ‘public sphere’) and women in charge of the inside (the ‘private sphere’))’ in the accounts of women across class and educational backgrounds and national origins (cf. Davidoff and Hall 1987; also see Ng 2004). Manhood/ Fatherhood is primarily defined in terms of men’s role as the breadwinner and provider. Mothers’ accounts also reflect the influence of cultural ideologies which prioritize husbands’ and children’s needs over women’s (Lee WKM2002). Apparently, men’s paid employment is not to be interfered with less respectable, unpaid educational work:

It’s hard enough for my husband to make money for the family… these [educational] matters are just too much trouble for him. [Sara, intermediate class immigrant mother from a middle class background in China]

This explains the unavailability of men’s educational labour and why their cultural capital tends not to be mobilized. Even when men are involved in children’s education, differential value is implicitly attached to their and their wives’ respective labour, which trivializes mothers’ more routine and onerous educational labour. Husbands are said to be only responsible for making ‘key decisions’ and ‘solving problems’ at ‘the crunch moment’. This explains why they are more likely to be consulted if not directly involved in school choice-making (cf. Brooks 2004; David et. al 1994; Reay 1998; Reay and Ball 1998). The active devaluation of women’s educational labour in

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136 These should also be understood in a context where women’s struggle for equality with men is widely perceived as antithetical to Chinese familism and its emphasis on ‘harmony’ (rather than conflict) (Chanda 2003).
everyday gender division of labour is one of the reasons why mothers can feel ashamed of but at the same time feel short-changed about their commitment to unpaid educational labour. This, as I discuss in the last section, has implications for their mobilization of cultural capital.

The way fathers are structurally positioned in the field and the influence of the cultural ideologies of manhood (or masculinity) means that they are less likely to be involved in those social networks that facilitate the exchange of education-related information and the accrual of cultural capital. As Faye (local intermediate class mother) suggested,

He [The husband, a supervisor at a construction site] simply doesn’t want to involve himself too much in the kids’ worlds. He has no access to the relevant information. When he chats with his colleagues, their topics are not about the kids, schooling or tuition.

Husbands’ disengagement from children’s education also deprives them of the skills to invest in emotional labour in the way their wives do in the mobilization of cultural capital, especially in routine educational involvement. Thus, even when mothers solicit their educational labour (for example, when mothers have to go to work), they find it hard to mobilize their cultural capital. Across class backgrounds and national origins, mothers reported that their husbands could not communicate and lacked patience with children. As Penny (working-class immigrant mother) exemplifies:

My son knows his father is more knowledgeable in English language but he does not ask his father [for help in schoolwork] [… …] neither of the kids listens to what he says.

Nonetheless, as the importance of the networks of the husbands of immigrant mothers in primary school choice-making shows, when it matters, men can generate cultural capital out of their more ‘macho’ networks. The same applies to the husband of Brenda (intermediate class local mother) who is the only husband reported to take primary responsibility for children’s education. According to Brenda, he can call up people to seek assistance for his son’s schoolwork, and he has asked students he met in the school where he used to work as a workman to do tuition for his son.
The kids … rebut whatever he [the husband] says… I’ve told him, ‘… *You can’t bear with that? I have got used to that.*’ [emphasis added]

This attests to the critical importance of mothers in cultural capital processes because of their amenability to ‘bearing with’ the emotional labour needed in such processes.

Taken together, men and women are positioned in the field in such a way that relates them to children’s education differently. It comes naturally for men to accrue value to themselves through paid work. But women are in an invidious position, since their educational work, on which they are judged as mothers, denies them access to the respectability that comes with paid work. This their husbands can find difficult to appreciate. This explains why, almost all mothers from the intermediate and working class reported that their husbands are more inclined to what Lareau (2003) terms the ‘accomplishment of natural growth’ in how they envision children’s education\(^{138}\). In their husbands’ eyes, mothers are aiming too high, and making too much fuss and hard work for their children. This is best illustrated by May (intermediate class immigrant mother) as she discussed her husband’s approach to her son’s education:

> He [the husband] is not nervous at all […] He himself does not really like studying […] He hasn’t any [expectations]…[he] has always been working and his life has been quite good. He can support [the life of] his wife and his son. He has a flat as his property.

Paid work, a breadwinning role and property are what May’s husband has achieved as a ‘respectable’ man. He is not judged on the basis of his adequacy in his educational role, unlike his wife, who has not worked since she got married and whose limited educational experience leaves her at risk of being judged as an inadequate mother. This illustrates why we have two types of ‘parent-school relationships: his and hers’

\(^{138}\) In contrast, the husbands of middle-class immigrant mothers have high educational aspirations and are more ready to involve in children’s education, although they are also more ready to offer opinions - and criticisms – about their wives’ educational involvement, according to Haley and Carmen. The emotional cost incurred for these mothers should not be understated.
(Lareau 1992:210; also see David 1997). This highlights the need to problematize gender in understanding cultural capital processes, since intermediate and working class children could have had some cultural capital accrued to them had it been their fathers rather than their mothers who were responsible for their education.

Because the cultural capital of husbands cannot be mobilized, there are socially-reproductive consequences for their wives’ educational involvement. More-advantaged (and in particular local-born) mothers can afford not to draw upon their husbands’ cultural capital to support their children’s education. However, the same cannot be said of immigrant mothers, and in particular more-disadvantaged immigrant mothers. It is because they are more likely to have disadvantaged access to the ‘right’ cultural capital in the field, and the affective experience of their educational involvement is more likely to undermine their mobilization of cultural capital. Nonetheless, mothers’ negotiation of the gender division of educational labour cannot be dismissed as simply as resignation to the socially imposed inferiority of their educational labour and on their personhood vis-à-vis their husbands (cf. Skeggs 2004). After all, it is their respectability which is at stake in the educational field. In this sense, mothers’ assumption of primary responsibility for children’s education should be understood as being what allows them to reclaim value for themselves (cf. Lee WKM 2004). This is evident in mothers’ remarks about their husbands as being ‘of low standard’, as someone who ‘knows nothing’ or even being ‘useless’ in relation to children’s education. These remarks were made by mothers across class and educational backgrounds and the local/immigrant division. Even Brenda (intermediate-class local-born mother), whose limited schooling experience leaves her no choice but to leave the management of her son’s education to her ‘smarter’ husband, can reclaim value for herself in how she shares educational labour with her husband. She rejects claims that she is a ‘happy little woman’ (as suggested by a fellow mother) who can be spared the hard educational work, which to her implies ‘lousiness’ and ‘uselessness’. She emphasizes that every day she has to see her son get into the school even if the school is just opposite home [……] I really care
him. He always says I am the better one.

Aside from asserting herself as the better parent when compared to her husband, Brenda also takes over the space on the school floor by barring her husband from volunteering and/or PTA activities. Lastly, mothers’ educational role, notwithstanding the frustrations and tears it brings, is what win mothers the affection of children. This is what makes mothers smile, an enjoyment and a privilege to which fathers have much less access. While mothers’ assumption of primary responsibility for children can leave fathers’ cultural capital unused, which can be particularly disadvantageous for less-advantaged mothers, the exercise of agency in their take-up of their educational role cannot be denied. While throughout my discussion I have emphasized how mothers’ assumption of a devalued role is shaped by the inequalities and marginalization they confront, I have also argued that mothers can exercise their agency and accrue value to themselves in their networking activities. These issues are what I turn to next.
III MOTHERS’ NETWORKING ACTIVITIES

This section examines mothers’ experience of their networking activities and the implications for their educational work. Mothers’ networking activities, which facilitate the generation of cultural capital, are naturalized as part of their everyday mothering work. However, mothers’ networking can also generate anxiety about the adequacy of their educational role. This is especially when considering the normative ideals of motherhood propagated in schools and (to a lesser extent) community organizations. These hold mothers responsible for their children’s education, and are an important source of the feelings of shame and guilt that can limit mothers’ mobilization of cultural capital. Less-advantaged mothers are particularly susceptible to such affective experience, because they are more likely to have disadvantaged access to the ‘right’ cultural capital or to be unable to mobilize that cultural capital. Activities that mothers participate in at school and in community organizations also reinforce the devaluation of mothers’ educational labour. Nonetheless, these opportunities for mothers to participate in volunteering and self-learning also allow them to accrue value to themselves and to pursue the respectability they are denied. In this sense, mothers’ take-up of their educational work should not be understood just as an expression of a habitus resigned and adapted to their experience of inequality and marginalization (cf. Skeggs 2004).

In Chapters 5 and 6, I show that across class backgrounds and the local/immigrant divide mothers can generate cultural capital from their social networks to make up for what they otherwise lack in supporting their children’s education. This is not only in terms of the information about choice-making as well as tuition and extracurricular activities options. Less-advantaged mothers also reported loans or gifts of books or musical instruments (from friends or neighbours) that their children need. As discussed earlier, the way men are positioned in the field does not facilitate the generation of cultural capital (for children’s education) out of their social networks. In contrast, mothers’ networking activities comes naturally as part of their everyday mothering work. Mothers form networks with fellow parents, mostly mothers,
primarily in primary schools and in community organizations but also in their
neighbourhood (cf. Bagnall et al. 2003; Ryan 2007). They chat, exchange information
and share their experiences of educational involvement and parenting when taking
children to and picking children up from the school and when delivering lunch. This is
not limited to full-time housewives. Three of the six of full-time working mothers
work on a schedule that allows them to at least deliver lunch to their children\textsuperscript{139}. Half
of the mothers also reported regular participation in seminars and activities, in
particular volunteering activities, and in PTA meetings at school. These usually take
place once classes begin or the two hours before classes are dismissed, making it
convenient for mothers to join these events once they get their children into the
classroom or just before they pick up their children from school. All these are
understood as a natural part of their everyday educational and mothering work, as
illustrated by the following quotes about mothers’ experience of volunteering at school:

We help with the work for the school and sometimes we sit together… like a
big family of volunteer mothers… we may chat about our kids’ experience,
how their studies is like, etc. [Jade, working-class immigrant mother]

What we chat about are usually topics that ordinary si-naais\textsuperscript{140} care… [which
are] about our kids and what we cook for dinner, what soup we cook. [Sara,
intermediate class immigrant mother from a middle-class background]

Mothers with more than one child tend to form networks primarily in one school only,
usually the one the younger child (children) is (are) attending. However, networks
formed in a younger children’s kindergarten or school can still generate cultural
capital, such as information about choice-making, for the elder children’s sake, and
vice versa. Mothers also share information about activities or courses organized in
community organizations, where the networks formed are another source of cultural

\textsuperscript{139} Two of these mothers begin work in the afternoon. Another mother has a part-time job in the morning and
another in the afternoon, leaving a gap for her attendance at school at lunch hour.

\textsuperscript{140} ‘Si-naai’ is a term describing (middle-aged) married women in Hong Kong. It is popularly used by mothers, but
it should be noted that the term, depending on the context, can be read as derogatory, which demeans married
women as petty-minded and ignorant.
capital. For example, Pam (working-class new immigrant single mother) learnt from the parents she met in her younger son’s kindergarten that there was a community centre servicing new immigrants in particular. Pam became a member of this centre and so could enrol her daughter in programmes which cost her little or nothing. For the majority of the working mothers, networks formed in community organizations was a more important source of (social and) cultural capital when compared to those in school, because it was easier for them to fit their participation in the programmes in community organizations into their schedule.

I demonstrate in Chapter 5 that mothers’ networks is an important source of information about choice-making, but I also show how these networks normalize mothers’ anxiety about choice-making and in turn their aversion to choices of ‘distinction’. Mothers’ anxiety does not only pertain to choice-making but also to educational involvement in general. In sharing information and experience, mothers are at the same time making comparisons with one another and circulating norms about motherhood. As Andrea (intermediate class immigrant mother from a middle-class background) suggested, she has to ‘learn about other mothers’ strengths to make up for our [her] own shortcomings’; it is exactly the realization of one’s ‘shortcomings’ that generates mothers’ anxiety about their adequacy as mothers. This is especially true when considering the nature of the talks and seminars – in particular at school - that mothers participate in. Mothers reported how they learnt from these talks and seminars to teach their children read, memorize, and do compositions, and how they should reason and communicate with children and manage the latter’s and their own emotions. These complement what they learn from teachers about watching cartoons in English language with children or how they should improve parent-child relationships (cf. O’Brien 2008). What is evident here is the construction of cultural ideals of motherhood which subject mothers to self-scrutiny about their educational adequacy. What mothers learn supports Wong and Chan’s (2006) contention that the cultural construction of motherhood in Hong Kong defines ‘good’ mothers as educated and cultured, who can provide ‘patient’ induction, ‘compassionate and considerate’ training, and are vigilant of children’s developmental needs at their different stages of
growth. The normative ideals propagated parallel those of ‘intensive mothering’ (Hays 1996) and ‘sensitive mothering’ (Vincent and Warren 1998) in Western societies which emphasize child-centredness and hold mothers morally responsible for their children’s education and development. That this can be understood as a form of regulation of mothers (Walkerdine and Lucey 1989) is evident in mothers’ feelings of guilt and shame about their failure to live up to these normative ideals. This is expressed in mothers’ accounts of their investment in emotional labour in their routine educational involvement and choice-making, as discussed in Chapters 5 and 6. What I emphasize here is how mothers can be made to feel terrible. For Yvonne (working-class immigrant single mother), the seminars she attended made her realize her ‘speech and attitudes’ were adversely affecting her sons; as she was ‘the biggest problem’ in her sons’ learning, she needed to ‘correct’ herself. Rosa (intermediate class local mother) suggested her inability to stop scolding her daughters would leave ‘unhappy memories…in the [daughters’] brain’, whereas Sara (intermediate class immigrant mother from a middle-class background) believed either her or her son would have needed ‘counseling’ had she not attended the seminars. What is more important is that these normative ideals discriminate against mothers who have disadvantaged access to the ‘right’ cultural capital or who cannot mobilize cultural capital as easily because they are working. For example, while working mother Andrea (intermediate class immigrant mother from a middle-class background) reads a lot, reading with her children at home, as advised by the school teachers, is ‘impractical’, because

If I have the spare time here [i.e. at office], I read…However, once you return home… both of us [she and her husband] are working and I still have to carry out my housework duties […] we human beings are bound to be … exhausted.

Working-class mothers who have disadvantaged access to the ‘right’ cultural capital also expressed their resistance against ideologies about how they should allow freedom for their children to develop self-direction. This does not make sense when all they can do is to concentrate on regulating their children’s activities intensively to
make sure the latter focus on schoolwork at home. This can also be at odds with the mothers’ upbringing experience; as Pam (working-class immigrant single mother) suggested, ‘It’s not like this in my days’. As I discussed in Chapter 6, more-advantaged mothers are better able to practice these ideologies – though not without some struggles (as exemplified by Rosa and Sara aforementioned). However, more-advantaged immigrant mothers can have trouble dealing with demands about their role in children’s English learning because of their disadvantaged access to the ‘right’ cultural capital. Carmen (middle-class immigrant mother) illustrates how her educational inadequacy was exposed and derided when a teacher confronted her at school. This leaves her with guilt and shame as a mother:

[The teacher said], ‘Your kid! … why not just take her back to mainland China’… I did have helped her [the daughter] with revision... I don’t understand… The teacher kept saying, ‘Your daughter didn’t do any revision [for English dictation]! …’ How could I be lying …? …I am not sure if I am not up to what is expected as a mother.

Despite her middle-class position, Carmen’s experience echoes with findings in the Western literature that ethnic minority mothers tend to be stereotyped as deficient and treated with disdain at school (e.g. Gillies 2005; Crozier and Davies 2007). The difficulties to support her daughter’s English learning on her own (other than purchasing private tuition) expose her ‘ambivalent’ position in the field. Carmen’s experience also shows that the ideals of motherhood propagated at school are not only gendered, classed but also privilege the cultural capital of local-born mothers.

Given that less-advantaged mothers are more reliant on networks to generate the ‘right’ cultural capital that they lack, they are more susceptible to having their educational inadequacy exposed at the same time. Mary (local working-class mother)

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141 This is especially true when considering that, for more than half of the less-advantaged immigrant mothers, these networks offer almost the only opportunity for them to socialize without spending; they seldom get out of their home otherwise.
explains how this is so as she recounted her experiences in her interactions with fellow parents at school:

I greet them [fellow parents] but I never chat with them for long. … their kids are very smart and it makes my son appear very slow and stupid. Their kids speak eloquently and I feel there’s such a big difference between the kids […]
[to socialize with the parents of those kids] is too hard for myself, let alone my son.

Mary illustrates how networking activities can subject mothers and their children to scrutiny at school (cf. Byrne and De Tona 2012) and makes such activities a hard time for the mothers. In comparison, networking in community organizations allows mothers to do away with the scrutiny of the schoolteachers (as in Carmen’s case), and less self-interest (in terms of parents seeking educational advantage on the school floor) is at stake. This helps explains why some of the less-advantaged mothers reported to have reduced their presence at school and become more actively involved in community organizations instead. In fact, none of the working-class immigrant single mothers reported regularly attending activities at school, although they have strong networks in the community and the neighbourhood which they use to generate cultural capital vital for their choice-making and arrangement of extracurricular activities.

It should be noted that, in community organizations and especially at school, the activities, especially volunteering activities, that mothers participate in are confined to traditionally-defined ‘feminine’ work which can be understood as an extension of their unpaid mothering (and domestic) work at home. These include looking after young children during lunch hours; story-telling to children; the learning or teaching of cookery; handicraft, embroidery or knitting work; as well as cleaning and tidying up classrooms. This means the virtual exclusion of men, and explains why fathers’ presence is limited to ‘crunch moments’ such as the Parents’ Days (where parents and teachers meet), ‘special’ talks and ‘big-scale events’\(^\text{142}\). Tasks taken up by volunteering

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\(^{142}\) What should be noted is the implicit value attached to men’s scarce presence at school over that of women. This
mothers at school also include catering to visitors in school events, packaging or fixing library books, distributing school notices and newspapers, etc. These tasks are what teachers have no time to deal with, and which mothers consider as ‘trivial stuff’ they undertake as unpaid work. Such devaluation of mothers’ labour in relation to children’s education, coupled with fathers’ virtual absence from the school floor, reaffirms and reproduces the differential value attached to men’s paid work (the reason why are absent from school) and women’s educational labour. This reinforces the skewed gender division of educational labour, which leaves husbands’ cultural capital unused, with potentially disadvantageous consequences.

Taken together, while mothers’ generation of cultural capital in networking activities comes naturally as part of their everyday mothering work, it also comes with a cost. Mothers are subject to the influence of normative ideals of motherhood propagated in the arenas where their networking takes place. They are compelled to subject their educational inadequacy to self-evaluation. This underlies their affective experience of educational involvement, not least when their unpaid labour is devalued vis-à-vis men’s paid work in the process. This, as I show in Chapters 5 and 6, can shape cultural capital mobilization in socially-reproductive ways. This is particularly true for less-advantaged mothers, especially immigrant and/ or single mothers, who are at constant risk of having their inadequacy exposed when engaging in children’s education at or outside home. By committing themselves to children’s education, the majority of mothers not only forgo (full-time) paid work but also private time for their personal interests. For example, Kit (working-class immigrant mother), who used to like reading, no longer reads - except when reading poems with her children. This illustrates how mothers can be understood as mere bearers of cultural capital (Silva 2005): they give up accruing cultural capital for themselves as they accrue cultural capital for their children (see also Reay 2004b). Nonetheless, mothers do not explains why men’s presence can be drawn upon as cultural capital at school. Two mothers reported how their husbands had turned up at school to confront teachers about their children’s behavioural problems, and how this pushed the teachers to act in favour of their children (e.g. reducing the punishment their children faced). Class difference in parents’ interactions with teachers has been extensively explored (e.g. Lareau 1989; Cooper 2007), but further research is needed for examining fathers’ interactions with the school and how this constitutes the ‘right’ cultural capital (but see Reay 1998; Crozier and Davies 2007).
participate in networking activities solely for the self-interest of yielding educational advantage through the generation of cultural capital. Rather, these networks allow them access to social support and care as well as friendship networks. This is much needed by less-advantaged mothers, given how their social life is constrained by financial deprivation, and by immigrant and/or single mothers, who have less access to support from family and kinship networks. Also evident is how mothers can make their commitment to their children’s education ‘work’ for them as they accrue value to themselves through their participation in volunteering and self-learning activities (cf. Chan AKW 2012). Even when mothers are full-time housewives or are out of paid work, they ‘work very hard as volunteers’. Volunteering can also ‘broaden your [their] horizons and get you [them] to meet more people’. This frees them of ‘idleness’ and keeps them in touch with ‘the world outside home’. Less-advantaged mothers also stressed they could learn ‘how to speak’ with ‘more substance’ and without ‘getting it wrong’ when communicating with others. These are the cultural capital they need for redressing the discrimination they face in the wider society. Some also enroll in courses or programmes in community organizations, which come at an affordable cost or free. This is

for fulfilling my life […] In the past when I was together with the si-naais … there were too many gossips… it is not a good thing to be together with them always. [Jennifer, working-class immigrant mother]

Jennifer shows that whereas ‘gossiping’ among si-naais is what allows exchange of information and generation of cultural capital for children’s education, it is not what enables mothers to establish ‘the image of a valued and legitimate self’ (Luttrell 1997 p126). But volunteering, or learning about computer usage or Chinese medicine in community organizations (or adult learning programmes) etc. do. This exemplifies how value can be created out of devalued mothering work. In particular for less-advantaged mothers, their ‘doing’ of their femininity, as in their assumption of primary responsibility for children’s education, is what allows them access to cultural capital they are otherwise denied given their position in the class structure and the ‘ethnic’
and gender order (cf. Skeggs 1997). Thus, mothers should not be understood as merely adapting themselves to conditions of inequalities and social marginalization (cf. Skeggs 2004) in undertaking unpaid educational labour. Rather, it is their exercise of agency that can be understood as what facilitates the availability of their educational labour for the generation of cultural capital for children’s education.
CONCLUSION

This chapter examines class disadvantage in education by exploring the embeddedness of cultural capital mobilization in the gendered lived realities of mothers (David 1997). By focusing on the gendered meanings mothers attach to their educational labour in classed and (for immigrant mothers) ‘ethnicized’ contexts, as well as in the context of their migration (for immigrant mothers), the findings presented deepen our understanding of mothers’ educational practices and their affective experiences, and the implications for class processes (cf. Griffith and Smith 1987; Walkerdine and Lucey 1989; David 1998; Reay 1998).

I have shown how mothers’ educational labour is constructed in a context where inequalities in the labour market are interlocked with mothers’ emphasis on their responsibility for children’s education. I highlight mothers’ feelings of shame and indignation about the way their commitment to children’s education, for which they are held morally responsible, denies them the respectability that comes with (full-time) paid employment (cf. Skeggs 1997, 2004; Newendorp 2010). (For partnered mothers) The devaluation of their unpaid educational work is reinforced in their negotiation of the gender division of (educational) labour with their husbands. This refers to the way fathers’ limited educational involvement is legitimized and deemed of being of more value when compared to the more routine and onerous educational labour of mothers. The naturalization of networking activities in schools and community organizations as everyday mothering work facilitates mothers’ generation of cultural capital. Nonetheless, I emphasize how this exposes mothers to the scrutiny against normative ideals of motherhood and normalizes their anxiety and feelings of inadequacy.

These observations enlighten us about the gendered meanings mothers attach to their educational labour and their affective experiences in carrying out such labour. I emphasize the intensity of these experiences for the more-disadvantaged mothers. Not only do they have more at stake as they commit themselves to their children’s education at the expense of paid employment, which is a crucial source of income and
respectability. Their disadvantaged access to the ‘right’ cultural capital also means that they are more vulnerable to the feelings of shame and guilt engendered in their networking activities. Moreover, the immobilization of fathers’ cultural capital could be disadvantageous for their children, given these mothers’ disadvantaged access to the ‘right’ cultural capital in the educational ‘field’. These observations enhance our understanding of the emotional investments of the more-disadvantaged mothers in children’s education, which, as discussed in earlier chapters, are more likely to hamper rather than facilitate their cultural capital mobilization when compared to that of their more-advantaged counterparts (cf. Reay 2004b). Despite this, I emphasize that mothers across class backgrounds and the local/immigrant divide can make their educational labour ‘work’ for them. As they generate and mobilize cultural capital for their children, they can at the same time accrue cultural capital and value to themselves (cf. Skeggs 2004).

To conclude, a gender perspective offers us insights into the construction of mothers’ educational labour in diverse, classed and ethnicized contexts (cf. Luttrell 1997; Cooper 2007). This enriches our understanding of the agency of the less-advantaged mothers in their mobilization of cultural capital and of the contingent ways in which this cultural capital ‘works’. By shedding light on the indeterminacy in the way class disadvantage is generated in educational processes, my findings deepen our understanding of the relevance of gender to class processes (cf. Walkerdine and Lucey 1989; Lareau 1992; Reay 1998).
CHAPTER EIGHT
CONCLUSION

This study of secondary choice-making and everyday educational involvement of socially-disadvantaged local-born and new immigrant mothers with children aged 11-15 in Hong Kong was designed to examine the mechanisms of class disadvantage in educational processes. In this chapter, I summarize my findings and the arguments presented in earlier chapters and consider the implications of such mechanisms for the educational outcomes, mobility trajectories and life-chances of disadvantaged children.

My study is located within the context of local education reforms, and was designed to counteract the dearth of local research in Hong Kong that examines the mechanisms of class disadvantage in educational processes. Despite its critics, I have drawn upon cultural capital theory and shown how it can be applied to the local context to facilitate understanding of the patterns of persistent class differentials in educational outcomes despite expanded educational opportunities. However, I have also drawn on insights of the Western literature about how ‘ethnicity’ and gender complicate class processes, and used these to address these issues in the local Hong Kong context. Overall, my findings about mothers’ educational practices show that class mechanisms generate disadvantage by restricting the access of more disadvantaged mothers to the ‘right’ cultural capital as stipulated by the particular ‘rules of the game’ of the local educational ‘field’. At the same time, my study sheds light on the diversity of structural and moral contexts in which cultural capital mobilization is embedded. My findings illustrate the myriad ways in which gender and ‘ethnicity’, i.e. the ‘ethniciized’ cultural inferiority deemed of new mainland Chinese immigrant mothers in the Hong Kong context, interact to aggravate, mitigate, or ameliorate class disadvantage. I underline the need for local researchers to spell out and problematize the institutionalization of class power relations within the education system. The present study makes a novel contribution to the wider literature by offering an account of class reproduction in Hong Kong which is different in important respects to that found in many other generic accounts which take as their focus advanced ‘Western’
capitalist societies. My findings also highlight the importance of examining the contextual contingency of how cultural capital ‘works’ and so stress the indeterminacy of class processes.
In Hong Kong, mass education was introduced in 1978. With the provision of nine-year free, universal and compulsory education, more working-class students were able to go to senior secondary schools and universities, just as in Western advanced economies which have undergone educational expansion in the last century. By 2011, 77% and 16% of the local population aged 15 or above attended secondary or higher education or completed a university degree course respectively (CSD 2012). More working-class members achieved educational success and experienced social mobility (see e.g. Wong and Lui 1992). Nonetheless, there is a persistent class gap in educational attainment (cf. Shavit and Blossfeld 1993). Post (2001) observed the persistent influence of mothers’ education and family income on educational attainment between 1991 and 2001. Also, in 2001, children from families in the top income quarter are 30% and 100% (i.e. twice) more likely than their counterparts from the bottom income quarter to attain senior secondary and university education. Middle-class children benefited disproportionately from expanded educational opportunities. So given the increasingly important role that educational credentials play in shaping one’s occupational outcomes and life-chances nowadays, social mobility patterns remain likely to be differentiated along class lines in a way integral to class reproduction. And in fact, there remain real and significant barriers to long-range mobility for those at the bottom of the class structure in Hong Kong (Wong and Lui 1992; Lui 2009; cf. Erikson and Goldthorpe 1992).

What we know less about is why and how the working class cannot capitalize upon these expanded educational opportunities in the same way as their more-advantaged counterparts. In fact, since Salaff’s (1981) study, there has been little research that examines the mechanisms of class reproduction in education in Hong Kong. Researchers have not often questioned why working class families continue to lose out educationally despite their high aspirations. Also, despite the increasing number of mainland immigrant students in Hong Kong since the 1990s, there is little known about why these immigrant students have only one-third and one-fourth as many
chances as their native counterparts to participate in senior secondary schooling and university respectively (Post 2004). In addition, there is little know about how the social marginalization of immigrants, and at the same time their high educational aspirations (cf. Sue and Okazaki 1990) are implicated in, thus complicate class processes in education.

To address this research gap, my inquiry has explored how parents negotiate the local educational context that has been transformed since the 1990s under reforms geared towards enhancing educational standards (Chan AKW 2004). As with reforms in Western education systems, ‘quality’ education has been reshaped in Hong Kong along neo-liberal lines, constructed around competition in the knowledge economy, and improved and monitored through outcome-based teaching and learning and the marketization of schooling, with schools encouraged to ‘opt out’ of the public sector for the development of a larger private sector of education provision. What has ensued is the introduction of more elaborate assessment mechanisms in primary and secondary schooling in coordination with a more demanding curriculum. Parents are also expected to rely on their own resources to support their children’s ‘life-wide learning’ and ‘whole-person development’ (see e.g. Tse 2004; Choi 2005), and the exercise of parents’ ‘rational’ choice in the school market is seen as a market mechanism which will both secure ‘the best’ for their children and also weed out substandard schools in the process (Ball 1993; Whitty and Edwards 1998). What is emphasized in these policy discourses, couched in the terms of the neoliberal doctrine, is the celebration of the agency of the self-managed individual citizen to improve oneself and to achieve social mobility. It is assumed that one can reflexively negotiate the risks and exploit the opportunities in the global economy unfettered by social-structural constraints including class (Beck and Beck-Gernsheim 2002). Beneath this veneer of individualism and meritocracy, however, lies the fact that schooling is becoming more selective and dependent upon class resources, given that parents are now expected to play a more pivotal role in shaping educational processes and outcomes (Brown 1990). Such discourses and policies neglect the unequal access of parents to the resources needed for negotiating what is demanded of them in the
school market. Nonetheless, the implications of neoliberal education reforms for class reproduction in Hong Kong should not be understood as similar to that in Western societies. This is considering the distinctive features of the local education system, the society-wide celebration of the instrumental value of education, and the way gender and 'ethnic' dynamics interact and complicate class processes in the local context. The application of cultural capital theory to the examination of class disadvantage in Hong Kong should therefore be attuned to these contextual factors.
II APPLYING CULTURAL CAPITAL THEORY TO THE HONG KONG CONTEXT

Bourdieu’s cultural capital theory (Bourdieu 1986; Bourdieu and Passeron 1990[77]) has been criticized for its over-determinism and the dearth of substantiating empirical evidence (e.g. Kingston 2001; Goldthorpe 2007). Despite this, following Lareau and Weininger (2004), I have shown how the theory can be applied to Hong Kong to facilitate my examination of the mechanism of class disadvantage in schooling in socially-disadvantaged contexts. I have focused on the interaction between parental practices and the ‘field’, and on the ‘fit’ between the cultural capital of the socially-disadvantaged and that demanded under education reforms (cf. Bourdieu 1973, 1984). The Western literature has demonstrated that Bourdieu’s insights help explain class disadvantage in education as researchers have documented how the middle class have advantaged access to the ‘right’ cultural capital in the ‘field’. This explains why the middle class can comply with institutional standards (cf. Lareau 1989) in terms of proactive educational involvement (e.g. Lareau 2003) and ‘prudential’ school choice-making (e.g. Ball 2003). These in turn facilitate their children’s entry into those privileged ‘circuits of schooling’ (Ball et al. 1995) in which ‘quality’ education is provided. In contrast, the working class is disadvantaged because of their lack of access to the cultural capital that ‘fits’ the field. The mechanism of disadvantage is more complicated than working class ‘deficit’, however. Firstly, the literature has drawn attention to the way in which ‘ethnicity’ interacts with class in generating disadvantage (see Byrne 2009) via mothers’ gendered educational labour (e.g. Griffith and Smith 1987; Reay 1998). Secondly, the literature has highlighted the way parental – read maternal - subjectivity is intertwined with neo-liberal reforms (Park 2007), with the onus placed on mothers to ‘get it right’ in the school market (e.g. David et al 1993). Those struggling to mobilize the ‘right’ cultural capital for their children are burdened to different degrees depending on their classed and ethnicized contexts, and their affective experience can shape their educational disadvantage in indeterminate ways (e.g. Reay 1998; cf. Skeggs 2004). However, the implication of such studies is that having and mobilizing the ‘right’ cultural capital depends on the ‘rules of the game’ in the institutional field, and so is highly context-specific and in a
manner which suggests that indeterminacies in class reproduction are likely to creep into educational processes.

Cultural capital does not generate class disadvantage in a straightforward manner in educational processes. This becomes evident in a research context like Hong Kong, where both differences in the institutional educational field and other local contextual particularities give rise to differences in how class plays outs in the mechanisms of school choice-making. We have abundant research evidence of a skewed gender division in educational labour in families (e.g. Choi 1995) when mothers’ educational involvement is constructed as morally virtuous under Chinese familism (e.g. Chao 1994). We also have an increasing presence of mainland immigrant students from economically-disadvantaged families. Despite their social marginalization, similar to their counterparts in Western contexts they are strongly driven for children’s educational success (cf. Sue and Okazaki 1990; Tseng et al. 2007). In addition, studies on school markets in East Asian societies highlight the need to specify how cultural capital ‘works’ in institutional contexts in which the ‘rule of the game’ differs from Western education systems (e.g. Wu 2009; Yamamoto and Brinton 2010). This is again relevant for studying the local educational system in Hong Kong, which is similar to its Western counterparts in terms of the neo-liberal principles that underpin education reforms, but where the school market is characterized by a distinctive symbolic order and a convoluted school places allocation system. This suggests differences in how the ‘right’ cultural capital becomes valued and demanded, in the way that cultural capital is mobilized, and thus in the mechanisms of class disadvantage in the local context compared to that documented in the Western literature (cf. Devine 2004). My research documents how the mechanisms of class disadvantage in education play out rather differently in Hong Kong by addressing three (interrelated) areas: secondary school choice-making, routine educational involvement, and gendered educational practices.
II SECONDARY SCHOOL CHOICE-MAKING

I first examine secondary school choice-making. In Hong Kong, schools are segregated according to their ‘banding’, which indicates the academic ability of their student intake. However, information about schools’ banding is not publicly circulated, and information about students’ banding, provided by primary schools, is often imprecise. Unfamiliarity with how ‘banding’ works means immigrant mothers are positioned in the school market at a distinct disadvantage. Nonetheless, across the local/immigrant division, all mothers can potentially access ‘insider’ knowledge of school reputations and of how they can make choices strategically through their social networks at school, in community organizations, and in the neighbourhood as they go about their everyday mothering work (e.g. when taking children to school or doing the groceries). This is only possible however with mothers - rather than fathers - in charge of choice. Gender facilitates the generation of cultural capital in a way that ameliorates the disadvantage of immigrants in the school market. However, the cultural capital generated through such gendered networks is not always the ‘right’ currency as defined by the market (cf. Gewirtz et al. 1995). The majority of mothers do not choose the ‘best’ options, i.e. private schools (including ‘DSS’ schools) and top-ability ‘band 1’ and EMI (English-as-the-medium-of-instruction) schools, many of which have been privatized in recent years. Most choose within their ‘school net’. Less-advantaged local-born and new immigrant mothers often lack the cultural capital to help their children negotiate the written tests or interviews in the selection processes of these schools. This is especially true when considering their disadvantaged access to the cultural capital needed for supporting children’s English language skills, which in the local context is a symbolic capital that must be mobilized for choice of EMI schools, which are at the same time mostly ‘band 1’ schools (cf. Bourdieu 1991). Interviews are often conducted in English in schools’ screening mechanisms, which represent a formidable obstacle deterring less-advantaged mothers from choosing these schools. Also, many of these mothers cannot afford the extracurricular activities expenses and (for private schools) tuition fees charged by such schools. Furthermore, the operation of the ‘banding’ system relies on parents’ own assessment of their
children’s ability level in choice-making. This augments the impact of class in constraining the horizons of choice of these mothers, encouraging their aversion to choices of ‘distinction’ (cf. Bourdieu 1984; Ball et al. 2002). Their internalization of their disadvantage in the ‘field’ and their acceptance of their (and their children’s) ‘inferiority’, which is classed but should also be understood as ‘ethnicized’ in the case of disadvantaged immigrant mothers, is demonstrated in the fears of their children not ‘fitting in’ top-banding EMI schools. Moreover, this extra hurdle in choice is gendered, because mothers’ defensiveness is rooted in their anxiety about the shame – in relation to their ‘adequacy’ as mothers - of failing to get it ‘right’ in choice (cf. Reay 1996). This help explains why even more-advantaged mothers sometimes express an aversion to choices of ‘distinction’, despite being better-resourced for making such choices.

Nonetheless, mothers’ choice-making cannot be dismissed as an act of resignation to the inevitable, because choices have to be continually worked at as mothers juggle risks and reflect on the decisions made throughout the choice process. Moreover, indeterminacy is built into the convoluted two-stage choice mechanism, which allows room for even less-advantaged mothers to take risks at an early stage and to have the risks backed up at later points of decision-making. Ambitious choices are made by a minority of less-advantaged mothers, whose confidence in such risky choices is backed up by the social capital they accrue in friendships networks or relationship with teachers. Some also have sufficient economic capital for hiring tutors or enrolling their children in courses in preparation for schools’ selection processes. Last but not least, a minority of the more-advantaged local intermediate class mothers and new immigrant mothers from middle class backgrounds express a strong sense of entitlement as they make ‘middle-class choices’. This is backed up by their relatively privileged educational backgrounds or by rich stocks of economic capital, which they mobilize to ameliorate the disadvantage associated with their class position and immigrant background.
My findings therefore affirm the influence of class in generating disadvantage in choice in Hong Kong and shed light on the contexts in which we can better understand why the socially-disadvantaged may be rendered ‘unskilled’ or ‘disconnected’ school choosers (Gewirtz et al. 1995). While the horizons of choice of the majority of mothers are ‘local’, they have access to social capital in their local networks to generate cultural capital. Even the more-disadvantaged mothers are active choosers rather than ‘onlookers’. In this sense, many mothers are at the same time ‘embedded’ and ‘contingent’ in their choices (cf. Ball et al. 2002b), to different degrees depending on the gendered and ‘ethnicized’ contexts of their particular social milieu. The generation of class disadvantage is not automatic.
IV ROUTINE EDUCATIONAL INVOLVEMENT

All mothers aspire to their children’s educational success. Give how their migration is geared towards exploiting education and social mobility opportunities in Hong Kong (cf. Ogbu 1985; Sue and Okazaki 1990), new immigrant mothers are particularly vocal about their high aspirations. The less-advantaged local and new immigrant mothers could not always mobilize their educational aspirations, however, because of their disadvantaged access to the ‘right’ cultural capital. They have difficulties in supporting their children’s English learning. Whilst they are proactive in arranging their children extracurricular activities in community organizations or at school, they either lack the economic capital, or consider it too risky to invest in sustained and accredited extracurricular activities (e.g. piano learning) for their children (cf. Goldthorpe 1996). These disadvantages have profound implications for their choice-making in a school market which privileges EMI schools and students’ participation in prestigious and/or competitive extracurricular activities (cf. Wong YL 2007). Also, immigrant mothers across class backgrounds often struggle to convert the educational cultural capital they have accrued in mainland China in the local educational field. They have trouble in adapting to the use of traditional Chinese characters of written Chinese in Hong Kong (as opposed to the simplified Chinese characters used in mainland China), as well as to the pedagogical styles adopted in schools. Nonetheless, for all mothers, emotional labour needs to be invested to minimize tension and conflicts with children for the smooth transmission of cultural capital (cf. Hochschild 1983; Lareau 1989). The more-advantaged local intermediate class mothers and new immigrant mothers from middle-class backgrounds are not immune to this, but are in a better position to minimize the potentially detrimental consequences of emotional labour. They can draw upon their relatively privileged educational or upbringing experiences to give them the confidence to encourage their children’s ‘self-directed’ learning. They can also bank on their economic capital to arrange for private tuition or classes in tutorial schools, which for immigrant mothers is particularly important for ameliorating their disadvantage in relation to their children’s English learning. By contrast, most of the less-advantaged mothers rely on intensive homework supervision.
and regulation of daily routines to ensure their children work hard in their studies. They also need to negotiate the self-perceived inferiority of their cultural capital and a more palpable sense of shame about their inadequacy as mothers compared to the more-advantaged mothers. In particular, the bitterness of highly-educated immigrant mothers about the irrelevance of their cultural capital should be understood in an ‘ethnicized’ context in which they are deemed culturally inferior for their immigrant status and gender. Less-advantaged mothers are therefore more liable to frustrations and conflicts with their children, an extra hurdle to negotiate as they try to mobilize their aspirations (cf. David et al. 1997; Reay 1998; Lareau 2003). As a result, a minority of the less-advantaged mothers choose to distance themselves from educational work in defense against the shame that feelings of educational inadequacy may invite (cf. Walkerdine et al. 2001). Gender conditions mothers’ affective experience in educational involvement in such a way that can reproduce class disadvantages. Nonetheless, it should be recognized that gender is important in facilitating mothers’ generation of cultural capital in social networks, as they go about their everyday mothering work. Access to information about more economical tuition options or extracurricular activities is particularly important for less-advantaged mothers. Taken together, my findings affirm, but at the same time complicate existing accounts of class advantage and disadvantage in parental educational involvement. The myriad ways that gender, which interacts with ‘ethnicity’, complicate class reproduction processes attest to some diversity within working-class experience in education. Class disadvantage therefore cannot be taken for granted.
Lastly, my study has explored how class processes in education are embedded in the gendered lived realities of mothers (David 1997). My findings indicate that the availability of mothers’ educational labour is only made possible by their disadvantage in the labour market. This is interlocked with cultural ideologies in Hong Kong that strongly valorize and moralize women’s responsibility as mothers to support their children’s education. Less-advantaged mothers have less freedom to choose whether to work or not, and in this sense they are more constrained in making their educational labour available. But what emerges strongly from mothers’ accounts in my sample is the dilemmas they experience in negotiating competing discourses of motherhood and citizenship. Their commitment to unpaid educational labour diminishes the value they can accrue to their personhood through full-time paid employment (cf. Skeggs 2004), but at the same time paid employment puts them at risk of being stigmatized as inadequate mothers (Griffith and Smith 1987). Mothers therefore continually have their respectability at stake as they commit themselves to their children’s education at the expense of their paid employment. That the majority of less-advantaged mothers in my study are not in paid employment suggests that they have more at stake in assuming their educational role compared to their more-advantaged counterparts. This is not only because they need paid work for income but also because such paid labour provides status for countering the cultural ‘inferiorization’ of their class, ‘ethnicity’ and gender (especially for single mothers). Education is also a high-stake project for immigrant mothers. Investing their labour in their children’s education in Hong Kong necessitates their relinquishment of their citizenship in mainland China, their detachment from their native family, and, for those from more privileged educational and class backgrounds, their enforced occupational downward mobility. The gendered context of their migration must be taken into account when considering the diversity in their class practices, especially for those in the working class. An appreciation of mothers’ negotiation of this double-bind, as well as their feelings of shame and indignation about their position, is fundamental to our understanding of the affective experience of their educational involvement (cf. Skeggs 2004). This helps to explain
the emotionally-charged character of their everyday educational practices, which are conducive to mother-child conflicts and frustrations and which can also thwart cultural capital mobilization. Nonetheless, for a minority of the less-advantaged mothers, it is precisely the desire to redeem the personal sacrifices they have made which underlies their ambitious choice-making for their children. My study also shows how such affective experiences are compounded by (married) mothers’ negotiation of the division of educational labour with their husbands, a process which reproduces the ideologies of motherhood and reinforces the devaluation of unpaid mothering work. This also explains the low levels of activation of fathers’ cultural capital in choice-making and routine educational practices, which - considering that it is mothers who are less likely to have the ‘right’ cultural capital for the ‘field’ - is again detrimental to the educational outcomes of less-advantaged children.

Lastly, my research has shown that gendered practices naturalize networking activities as ‘everyday’ mothering work and facilitates the generation of cultural capital (cf. David et al. 1994), which is crucial for mothers’ school choice-making and routine educational involvement. But in engaging in such activities, mothers are also required to monitor and evaluate themselves against other women in relation to values of adequacy and ‘worthiness’ as mothers (Sayer 2002) and against the normative ideals of motherhood propagated in schools and in community organizations. This is an important source of shame and guilt (cf. Walkerdine and Lucey 1989), which, as I have discussed earlier, can hold back mothers’ mobilization of cultural capital especially for less-advantaged mothers. Despite this, I have emphasized that it is mothers’ desire for respectability which is precisely what underlies their involvement in networks and in particular volunteering activities at school and in the community. This gives them access to cultural capital, primarily in terms of the confidence they need to present and assert themselves in public, to accrue value to themselves independent of their children’s needs (cf. Skeggs 1997). This is particularly important for more-disadvantaged immigrant mothers as they endeavor to counter their ‘ethnicized’ cultural inferiority. My findings shed light on the diversity of structural and moral contexts in which mothers’ cultural capital mobilization is embedded (cf.
David et al. 1997; Duncan 2005; Byrne 2006). In particular, mothers’ agency in their creation of value out of devalued educational labour must be taken into account when understanding the generation of cultural capital in disadvantaged families.
CONCLUSION AND IMPLICATIONS

Hong Kong represents a research context with similarities but also important differences to that documented in the Western literature in terms of the society-wide celebration of the instrumental value of education. This is inscribed in the ethos of competitive individualism, and buttressed by a sense of insecurity that permeates the society as the ex-colony grapples with economic and political changes before and after China’s resumption of her sovereignty in 1997. Yet, despite the well-documented educational aspirations of the socially-disadvantaged, class differentials in educational outcomes have persisted. Informed by cultural capital theory, this study has explored why the aspirations of the disadvantaged groups are less effectively mobilized in educational processes. I have argued that we can better understand the mechanisms of class disadvantage by examining the way class shapes the extent of ‘fit’ between the cultural capital of disadvantaged mothers and that demanded by the educational ‘field’. In particular, I have emphasized how the context of migration and ‘ethnicization’ shapes the access to capitals and respectability of new mainland Chinese immigrant mothers. This should be understood as implicated in, and as what complicates their class aspirations and educational practices. In contrast to the approach of some local research, I have underlined the need to contextualize our understanding of cultural capital in relation to the particularities of local education systems and how they institutionalize the privilege of middle-class cultural capital. In particular, in Hong Kong, I have highlighted the symbolic value of English language upheld in the ‘field’ and the complex and opaque symbolic order of the local school market. This incurs a distinctive disadvantage for immigrant mothers from China, erects extra structural and psychological barriers to the access of the socially-disadvantaged to ‘quality’ education, and shapes local cultural capital mobilization in a distinctive way.

My study also fills a research gap in the local literature by offering a gender perspective on parental educational practices. My use of semi-structured interviews gave me access to mothers’ narratives of their experiences of educational involvement.
in their own terms. This methodological approach helps to unpack the meanings of the ‘lack’ of resources or capitals amongst the socially-disadvantaged. I have emphasized the contextual embeddedness of such ‘lack’ in a context where the neo-liberal project of producing enterprising and upwardly-mobile citizens corroborates with the local values of Chinese familism in the construction of the morally ‘virtuous’ category of mothers in engineering children’s educational success (cf. Chao 1994; Wong and Chan 2006). On the one hand, educational aspirations are primarily backed up by mothers’ hard labour and personal sacrifice. On the other hand, this means the responsibility to ‘get it right’ rests squarely on mother’s shoulder and means mothers are constantly susceptible to the affective experiences of shame and guilt in their assumption of their educational role (cf. Skeggs 2004; Sayers, 2005). In my research, feelings of educational inadequacy are endemic to the experiences of mothers across class and the local/immigrant division (cf. Chan et al. 2008). Nonetheless, these feelings of inferiority are also magnified for those mothers with disadvantaged access to the ‘right’ cultural capital in the ‘field’ and respectability in the wider society. It is under these circumstances that the horizons of possibility for disadvantaged mothers become limited and circumscribed. It is this which inhibits their mobilization of cultural capital in their choice-making and everyday educational involvement (cf. Bourdieu 1984; Lareau 2003) and produces their ‘lack’.

Nonetheless, this study’s focus on the embeddedness of educational practices in mothers’ particular social milieu has also shown how cultural capital can be generated in socially-disadvantaged families. Gender inequalities in the labour market interlocks with cultural ideologies of motherhood in making available mothers’ educational labour, and the time and energy invested in social networks can generate cultural capital to ameliorate disadvantages associated with class and one’s immigrant status. Mothers’ assumption of their educational role can also be understood as a ‘vocation’ through which they seek respectability to counter the construction of cultural inferiority resulting from the economic ‘unproductivity’ of their detachment from (full-time) paid employment (cf. Skeggs 1997; Li HL 2009). This is especially true for new immigrant mothers, including those who are single mothers. Their ‘inferiority’ is
compounded by their ‘ethnicized’ immigrant and/or single-mother status. This explains their determination to engineer the best for their children’s education. Relatively highly-educated local intermediate-class mothers and new immigrant mothers from privileged backgrounds in China can draw upon their educational and upbringing experience as cultural capital in school choice-making and in facilitating their children’s learning. However, I have also shown that a minority of less-advantaged mothers capitalize upon the indeterminacy built into the local choice mechanism to make ambitious school choices. This highlights how mothers’ agency is made possible by the institutional context. All these testifies to the relative misalignment between class and cultural capital and shows that class disadvantages are not only generated and magnified, but can also be attenuated or even overcome under diverse ‘ethnicized’ and gendered circumstances. In producing these findings, my study contributes to the local literature by showing both how migration and ‘ethnicity’ qualify class disadvantages (Archer and Francis 2006) but also the centrality of gender to class processes in education (Smith 1998; Stambach and David 2005) in Hong Kong.

To conclude, my findings show the endurance of class in structuring the distribution of advantage and disadvantage in educational process. But at the same time, my study highlights how gender, ‘ethnicity’ and the educational field shape how class ‘works’ in indeterminate ways. By showing how less-advantaged mothers can engage in the education market with ‘middle-class’ cultural capital, albeit undergoing processes different from that of the middle class, my study provides a useful perspective for understanding the educational success of a minority of working class and new immigrant students in Hong Kong (cf. Leung BKP; Tang 2002; Lam KY 2006). The fact that my sample of mothers were recruited through school PTAs and community organizations or grassroots groups does mean that my study excludes that those at the very bottom of the class structure, including those families in which mothers must work and cannot be available for educational labour. Nonetheless, by situating their educational practices in the specificity of their circumstances, my study sheds light on how structural patterns of persistent class differentials in educational outcomes
manifest in particular contexts (see Irwin 2009). By showing the contingencies of how cultural capital ‘works’ for families located in ‘ambivalent’ positions – as occupied by the better-educated local intermediate class mothers or immigrant mothers from middle-class backgrounds – my study also accentuates the importance of examining the indeterminacy of and variation in class processes, which cannot be adequately captured by accounts which focus on the middle class/working class dichotomy.

I have emphasized the need for local researchers to disentangle the way class power is institutionalized in local educational ‘fields’ and is implicated in the generation of disadvantage. This also suggests that the basic tenets of education reform must be problematized if class inequality is to be redressed. Without doing so, the premium placed on productivity, efficiency and ‘value-addedness’ will only encourage advantaged groups to establish new bases on which to reassert their exclusivity as ‘quality’ education becomes ‘popularized’. This is exemplified in the privatization of local elite secondary schools, and in how they change their curriculum to tailor for the International Baccalaureate, formerly exclusive to international schools, in place of the HKSDE (which S6 public school students sit for). In this way, the ‘distinction’ of the elite is reasserted even at a time when the coverage of free education is extended, the number of selection points in the academic structure is reduced, and when mixed-ability school intake is encouraged. This attests to the nature of education as a positional good (Hirsch 1976) with the ‘quality education’ and social mobility envisioned in education reforms only achieved by a selected few. In this sense, initiatives to ‘compensate’ for disadvantaged groups’ ‘deficit’ of capitals merely serve to deflect attention away from the sources of injustice in the ‘field’. The same can be said of pleas for parents to raise their level of educational involvement (e.g. Ho SC 2006a), which fail to question whether heightened expectations of parental involvement make sense in the situated contexts of the disadvantaged. To address class as a central issue in education may be difficult in today’s political climate. Nonetheless, we can begin with research that approaches class as embodied and situated practices (Crompton 2008) and sensitizes us to the meanings of educational practices in the diverse contexts inhabited by disadvantaged groups. Not only does this
enlighten us about the ‘lived’ realities behind the correlations between family backgrounds and educational outcomes produced in quantitative research, it also goes a long way to challenge stereotypes of ‘deficit’ and to encourage disadvantaged groups to recognize the enabling aspects of their values and practices in supporting their children’s education.
**APPENDIX I THE INTERVIEW SCHEDULE**

Semi-structured interviews were conducted with the mothers recruited for the study. The interview schedule is presented below. It should be noted that questions were not asked in accordance with a rigid sequence. Also, questions were not necessarily asked with the exact wordings as presented below.

Questions bracketed are probing questions asked following the preceding question(s) asked.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>On school choice-making:</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>What schools has your child been to? Where is</td>
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<tr>
<td>your child studying right now?</td>
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<tr>
<td>How did your child enter these schools? How</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>were the decisions made?</td>
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<tr>
<td>What schools are you thinking of for your</td>
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<tr>
<td>child next year (asked where appropriate)?</td>
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<tr>
<td>Why? [Do you need to do anything about this at</td>
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<tr>
<td>this moment? What do you have to do, and why</td>
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<tr>
<td>(or why not)?]</td>
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<table>
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<tr>
<th>On mothers’ routine educational involvement:</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>How do you think your child's life at school</td>
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<tr>
<td>is? How is his/ her homework and</td>
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<tr>
<td>performance? [Do you need to do anything about</td>
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<td>this at this moment? What do you have to do,</td>
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<tr>
<td>and why (or why not)?]</td>
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<tr>
<td>Other than going to school, what else does</td>
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<td>your child do? [Does he/ she participate in</td>
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<tr>
<td>any activities? Why this/ these activity(ies)?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Does he/ she come over to/ go to/ join the</td>
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<td>centre’s/ the agency’s/ the group’s (depending</td>
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<td>on the site entered) activities often? Why or</td>
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<tr>
<td>why not?</td>
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<tr>
<td>On Saturdays and Sundays or during school</td>
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<tr>
<td>holidays, what does your child usually do?</td>
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<tr>
<td>Why?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

| On mothers’ interactions with fellow parents   |
| and the school:                                |
| Do you come over/ go to the school often?      |
| Do you know any parents (mothers) around? How  |
| do you get to know them? What is               |
being talked about?
How are the teachers? What is being talked about with them?
How about your family members, and your relatives (e.g. the grandma, the aunt...)?

On educational aspirations and doing motherhood in general:
What is the thing you are most pleased with in your child? Why? Is there anything that cause you headaches, and if so what is (are) that (those), and why? [Do you need to do anything about this at this moment? What do you have to do, and why (or why not)?]
What do you (and the other family members, where appropriate) think your children will be like in the future? Why? [Do you need to do anything about this at this moment? What do you have to do, and why (or why not)?]

A set of questions probing family background and circumstances were asked at the end of each interview. These questions included but were not limited to:

Were (Was) you (your (ex-) husband/ partner/ where appropriate) born/ educated in Hong Kong?
What level of educational attainment was reached? How was school back then? Have you just recently arrived? Why have you decided to come over to (and settle in) Hong Kong? How long have you been here?
Have (Has) you (your (ex-) husband/ partner/ where appropriate) always been working? What industry are (is) you ((ex-) husband/ partner/ where appropriate) in?
Where are you living? Whom are you living with?

Certain probing questions were initiated during an interview whenever appropriate.
The following are examples of these probing questions:

How do you know about this? Has it been always like this?
What can you do about this then? Is there anyone who can help you around? Have you talked about this (with the father, the grandma, the teacher(s), the parent(s)/ mother(s),
the child...)?
Why don’t you consider/ do this? Have you thought of...?
What is pushing you to do (or continue doing) this?
Does the child like it? How do you think of this? What can you do about this? Why is that?
What is exactly being done? Would you mind explaining a bit more?
APPENDIX II PROFILE OF THE MOTHERS

The majority of mothers recruited for the study came from five different districts in Hong Kong. The exceptions were Rosa (local-born intermediate class mother) who came from Tsuen Wan and Faye (local-born intermediate class mother) who came from Yuen Long. The districts and their corresponding school nets are presented below:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Districts (Abbreviation)</th>
<th>School nets (Abbreviation)</th>
<th>Number of local-born mothers</th>
<th>Number of immigrant mothers</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Tai Kok Tsui (TKT)</td>
<td>Yau Tsim Mong (YTM)</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cheung Sha Wan (CSW)</td>
<td>Sham Shui Po (SSP)</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sham Shui Po (SSP)</td>
<td>Sham Shui Po (SSP)</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tin Shui Wai (TSW)</td>
<td>Yuen Long (YL)</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tuen Mun (TM)</td>
<td>Tuen Mun (TM)</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tsuen Wan (TW)</td>
<td>Tsuen Wan (TW)</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yuen Long (YL)</td>
<td>Yuen Long (YL)</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 3 Geographical distribution of mothers

Presented below is the profile of the local-born mothers, followed by the profile of the immigrant mothers. Please note that: (i) not all mothers gave precise information about their or their (ex-) husbands’ or partners’ educational attainment level in the interviews. Most local-born mothers could state clearly the level of education reached by themselves or their husbands. For immigrant mothers, some stated that they or their (ex-) husbands or partners went to or finished junior or secondary school in China, whereas others stated that they or their (ex-) husbands or partners had done schooling equivalent to reaching a certain level of education in Hong Kong. Immigrant mothers who stated that they had done schooling equivalent to reaching or finishing S3 or S5 in Hong Kong are treated as having gone to or finished junior or secondary schooling in China respectively; (ii) the class background of (married) mothers is primarily
determined by their husbands’ occupational status with reference to the class schema devised by Wong and Lui (1992) (see Chapter 3).

In the following, I also indicate whether the mothers are categorized as ‘the more-advantaged’ or ‘the less-advantaged’ mothers, as I did in my data analysis and throughout my discussion in the thesis.

Table 4 Profile of local-born mothers

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Mother</th>
<th>Marital status; Educational attainment (mother and/or (ex-)husband)</th>
<th>Occupational status (mother and/or (ex-)husband)</th>
<th>The child the interview focused on</th>
<th>Location (School net)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Brenda</td>
<td>Married. Did not finish primary school in Hong Kong. Full-time housewife, previously garment factory worker. Husband: Finished S3 in Hong Kong. Instructor (construction workers training).</td>
<td></td>
<td>Son (S4)</td>
<td>TM (TM)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Intermediate class, less-advantaged</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Clara</td>
<td>Married. S5 graduate in Hong Kong. Full-time housewife, previously working in the trading industry. Husband: Educational attainment level unknown. Salesperson (machinery in China).</td>
<td></td>
<td>Daughter (S1)</td>
<td>TSW (YL)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Intermediate class, more-advantaged</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Faye</td>
<td>Married. Did not finish S3 in Hong Kong. Full-time housewife, previously garment factory worker.</td>
<td></td>
<td>Daughter (P6)</td>
<td>YL (YL)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Intermediate class, less-advantaged</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Name</td>
<td>Class</td>
<td>Background</td>
<td>Son</td>
<td>Occupation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>--------</td>
<td>----------------</td>
<td>-----------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>--------------</td>
<td>--------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Irene</td>
<td>Working class, less-advantaged</td>
<td>Husband: Did not finish S3 in Hong Kong. Supervisor (construction site).</td>
<td>Son (S1)</td>
<td>SSP (SSP)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lara</td>
<td>Intermediate class, more-advantaged</td>
<td>Married. S5 graduate in Hong Kong. Full-time housewife, previously working in the insurance industry. Husband: Did not finish S3 (unknown location). Interior furnishing worker/builder (self-employed).</td>
<td>Daughter (P6)</td>
<td>TSW (YL)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Linda</td>
<td>Intermediate class, more-advantaged</td>
<td>Married. S5 graduate in Hong Kong. Accounting clerk. Husband: Finished junior secondary schooling in China. Unemployed, previously restaurant worker.</td>
<td>Son (S1)</td>
<td>TSW (YL)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mary</td>
<td>Working class, less-advantaged</td>
<td>Married. Did not finish S3 in Hong Kong. Full-time housewife, previously cashier in restaurant. Husband: Went to senior secondary school (reaching S4 or S5 level) in Hong Kong. Driver/Workman.</td>
<td>Son (P6)</td>
<td>TSW (YL)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nancy</td>
<td>Working class, less-advantaged</td>
<td>Married. Finished S3 in Hong Kong. Part-time newspaper deliverer and part-time domestic</td>
<td>Son (S4)</td>
<td>TM (TM)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Name</td>
<td>Status</td>
<td>Description</td>
<td>Relation</td>
<td>Location</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>----------</td>
<td>-------------------------</td>
<td>-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
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<td>------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nicole</td>
<td>Married, S5 graduate</td>
<td>Hong Kong. Part-time shipping clerk. Husband: Finished S3 (location unknown). Supervisor (factory in China).</td>
<td>Son</td>
<td>TSW (YL)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nicole</td>
<td>Intermediate class,</td>
<td>more-advantaged</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rosa</td>
<td>Married, S5 graduate</td>
<td>Hong Kong. Full-time housewife, previously working in a clerical position in the entertainment industry. Husband: Did not reach beyond S3 in Hong Kong. Small proprietor (metal shop).</td>
<td>Daughter</td>
<td>TW (TW)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rosa</td>
<td>Intermediate class,</td>
<td>more-advantaged</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nicole</td>
<td>Unmarried, S5 graduate</td>
<td>Hong Kong. Driver. Husband: Finished S1 in Hong Kong. Driver.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nicole</td>
<td>Intermediate class,</td>
<td>more-advantaged</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mother</td>
<td>Marital status; Educational attainment (mother and/or (ex-)husband)</td>
<td>Occupational status (mother and/or (ex-)husband)</td>
<td>The child the interview focused on</td>
<td>Location (School net)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>--------</td>
<td>---------------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>-------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>-----------------------------------</td>
<td>----------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Carmen Middle class, more-advantaged</td>
<td>Married. Senior secondary graduate in China. Full-time housewife, previously receptionist in China. Husband: Master degree holder (Hong Kong). Businessman in the shipping industry.</td>
<td></td>
<td>Daughter (P6)</td>
<td>TSW (YL)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Flora Working class, less-advantaged</td>
<td>Divorced. Senior secondary graduate in China. Full-time housewife, previously caretaker in elderly’s home in Hong Kong. Ex-husband: Went to secondary school (unknown location).</td>
<td></td>
<td>Daughter (S1)</td>
<td>TKT (SSP)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Name</td>
<td>Class, Advantaged</td>
<td>Occupation/Background</td>
<td>Relationship</td>
<td>Son/Treatment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-------</td>
<td>------------------</td>
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<td>--------------</td>
<td>--------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hazel</td>
<td>Working class, less-advantaged</td>
<td>Working in the telecommunications industry.</td>
<td>Daughter</td>
<td>SSP (SSP)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Haley</td>
<td>Middle class, more-advantaged</td>
<td>Married. Senior secondary graduate in China. Full-time housewife, previously salesperson in Hong Kong. Husband: Bachelor degree holder (location unknown). Electric engineer.</td>
<td>Son</td>
<td>TM (TM)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Helena</td>
<td>Middle class, more-advantaged</td>
<td>Married. Senior secondary graduate in China. Full-time housewife, previously senior customer service officer in Hong Kong. Husband: Bachelor degree holder (location unknown). Engineer.</td>
<td>Son</td>
<td>TSW (YL)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Name</td>
<td>Class</td>
<td>Educational Attainment</td>
<td>Occupation</td>
<td>Relationship</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-------</td>
<td>----------------</td>
<td>-------------------------</td>
<td>-------------------------------</td>
<td>--------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kay</td>
<td>Working class, less-advantaged</td>
<td>Divorced. Limited education received. Janitor. Ex-husband: No information available.</td>
<td>Son (S2)</td>
<td>SSP (SSP)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Liz</td>
<td>Working class, less-advantaged</td>
<td>Divorced. Finished post-secondary education in China. Full-time housewife (with irregular part-time jobs),</td>
<td>Son (P6)</td>
<td>TKT (SSP)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Name</td>
<td>Social Class</td>
<td>Marital Status</td>
<td>Educational Background</td>
<td>Occupation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>----------</td>
<td>--------------</td>
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<td>-------------------------</td>
<td>------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lucy</td>
<td>Working class, less-advantaged</td>
<td>Married</td>
<td>Limited education received</td>
<td>Full-time housewife, previously food-stall salesperson</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>May</td>
<td>Intermediate class, less-advantaged</td>
<td>Married</td>
<td>Limited education received in Macau</td>
<td>Full-time housewife, previously garment factory worker (location unknown)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Molly</td>
<td>Working class, less-advantaged</td>
<td>Married</td>
<td>Graduated from teacher training college/university in China</td>
<td>Housewife with multiple part-time jobs (e.g. as a workman in a bank)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ocean</td>
<td>Working class, less-advantaged</td>
<td>Married</td>
<td>Did not finish junior secondary schooling in China</td>
<td>Full-time housewife, previously</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Name</td>
<td>Class</td>
<td>Background</td>
<td>Family Details</td>
<td>Education</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>------</td>
<td>-------</td>
<td>------------</td>
<td>----------------</td>
<td>-----------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Penny</td>
<td>Working class, less-advantaged</td>
<td>Married. Finished junior secondary schooling in China. Full-time housewife (with irregular part-time jobs), previously accounting worker in China. Husband: Finished S3 in Hong Kong. Unemployed, previously security guard.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Susie</td>
<td>Working class, less-advantaged</td>
<td>Married. Finished junior secondary schooling in China. Full-time housewife (with irregular part-time jobs), previously factory worker in</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Name</td>
<td>Status</td>
<td>Education and Employment Details</td>
<td>Relationship</td>
<td>Occupation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>----------</td>
<td>-------------------------------</td>
<td>--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>--------------</td>
<td>------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tina</td>
<td>Working class, less-advantaged</td>
<td>Went to secondary school in China. Interior furnishing worker.</td>
<td>Son (S3)</td>
<td>CSW (SSP)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### APPENDIX III THE CLASS STRUCTURE OF HONG KONG

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Seven-folded Class</th>
<th>Three-folded Class</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I</td>
<td>Upper Service Class: Higher-grade professionals, administrators &amp; officials, managers in large establishments</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>II</td>
<td>Lower Service Class: Lower-grade professionals, administrators, high-grade technicians, managers, supervisors of non-manual employees</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>III</td>
<td>Routine non-manual employees in commerce &amp; administration, personal service workers &amp; sales</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IV</td>
<td>Petty Bourgeoisie: Small proprietors, artisans, contractors</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>V</td>
<td>Low-grade technicians, supervisors of manual workers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>VI</td>
<td>Skilled manual workers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>VII</td>
<td>Semi-skilled &amp; unskilled workers, agricultural workers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Service class (Referred to as ‘middle class’ in the thesis)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Intermediate class</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Working class</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 6 The class structure of Hong Kong (Wong and Lui (1992))
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