



## **Cognitive Structure of Social Mobility: Moral Sentiments and Hidden Injuries of Class**

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### **Abstract**

Drawing on the mobility accounts of eighty-nine respondents who perceived themselves as socially mobile in post-war Hong Kong, I devise a typology of four biographies – normal, choice, special, and emotional biographies – to examine the cognitive structure of their accounts in order to make sense of moral sentiments of class. Three tentative conclusions are drawn. First, class feelings could be seen as better class markers than self-reported class identity. Second, upward mobility does not simply complicate class feelings but could lead to a distorted class sentiment that justifies rather than challenges class inequality; yet four biographies show a variety of its operation. Third, upward mobility does not necessarily treat previous class injuries; instead, it could bring new class injuries. In sum, social fluidity of a class society does not make class inequality less arbitrary or more just nor does it necessarily render class feelings and moral sentiments of class as irrelevant.

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**Keywords: Moral Sentiments of Class, Class Injuries, Social Mobility, Biography, Middle Class, Hong Kong**

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### **Introduction**

**1.1** In his insightful piece, Sayer (2002) discusses what has been overlooked in the study of class inequality is moral sentiments of class. Moral sentiments of class somehow reveal our genuine evaluations of a class system as to whether it is fair or not (cf. Sayer 2005); our evaluations could indicate our views on the moral worth of different class positions. And therefore, we may develop feelings towards different class positions within a specific system. Where the reproduction of class inequality is concerned, we could probably say that a circulation is at work in linking class with class feelings (cf. Reay 2005): class feelings are generated by class inequality; they could, in turn, play a part in the making of class and thus reproducing class inequality. Class injuries could be seen as a distinctive case in point. As Sennett and Cobb (1972) have powerfully demonstrated, in an unequal society the working class, or the disadvantaged, in addition to being deprived in material terms, suffer from a low social standing. Such economic deprivation leads to a lack of social recognition, which, in turn, somehow makes the disadvantaged feel ashamed, lesser, deficient, and simply inferior (cf. Bourdieu et al. 1999). In other words, what the disadvantaged suffer in an unequal society is not simply material hardship but something perverse that hurt their feelings: that is, a system of social stratification hurts the disadvantaged not simply in economic and social terms but also in emotional terms. Sennett and Cobb's idea of hidden injuries of class is insightful in that it highlights the fact that damages caused by a class system to the disadvantaged could be both visible and hidden, and that hidden injuries in emotional terms are by no means less hurtful to the disadvantaged than visible damages in economic terms. In this sense, the emotional aspect of class – such as class injuries – could provide a distinctive perspective to understand class inequality.

**1.2** What could arguably complicate this line of inquiry is social mobility. Against a particular class system, assuming that social mobility is viable within the system, presumably some of a disadvantaged working class would seek to enable their children to get out of such class and thus to escape from the so-called class fate, in the hope that their children would not repeat their miserable experience. As pride is assumed to be attached to a new class position, upward mobility could be seen as bringing an improvement to a disadvantaged class not only in economic terms but also emotional terms (cf. Sayer 2002). One may, then, argue that perhaps previous class injuries could be compensated for by upward mobility. If so, this anticipated compensatory effect of upward mobility could very well serve as a justification for the very

existence of a specific class system or class inequality more generally: so long as social mobility is feasible for all individuals within a class system, class inequality is perhaps tolerable in both economic and emotional terms. What follows from this argument is a concern not about abolishing a class system but about making sure that the option of upward mobility within the system is open to all. However, paradoxically, the very act of a disadvantaged class of enabling their children to leave their disadvantaged class origin, or their very desire of having their children move upwards could arguably be seen as reinforcing their sense of shame about the origin and also their feeling of inferiority about coming from that particular origin. In other words, the impact of social mobility on our evaluations of and thus feelings towards a system of class inequality as well as different class positions within it is not that straightforward. Indeed, what has been emerging from the existing studies on the socially mobile is a sense of ambivalence and a mixture of feelings. And it is particularly true of the upwardly mobile: upward mobility could somehow be seen as a mixed blessing (cf. Jackson and Marsden 1962). The upwardly mobile are usually seen as winners in social competition. As expected, they are reported to feel proud of escaping from their previous class plight and climbing up the social ladder to a better class position. Nevertheless, in addition to a sense of pride, feelings of guilt, shame, and anxiety have also been reported: some of the upwardly mobile are also found to feel guilty about betraying their class origin, some ashamed of their humble origin, and others anxious about being found out (e.g. Dews and Law 1995; Ryan and Sackrey 1996). In other words, there is no guarantee that previous class injuries will automatically be treated by upward mobility. Besides, in addition to social betterment and class pride, upward mobility could bring in some unforeseen contradictory feelings, which could perhaps be seen as new injuries. What this suggests is that in an unequal society, even its winners do not necessarily escape from being hurt by a class system. All in all, previous class injuries are not necessarily compensated for by social mobility or are automatically replaced entirely by feelings attached to a new class position.

**1.3** The complication of social mobility involved in understanding class feelings could shed light into the study of class formation. In examining the impact of social mobility on class formation, class identity has been one major focus of investigation, although controversies remain (cf. Savage et al. 2001). Looking at the objective dimension of class identity, researchers have been debating over how to assign correctly, so to speak, previous and current class positions of mobile individuals at different times when the class structure is still in the making or undergoes changes (cf. Crompton 1998). And, looking at the subjective dimension of class identity, researchers have been arguing how to capture accurately, so to speak, the reported subjective perception of mobile individuals about their social relocation (cf. Devine et al. 2005). In making sense of their social relocation, mobile individuals themselves may have rather different evaluations of the system of social stratification as well as its changes over time vis-à-vis sociologists. Given the insight of class feelings, class feelings may even be better than class identity, either objectively measured by sociologists or subjectively reported by mobile individuals, in capturing complexity involved in social relocation, especially when a class system is not well established or undergoes rapid changes. The focus of existing studies of social mobility has been mainly on its economic and political aspects and thus its impact on identity politics or class formation (cf. Clark and Lipset 2001). While studies of this kind are certainly important, the affective aspect of upward mobility, as well as the affective aspect of class, may well provide an additional, if not new, dimension to our understanding of the impact of social mobility on class formation. What this suggests is a necessity of looking into the emotions of the socially mobile. Assuming that how we feel about our social relocation could somehow be revealed by the way in which we talk about our mobility experiences, one plausible way of making a start is to tap into the narratives of the socially mobile to examine the cognitive structure of their mobility accounts: how do the socially mobile frame their mobility experiences?

**1.4** The concepts of 'normal biography' and 'choice biography' (Ball et al. 2002) could be of some use here. The two concepts are initially used by Du Bois-Reymond (1998) in a study of the youth to highlight some recent changes in life concepts of the new generation. Instead of following a so-called normal biography, where status passage into the adulthood is linear, anticipated, predictable, and full of unreflexive transitions, the youth make a variety of decisions along their way and at the same time constantly adapt to the changing demands of the environment; and therefore, their biographies could be characterised as a choice biography. In making use of Bourdieu's concepts of classification and judgement (1984), Ball and his associates (2002) modify somewhat the concepts of 'normal biography' and 'choice biography' and apply them in their analysis to contrast how middle-class and working-class students make higher education choices: given their different cognitive structures of choice, middle-class students frame their educational career within a normal biography whereas working-class students do it within a choice biography. What characterises a normal biography of their educational career by the middle-class students is an absence of decision: their decisions are always taken for granted or simply assumed. In contrast, in a choice biography the working-class students make deliberate decisions: they are required to constantly reflect on the available options and to justify their decisions. Given this insight and the fact that developing a career involves a lot of decision-makings, it would be interesting to find out whether such class distinction in framing how students make educational choices also applies to how individuals talk about career and social advancement: the cognitive structure of mobility accounts. That is to say, when the mobility accounts of individuals of a disadvantaged-class origin are compared with those of individuals of an advantaged-class origin, would we find such clear one-to-one correspondence between biography type and individuals' mobility experience?

**1.5** This paper seeks to address the issue of moral sentiments of class in the case of the socially mobile. To this end, I shall seek to look into the cognitive structure of mobility accounts and explore its implications for the emotional aspect of class. Hong Kong as an industrial-capitalist society making an economic miracle is used for illustration. Data for this paper are based on a qualitative mobility study of post-war Hong Kong. Drawing on the narratives of eighty-nine middle-class respondents, I shall examine how they frame their experiences of social mobility; a comparison is made between those of a disadvantaged class origin (i.e. the upwardly mobile) and those of an advantaged class origin (i.e. the immobile). In what follows, I shall first provide the background of this mobility study discussing its social context and research design. Then, I shall discuss how eighty-nine middle-class respondents tell their

stories of social mobility. A typology of four biographies is devised: normal, choice, special, and emotional biographies. In short, social mobility, upward mobility in particular, indeed complicates class feelings but does not necessarily treat class injuries. Finally, I shall conclude this paper by arguing that social fluidity of a class society does not make class inequality less arbitrary or more just, nor does it necessarily render class feelings and moral sentiments of class as irrelevant.

## **Social Context and Research Design**

**2.1** In addressing the issue of moral sentiments of class in the case of the socially mobile, this paper seeks to examine how the socially mobile in post-war Hong Kong frame their narratives of social mobility. Post-war Hong Kong experienced compacted changes in a short time span and was seen as a context enhancing many rags-to-riches legends; and therefore, it could be used as an example for illustration. Right after the Second World War, Hong Kong was essentially a poor city full of refugees, mainly from China, and the great majority of its population lived from hand to mouth (Hambro 1955). What could be seen as of particular relevance to understanding specificity of Hong Kong as a context of Chinese society is the so-called traditional Chinese ideology of the family (cf. Baker 1979). According to this ideology, the family should be continued through the male line: a son is to carry his family name, to inherit family property, and to get married in order to have at least one son to keep the family going. The expectation of having a child fed, clothed, housed, and taken care of by his/her parents when the child is young and incapable is observed in many societies. But what could be seen as peculiar to Chinese societies is an expectation of a son to feed, clothe, shelter, and care for his elderly parents, thus directly reciprocating their previous care of him. The reciprocity of a daughter is indirect in that it is her husband's parents to whom she repays the care expended on her by her own parents. What is of relevance of this ideology to social mobility is that sons are expected to advance through education and employment and daughters through marriage, and that social and economic achievements of sons are seen as bringing an advancement to the entire family whereas those of daughters are not. While I do not mean to suggest that the Chinese all subscribe to this ideology or practise it, this particular ideology could somehow be seen as a common belief structuring parent-child interactions in post-war Hong Kong. In that period of Hong Kong, there were three social strata: the British ruling class at the top, few local Chinese elites in the middle, and the mass Chinese at the bottom (Chan 1991). While the mass Chinese could not be seen as a class, if at all, equivalent to the working class in the West, a class equivalent to the middle class in the West did not exist. Basically, there was not much room for upward mobility, although upward mobility was very much desired. Because of industrialisation, the economy took off in the late 1960s. Given a rapid economic growth in the 1960s and 1970s and subsequent changes in its economic structure, and also political changes in the late 1960s and early 1970s, post-war Hong Kong saw a rapid expansion of the service sector and thus a creation of a large number of professional, managerial, or administrative middle-class occupations (Carroll 2007; cf. Faure 2003). In other words, such post-war structural changes in Hong Kong created an abundance of advantaged middle-class positions and thus made room for upward mobility. Indeed, the proportion of working population holding such middle-class professional, administrative, or managerial jobs was increased dramatically from 8.2% in 1961 to 29.2% in 1996 (Hong Kong Census Statistics Department). Demographically speaking, a newly emerging local middle class, consisting of professional, managerial, and administrative employees, became socially visible in the early 1980s. Members of this newly emerging middle class are the study target of this paper. How do they frame their narratives of social mobility? Does the cognitive structure of narratives offered by those of a disadvantaged-class origin differ from that of narratives offered by their advantaged-class counterparts? If so, in what ways do they differ?

**2.2** In order to address these questions, this paper will draw on part of the data from a qualitative mobility study in post-war Hong Kong. One primary concern of this study<sup>[1]</sup> was to examine how individuals of different class backgrounds got into a newly emerging middle class in post-war Hong Kong. More exactly, the examination was about how individuals got into the middle class through taking up a teaching or managerial post or marrying someone with such a post. Teachers and managers, two middle-class occupational categories in Goldthorpe class schema (Erikson and Goldthorpe 1992: 39-42), are selected because they are two rather broad occupational categories covering a wider range of middle-class occupations; and so, the mobility experiences of these two categories are expected to be not specific to the mobility experiences of the two occupational groups but representative of the mobility experiences of the middle class.

**2.3** The recruitment of respondents was targeted at teachers or managers or spouses of teachers or managers who had at least one child aged six or above.<sup>[2]</sup> The recruitment was done basically through informal rather than formal channels. It was true that I sent off recruitment letters to a number of firms, banks, organisations, secondary schools, tertiary institutions, and universities; but only three respondents were recruited through such formal channels. Most respondents were recruited through informal channels, more accurately, through the exploitation of my social networks, mainly my father's social networks. In addition, four respondents were recruited through the further introduction of some interviewed respondents. In fact, the recruitment could be seen as an illustration of the strength of weak ties (Granovetter 1995): given my disadvantaged class origin and the fact that I was single and young at the time, there were not many middle-class parents, let alone those having at least one child aged six or above, in my immediate social circle; and therefore, I had to rely on weak social connections – i.e. social networks of my acquaintances and social networks of acquaintances of my acquaintances – to make possible the recruitment. Finally, eighty-nine respondents were recruited; they were parents of forty-nine families:<sup>[3]</sup> forty-three were teachers, thirty were managers, and sixteen were their spouses having neither a teaching nor a managerial occupation. That was, seventy-three got into the middle class via employment and sixteen via marriage. The respondents were middle-aged parents (about forty-four to forty-five years old in 1997), mostly having two children. Most of them were born and grew up in Hong Kong. Taped interviews with respondents were conducted between September 1996 and August 1997; most of them took about an hour, ranging between forty-five minutes and two-and-half hours. The interviews were then transcribed and translated to English from Cantonese, the major local dialect in Hong Kong.

**2.4** While being recruited by their current occupation or by that of their spouse, eighty-nine respondents all belonged to Classes I and II of Goldthorpe class scheme. But, in my analysis the respondents were classified by their class origin in terms of the occupation of their father when they were fourteen. As mentioned above, post-war Hong Kong saw significant changes in its class structure and an emergence of the middle class of professionals, managers, and administrators. Therefore, in following a common practice in mobility studies (cf. Breen 2004), I used two slightly different versions of Goldthorpe class scheme to classify fathers of respondents and the respondents themselves respectively. Given that a local middle class was emerging in the post-war years, the respondents could all be seen as experiencing social mobility into the middle class; in fact, the respondents also saw themselves as socially mobile. But, for the purposes of this paper, I shall still divide them into the upwardly mobile and the immobile. I shall refer to thirty-seven respondents who came from a relatively advantaged class (Class I or II or III or IVa of Goldthorpe class scheme) as the immobile and fifty-two respondents who came from a relatively disadvantaged class (Class IVb or V or VI or VII of Goldthorpe class scheme) as the upwardly mobile. And then, I shall refer to the data on how respondents narrated their experiences of social mobility so as to analyse the cognitive structure of their narratives: how did the respondents structure their mobility accounts? In particular, the analysis below will focus on the following themes: how they evaluated what their parents did for them; how they viewed their career trajectories; how they commented on and accounted for their achievements.

**2.5** By design, this is a retrospective study of a small non-random sample of self-selected middle-class parents. What readers should note are two limitations of respondents' narratives: reliability and statistical representativeness. When asked to look back on what they did before, the respondents could be seen as reconstructing what had happened and may thus give a partial mobility account. In addition, in spite of meeting the set selection criteria, the respondents were not selected randomly but basically recruited through my social networks; the statistical representativeness of their accounts could be in doubt. Surely, readers should take these limitations into consideration while interpreting respondents' narratives; but, I believe, their narratives of social mobility, however partial and however statistically unrepresentative, would not make them of lesser use in enabling us to explore further the issue of moral sentiments of class.

### **Typology of Biographies**

**3.1** To reiterate, structural changes in the labour market in post-war Hong Kong led to a dramatic increase in the number of professional, managerial, and administrative occupations. Baby-boomers, including many respondents, particularly those with a secondary education, then took advantage of newly available structural opportunities to obtain such kinds of middle-class occupations (Wong 2001); this, in turn, led to an emergence of the first-generation local middle class. Where getting into the middle class via employment was concerned, three mobility paths were distinguished: professional, managerial, and bureaucratic paths. A professional path starts with a professional or lower-level professional job such as nurse, school teacher, or social worker and is usually followed by a series of subsequent promotions within the profession. A managerial path begins with a junior clerical position in an international corporation and is then followed by a number of promotions to a managerial post either in the same corporation or in a new one. And, a bureaucratic path starts with the post of a junior civil servant and is followed by rank-by-rank promotions to the post of an administrator within the bureaucracy of civil service. Unsurprisingly, where respondents of this study were concerned, all teacher respondents got into the middle class through a professional path, many manager respondents who worked in the private sector a managerial path, and nearly all manager respondents who worked in the public sector a bureaucratic path. In addition to getting into the middle class through employment, some respondents, the spouses of teachers or managers having neither a teaching nor a managerial occupation, entered the middle class through marriage.

**3.2** Despite such structural changes, eighty-nine respondents, when asked to look back on their mobility experiences and to account for their successes, downplayed the role of luck or structural factors but stressed on their ability and efforts. In short, they saw themselves as people who were capable and industrious and what underscored their narratives was a sense of pride and thus a suggestion that they deserved an advantaged middle-class position. This was particularly true of the upwardly mobile. Responses of this kind are consistent with what Sayer (2002) called a distorted class sentiment, in that class inequality is considered unjustified if it is based on luck or a tradition of class inheritance (i.e. the existing system of inequality) but it would be seen as justified if it is based on merit and effort. However, this distorted class sentiment does not operate in such a simple manner. In spite of a sense of pride conveyed by all respondents, class effects on the cognitive structure of the respondents' narratives are still observed. A distinction made by Ball and his associates (2002) between normal biography and choice biography, after some modification, is of help in capturing class effects: that is, the narratives of the immobile could generally be described as normal biographies and those of the upwardly mobile choice biographies. Nevertheless, this distinction in biography does not provide a full picture of the operation of such distorted class sentiment. In particular, the distinction, while capturing class effects, does not take into consideration family effects – effects also related to the traditional Chinese ideology of the family mentioned above. In such cases, neither normal biography nor choice biography could capture the impact of family effects, especially the emotional impacts, on how these respondents structure their mobility accounts.

**3.3** In analysing how eighty-nine respondents frame their mobility accounts, I seek to make use of the distinction of normal and choice biographies and also to take account of family effects; what emerge from my data are four types of biographies: normal, choice, special, and emotional biographies. What characterises a normal biography is a view of mobility as part of life following normal progression taking the biographer smoothly from one stage to another. In contrast to a sense of normality, a choice biography of mobility experience is underscored by a sense of deliberateness whereby mobility is seen as constituted by a number of strategic moves consciously made by the biographer at different stages and by an emphasis on the biographer's distinctive personality traits. A special biography is similar to a choice

biographer in these regards; however, what makes a special biography distinctive is a sense of specialness expressed by the biographer together with a very strong sense of pride that is closely related to their parents' expectations of them. Whereas a sense of pride underscores all biographies, an emotional biography is characterised by an undertone of rage and bitterness. Table 1 summarises the distribution of eighty-nine respondents by their mobility experience and the type of their biography.

Table 1: The distribution of eighty-nine respondents by mobility type and by biography type

Mobility type	Normal biography	Choice biography	Special biography	Emotional biography	Total
Immobile	27	0	6	4	37
Upwardly mobile	12	16	20	4	52
Total	39	16	26	8	89

### **Normal Biography and Choice Biography**

**3.4** Class effects are captured rather well by the distinction of normal and choice biographies. As shown in Table 1, in framing their narratives on their social mobility into the middle class, the majority – more than two-thirds – of the thirty-nine 'normal' respondents<sup>[4]</sup> were immobile whereas all sixteen 'choice' respondents were upwardly mobile. In addition, twenty-seven out of the thirty-seven immobile respondents structured their mobility experiences in a normal biography. Taking their mobility into the middle class for granted, 'normal' respondents regarded it as part of normal progression and thus were rather unreflective about the decisions they had made: they considered that they just did what ordinary people did, and that their mobility into middle class was expected. A sense of normality or even ordinariness underscored their mobility accounts. This sense of normality began with how they talked about the parental assistance that they had received at the very beginning of their trajectories. As 'normal' respondents considered that it was parents' duties to pave the way for their children, they found it absolutely normal that their parents supported them in education and enabled them to attain an advantaged level of education, which then led them to an advantaged first job. With such an advantageous career beginning, 'normal' respondents then considered that they just followed a normal career getting promoted to a number of senior positions over these years and finally to their current post and also to the middle class. Put simply, despite being seen as successful, 'normal' respondents did not see themselves or their achievements as extraordinary; rather, they saw themselves as no different from ordinary people doing what was normally required of them. Mr. Pak's<sup>[5]</sup> comments on his achievements are typical of 'normal' respondents.

'I am as ordinary as many other people. I don't see I have achieved something very special. ... I work hard and, I think, I am capable. But, everyone is the same. I just follow the very same path as do many people; and I do as well as many people do. ... There is nothing special about me. If anything, perhaps I should have become a chartered engineer much earlier if I had been as smart as my brother.' (Mr. Pak, immobile)

**3.5** In stark contrast to 'normal' respondents, 'choice' respondents did not take their mobility into the middle class for granted but described in detail how they decided to fight their way out at the beginning, how they made deliberate choices and overcame obstacles at each stage and got passed from one stage to the next, and how they finally made it to the middle class. In offering a heroic account of upward mobility, 'choice' respondents considered that they were extraordinary individuals making consequential moves and their mobility trajectory was constituted by a series of strategic moves. In short, their narratives were underscored by a sense of deliberateness. This sense of deliberateness in some cases began with how they decided to resist their parents. According to 'choice' respondents, the finances of their parents were rather tight in that they did not or could not support the education of the respondents and asked them to quit school at an early age. Despite their understanding of their parents' financial situation, 'choice' respondents still considered that their parents were rather ignorant in deciding to ask them to quit school.<sup>[6]</sup> To 'choice' respondents, their parents were the very first hurdle on their way into the middle class. Some 'choice' respondents deliberately chose to disobey their ignorant parents and to replace their parents' plans for them with their own plans. Even for those who agreed to quit school at an early age and thus had a disadvantaged career start, instead of following a trajectory that usually led them into the working class, after formal education they chose to work against their so-called class fate. In short, 'choice' respondents considered that a number of consequential strategic moves that they made at various points in their life steered them away from the working class but towards the middle class; without making those strategic moves, they would not have become upwardly mobile, as Mr. Tong articulated.

'I always tell my children that I am a legend. Don't you think? ... If I had not chosen to come to Hong Kong alone at seventeen, I would have died in China under the rule of the communists. ... Without any qualification and knowing no people here, I had to start from scratch and to fend for myself. ... (I) If I had not bumped into my "uncle" – a person from my village whom I met by accident – and if he had not let me live with him thus stay in that neighbourhood, I would not have met that group of friends, my future business partners. ... And if the friends had not kindly let me join them to start the business at the beginning, I would not have become a manager, let alone a major shareholder at a later stage. ... I would



not have become so rich and could not have afforded to retire at such an early age – in my early forties.' (Mr. Tong, upwardly mobile)

**3.6** In expressing a sense of normality or ordinariness, thirty-nine 'normal' respondents were not being modest or uncritical. Similarly, in conveying a sense of deliberateness, sixteen 'choice' respondents did not mean only to show off. Rather, as implied by Ball and his associates (2002), the cognitive structures of their narrations are somehow shaped by their mobility experiences and evaluations of the class system. And the achievements of people whom they took as reference points also explained in part their differences in self-evaluations. Most 'normal' respondents, especially the immobile, were not the only ones in their family who got into the middle class: most of their siblings also did the same (Wong 2005). Given that people closest to them, like their parents and/or siblings, also made a similar kind of social and economic achievement, 'normal' respondents, especially the immobile, did not see themselves as extraordinary but ordinary enough to reach a so-called 'common' standard. Unlike them, 'choice' respondents were usually in the minority, if not the only children, in their families who succeeded in getting this far. And this fact made 'choice' respondents feel they were extraordinary. What should also be noted here was that a sense of 'ordinariness' expressed by immobile 'normal' respondents somehow echoed Bourdieu's (1984) 'habitus': these respondents did not feel that they got into the middle class; rather, they belonged there. These immobile 'normal' respondents did not feel that they were at an advantage in social competition; instead, they felt that they were just as ordinary as their parents and siblings. In a way, it was inconceivable to these respondents that things could have happened very differently. Their perception is in line with a sense of entitlement emerged from the narratives of Lareau's (2002) middle-class respondents: as with Lareau's respondents, these immobile 'normal' respondents somehow considered that they were entitled to be in the middle class. However, the fact that twelve 'normal' respondents were upwardly mobile, as shown in Table 1, suggested that this sense of normality expressed by 'normal' respondents was somewhat different from a sense of entitlement found for Lareau's middle-class respondents. What this sense of normality reveals is not simply a class-specific experience but a career experience common to a particular group of baby-boomers in Hong Kong: to reiterate, structural changes in the labour market at the time made it possible that a great number of people, even without a secondary education, could make their way into the middle class via employment, albeit in a less direct manner. Indeed, in view of subsequent economic restructuring and an educational expansion in the 1990s, people in twenty-first century Hong Kong even with a university qualification could not secure a clerical job with a pay and social status equivalent to one which was available to people with a secondary education in the 1970s. All eighty-nine respondents of this study recognised such change and thus worried that the mobility of their children in the future might be blocked (Wong 2007a). In other words, what a sense of normality expressed by 'normal' respondents is generated not simply by a sense of class-linked entitlement but by a career mobility experience commonly shared by the same generation; the narrative of each 'normal' respondent could be seen as an individual's account of a collective experience of career mobility in that period.

**3.7** As mentioned above, all respondents of this study sought to convey a message that they deserved a privileged middle-class position. In addition to this, 'normal' and 'choice' respondents also sent off messages that provided justifications, albeit in different forms, for the very existence of class inequality. The immobile 'normal' respondents, given their habitus, were somehow blind to the existence of class inequality and overlooked structural barriers in social mobility posed by class inequality; their accounts implicated that every ordinary person, despite the system of class inequality, could make it to the middle class. In contrast, upwardly mobile 'normal' respondents and 'choice' respondents recognised the existence of class barriers. Nevertheless, given their upward mobility, the upwardly mobile 'normal' respondents sought to make generalisation of their mobility experiences that were specific to baby-boomers and thus their generation to the mobility experiences of the public, and the 'choice' respondents attributed their success to a number of strategic moves they had made. In doing so, both of them were no different from saying that class barriers could actually be overcome if an individual was talented and hardworking enough, and thus laying the blame on an individual rather than the system. It was small wonder that both 'normal' and 'choice' respondents were rather harsh on those of their generation who could not make it to the middle class; neither were they sympathetic with younger generations who complained about their mobility opportunities being blocked. In brief, the sentiment underlying the narratives of 'normal' and 'choice' respondents does not challenge the arbitrariness of class, let alone the injustice of class, but legitimises the system of class inequality; what underscored their sentiment was a sense of normality about, if not a justification of, the very existence of class inequality.

### ***Special Biography***

**3.8** Whereas the distinction of normal and choice biographies captures rather well class effects on mobility experiences, it does not leave much room to make sense of family effects. To this end, I come up with two more types of biographies: special and emotional biographies. Let me now turn to special biography. While all respondents of this study in one way or another perceived themselves as upwardly mobile and were proud of their achievements, 'special' respondents conveyed a particularly strong sense of specialness about themselves and they all saw themselves as their family prides. Surely, part of this sense of specialness could still be understood as a kind of class effects on mobility experiences; upward mobility provides one perspective to make sense of special biographies: as indicated in Table 1, twenty out of twenty-six 'special' respondents were upwardly mobile. At one level, perhaps we could even say that special biographies were not so different from choice biographies, in that 'special' and 'choice' respondents both considered that they had overcome numerous barriers in making their way into a newly emerging privileged middle class, and therefore they both saw themselves as extraordinary individuals and their achievements as hard-won. In short, they both considered that such special personal qualities as industrious, perseverance, and dependability made them stand out from the crowd. One could probably argue that the boundary between choice and special biographies is not so clear cut. However, two major differences are noted. The first is about how they perceived their parents' expectations of them. 'Choice' respondents described their parents as ignorant about the role of education in their future, thus having no expectations of the respondents. As mentioned above, the first strategic move for many 'choice'

respondents was to resist their parents' plans for them. In a sense, we can say that their parents fit in quite well with the stereotype of ignorant working-class parents. And therefore, 'choice' respondents considered that their achievements as well as upward mobility did not mean much to their parents and were actually beyond their parents' imagination. By contrast, 'special' respondents emphasised that their parents had very high hope of them, in that the respondents were expected to outperform their parents. In particular, upwardly mobile 'special' respondents were usually their parents' hope, if not the only hope, of realising their parents' dream, or unfulfilled desire, of having someone from the family crossing the class border: their parents did not want the respondents to follow in their footsteps to become a manual worker or self-employed vendor; instead, they wanted them to obtain a so-called white-collar well-paid job and then lead a better and more comfortable life than theirs. In a way, 'special' respondents, especially the upwardly mobile, considered their parents to be exceptionally ambitious. And therefore, despite their similar achievements, 'special' respondents, unlike 'choice' respondents, considered themselves as their family prides and that their achievements would bring glory to their parents.

**3.9** Consistent with what have been reported for the upwardly mobile in the US or UK, both 'choice' respondents and 'special' respondents (especially the upwardly mobile), regardless of their parents' expectations of them, were proud of being able to cross the class border. However, in contrast to their western counterparts, their pride was not mixed with a feeling of guilt or shame or anxiety: they did not feel guilty about betraying their class origin, or ashamed of their humble class origin, or anxious about being found out. On the contrary, they were proud to let people know that they came from a humble origin so as to impress people with the fact that they were able to leave it behind, then move upwards, and finally make it into the middle class. As I discussed this elsewhere (2010), this finding may well be specific to that period of Hong Kong and I shall not repeat it here. But this leads me to the second difference between 'choice' and 'special' respondents. In expressing a sense of pride, 'choice' and 'special' respondents were both proud of moving upwards, thus proud of making social progress. However, 'special' respondents showed their pride in the middle class per se; and this pride is usually mixed with a sense of contempt. That is, strong classed emotions are detected in special biographies: pride is attached to the middle class and contempt to a disadvantaged class. I am not sure if their pride in being in the middle class is somehow derived from the fact that they have made conscious effort to materialise their parents' high hope of them crossing the class border. But what is clear is that 'special' respondents seek to emphasise their middle-classness. In doing so, those upwardly mobile sought to distance themselves from their humble class origin; in other words, such classed emotions could arguably be seen as a way of class dis-identification (cf. Skeggs 1997), as in the case of Mr. Mui.

'I like reading a lot and I see reading skill as a very important skill that my children should acquire. ... Well, you are probably surprised by this because of my social origin. ... See, I know I am very middle-class. ... Many church members of mine, when getting to know me well enough, told me that it was inconceivable to them that I spent my childhood and adolescence in a temporary squatter area for I was so articulated and well read. ... I know I don't look like coming from the tacky working class.' (Mr. Mui, upwardly mobile)

**3.10** In a way, Mr. Mui's articulation echoes Goldthorpe's (1987) finding for contemporary Britain: among Goldthorpe's middle-class respondents, the upwardly mobile act more like the middle class than do the immobile. Despite not feeling ashamed of his class origin, Mr. Mui was clearly distancing himself from it by showing his contempt for it. Two points are noted from his pride in being in the middle class now and his contempt for the working class. First, Mr. Mui shares general social and moral evaluations of positions within a class system: the social desirability and moral worthiness of an emerging middle class and the social undesirability and moral unworthiness of a disadvantaged class. Second, his classed emotions somehow operated in a perverse manner. On the one hand, his contempt is the basis of his pride. If he had not come from a humble origin for which he had contempt, Mr. Mui would not have felt so proud of being able to get out of it or being able to reach a socially desirable destination then. In other words, Mr. Mui's contempt for his humble origin is necessary for his pride. We could perhaps say that his pride and contempt are the two sides to the same coin. But, on the other hand, his pride actually serves to accentuate his contempt for the working class; it even leads him to become self-defeating. In showing contempt for his humble origin, Mr. Mui was defeating part of himself as well as denying his past. In a way, we could say that his contempt is somehow destroying his pride. To repeat, unlike the upwardly mobile in the West, upwardly mobile 'special' respondents did not report a mixed feeling of pride, shame, guilt, or anxiety. However, I am not sure if self-denial or being self-defeating could be seen as better than having such mixed feeling: destructive feelings could perhaps be seen as class injuries of a new form.

**3.11** Upward mobility just provides one perspective to make sense of special biographies; what is also of relevance in understanding the special biographies of seven respondents is the abovementioned traditional Chinese ideology of the family. These seven 'special' respondents – four immobile and three upwardly mobile – are all advantaged sons in their families: their parents practised such ideology, in that they provided them with preferential parental treatment enhancing their education and career at the expense of that of their sisters. It was true that the parents of these seven 'special' respondents were not so different from the parents of the other 'special' respondents, in that they all had high hope of 'special' respondents and saw the success of the respondents as their family pride. But what differentiated them from the parents of the other 'special' respondents was that they attached a very special symbolic meaning to their sons' economic and social success. That is, what they felt pleased about was not simply the fact that their children materialised their unfulfilled ambition but that their sons, rather than daughters, could bring glory to the entire family (constituted by all ancestors in the past and future successors) as well as the entire clan or lineage (cf. Baker 1979). In other words, family effects manifested in ambitious parents having high hope of their children may not be culture-specific but family effects manifested in parents practising the ideology certainly are. Although one could say that the ideology is not so different from many other patriarchal ideologies, its meaning and operation could well be seen as culturally specific to the Chinese. It was true that the ideology was not exclusively practised by any class, even in ancient China; but, not every class could afford to practise it in the same way. With such recognition, four immobile 'special' respondents still

took the fact that their parents practised it as proof that their parents were cultivated, educated, or simply classy; and so, these respondents viewed their upbringing as not merely special but superior, as Mr. Lung proudly expressed.

'My father was a school principal. ... (A)ll my sisters stayed at home! You have to know, we are a family of intellectuals: all my ancestors are intellectuals and so am I. My father is a well-read traditional Chinese scholar. ... As a cultivated intellectual, my father nurtured me in the right way; he was a very strict and demanding father. ... But that is exactly how a good parent should be. ... He taught me to become a respectable and knowledgeable person. ... I think, whether a person could become a success boils down to his upbringing. ... It is a matter of family teaching. How could a person be a failure if he comes from such a respectful family as mine? I am living proof for that.' (Mr. Lung, immobile)

**3.12** Two points are noted from Mr Lung's class pride: his pride in being brought up in an intellectual family. First, there was a gender difference in such class pride, in that daughters brought up in the same family did not receive the same kind of social recognition in the public sector but would only have more bargaining power in the marriage market. While Mr. Lung as advantaged son expressed pride in having parents practising the ideology, I was not sure if disadvantaged daughters of the same class origin would share such pride.<sup>[7]</sup> In fact, some disadvantaged daughters structured their mobility experiences in 'emotional' biographies, as will be discussed below.<sup>[8]</sup> Second, such class pride was in line with a common understanding that the ideology was usually related to the upper class – the class of scholars – in ancient China. Knowing this, three upwardly mobile 'special' respondents prided their parents on the fact that they were exceptionally ambitious imitating such an admirable practice, albeit sexist, commonly found for the upper class. In other words, the three 'special' respondents also saw the upper class as superior and attached pride to it, although they had not got there yet. As an example, Mr. Doo described in detail how his father, a lighter-repairer, despite having a meagre income, still insisted on sending him and his two brothers to study in two secondary schools; instead of commenting on his father being sexist for not doing the same for the education of his three sisters, Mr. Doo proudly praised his father for being so ambitious in doing his best to enable him and his brothers to climb up the social ladder. Six advantaged son 'special' respondents recognised that they received preferential parental treatment; but basically they took such sexist practices for granted and did not comment on that. Mr. Law was the only advantaged son who expressed sympathy to his elder sister feeling grateful for her sacrifices. Given the small number of such cases in my study, I am not in a position to comment on how the ideology impacts on the relationships between advantaged brothers and disadvantaged sisters; but this line of inquiry definitely deserves more of our attention.

**3.13** We could say that special biographies highlight family effects on mobility experiences revealing more of how respondents shouldered with high parental expectations, albeit in different forms, evaluate a class system and how they feel about different class positions. Class feelings are noticeable in special biographies; feeling special about themselves, what twenty-six 'special' respondents seek to convey through a sense of specialness is essentially a sense of class pride: their pride in being in the middle class. Yet, differences are noted between seven advantaged son 'special' respondents and the remaining 'special' respondents in the basis of such pride. The former prided themselves on receiving a special and thus superior upbringing: the pride of the four immobile respondents was based on their perception that their parents were 'genuinely' cultured so that they could pass on directly to them an authentic superior outlook and life-style specific to their privileged origin, whereas the pride of the three upwardly mobile respondents was derived from their perception that their parents were exceptionally ambitious bringing them up in a way so atypical to their humble class origin. In contrast, instead of focusing on their upbringing, the other 'special' respondents prided themselves on having very special personal qualities so that they could fulfil their parents' high expectations of them. Regardless, in their narratives, none of twenty-six 'special' respondents challenged the injustice of class or the class hierarchy. In addition, the seven advantaged son 'special' respondents also did not challenge the injustice of gender or the gender hierarchy.

### ***Emotional Biography***

**3.14** In addition to bringing positive emotions to some family members, family effects could also bring negative emotions to others. This brings me to emotional biographies; they are characterised by negative emotions caused by the family. There are eight 'emotional' respondents, as shown in Table 1. Their parents all were selective in treating children of different birth orders and genders and children borne by different wives,<sup>[9]</sup> although there were only six cases where parents practised the ideology. In stark contrast to 'special' respondents who were all seen as special children and thus advantaged in their families, 'emotional' respondents were all disadvantaged children: their parents enabled their siblings to get ahead at their expenses. Given their parents' partiality, 'emotional' respondents expressed a strong sense of unfairness about selective parental treatment. As in the case of Mr. Choi, his father, at the time was a factory worker, asked him, the eldest child, to quit school and to work in a factory at the age of twelve out of economic necessity. After his father saved enough to set up his own factory, he asked Mr. Choi to quit his first job and to work for him as a manager. The business of Mr. Choi's father expanded with time; at a later stage, Mr. Choi's two younger brothers also joined the family business. To make a long story short, Mr. Choi's feeling that his father was partial to his younger brothers had been growing with time, which led him to have big rows with his father; and finally his father fired him. After working for his father over twenty years, Mr. Choi, without a formal qualification, did not have much work experience elsewhere; and therefore, he failed to secure a decent paid job but became self-employed running a series of small businesses, one after another. Yet, given the insecurity of running a small business, Mr. Choi had ended up closing down his business in each case and became a bus driver when I interviewed him.<sup>[10]</sup> Mr. Choi suffered not only in economic terms but also in emotional terms: he felt bitter about being used as if he were a piece of chess in his father's plan.



'I think I was naive to follow my father's plan. In fact I was like a piece of chess in his plan: he asked me to quit my first job and learn the trade of running a plastic factory. He just used me to his benefits. After working for him over twenty years, I have got nothing.' (Mr. Choi, upwardly mobile)

**3.15** It was true that Mr. Choi was bitter about making sacrifices for the sake of his father's career advancement or the economic interest of the entire family. Yet, he understood that he was selected to make sacrifices at the time when his siblings were still small mainly because of tight family finances. Similarly, Mrs. Tang also recognised that economic necessity was part of the reason why her mother asked her to quit school and start working in a factory: her parents needed her immediate financial contributions to support her eldest brother in education. In brief, it was true that four upwardly mobile 'emotional' respondents were frustrated with being blocked by their parents. But, given that economic necessity played a part in their parents' discriminating decision, they somehow believed that their parents were forced to make such a difficult decision and their parents might have done differently if their finances had not been so tight. So, when compared with four immobile 'emotional' respondents, as will be discussed below, four upwardly mobile 'emotional' respondents could be seen as not so angry at their parents. In a sense, we could say that ascribed-status based parental discrimination was overshadowed by class effects: the fact that their parents were in the poor working class did not lead them to express a sense of class inferiority and their parents' discriminating decision also did not make them feel lesser or inferior; rather, this very fact somehow made their parents' discrimination acceptable to these 'emotional' respondents. By contrast, given that economic necessity was of irrelevance in their parents' decisions, four immobile 'emotional' respondents were not simply frustrated but very angry. Their rage, together with a sense of bitterness, was very strongly conveyed in their narratives, as in the case of Mr. Luk.

'My family was quite well-off but my parents are not well-educated. We daughters have no status... There would be no problems to let the sons complete a university education. But daughters had to work right after secondary form five. ... (My father) is very traditional. ... (Y)ou can see he forced my second eldest brother to complete secondary form five even though he didn't like studying. I think if he had been willing to study, my father would have sent him abroad. .... They wouldn't have any expectations of the daughters. But they had straight demands that my two youngest brothers had to become doctors. ... I don't think they cared about their daughters. They felt that they had treated me very well already because they let me complete secondary form five.' (Mrs. Luk, immobile)

**3.16** In stark contrast to the seven advantaged son 'special' respondents mentioned above, the six disadvantaged daughter child 'emotional' respondents here did not consider their parents' subscription to the traditional Chinese ideology of the family as a sign that their parents were educated or cultivated. On the contrary, they saw their parents' sexist practice as a sign that they were backward or uneducated. Needless to mention, they did not see having such parents as a pride. The subtext underlying such responses was this: while their parents occupied an advantaged economic or social position, morally speaking they were not qualified to take it. 'Emotional' respondents were very angry and bitter about the fact that their parents deliberately deprived them vis-à-vis their siblings simply because of their ascribed status: an eldest child, a daughter, or a child borne by a second wife. Particularly, it was inconceivable for four immobile 'emotional' respondents that their parents treated them much more poorly than their siblings for such a reason alone. In this way, the impact of ascribed-status based parental discrimination on their self-esteem was magnified by class effects: the fact that their parents were in a well-off advantaged class did not bring the immobile respondents a sense of class pride or superiority; rather, this very fact brought them an inferiority complex vis-à-vis their siblings: the respondents questioned why they were doomed to be inferior in their parents' eyes simply because they were daughters or children borne by their father's second wife. Because of such complex, these respondents somehow developed some sort of love-hate relationships with their parents. And, their rage and bitterness would spill out, albeit uncontrollably, from time to time. As in the case of Mrs. Luk, despite her father's selective treatment, she took care of her parents in their old age; in fact, she and her husband and daughter visited her parents every weekend. However, it did not mean that Mrs. Luk then forgot being treated unfairly or forgave her father. While a sense of anger and bitterness lingers in her narrative, she has been having contradictory feelings towards her parents.

'My father had expected my brothers to succeed. As he wished, my two youngest brothers become doctors. ... But so what? They don't have time for my parents. ... At the end of the day, contrary to their expectation, it is me, her daughter, who takes care of them in their old age. ... Why did my parents treat me like that? ... I am their daughter but I am also their child. ... Well, he treated me badly. But now, I show how wrong he was in treating me that way. ... I have already shown that a daughter could be as good as, if not better than, a son.' (Mrs. Luk, immobile)

**3.17** What emotional biographies captured were class injuries mediated through the family. These emotional narratives illustrate how class feelings could be experienced through gender, birth order, or the status of one's biological mother (cf. Sayer 2002). Overwhelmed by injuries caused by the family, none of eight 'emotional' respondents challenged class inequality and injustice; instead, class inequality and injustice was overshadowed by inequality and unfairness within the family. One aspect of the injustice of class is that an arbitrary or simply wrong linkage between class and self-worth could lead to class injuries. By the same token, we could put forward that an arbitrary linkage between parental love and self-worth could also lead to family injuries. Perhaps one could argue that class injuries after all are not so damaging for they could probably be compensated for by upward mobility. But, as illustrated above, it is not necessarily the case. Nevertheless, even if it were the case, we could still argue that injuries caused by the family were much more damaging for they would lead to life-long emotional damages which were unlikely to be repaired.

## Concluding Remarks

**4.1** This paper sought to address the issue of moral sentiments of class by looking into the case of the socially mobile against the context of a changing class structure. More specifically, the analysis focussed on the cognitive structure of mobility accounts of eighty-nine respondents who got into a newly emerging middle class from different class origins. In examining the cognitive structure of their mobility accounts, I devise a typology of four biographies: normal, choice, special, and emotional biographies. While normal and choice biographies capture class effects, in very broad sense, on mobility experiences, special and emotional biographies highlight family effects. What should be noted is that even if family effects manifested in parents' expectations of their children could be seen as universal which could be of relevance to studies of a similar kind in other places at other times, family effects manifested in parents' practising a particular ideology should be viewed as context- and/or time-specific. But, what we could make generalisation is this: whatever family ideology is practised, what is of relevance to an analysis of moral sentiment of class is how class feelings are experienced by children advantaged by the family ideology vis-à-vis their disadvantaged counterparts.

**4.2** So, what can we learn from this small-scale qualitative study about a specific period of Hong Kong? Three points are tentatively concluded. First, in order to capture the subjective dimension of class identity, class feelings could serve as more accurate class markers than self-reported class identity, especially when the class structure is still in the making. Whereas respondents may not use the same terminology as sociologists in naming positions within a given class system, respondents would unmistakably express feelings towards different positions within the class system. Whereas respondents could easily conceal their genuine evaluations of a class system by giving politically correct comments, so to speak, on different class positions, it is not so straightforward for them to do the same if their feelings are analysed. In a way, where understanding the genuine evaluations of individuals on the system of social inequality is concerned, a line of inquiry along class feelings seems rather promising. Second, given their mobility into a privileged middle class, albeit emerging, and their belief that their mobility is based on ability and effort, eighty-nine respondents basically see class inequality as justified; this is consistent with a distorted class sentiment suggested by Sayer (2002) that legitimises rather than contests the existing system of class inequality, thus leaving the issues of the injustice or arbitrariness of class unchallenged. But, the operation of this distorted class sentiment is not that straightforward; four biographies provide us with different mechanisms. Normal biographies take mobility for granted in that they are no different from turning a blind eye to class injustice; emotional biographies are too overwhelmed by unfairness within the family to acknowledge class inequality and injustice; and, choice or special biographies focus so much on mobility rather than the system itself that they serve to strengthen such a distorted sentiment of class inequality. Third, upward mobility – an improvement of social or class position – is not necessarily a treatment of previous class injuries; neither does it render class feelings irrelevant. Rather, as special biographies show, upward mobility itself could be accompanied by certain moral sentiments distorted by class, which would in turn complicate further the already complex class feelings. On the one hand, such distorted sentiments resulted from upward mobility obscure, if not further, the arbitrariness or injustice of class. On the other hand, such distorted sentiments could lead to contradictory class feelings that are self-defeating and thus could be seen as new class injuries in disguise. Whereas many sociologists have argued that social mobility does not necessarily redress class inequality, some supporters of meritocracy put forward that a system of class inequality, and more generally social inequality, is justified as long as social mobility is allowed and is merit-based. In sum, given the distorted sentiments and class injuries, meaning that the influence of class is not only confined to the domains of economics and politics but to the domains of moral worth and emotion, and that the life-long impacts of moral and emotional aspects of class on individuals could be even more critical and significant, albeit hidden, I argue that a class society, however socially mobile or fluid it is, even if it were to be justified in economic terms, could not be justified in moral terms. It is true that a typology of four biographies and the illustrations here are based on a context-bound qualitative study. Further works are surely required to show the generality of the typology and such illustrations. But, my point here is clear. Agreeing with Sayer's (2002) remark: 'Class has been a relatively neglected and unfashionable topic of late, but its salience and influence remain, and recent work on the subjective experience of class brings home its moral significance,' I believe that class feelings and its moral sentiments constitute a non-ignorable aspect in the study of class, and that the significance of this aspect would not fade away with an increasing level of social fluidity.

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## Notes

<sup>1</sup>This study was funded in the form of J.K. Swire Memorial Scholarship 1995-1998.

<sup>2</sup>The criterion of having at least one child aged six or above is irrelevant to this paper.

<sup>3</sup>Spouses of nine respondents declined to be interviewed.

<sup>4</sup>For the sake of convenience, I shall refer to respondents by adding a noun adjective with quotation marks before them so as to indicate the type of biography that they offer. For example, 'normal' respondents refer to respondents offering a normal biography.

<sup>5</sup>All names are fictitious in this paper.

<sup>6</sup>As mobility odds would tell us that the chances are very slim for people coming from a humble origin and quitting school at an early age to get into the middle class via employment. Consistent with this, many 'choice' respondents got into the middle class and thus became upwardly mobile via marriage. I am not saying that these respondents are conscious of using marriage as a mobility strategy. The point is that these 'choice' respondents are well aware that but for their marriage, their mobility would not have been

possible.

<sup>7</sup>For more on the subordinate position of Chinese women, as well as the rhetoric prescribing their subordination, see Croll (1995) and the references cited there, particularly in its introduction.

<sup>8</sup>In fact, thirty-four of my respondents reported that their parents treated them differently vis-à-vis their siblings; and, nineteen highlighted that such discriminating parental treatment was based on children's genders (cf. Wong 2007b). Seven of the nineteen respondents structured their mobility experiences in special biographies and they were all advantaged sons. However, just as some advantaged son did not structure their mobility experiences in special biographies, so not every disadvantaged daughter organized hers in an emotional biography; some of the respondents whose parents treated sons and daughters differently just took their parents' sexist practices for granted and structured their accounts in a normal biography.

<sup>9</sup>Polygamous marriage was legal before 1971 in Hong Kong. The fathers of eleven respondents of this study had more than one wife at the same time. According to the traditional Chinese ideology of the family, the children borne by the first wife of a man enjoy a higher status and usually receive more parental resources.

<sup>10</sup>Mr. Choi was recruited to this study because he was a spouse of a teacher. In fact, Mr. Choi's mobility experience was rather complicated, as I discussed elsewhere (Wong 2001). In brief, coming from a humble origin and taking up a manual first job, then moving upwards into the middle class, despite suffering from downward career mobility at a later stage out of the middle class (a manager running his father's factories), Mr. Choi remained in the middle class via marriage.

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