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**HONG KONG'S POST-80S GENERATION:**  
**PROFILES AND PREDICAMENTS**

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# Hong Kong's Post-80s Generation: Profiles and Predicaments<sup>†</sup>

A CPU Commissioned Report

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# Hong Kong's Post-80s Generation: Profiles and Predicaments

## Executive Summary (English)

Based on a series of census/by-census data from 1981 to 2006 and the data from a household survey conducted in 2007, this report documents the demographic profiles and the socioeconomic predicaments of the post-80s generation in Hong Kong in the context of rapid social changes, in particular, the economic restructuring and educational expansions that took place in the 1990s. The report also analyzes young people's subjective evaluation of their socioeconomic status, perceptions of inequality, social identity and political orientation.

### **The major findings are summarized as below:**

- The young post-80s generation is the major beneficiary of the higher education expansion in the 1990s, and they have enjoyed more educational opportunities than those in the same age group in earlier years.
- Improved education does not necessarily lead to more employment opportunities. Unemployment rates have been increasing in the past decade for young people, particularly for the post-80s generation, even among those with tertiary education.
- Among those who are employed, the highly educated ones have a much less chance of obtaining a managerial or professional job than before, although they are still more likely to find such a job than those who do not have higher education. They are increasingly driven to associate professional and clerical jobs, and to some extent, sales and service jobs.
- The earnings of young people relative to the general working population have been declining over time, although they seem to be able to catch up later. The post-80s may also be able to do so.
- No evidence suggests any decline in either intergenerational or intra-generational mobility for the post-80s, although their transitions from school to work have become more precarious and unstable than before.
- Because of the uncertainties associated with bumpy transitions from school to work, more young people are delaying marriage and living with their parents even after marrying.
- In terms of subjective stratification, young people are less likely to identify themselves as being in the higher social strata than older people, but their level of job and life satisfaction do not differ from other groups.

- The post-80s generation seems to be a heterogeneous group. No evidence suggests that the post-80s generation has developed distinctive values and political orientations as a group.

**Main points in the report:**

- The problems that the post-80s generation faces are not unique to Hong Kong, but are rather associated with the stage of economic development. The growth in the number of managerial and professional jobs in the service sector cannot keep pace with dramatic expansions in the higher education sector.
- Higher unemployment rates, lower starting salaries, and insecure jobs have put many young people in disadvantaged positions, protracting the transition from school to work and from childhood to adulthood. The key issue for Hong Kong's youth nowadays can be seen as the increasingly bumpy transition from school to work, rather than the lack of upward mobility.
- Recent protests of a group of young social/political activists labelled as “the post-80s” are not a direct response to the young generations' worse-off socioeconomic situations, but their radical behaviour should be seen as a warning sign for policy makers who should seriously address their concerns and needs.
- While the social trend is hardly reversible, government policies to a large extent can help to smooth the transitions from school to work and facilitate young people's subsequent career development. Policies are called for in labour markets, education, and in the relevant institutional processes/mechanisms to link the two. More resources and programs are needed to promote the inclusion of youths as stakeholders in the society to avoid marginalization and other negative consequences.

# 香港之“八十後”世代：其形貌及境況

## 報告中文摘要

根據 1981 至 2006 年的人口普查/中期人口普查和 2007 年住戶抽樣調查的數據，本研究報告描述了香港「80 後」青年人在急劇的社會變化過程中，特別是 90 年代的經濟轉型和教育擴張下的群體特征和個人的發展狀況。同時，報告也分析了他們對其社經地位、不平等、身份和政治方向的主觀評價。

結果摘要如下：

- 「80 後」青年人是 90 年代高等教育擴張的主要受益人。比起以前的同齡人，他們享有更多的教育機會。
- 教育水平的提高不一定意味著有更多的就業機會。青年人的失業率隨著時間而增長，包括大專程度的人。「80 後」的情況變得尤其嚴重。
- 在就業市場中，雖然那些受過高等教育的「80 後」比沒有受過高等教育的更容易找到工作，但是能擔任管理/專業工作的機會卻比以前的人少很多，越來越多的人都集中在輔助專業和文職，甚至銷售或服務性的工作。
- 相對總體勞動人口，青年人的收入隨著時間不斷下降，儘管他們日後有可能會趕上。「80 後」可能也會如此。
- 沒有證據顯示「80 後」的代內和代際間的流動性減少，但從學校到工作的過渡卻比以前的人不穩定，時間更長。
- 與學校到工作的不穩定過渡相關的不明朗因素，導致越來越多青年人推遲結婚，甚至婚後仍與父母同住。
- 從主觀社會分層的評價，雖然相對年紀大些的人，青年人多不傾向認為自己處於較高的社會階層，但他們對自己的工作和生活的滿意度與其他組群沒有差別。
- 「80 後」青年人的內部差異性很大。沒有證據顯示「80 後」已發展為具有獨特價值觀和政治取向的組群。

報告主要觀點如下：

- 「80 後」面臨的問題並非香港獨有的，而是與經濟發展的過程有關。管理和專業職位的供應跟不上迅速擴大的高等教育。
- 高失業率、低起薪，和不穩定的工作令到很多青年人處於不利的位置，從而拖長了學校到工作，或童年到成年的過渡時期。現今香港青年人的關鍵問題是學校到工作的過渡太不穩定，而不是缺乏向上的社會流動性。
- 最近被社會和政治人士稱為「80 後」的抗議事件，這種激進行為並不是直接針對年輕一代面臨的社會經濟困境，不過，政策制定者應該正視他們的關注和需要。
- 雖然社會趨勢是難以逆轉的，但是政府的政策在很大程度上可以幫助「80 後」順利從學校過渡到工作，以及促進青年人日後的職業發展。因此，需要一個全面綜合的政策，使到勞動力市場、教育和其他機制能互相配合。投放更多的資源和方案去吸納青年人作為社會的其中一個持份者，以避免他們的邊緣化和其他負面的後果。

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# Hong Kong's Post-80s Generation: Profiles and Predicaments

## I. Introduction

“Post-80s” has become a popular phrase in Hong Kong during the past few months. A group of young protesters, labelled as the “post-80s” by the press, has dominated local media coverage because of their recent participation in various social movements.

Journalists, political commentators, government officials and scholars have all expressed their opinions about this young generation in newspaper columns and through public speeches. Some argue that the active involvement of disgruntled youths, born in or after 1980 and aged between 20 to 30 years old, can be linked to the lack of opportunity for upward social mobility compared to the older generations (e.g., 呂大樂 2007). Unlike in the old days, having a tertiary degree no longer guarantees a good job and a middle-class life style. Others believe that the young generation, growing up in a relatively better-off environment, holds different values and unrealistically high expectations of material conditions, and therefore their striking behaviours in public are simply expressions of their existence and identity.

Despite many heated discussions on the blocked social mobility and the distinctive feature of the post-80s generation in Hong Kong, not a single empirical research, as far as we know, has provided population-based evidence in regard to the issue concerned. Based on the data from the censuses and by-censuses from 1981 to 2006 and from a territory-wide household survey we conducted in 2007, this report aims to document the demographic profiles and the economic predicaments of the post-80s generation in Hong Kong in the context of rapid social changes, in particular, the

economic restructuring and educational expansions that took place in the 1990s. The report also analyzes young people's subjective evaluation of their socioeconomic status, perceptions of inequality, social identity and political orientation, and finally discusses the policy implications of these findings.

In this study, we define the post-80s generation as those who were born in or after 1980, in other words, those who are roughly under 30 years of age in 2010. By “generation”, often termed as “cohort” by sociologists and demographers, we refer to a group of individuals who have shared a particular experience during a particular time span.

Research on the peculiarities of the post-80s generation or cohort, which is the focus of this report, is impossible without making comparisons to other birth cohorts. Scholars in sociology and demography often employ cohort analysis to study social changes – the cohort variations in certain outcomes are interpreted as reflecting the macro-level structural changes (Ryder 1965). The identified problems faced by a particular cohort thus call for social policy interventions, as implied by the discussion on the post-80s generation in Hong Kong nowadays.

However, cohort effects are often intertwined with age effects, as they are linearly related<sup>1</sup> (Yang 2008). With the cross-sectional data in a particular year, we should be very cautious to use cohort variations (people of different age groups) to infer periodic changes. It is commonly accepted that younger people tend to have lower occupational status and income than older people, largely because they have not had sufficient time to develop their career and to get promoted. It is unclear whether the problems faced by the

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<sup>1</sup> Cohort=Period-Age.

current post-80s generation in Hong Kong are unique to them or universal to all youths in their 20s at different historical periods.

Finally, the cohort itself may have changed over time. In other words, people of different ages may possess different demographic characteristics as a result of social change. A typical example is education: the younger generation tend to receive more education than the older generations. Therefore, a simple comparison of the labour market conditions among different birth cohorts may provide little clue to understanding the causal mechanism of the problems faced by a particular cohort, in this case, Hong Kong's post-80s generation. Multivariate analyses with statistical controls are thus needed.

The report contains seven parts. Following the introduction, we briefly describe the socioeconomic changes and their impact on youth life in today's societies in general, and in the Hong Kong society in particular. We then introduce the data and methods used in our analyses, followed by empirical results which are divided into three subsections. Finally, we summarize the findings and discuss their policy implications.

## **II. Youth and Social Change in Hong Kong**

Adolescence is a life stage critical to every individual's development, during which one receives and completes education, enters the labour force and starts a career, gets married and has children. In a traditional society, such transitions from childhood to adulthood tend to be short, smooth and straightforward, following a linear and predicible trajectory. In modern societies, such transitions have been increasingly protracted, and have seemingly become more complex. These changes over the past decades are a direct result

of the economic transformation and re-structuring of labour markets, of increases in demand for educated workers, of flexible employment practices and of social policies that have extended the period that young people are dependent on their parents and families (Furlong and Cartmel 1997). As a consequence of these changes, young people nowadays are facing enormous pressure and increasing uncertainties which their parents' generation have not been experienced.

These trends seem to be universal in developed societies, where economies are mature without much new growth in opportunities. Youth issues are neither unique to Hong Kong nor new to this era. Throughout the European Union, rates of unemployment among young people tend to be higher than among the general population. In 1996 the rate of youth unemployment in the EU was around 20 percent, more than twice of that of adults (9%), and was especially high among members of ethnic minorities.

As long-term unemployment is often associated with other negative psychological and social consequences (e.g., drug abuse, family violence, adolescent crime, and teenage pregnancy), governments in many countries have poured resources and designed programs to promote youth social inclusions (Furlong and Cartmel 1997). Even in China where economic growth has been dramatic in the past three decades, unemployment for young people, including many college graduates who have benefited from the higher education expansion since the late 1990s, has become one of the greatest challenges to the government and the public at large.

The young generation is represented by individuals with a high level of education and high expectations for career and life, but who are facing unmatched opportunities. Education is thus a key revolving mechanism in shaping their transitions from school to

work, their career mobility and their subjective well-being. Indeed, educational expansion, especially for the tertiary level, is coupled with the transformation to a service economy in western countries in the 1970s and in Hong Kong in the 1990s. Educational qualifications have become more important than before in obtaining a job in a service economy. On the one hand, we see those who experienced frustration in formal education and public examinations feel particularly helpless and depressed; early school leavers were the first to be squeezed out the competitive labour markets and risked falling into long-term unemployment. On the other hand, the transition from elite to mass higher education suggests that those who have successfully entered into tertiary institutions face fierce competitions and high differentials once they are in.

Education, especially higher education, may also infuse young people with new values and ideas that might be different from the traditional ones held by adults. The young generation has always been an important force that prompts social changes. Views on individualism, human rights and democracy, social justice and environmental protection are just a few held by the younger and more educated generations that might differ from those of the older generations.

Such social changes have been observed in Hong Kong as well. Hong Kong's economy has been gradually transformed from being a manufacturing base in the 1970s and 1980s to a regional hub of business services in the 1990s, accompanied by employment declines in the secondary (industrial) sector and growths in the tertiary (service) sector. The service sector absorbs the majority of the labour force. Meanwhile, the tertiary education was expanded rapidly as part of the government's efforts to develop Hong Kong into a knowledge-based economy. The enrolments in higher education have

tripled since 1989, albeit still at a very low level compared with other developed economies.

**Figure 1. Structural Transformation and Higher Education Expansion in Hong Kong, 1986-2007**

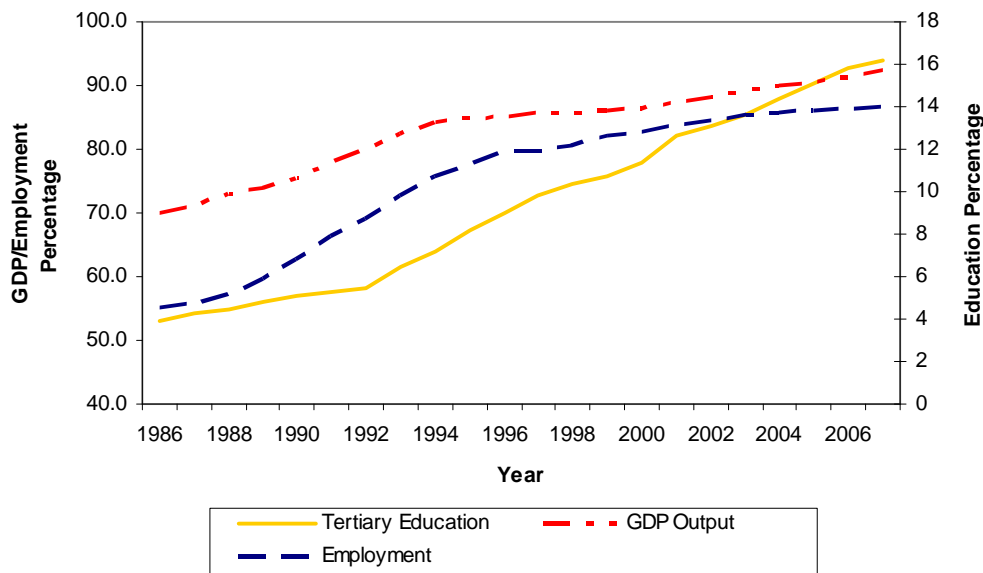


Figure 1 presents the changes in GDP and employment share in the tertiary sector in Hong Kong from 1986 to 2007 (left axis) and the percentage of population aged 15 or above who received higher education (right axis). In the context of rising income inequality and increasing rich-poor gaps, most attention is paid to children, the elderly, immigrants and unskilled workers, whereas college graduates are often perceived as the group with human capital and thus beneficiaries of such structural transformation. In fact, Hong Kong youths, just like their counterparts in other developed economies, seem to encounter similar challenges these days, and the problems might be particularly severe for them, as the Hong Kong government, unlike those in European welfare states, has no systematic youth policies to assist them in coping with the challenges.

### III. Data, Variables and Methods

To document the profiles and predicaments of the post-80s generation, we analyze the micro-data from a series of censuses and by-censuses data of Hong Kong from 1981 to 2006 and a household survey conducted in 2007. The censuses and by-censuses contain comparable information on respondents' educational attainment, labour force participation, occupation, monthly earnings, as well as other demographic characteristics. Except for the 1981 and 1986 data, which contain one-percent samples, all other sample data used here are five-percent samples of the population in the respective years.

The repeated cross-sectional data would enable us to disentangle the cohort/period effect from the age effect. For example, if we restrict the analyses to the sample age from 18 to 47 years old in 2006 (namely, those born between 1959-1988), as laid out in Table 1, conventional methods in cohort analysis would mainly compare different age groups (in columns), whereas inter-censual analyses can compare groups both across rows and across diagonal cells. The row comparisons indicate how individuals of a particular birth cohort change over time as they get older, whereas the diagonal comparisons suggest how individuals at the same age/life stage fare in different years. It should be noted that those aged between 18 and 27 in 2006 (in bold fonts) cover the majority of the post-80s generation currently concerned.

We employ such an analytical strategy to document the demographic profiles and identify both the common problems faced by all youths in different years and the unique problems faced by the current post-80s generation. The profile characteristics we attempt to look at include education (percent of people with tertiary education), status of employment, occupation (percentage of managers, professionals and associate

professionals), earnings, marriage rates and the percentage living with parents. The last two are the typical indicators measuring the transition from youth to adulthood.

**Table 1, Age, Period and Cohort Effects**

| Birth year       | 1981      | 1986      | 1991      | 1996      | 2001             | 2006             |
|------------------|-----------|-----------|-----------|-----------|------------------|------------------|
| 1959-1963        | Age 18-22 | Age 23-27 | Age 28-32 | Age 33-37 | Age 38-42        | Age 43-47        |
| 1964-1968        |           | Age 18-22 | Age 23-27 | Age 28-32 | Age 33-37        | Age 38-42        |
| 1969-1973        |           |           | Age 18-22 | Age 23-27 | Age 28-32        | Age 33-37        |
| 1974-1978        |           |           |           | Age 18-22 | Age 23-27        | Age 28-32        |
| <b>1979-1983</b> |           |           |           |           | <b>Age 18-22</b> | <b>Age 23-27</b> |
| <b>1984-1988</b> |           |           |           |           |                  | <b>Age 18-22</b> |

The census/by-census data do not contain information on an individual’s family background or job mobility history, or subjective wellbeing, which are important to understanding the socioeconomic conditions of the young generation. Towards this end, we analyze the data from the survey on “Social Inequality and Mobility in Hong Kong,” conducted in 2007. The large-scale citywide representative probability survey adopted a two-stage stratified replicated sampling design: in the first stage, a random sample of addresses (or all households in the addresses sampled) was selected, with the type of housing and residential district as stratification factor; in the second stage, a person aged between 18 and 60 in the sampled households was randomly selected and interviewed using the last birthday method. As a result, 4013 interviewees born between 1946 and 1989 participated in the survey (for a technical report, see Wu [2008]).

The survey covers comprehensive information related to social stratification and mobility in Hong Kong and consisted of five parts: A) personal characteristics; B) work and career history; C) family background and family life; D) socioeconomic status and perception of inequality; and E) identity and political participation. Because of a

relatively large sample with detailed information, we are able to divide the respondents into different birth cohorts and compare the post-80s generation with other generations to gain a comprehensive understanding of the young people today in Hong Kong.

In the analysis of the survey data, we define four cohorts: 1946-1959, 1960-1969, 1970-1979, and 1980-1989, with the last cohort referring to the post-80s generation which is the focus of this report. We examine the cohort variations in educational attainment, occupational attainment and mobility, subjective evaluation of their socioeconomic status, perceptions of inequality and political orientation. Given the lack of longitudinal survey data in most countries, research in social stratification typically approximates temporal change with cohort variations (e.g., Shavit and Blossfeld 1993), although it might be confounded with the age effect, especially for young people. The inter-censal analysis can supplement the inter-cohort analysis and provide solid evidence on the socioeconomic condition and subjective well-being of the post-80s generation in Hong Kong.

Occupation is a key indicator of a person's socioeconomic status and is also a key variable in social stratification and mobility research. People receive education, find jobs and gain income for living and status as social recognition. We coded father's occupation when the respondent was at age 14 (family background), the first occupation, current occupation, and occupations in 2001 into six broad categories (manager/professional, associate professional, clerk, service worker, skilled worker, and unskilled worker).

Education is a key intermediate variable in the process of social mobility and status attainment. We group them into four levels: lower secondary or below, upper secondary, associate/sub-degree, degree or above).

Most of the following analyses will employ cross-tabulations of the four cohorts to demonstrate the temporal trend. We also employ binary logistic regression (on occupational attainment) and ordinal logistic regression models (on subjective evaluation) with multiple controls in the analyses. We highlight the role of educational expansion and economic transformation in shaping the structure of opportunities and well-being of Hong Kong youths in the past decades.

## **IV. A Demographic Portrait of the Post-80s Generation in Hong Kong**

### **4.1 Education**

Table 2 presents the percentage of people born between 1959 and 1988 who have received or were receiving tertiary education as of 2006. Because people normally complete high school and continue post-secondary education or enter the labour market at age 18, the oldest cohort born in 1959-1963 started such transitions in 1981. The post-80s generation has clearly benefited from the higher education expansion in the 1990s, and are now enjoying more educational opportunities than those of the same age in earlier years. As Figure 2 shows, only 7.46 percent of young people aged between 18 and 22 had tertiary education in 1981, while 39.75 percent of youths of the same age in 2006 enjoyed such opportunities. For those aged between 23 and 27 in 2006, only 13.32 percent in 1986 but 46.67 percent in 2006 had tertiary education. In general, as seen in the last column, younger people in 2006 tended to have more education than older

people,<sup>2</sup> but even older people have benefited from the school expansion (via continuing education), as suggested by the increasing percentages across columns in the table.

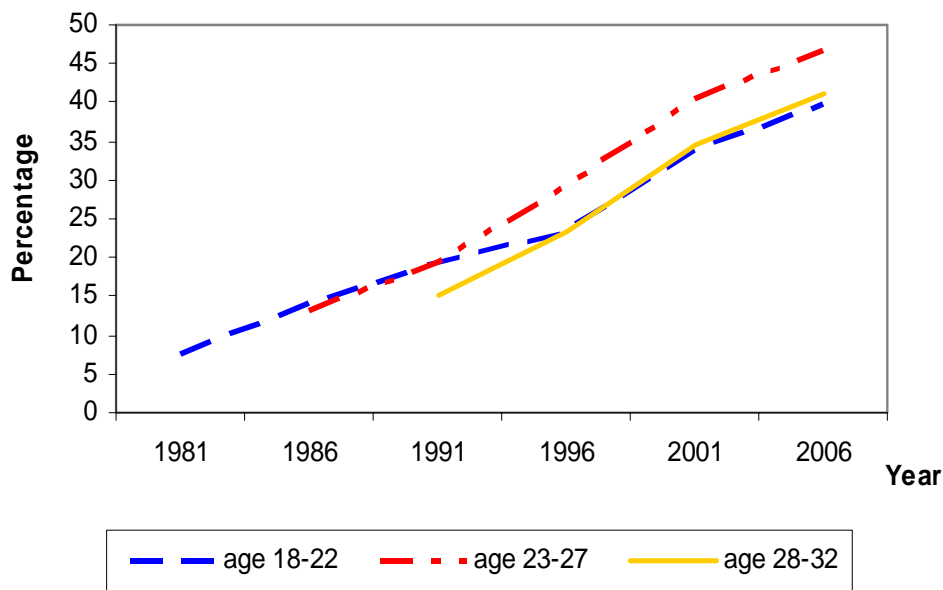
In the lower panel of the table, we present tertiary educational attainment separately for male and female. The temporal trends do not differ very much by gender, except for the fact that women's level of education has improved much faster than men's. By 2001 the gender gaps are reversed in favour of women for those born after 1979, i.e., the post-80s generation.

**Table 2. Percentage of Population with Tertiary Education in Hong Kong by Birth Cohort, 1981-2006**

| Birth year       | 1981 | 1986  | 1991  | 1996  | 2001         | 2006         |
|------------------|------|-------|-------|-------|--------------|--------------|
| 1959-1963        | 7.46 | 13.32 | 15.24 | 17.66 | 19.09        | 19.92        |
| 1964-1968        |      | 14.01 | 19.38 | 23.36 | 26.76        | 26.99        |
| 1969-1973        |      |       | 19.55 | 29.15 | 34.49        | 34.33        |
| 1974-1978        |      |       |       | 23.38 | 40.60        | 41.04        |
| <b>1979-1983</b> |      |       |       |       | <b>33.91</b> | <b>46.67</b> |
| <b>1984-1988</b> |      |       |       |       |              | <b>39.75</b> |
| <b>Male</b>      |      |       |       |       |              |              |
| 1959-1963        | 7.78 | 14.60 | 17.67 | 20.55 | 22.23        | 23.13        |
| 1964-1968        |      | 13.45 | 20.86 | 25.95 | 30.45        | 31.07        |
| 1969-1973        |      |       | 19.48 | 29.72 | 36.84        | 37.62        |
| 1974-1978        |      |       |       | 24.72 | 40.90        | 43.12        |
| <b>1979-1983</b> |      |       |       |       | <b>32.84</b> | <b>47.44</b> |
| <b>1984-1988</b> |      |       |       |       |              | <b>39.27</b> |
| <b>Female</b>    |      |       |       |       |              |              |
| 1959-1963        | 7.10 | 12.02 | 12.86 | 14.96 | 16.18        | 16.98        |
| 1964-1968        |      | 14.61 | 17.93 | 21.19 | 23.78        | 33.71        |
| 1969-1973        |      |       | 19.63 | 28.65 | 32.63        | 31.92        |
| 1974-1978        |      |       |       | 24.02 | 40.35        | 39.42        |
| <b>1979-1983</b> |      |       |       |       | <b>34.94</b> | <b>46.02</b> |
| <b>1984-1988</b> |      |       |       |       |              | <b>40.22</b> |

<sup>2</sup> Except for those aged between 18 and 22 years old, as some might still have been in high school.

**Figure 2. Tertiary Education Attainment by Age Groups in Hong Kong, 1981-2006**



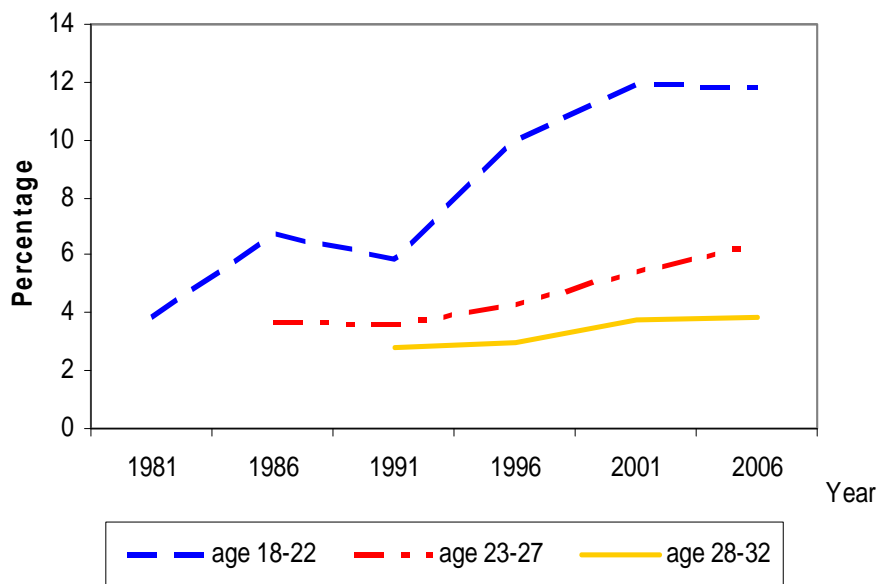
## 4.2 Employment

Improved education among young people did not necessarily lead to more employment opportunities, which are largely contingent upon macro-economic conditions and industrial structures. As Table 3 shows, the percent of unemployed youths (excluding students and other economically inactive people) increased sharply during the same period when tertiary education was expanded in the 1990s: only 3.87 percent of young people aged between 18 and 22 (born in 1959-1963) were unemployed in 1981; the rate increased to 10 percent in 1996 (for those born in 1974-1978) and further to 11.84 in 2006 (for those born in 1984-1988). This trend is plotted in Figure 3 and confirms the conventional observation that young people have more difficulty in the transition from school to work in the developed world, and men are even worse-off than women.

**Table 3. Percentage of Unemployed Youths in Hong Kong by Birth Cohort, 1981-2006**

| Birth year       | 1981 | 1986 | 1991 | 1996  | 2001         | 2006         |
|------------------|------|------|------|-------|--------------|--------------|
| 1959-1963        | 3.87 | 3.70 | 2.78 | 2.73  | 3.70         | 6.11         |
| 1964-1968        |      | 6.72 | 3.59 | 2.97  | 3.21         | 4.67         |
| 1969-1973        |      |      | 5.86 | 4.32  | 3.79         | 3.88         |
| 1974-1978        |      |      |      | 10.00 | 5.40         | 3.87         |
| <b>1979-1983</b> |      |      |      |       | <b>11.92</b> | <b>6.36</b>  |
| <b>1984-1988</b> |      |      |      |       |              | <b>11.84</b> |
| <b>Male</b>      |      |      |      |       |              |              |
| 1959-1963        | 4.36 | 3.61 | 2.57 | 3.39  | 4.51         | 5.85         |
| 1964-1968        |      | 6.49 | 3.68 | 3.65  | 4.35         | 5.04         |
| 1969-1973        |      |      | 6.57 | 5.29  | 5.30         | 5.22         |
| 1974-1978        |      |      |      | 11.38 | 7.03         | 5.14         |
| <b>1979-1983</b> |      |      |      |       | <b>15.39</b> | <b>8.43</b>  |
| <b>1984-1988</b> |      |      |      |       |              | <b>14.61</b> |
| <b>Female</b>    |      |      |      |       |              |              |
| 1959-1963        | 3.30 | 3.81 | 3.06 | 1.74  | 2.59         | 6.46         |
| 1964-1968        |      | 6.96 | 3.48 | 2.22  | 1.96         | 4.27         |
| 1969-1973        |      |      | 5.12 | 3.35  | 2.36         | 2.60         |
| 1974-1978        |      |      |      | 8.53  | 3.93         | 2.74         |
| <b>1979-1983</b> |      |      |      |       | <b>8.45</b>  | <b>4.58</b>  |
| <b>1984-1988</b> |      |      |      |       |              | <b>9.19</b>  |

**Figure 3. Unemployment Rate in Hong Kong by Age Groups, 1981-2006**



The good news is that, such a high unemployment rate seems to be transient and

declines over time as people get older. For those born in 1974-1978, 10 percent of them were unemployed in 1996 when they were 18-22 years old, but only 3.87 percent were unemployed in 2006 when they were 38-42 years old.

### **4.3 Occupation**

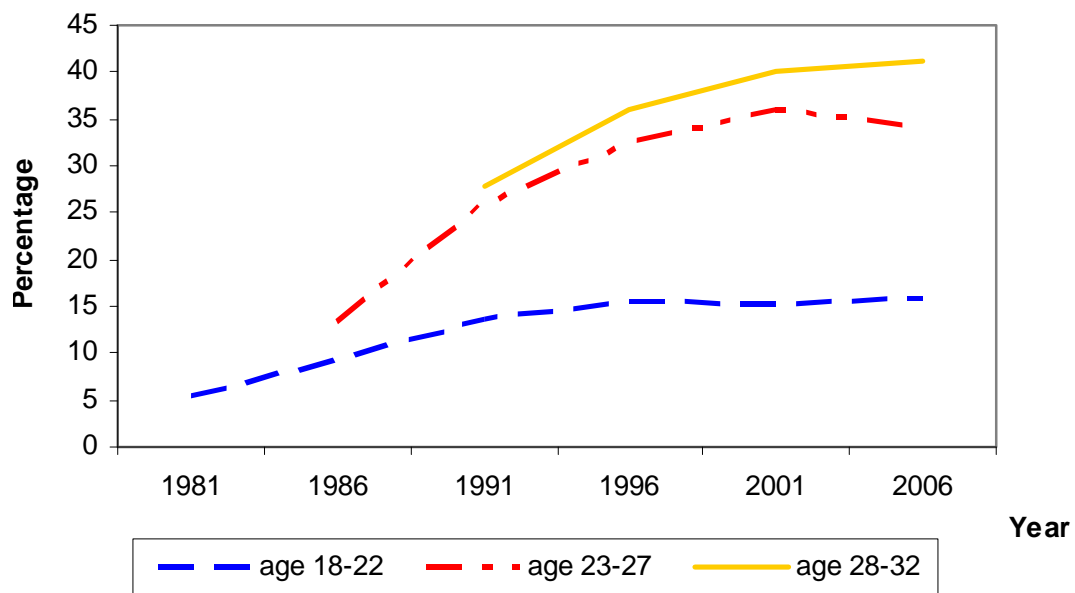
Among those who are employed, what kinds of occupation are they able to attain? Table 4 shows trends in attainment of managerial/professional and associate professional jobs by birth cohorts from 1981-2006. To maintain the consistency of occupational categories used in different census rounds, we aggregate managerial and professional/associate professional jobs which are generally considered as “good jobs.”

Results in the table above show that the percentage share of managers and professionals/associate professionals has increased over time for young people of age 18-22, who had just started to enter the labour force: from 5.34 percent in 1981 to 15.94 percent in 2006. This is in line with the occupational structure change in response to the trend previously presented in Figure 1. Nevertheless, such a dramatic increase took place mainly in the 1980s and early 1990s. From 1996 to 2006, the improvement has been very modest, as shown by the flat lines in Figure 4. This trend is in sharp contrast to the rapid increase in the number of college graduates in the 1990s and has important implications for social mobility. In other words, opportunities were and are still growing, but not at a pace comparable to the supply of college graduates. It is therefore increasingly difficult for young people to get a good job today than decades ago.

**Table 4. Percentage of Managers/Professionals /Associate Professionals in Hong Kong by Birth Cohort, 1981-2006**

| Birth year       | 1981 | 1986  | 1991  | 1996  | 2001         | 2006         |
|------------------|------|-------|-------|-------|--------------|--------------|
| 1959-1963        | 5.34 | 13.41 | 27.69 | 34.18 | 34.30        | 32.20        |
| 1964-1968        |      | 9.34  | 25.82 | 35.90 | 39.96        | 38.70        |
| 1969-1973        |      |       | 13.67 | 32.35 | 40.20        | 40.77        |
| 1974-1978        |      |       |       | 15.50 | 36.09        | 41.12        |
| <b>1979-1983</b> |      |       |       |       | <b>15.39</b> | <b>34.07</b> |
| <b>1984-1988</b> |      |       |       |       |              | <b>15.94</b> |
| <b>Male</b>      |      |       |       |       |              |              |
| 1959-1963        | 5.58 | 14.09 | 30.33 | 37.37 | 38.77        | 36.66        |
| 1964-1968        |      | 7.05  | 29.93 | 40.02 | 44.77        | 43.54        |
| 1969-1973        |      |       | 13.17 | 35.28 | 45.88        | 46.46        |
| 1974-1978        |      |       |       | 14.93 | 40.55        | 45.97        |
| <b>1979-1983</b> |      |       |       |       | <b>16.76</b> | <b>37.76</b> |
| <b>1984-1988</b> |      |       |       |       |              | <b>16.44</b> |
| <b>Female</b>    |      |       |       |       |              |              |
| 1959-1963        | 5.06 | 12.58 | 23.94 | 29.47 | 28.25        | 26.32        |
| 1964-1968        |      | 11.69 | 22.39 | 31.50 | 34.84        | 33.51        |
| 1969-1973        |      |       | 14.18 | 29.53 | 35.24        | 35.52        |
| 1974-1978        |      |       |       | 16.08 | 32.20        | 36.91        |
| <b>1979-1983</b> |      |       |       |       | <b>14.13</b> | <b>31.03</b> |
| <b>1984-1988</b> |      |       |       |       |              | <b>15.50</b> |

**Figure 4. Percentage of Managers/Professionals/Associate Professionals in Hong Kong by Age Groups, 1981-2006**



#### 4.4 Earnings

How much do young people earn from work relative to the general working population?

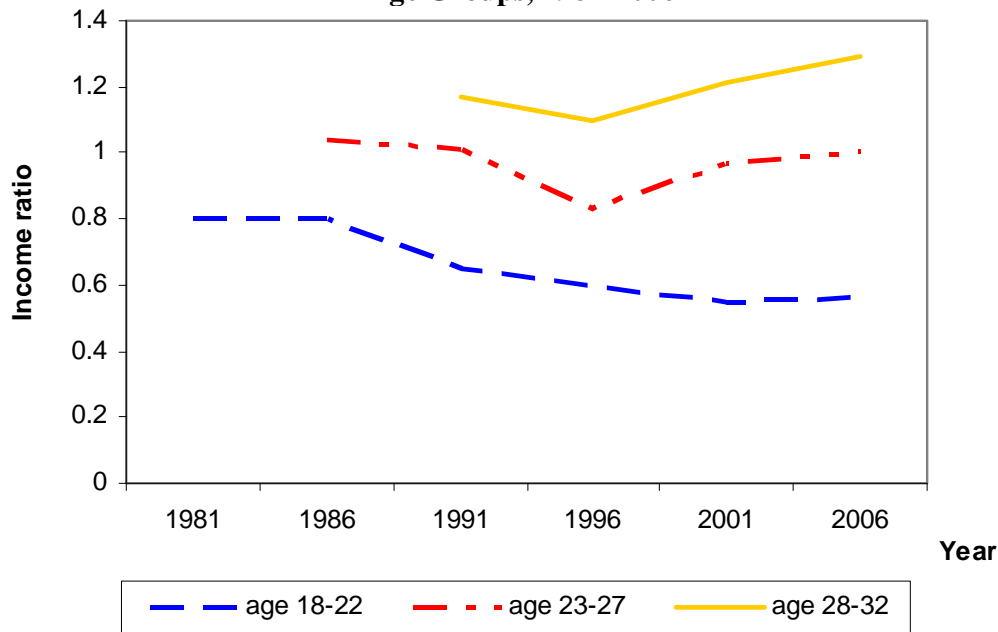
In Table 5 we calculate the ratio of the monthly median income for different birth cohorts to the general population, again, from 1981 to 2006.

Young people of age 18-22 earned 80 percent of Hong Kong's median salary in 1981, 60 percent in 1996 and only 56 percent in 2006. The trend is plotted in Figure 5 for the selected three age groups. The ratio in 2006 is close to the minimum wage or poverty line, defined as 50 percent of the median income, and this is the aggregate figure for all young people. For those with lower education, their situations may be even worse.

**Table 5. The Ratio of Median Earnings (Subgroup vs. General Working Population) in Hong Kong by Birth Cohort, 1981-2006**

| Birth year       | 1981 | 1986 | 1991 | 1996 | 2001        | 2006        |
|------------------|------|------|------|------|-------------|-------------|
| 1959-1963        | 0.80 | 1.04 | 1.17 | 1.12 | 1.12        | 1.14        |
| 1964-1968        |      | 0.80 | 1.01 | 1.10 | 1.25        | 1.31        |
| 1969-1973        |      |      | 0.65 | 0.83 | 1.21        | 1.38        |
| 1974-1978        |      |      |      | 0.60 | 0.97        | 1.29        |
| <b>1979-1983</b> |      |      |      |      | <b>0.55</b> | <b>1.00</b> |
| <b>1984-1988</b> |      |      |      |      |             | <b>0.56</b> |
| <b>Male</b>      |      |      |      |      |             |             |
| 1959-1963        | 0.87 | 1.19 | 1.25 | 1.23 | 1.28        | 1.43        |
| 1964-1968        |      | 0.80 | 1.11 | 1.19 | 1.33        | 1.54        |
| 1969-1973        |      |      | 0.66 | 1.08 | 1.29        | 1.61        |
| 1974-1978        |      |      |      | 0.67 | 1.04        | 1.37        |
| <b>1979-1983</b> |      |      |      |      | 0.59        | 0.99        |
| <b>1984-1988</b> |      |      |      |      |             | 0.59        |
| <b>Female</b>    |      |      |      |      |             |             |
| 1959-1963        | 0.73 | 0.96 | 0.99 | 0.78 | 0.83        | 0.85        |
| 1964-1968        |      | 0.80 | 0.89 | 0.90 | 1.08        | 0.96        |
| 1969-1973        |      |      | 0.64 | 0.83 | 1.11        | 1.02        |
| 1974-1978        |      |      |      | 0.60 | 0.94        | 1.17        |
| <b>1979-1983</b> |      |      |      |      | <b>0.55</b> | <b>1.02</b> |
| <b>1984-1988</b> |      |      |      |      |             | <b>0.53</b> |

**Figure 5. Change in Relative Income (Ratio of Median Income) in Hong Kong by Age Groups, 1981-2006**



#### 4.5. Marriage and Living Arrangement

In Chinese culture, getting married and moving out are the important milestones of the life course transition from childhood to independent adulthood. Because of extended schooling and a protracted job-hunting period, especially if one wants to find a good job with decent pay, young people are increasingly delaying marriage and among those who are married, more of them tend to live with their parents, presumably because of difficulties in affording a flat. The process of going from graduation, to finding a job, getting married, and moving out takes much longer time now than decades ago because of the socioeconomic uncertainties that the post-80s are facing.

Table 6a presents the percentages of married youths living with their parents by birth cohort. Among those who are married, as plotted in Figure 6, there is an increase in the percentage of people living with their parents, although the increase is modest. For

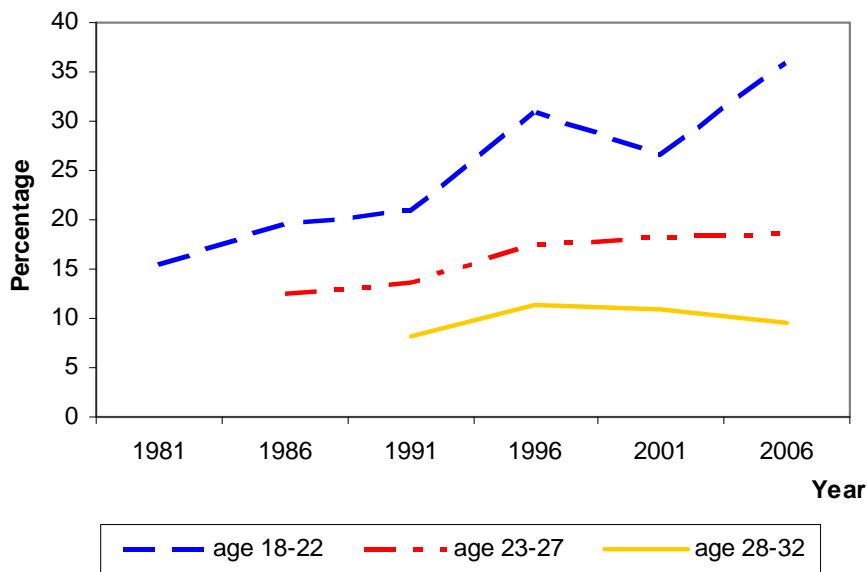
instance, 29.11 percent of those aged between 23 and 27 in 2006, if married, lived with their parents, in contrast to 23.73 percent in 1981.

In fact, more young people tend to delay their marriage. Table 6b demonstrates the trend in marriage rate by different cohorts: only 14.25 percent of those aged between 23 and 27 were married in 2006 compared to 32.89 percent in 1986; and only 45.20 percent of those aged between 28 and 32 are married compared to 62.43 percent in 1991. To be certain, the age pattern of marriage differs between men and women.

**Table 6a. Percentage of Married People Living with Parents in Hong Kong by Birth Cohort, 1981-2006**

| Birth year       | 1981  | 1986  | 1991  | 1996  | 2001  | 2006  |
|------------------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|
| 1959-1963        | 15.56 | 12.46 | 8.28  | 7.17  | 4.88  | 3.16  |
| 1964-1968        |       | 19.63 | 13.69 | 11.30 | 7.87  | 4.89  |
| 1969-1973        |       |       | 20.82 | 17.48 | 10.90 | 6.95  |
| 1974-1978        |       |       |       | 30.93 | 18.13 | 9.48  |
| <b>1979-1983</b> |       |       |       |       | 26.64 | 18.55 |
| <b>1984-1988</b> |       |       |       |       |       | 35.93 |
| <b>Male</b>      |       |       |       |       |       |       |
| 1959-1963        | 31.01 | 24.72 | 14.81 | 12.70 | 8.65  | 5.34  |
| 1964-1968        |       | 46.15 | 30.12 | 22.42 | 15.52 | 8.95  |
| 1969-1973        |       |       | 47.27 | 38.01 | 23.40 | 13.83 |
| 1974-1978        |       |       |       | 54.15 | 40.40 | 20.03 |
| <b>1979-1983</b> |       |       |       |       | 64.10 | 44.18 |
| <b>1984-1988</b> |       |       |       |       |       | 62.04 |
| <b>Female</b>    |       |       |       |       |       |       |
| 1959-1963        | 10.11 | 6.33  | 3.36  | 2.17  | 1.25  | 0.94  |
| 1964-1968        |       | 11.29 | 5.95  | 3.94  | 2.18  | 1.61  |
| 1969-1973        |       |       | 11.40 | 8.21  | 3.62  | 2.43  |
| 1974-1978        |       |       |       | 20.92 | 7.61  | 3.62  |
| <b>1979-1983</b> |       |       |       |       | 13.04 | 7.89  |
| <b>1984-1988</b> |       |       |       |       |       | 26.10 |

**Figure 6. Percentage of Married People Living with Parents, 1981-2006**



**Table 6b. Marital Rate in Hong Kong by Birth Cohort, 1981-2006**

| Birth year       | 1981  | 1986  | 1991  | 1996  | 2001         | 2006         |
|------------------|-------|-------|-------|-------|--------------|--------------|
| 1959-1963        | 8.56  | 32.89 | 62.43 | 75.75 | 80.07        | 79.86        |
| 1964-1968        |       | 6.12  | 28.69 | 55.89 | 69.92        | 73.48        |
| 1969-1973        |       |       | 5.13  | 25.43 | 50.48        | 65.34        |
| 1974-1978        |       |       |       | 4.73  | 19.62        | 45.20        |
| <b>1979-1983</b> |       |       |       |       | <b>3.15</b>  | <b>14.45</b> |
| <b>1984-1988</b> |       |       |       |       |              | <b>2.24</b>  |
| <b>Male</b>      |       |       |       |       |              |              |
| 1959-1963        | 4.25  | 21.44 | 54.28 | 74.03 | 81.73        | 84.13        |
| 1964-1968        |       | 2.81  | 18.56 | 47.75 | 66.90        | 73.59        |
| 1969-1973        |       |       | 2.65  | 16.85 | 41.87        | 61.11        |
| 1974-1978        |       |       |       | 2.80  | 13.55        | 37.02        |
| <b>1979-1983</b> |       |       |       |       | <b>1.71</b>  | <b>9.34</b>  |
| <b>1984-1988</b> |       |       |       |       |              | <b>1.25</b>  |
| <b>Female</b>    |       |       |       |       |              |              |
| 1959-1963        | 13.32 | 44.87 | 70.39 | 77.38 | 78.53        | 75.95        |
| 1964-1968        |       | 9.71  | 38.59 | 63.00 | 72.28        | 73.40        |
| 1969-1973        |       |       | 7.72  | 33.01 | 57.34        | 68.46        |
| 1974-1978        |       |       |       | 6.74  | <b>24.89</b> | <b>51.53</b> |
| <b>1979-1983</b> |       |       |       |       | <b>4.55</b>  | <b>18.71</b> |
| <b>1984-1988</b> |       |       |       |       |              | <b>3.19</b>  |

Leaving school, getting a full-time job, getting married and starting a family are

often seen as sequential events, following well-structured norms that guide individuals through the life course in a predictable pattern. For the post-80s generation, labour market entry has become more casualized (less standardized). Having a precarious or unstable employment has become a typical part of the working life of young people, including university graduates. Increasing unemployment rates, lower starting salaries, and insecure jobs put many young people in vulnerable positions, protracting the transition from school to work and from childhood to adulthood, resulting in delayed marriage/non-marriage and low total fertility rate (Census and Statistics Department 2005).

## **V. Occupational Attainment and Mobility**

### **5.1 Descriptive Statistics**

The above section has documented the profiles of the post-80s generation in 2006 through a comparison with their counterparts in earlier years. The findings suggest a number of specific problems they face in the transition from school to work and from childhood to adulthood, which are hardly attributable to the age effect. Instead, they are constrained by the structural changes that have taken place in Hong Kong since the 1990s. This section examines the trends in occupational mobility based on the analyses of the survey data in 2007.

The descriptive statistics presented in Table 7 for 4,013 individuals are consistent

with those reported in the census/by-census data.<sup>3</sup> For example, young people, especially the post-1980s generation, are more educated than the older generations, and they are more likely to be born in Hong Kong. Consistent with what is reported in Table 3, the unemployment rate of the post-80s in 2007 is the highest among all four cohorts, reaching 15.25 percent. The relationship between age and unemployment shows a U-shaped pattern, first declining as people approach middle age and then increasing after their mid-40s.

**Table 7. Profiles of Respondents by Birth Cohorts, “Social Inequality and Mobility in Hong Kong, a Benchmark Survey” (2007)**

| Birth cohort             | 1946-1959 | 1960-1969 | 1970-1979 | <b>1980-1989</b> | Total |
|--------------------------|-----------|-----------|-----------|------------------|-------|
| <b>Education</b>         |           |           |           |                  |       |
| Lower Secondary or below | 60.75     | 40.90     | 19.31     | <b>3.96</b>      | 37.47 |
| Upper Secondary          | 25.74     | 32.76     | 38.99     | <b>46.12</b>     | 27.71 |
| Associate/sub-degree     | 6.86      | 11.04     | 16.09     | <b>22.68</b>     | 18.52 |
| College degree or above  | 6.65      | 15.29     | 25.62     | <b>27.25</b>     | 16.29 |
| Born in Hong Kong        | 52.14     | 67.21     | 68.51     | <b>81.82</b>     | 64.52 |
| Unemployed               | 8.63      | 4.14      | 6.99      | <b>15.25</b>     | 7.86  |
| <b>First job</b>         |           |           |           |                  |       |
| Manager/Professional     | 5.31      | 7.63      | 10.53     | <b>7.03</b>      | 7.33  |
| Associate Professional   | 3.92      | 6.58      | 8.45      | <b>8.65</b>      | 6.23  |
| Clerk                    | 12.67     | 21.94     | 33.80     | <b>34.32</b>     | 22.49 |
| Sales/service worker     | 12.43     | 19.02     | 24.52     | <b>33.78</b>     | 19.44 |
| Skilled/unskilled worker | 65.66     | 44.83     | 22.71     | <b>16.22</b>     | 44.50 |
| <b>Current Job</b>       |           |           |           |                  |       |
| Manager/Professional     | 13.06     | 16.40     | 18.00     | <b>8.90</b>      | 14.79 |
| Associate professional   | 7.40      | 10.19     | 10.80     | <b>11.57</b>     | 9.74  |
| Clerk                    | 12.48     | 17.86     | 31.42     | <b>38.58</b>     | 22.69 |
| Sales/service worker     | 13.93     | 20.37     | 18.82     | <b>26.41</b>     | 18.97 |
| Skilled/unskilled worker | 53.12     | 35.19     | 20.95     | <b>14.54</b>     | 33.81 |
| # of jobs ever had       | 4.22      | 4.11      | 3.28      | <b>2.59</b>      | 3.76  |

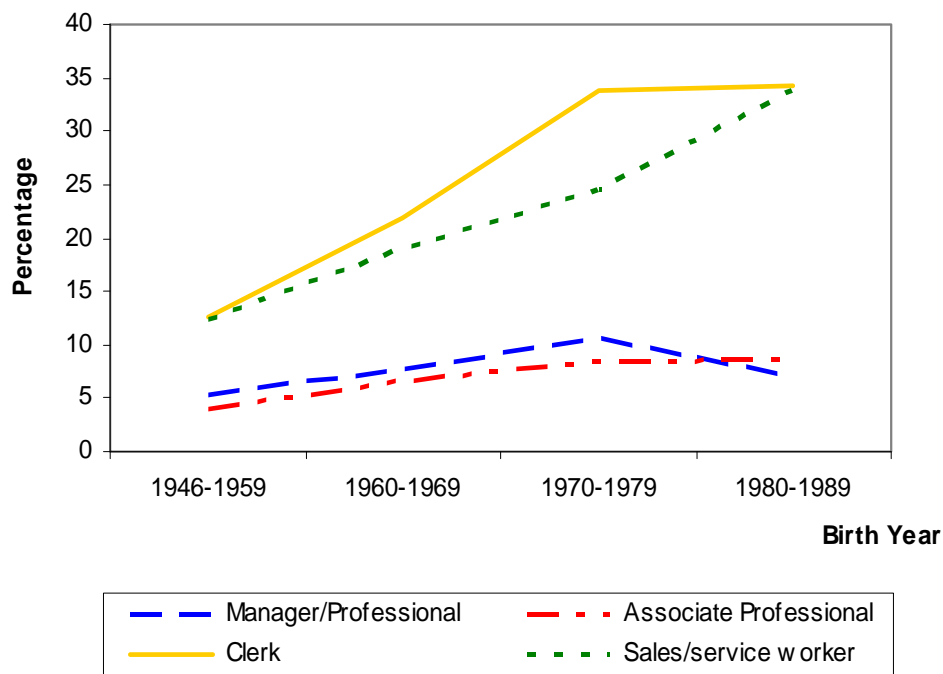
The distributions of respondents’ first occupations and current occupations are also presented in Table 7. Due to the economic restructuring, the post-80s generation are

<sup>3</sup> For descriptive statistics separated by male and female, see Tables 1 and 2 in the Appendix.

now much less likely to become manufacturing workers as most factories have been relocated north to the Pearl River Delta since the 1980s. However, they are no more likely than those born in the 1960s and 1970s to enter managerial or professional occupations, or even associate professional occupations.

Figures 7a and 7b demonstrate the trends in becoming in managers/professionals, associate professionals, clerks, sales and service workers. Despite the substantial expansion in tertiary education, the percentage of people who started their first job as managers, professionals or associate professionals did not increase at the same pace. The percentage of those who started their first job as managers or professionals, irrespective of age, seems to be even lower for the post-80s generation than for those born in the 1970s.

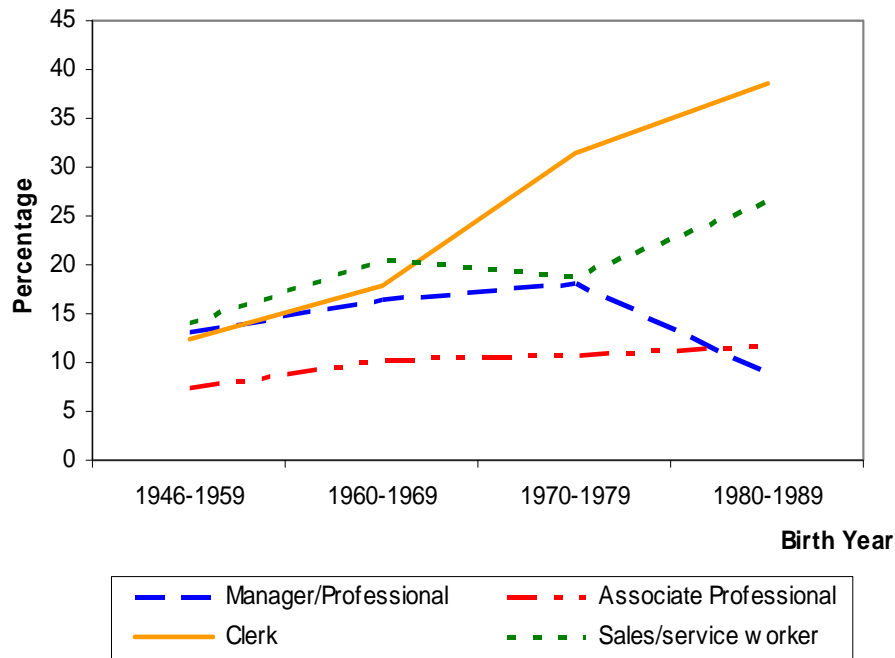
**Figure 7a. First Occupational Attainment by Birth Year**



The attainment of the current occupation for different birth cohorts may be

affected by age, as young people may need more time since their first job to achieve mobility and stability in their careers. The trend leaning even worse against the post-80s generation in Figure 7b can partly explained by this factor.

**Figure 7b. Current Occupational Attainment by Birth Year**



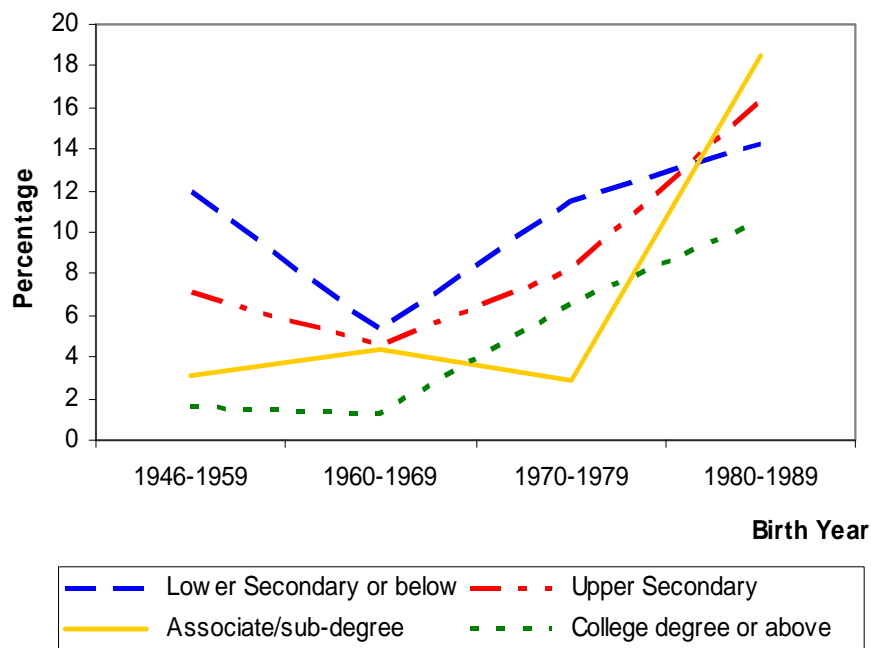
## 5.2 Education, Employment and Occupational Attainment

What is the role of increasing education in accounting for this trend? In Table 8, we show the unemployment rate by educational levels for different birth cohorts. Overall, it is still true that education prevents unemployment, as indicated in the last column of the table. However, this pattern is applicable only to the two older cohorts (1946-1959, 1960-1969). Not only are young people suffering from higher unemployment rates, but the educational gradients in the likelihood of unemployment also seem to be not obvious for them compared to the older cohorts.

**Table 8. Percentage of People without Jobs by Birth Cohort, Controlling for Education**

| Birth cohort             | 1946-1959 | 1960-1969 | 1970-1979 | 1980-1989    | Total |
|--------------------------|-----------|-----------|-----------|--------------|-------|
| <b>Overall</b>           |           |           |           |              |       |
| Lower Secondary or below | 11.96     | 5.28      | 11.46     | <b>14.29</b> | 9.57  |
| Upper Secondary          | 7.14      | 4.57      | 8.11      | <b>16.31</b> | 8.35  |
| Associate/sub-degree     | 3.16      | 4.32      | 2.88      | <b>18.55</b> | 7.23  |
| College degree or above  | 1.56      | 1.31      | 6.57      | <b>10.53</b> | 5.29  |
| <b>Male</b>              |           |           |           |              |       |
| Lower Secondary or below | 13.36     | 7.1       | 15.63     | <b>20.00</b> | 11.76 |
| Upper Secondary          | 6.15      | 4.80      | 8.65      | <b>22.08</b> | 9.17  |
| Associate/sub-degree     | 3.39      | 6.58      | 4.48      | <b>20.63</b> | 8.68  |
| College degree or above  | 2.33      | 2.15      | 7.77      | <b>8.33</b>  | 5.35  |
| <b>Female</b>            |           |           |           |              |       |
| Lower Secondary or below | 9.16      | 2.61      | 3.13      | <b>0.00</b>  | 5.63  |
| Upper Secondary          | 9.09      | 4.26      | 7.63      | <b>9.38</b>  | 7.31  |
| Associate/sub-degree     | 2.78      | 1.59      | 1.39      | <b>16.39</b> | 5.60  |
| College degree or above  | 0         | 0         | 5.26      | <b>12.96</b> | 5.22  |

**Figure 8. Unemployment Rate by Education Level in Hong Kong**



As Figure 8 shows, unemployment rates for tertiary school graduates are increasing much more rapidly for the younger cohorts, especially for those holding

associate/sub-degrees. For the post-80s generation, 18.55 percent of graduates with associate/sub-degrees and 10.53 percent of graduates with college degrees or above are unemployed, whereas only 3.16 percent of people with associate/sub-degrees and 1.56 percent of people with at least college degrees who were born in 1946-1959 are unemployed.

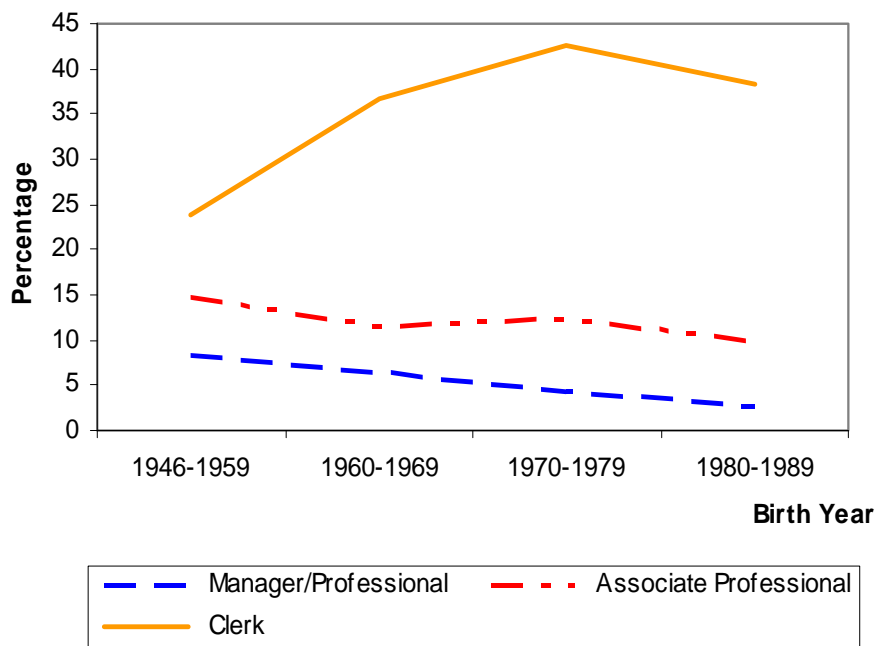
**Table 9. First Job Attained, by Birth Cohort, Controlling for Education Level**

|                          | 1946-1959 | 1960-1969 | 1970-1979 | 1980-1989    | Total |
|--------------------------|-----------|-----------|-----------|--------------|-------|
| Lower Secondary or below |           |           |           |              |       |
| Manager/Professional     | 1.40      | 1.09      | 0         | 0            | 1.14  |
| Associate Professional   | 1.26      | 2.17      | 2.44      | 0            | 1.63  |
| Clerk                    | 3.21      | 6.25      | 9.76      | <b>19.05</b> | 5.05  |
| Service worker           | 11.17     | 21.47     | 34.96     | <b>33.33</b> | 17.02 |
| Skill/unskilled worker   | 82.96     | 69.02     | 52.85     | <b>47.62</b> | 75.16 |
| Upper Secondary          |           |           |           |              |       |
| Manager/Professional     | 4.36      | 3.76      | 4.13      | <b>0</b>     | 3.50  |
| Associate Professional   | 3.27      | 5.26      | 4.13      | <b>3.08</b>  | 4.05  |
| Clerk                    | 26.55     | 28.95     | 40.98     | <b>30.77</b> | 31.43 |
| Service worker           | 14.18     | 22.56     | 28.93     | <b>43.85</b> | 24.75 |
| Skill/unskilled worker   | 51.64     | 39.47     | 22.73     | <b>22.31</b> | 36.25 |
| Associate/sub-degree     |           |           |           |              |       |
| Manager/Professional     | 8.39      | 6.33      | 4.32      | <b>2.68</b>  | 5.57  |
| Associate Professional   | 14.69     | 11.39     | 12.35     | <b>9.82</b>  | 12.17 |
| Clerk                    | 23.78     | 36.71     | 42.59     | <b>38.39</b> | 35.48 |
| Service worker           | 16.78     | 18.99     | 24.69     | <b>34.82</b> | 23.13 |
| Skill/unskilled worker   | 36.36     | 26.58     | 16.05     | <b>14.29</b> | 23.65 |
| College degree or above  |           |           |           |              |       |
| Manager/Professional     | 36.47     | 30.43     | 30.21     | <b>21.50</b> | 29.54 |
| Associate Professional   | 10.59     | 14.29     | 14.58     | <b>15.89</b> | 14.13 |
| Clerk                    | 29.41     | 32.30     | 34.38     | <b>37.38</b> | 33.58 |
| Service worker           | 10.59     | 7.45      | 11.46     | <b>20.56</b> | 11.93 |
| Skill/unskilled worker   | 12.94     | 15.53     | 9.38      | <b>4.67</b>  | 10.83 |

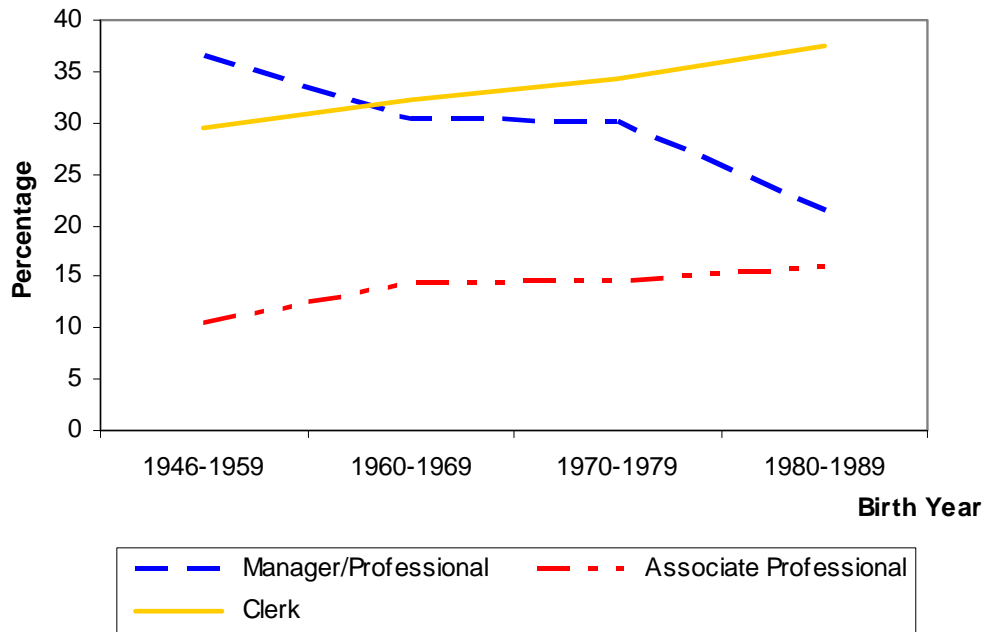
Table 9 shows the first jobs of those who have jobs by cohort and education level. The role of education in attaining the first job is twofold. On the one hand, education is still important for the post-80s generation. Those who have lower education levels almost have no chance of obtaining managerial or professional/associate professional jobs while

it was still possible 30 or 40 years ago. On the other hand, for those who received higher education, it is increasingly difficult for them to obtain managerial/professional or associate professional jobs. Among those who have college degrees, 36.47 percent of those born between 1946 and 1959, 30.43 percent of those born in the 1960s, and 30.21 percent of those born in the 1970s were already managers/professionals in their first jobs, whereas only 21.50 percent of the post-80s generation could achieve that now. Instead, they are increasingly concentrated in associate professional and clerical occupations, and to some extent, service/sales occupations (Figure 9a). Those with associate/sub-degrees are left with even lower level occupation (Figure 9b).

**Figure 9a. Percentage of First Jobs as Managers/Professionals/Associate Professionals for Holders of Associate Degrees or Equivalent in Hong Kong, by Birth Cohort**



**Figure 9b. Percentage of First Jobs as Managers/Professionals /Associate Professionals for Holders of with College Degrees or Above in Hong Kong, by Birth Cohort**



### 5.3 Occupational Mobility and Attainment

The research in social mobility is a specialized and highly technical field in sociology. Sociologists often make a distinction between intergenerational mobility and intra-generational or career mobility. The former is a measure of the societal openness while the latter shows how people change jobs and move ahead since their first jobs. The mobility could be in both directions, upward or downward, based on the ranking of occupational status. Several years back, we created a socioeconomic index that ranks all occupations in Hong Kong from low to high, based on the census data that contain the average income and educational qualifications of each occupation (Wong and Wu 2006). Hence we define upward mobility as the movement from a lower-status occupation to a

higher-status occupation and downward mobility as that from a lower-status occupation to a higher-status occupation.

**Table 10. Trends in Occupational Mobility in Hong Kong**

|   | 1946-1959 | 1960-1969 | 1970-1979 | <b>1980-1989</b> | Total |
|---|-----------|-----------|-----------|------------------|-------|
| <b>Inter-generational mobility</b>                            |           |           |           |                  |       |
| Upward mobility   | 51.09     | 60.31     | 66.26     | <b>67.79</b>     | 60.49 |
| Immobility  | 11.93     | 9.28      | 11.72     | <b>5.56</b>      | 10.11 |
| Downward mobility   | 36.98     | 30.41     | 22.02     | <b>26.67</b>     | 29.41 |
| <b>Intra-generational mobility (first to current job)</b>     |           |           |           |                  |       |
| Upward mobility   | 30.25     | 31.82     | 24.36     | <b>21.28</b>     | 27.92 |
| Immobility  | 41.36     | 43.14     | 57.41     | <b>65.35</b>     | 49.54 |
| Downward mobility   | 28.40     | 25.04     | 18.23     | <b>13.27</b>     | 22.55 |
| <b>Intra-generational mobility (From 2001 to current job)</b> |           |           |           |                  |       |
| Upward mobility   | 5.96      | 8.09      | 9.96      | <b>22.02</b>     | 8.71  |
| Immobility  | 87.09     | 84.29     | 80.69     | <b>62.39</b>     | 82.95 |
| Downward mobility   | 6.95      | 7.62      | 9.35      | <b>15.60</b>     | 8.33  |

**Figure 10a. Intergenerational Occupational Mobility –From Father’s Job to Current Job**

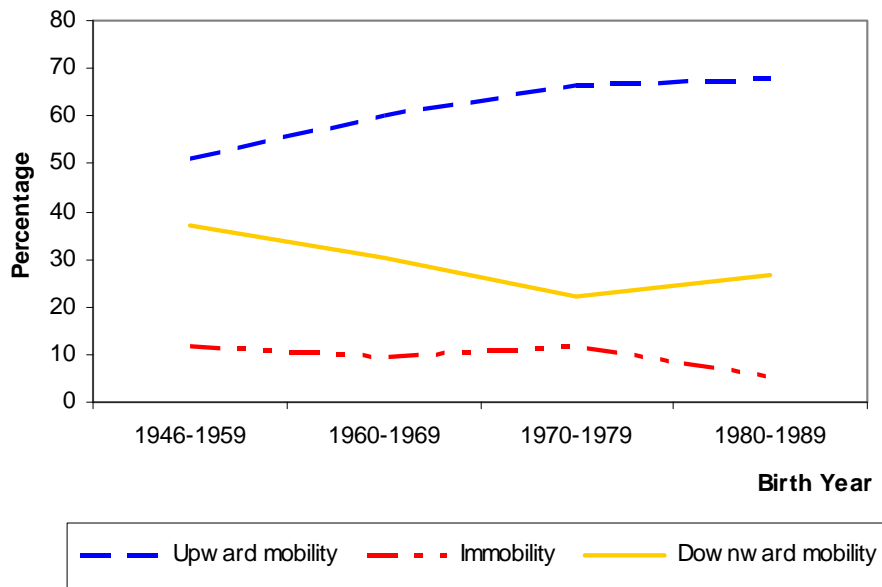
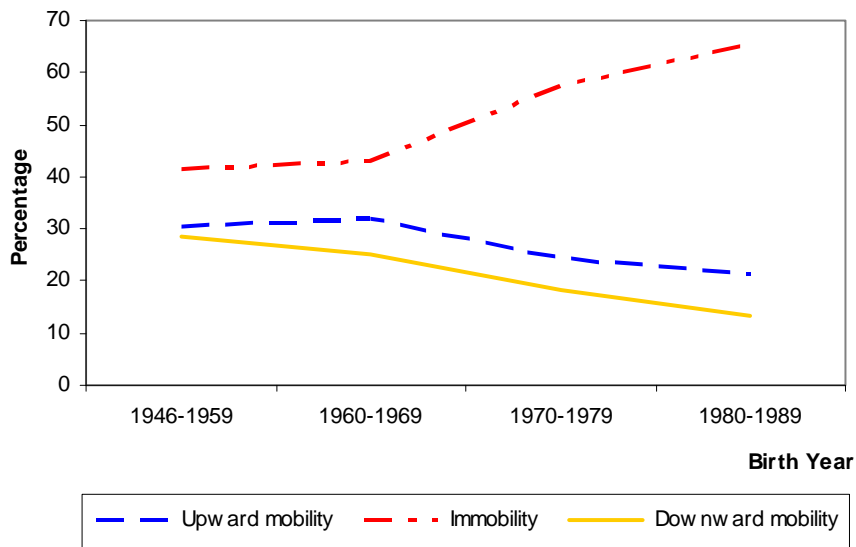


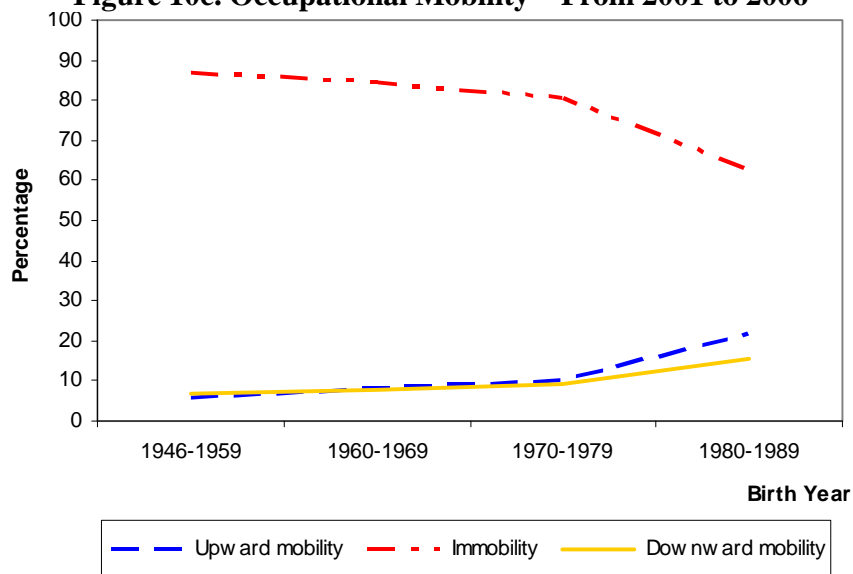
Table 10 presents cohort variations in intergenerational mobility rates, intra-generational mobility rates, and job mobility rates in the period from 2001 to 2006.

Regarding intergenerational mobility, Hong Kong is extremely open and few people, even those born after the 1980s, currently do what their fathers did when they were at age 14. Family backgrounds play little role in determining people's occupational achievements, and mobility chances are higher, though not always in the upward direction.

**Figure 10b. Occupational Mobility – From First Job to Current Job**



**Figure 10c. Occupational Mobility – From 2001 to 2006**



Regarding intragenerational mobility or career mobility, we plot two figures, one

is the mobility from the first job to the current job, and the other is the mobility from 2001 to 2006 for those who had jobs in that period. As Figure 10b shows, the post-80s generation has a higher rate of immobility and a lower rate of both upward and downward job mobility, because they are still relatively younger and have shorter career histories. In the five years from 2001 to 2006 (Figure 10c), indeed, they had much higher upward mobility but also downward mobility compared with older generations. At the earliest stage of their careers, the post-80s are much more vulnerable and more likely to be influenced by the fluctuations in the economy.

**Table 11. Binary Logit Model Predicting the Likelihood of Becoming Middle-Class**

|                                 | Model 1              | Model 2              | Model 3              |
|---------------------------------|----------------------|----------------------|----------------------|
| Cohort<br>(1946-1959 [omitted]) |                      |                      |                      |
| 1960-1969                       | 0.482***<br>(0.134)  | -0.044<br>(0.150)    | -0.048<br>(0.152)    |
| 1970-1979                       | 0.854***<br>(0.136)  | -0.113<br>(0.155)    | -0.093<br>(0.156)    |
| <b>1980-1989</b>                | 0.113<br>(0.167)     | -1.119***<br>(0.186) | -1.135***<br>(0.187) |
| Education                       |                      |                      |                      |
| Lower secondary or below        |                      |                      |                      |
| Upper secondary                 |                      | 1.213***<br>(0.217)  | 1.164***<br>(0.219)  |
| Associate/sub-degree            |                      | 2.192***<br>(0.210)  | 2.143***<br>(0.213)  |
| College degree or above         |                      | 3.496***<br>(0.203)  | 3.412***<br>(0.208)  |
| Female                          |                      |                      | -0.406***<br>(0.116) |
| Born in Hong Kong               |                      |                      | 0.139<br>(0.138)     |
| Constant                        | -2.453***<br>(0.098) | -3.722***<br>(0.182) | -3.573***<br>(0.200) |
| Pseudo R <sup>2</sup>           | 0.016                | 0.197                | 0.202                |
| Likelihood ratio Chi2           | 45.23                | 548.07               | 562.79               |
| Degree of freedom               | 3                    | 6                    | 8                    |

Notes: \* p<.05 \*\*p<.01 \*\*\* p<.001

Finally, as many commentators have claimed, the post-80s generation, unlike the earlier generations, experiences more difficulties in achieving upward mobility and

becoming middle class, even for those with tertiary education. We test the claims with multivariate analysis via a binary logit model. The results are shown in Table 11. For simplicity, we define managerial, professional or associate professional occupations as middle-class occupations, and code it as a dummy variable (1 if yes and 0 otherwise).<sup>4</sup> Therefore, the dependent variable is the likelihood of achieving middle-class status. We take into account education, gender, and immigration status and examine the cohort difference.

In Model 1, we only include cohorts as independent variables. It shows that those born in the 1960s and the 1970s indeed have significant advantages in becoming middle class over those born before 1960, but the post-80s' advantages are not obvious. In Model 2 we include education, an important factor predicting the chance of becoming a member of the middle class. Net the effect of education, the chances for those born before 1980 do not differ very much from each other, whereas the post-80s generation shows a significant disadvantage, as indicated by the negative and significant coefficient ( $p < .001$ ). This is to say, holding education constant, those born after 1980 are much less likely to achieve middle-class status compared with those born earlier. Even if we take into account gender and immigration status in Model 3, the results still hold true, consistent with descriptive statistics presented in previous tables.

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<sup>4</sup> The median monthly income for the middle class is HKD 18,750 and the mean is HKD 24,103.

## VI. Subjective Well-being and Political Orientation

The above analyses have documented the profiles and the predications in transition from school to work, occupational attainment and career mobility of the post-80s generation in Hong Kong today. How they perceive the opportunity and evaluate their socioeconomic conditions has important political and social implications. In this section, we look at three subjective aspects of the generation: subjective well-being, social attitude and political orientation.

**Table 12. Ordinal Logit Models on Subjective Evaluation of Socioeconomic Status**

|                                      | Job Satisfaction <sup>a</sup> | Life Satisfaction <sup>a</sup> | Subjective Strata <sup>b</sup> |
|--------------------------------------|-------------------------------|--------------------------------|--------------------------------|
| Cohort                               |                               |                                |                                |
| (1946-1959 [omitted])                |                               |                                |                                |
| 1960-1969                            | -0.061<br>(0.103)             | 0.005<br>(0.078)               | 0.030<br>(0.078)               |
| 1970-1979                            | -0.069<br>(0.114)             | -0.044<br>(0.089)              | -0.221*<br>(0.089)             |
| 1980-1989                            | -0.253<br>(0.136)             | 0.113<br>(0.099)               | -0.349***<br>(0.099)           |
| Education                            |                               |                                |                                |
| (Lower secondary or below [omitted]) |                               |                                |                                |
| Upper secondary                      | 0.517***<br>(0.107)           | 0.361***<br>(0.082)            | 0.888***<br>(0.082)            |
| Associate/sub-degree                 | 0.767***<br>(0.123)           | 0.483***<br>(0.094)            | 1.033***<br>(0.094)            |
| College degree or above              | 1.087***<br>(0.124)           | 0.739***<br>(0.100)            | 1.829***<br>(0.101)            |
| Female                               | 0.163*<br>(0.080)             | 0.167**<br>(0.061)             | 0.151*<br>(0.061)              |
| Born in Hong Kong                    | 0.300***<br>(0.093)           | 0.447***<br>(0.068)            | 0.708***<br>(0.068)            |
| Cut point1                           | -3.875                        | -2.496                         | 0.548                          |
| Cut point2                           | -1.437                        | -1.008                         | 2.496                          |
| Cut point3                           | 1.010                         | 1.520                          | 5.042                          |
| Cut point4                           | 4.326                         | 3.558                          | 7.973                          |
| N                                    | 2392                          |                                |                                |
| LR Ch2 (8)                           | 130.81                        | 165.45                         | 634.45                         |
| Pseudo R <sup>2</sup>                | 0.025                         | 0.017                          | 0.068                          |

Notes: \* p<.05 \*\*p<.01 \*\*\* p<.001. Figures in parentheses are standard errors.

a. five-point scale: 1. very unsatisfied 2. unsatisfied 3. so-so 4. satisfied 5. very satisfied

b. five-point scale: 1. low 2. lower middle 3. middle 4. upper middle 5. upper

Subjective well-being is measured with three measures: satisfaction with job (for

those who have jobs), satisfaction with life, and self-identified social strata. Satisfaction is classified into five levels (1=very unsatisfied, 2=satisfied, 3=ok, 4=satisfied and 5=very satisfied), while subjective strata is also classified into five levels (1=lower, 2=lower middle, 3=middle, 4=upper middle, 5=upper). We use ordinal logit models. The negative coefficients of an independent variable can be interpreted as being less likely to be in a higher scale than in a lower scale. The cut-off points are constant terms for each pair of comparisons.<sup>5</sup>

Results in Table 12 show that women are more likely to be satisfied with their jobs and lives than men, and those born in Hong Kong are more likely to be satisfied than immigrants. Those with higher education also tend to be more satisfied. Controlling for these variables, the post-80s generation do not differ from other cohorts in their level of satisfaction, although they are significantly less likely to identify themselves in higher social strata than those born in the 1950s and 1960s ( $p < .001$ ).

Why do post-80s generation feel left behind but are not particularly unsatisfied with their jobs and lives? This may be related to how they perceive social inequality and opportunities in Hong Kong: as they get older, they may still have chance to catch up. In Table 13, we ask a set of questions on perception of inequality and subjective evaluation of the Hong Kong society and run a set of ordinal logit models to examine the cohort variation, controlling for education, gender, and immigration status.

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<sup>5</sup> Alternatively, we have tried to fit linear regression models and yielded similar results.

**Table 13. Ordinal Logit Models on Social Attitude and Perception of Inequality**  
(1= strongly disagree 2=disagree 3=neutral 4=agree 5=strongly agree)

|                                      | HK is full of opportunities    | HK is a fair and just society     | HK is the place where competent people prosper | HK is an extremely unequal society | Effort is key to success         | Kids from rich families are more likely to succeed | HK government has taken good care of the poor | Big businesses dominate HK's economy |
|--------------------------------------|--------------------------------|-----------------------------------|--|------------------------------------|----------------------------------|--|---|--------------------------------------|
| Cohort (1946-1959 [omitted])         |                                |                                   |  |                                    |                                  |  |   |                                      |
| 1960-1969                            | 0.028<br>(0.081)               | 0.033<br>(0.077)                  | 0.074<br>(0.080)                               | -0.001<br>(0.075)                  | 0.030<br>(0.077)                 | 0.075<br>(0.078)                                   | -0.107<br>(0.074)                             | -0.032<br>(0.078)                    |
| 1970-1979                            | -0.127<br>(0.092)              | 0.175*<br>(0.089)                 | 0.033<br>(0.092)                               | -0.079<br>(0.086)                  | -0.018<br>(0.088)                | 0.143<br>(0.088)                                   | -0.044<br>(0.085)                             | -0.201*<br>(0.089)                   |
| <b>1980-1989</b>                     | <b>0.123</b><br><b>(0.103)</b> | <b>0.346***</b><br><b>(0.098)</b> | <b>0.003</b><br><b>(0.102)</b>                 | <b>-0.106</b><br><b>(0.096)</b>    | <b>0.281**</b><br><b>(0.098)</b> | <b>-0.005</b><br><b>(0.099)</b>                    | <b>0.029</b><br><b>(0.094)</b>                | <b>-0.288**</b><br><b>(0.099)</b>    |
| Education                            |                                |                                   |  |                                    |                                  |  |   |                                      |
| (Lower Secondary or below [omitted]) |                                |                                   |  |                                    |                                  |  |   |                                      |
| Upper secondary                      | 0.159<br>(0.084)               | 0.168*<br>(0.080)                 | 0.215*<br>(0.083)                              | -0.307***<br>(0.078)               | 0.306***<br>(0.081)              | -0.130<br>(0.081)                                  | 0.208**<br>(0.078)                            | 0.117<br>(0.082)                     |
| Associate/sub-degree                 | 0.266**<br>(0.098)             | 0.188*<br>(0.093)                 | 0.193*<br>(0.097)                              | -0.457***<br>(0.090)               | 0.176<br>(0.092)                 | -0.228*<br>(0.093)                                 | 0.114<br>(0.090)                              | -0.001<br>(0.093)                    |
| College degree or above              | 0.376***<br>(0.104)            | 0.263**<br>(0.100)                | 0.444***<br>(0.103)                            | -0.572***<br>(0.097)               | 0.298***<br>(0.099)              | -0.162<br>(0.100)                                  | 0.235*<br>(0.095)                             | 0.299**<br>(0.100)                   |
| Female                               | 0.092<br>(0.063)               | 0.061<br>(0.060)                  | 0.042<br>(0.063)                               | -0.197***<br>(0.059)               | 0.042<br>(0.060)                 | -0.113<br>(0.061)                                  | 0.052<br>(0.058)                              | -0.085<br>(0.061)                    |
| Born in Hong Kong                    | 0.155*<br>(0.070)              | -0.014<br>(0.066)                 | -0.065<br>(0.069)                              | 0.092<br>(0.065)                   | 0.026<br>(0.067)                 | 0.031<br>(0.067)                                   | -0.022<br>(0.064)                             | 0.008<br>(0.068)                     |
| Cut point 1                          | -4.592                         | -4.072                            | -4.821   | -3.052                             | -4.278                           | -4.744   | -2.610  | -4.681                               |
| Cut point 2                          | -1.877                         | -1.350                            | -2.478   | -0.472                             | -1.535                           | -1.953   | -0.409  | -2.730                               |
| Cut point 3                          | -0.840                         | -0.291                            | -0.811   | 0.551                              | -0.193                           | -1.173   | 0.486   | -1.135                               |
| Cut point 4                          | 2.031                          | 2.256                             | 1.980  | 3.058                              | 2.458                            | 1.193  | 2.912   | 1.307                                |
| Pseudo R <sup>2</sup>                | 0.005                          | 0.004                             | 0.003  | 0.007                              | 0.004                            | 0.001  | 0.001   | 0.005                                |
| LR $\chi^2$ (8)                      | 40.12                          | 41.16                             | 24.23  | 72.27                              | 42.42                            | 13.01  | 15.16   | 22.03                                |

Notes: \*p<.05 \*\*p<.01 \*\*\*p<.001; figures in the parentheses are standard errors.

Results in Table 13 show that, controlling for education, gender, and immigration status, the post-80s generation does not differ significantly in their answers from other cohorts to most questions related to subjective evaluation of Hong Kong society. If there is, they are more likely to agree that Hong Kong is a fair and just society and to believe that effort is a key to success; and they are less likely to agree that big businesses dominate Hong Kong's economy. These findings suggest that the post-80s generation, as a whole, has not developed distinctive values and attitudes towards social justice and opportunities, as suggested by a group of radical young protestors labelled as "the post-80s generation." Instead, they may represent the opinions and views of a subgroup of youth with higher education. In fact, college graduates are more likely to think that "big businesses dominate Hong Kong's economy."

The post-80s generation has been in the media spotlight after a small group of them actively participated in various social movements and demonstrations, e.g., against the high-speed rail link and for universal suffrage, many of which have a China factor. Therefore, after more than 10 years of Hong Kong's return to Chinese sovereignty, it is important to look at how the post-80s generation's views on China and their political orientations differ from those of other cohorts. Table 14 presents ordinal logit models for four questions related to their attitude towards Chinese culture (history) and development (future), measured using a 5-point scale. Table 15 is the results of comparisons of identity and political orientations between the post-80s generation and others.

Results in Table 14 show that, compared with those born in 1946-1959, young people in Hong Kong are less likely to think "I am mainly influenced by Chinese culture" and more likely to think "I am mainly influenced by western culture." Moreover, the

post-80s generation is also much *less* likely to think “I have confidence in China’s future,” although their knowledge of China do not differ much from other groups after controlling for education, gender, and immigration status.

**Table 14. Ordinal Logit Models on Views on China**  
(1= strongly disagree 2=disagree 3=neutral 4=agree 5=strongly agree)

|                                    | I am mainly<br>influenced by<br>Chinese culture | I am mainly<br>influenced by<br>Western culture | I am confident<br>in China’s<br>future | I don’t know<br>much about<br>China |
|------------------------------------|---|---|--|-------------------------------------|
| Cohort                             |   |   |  |                                     |
| 1946-1959 [omitted]                |   |   |  |                                     |
| 1960-1969                          | -0.209**<br>(0.076)                             | 0.224**<br>(0.075)                              | 0.041<br>(0.076)                       | 0.035<br>(0.075)                    |
| 1970-1979                          | -0.138<br>(0.087)                               | 0.227**<br>(0.087)                              | 0.032<br>(0.087)                       | 0.023<br>(0.086)                    |
| 1980-1989                          | <b>-0.430***</b><br><b>(0.097)</b>              | <b>0.309***</b><br><b>(0.096)</b>               | <b>-0.221*</b><br><b>(0.097)</b>       | 0.179<br>(0.095)                    |
| Education                          |   |   |  |                                     |
| Lower secondary or below [omitted] |   |   |  |                                     |
| Upper secondary                    | 0.164*<br>(0.079)                               | 0.333***<br>(0.078)                             | 0.145<br>(0.079)                       | -<br>0.275***<br>(0.078)            |
| Associate/sub-degree               | -0.065<br>(0.092)                               | 0.523***<br>(0.091)                             | 0.186*<br>(0.092)                      | -0.335***<br>(0.090)                |
| College degree or above            | 0.070<br>(0.097)                                | 0.827***<br>(0.098)                             | 0.198*<br>(0.097)                      | -0.366***<br>(0.096)                |
| Female                             | -0.050<br>(0.059)                               | -0.004<br>(0.059)                               | -0.128*<br>(0.059)                     | 0.098<br>(0.058)                    |
| Born in Hong Kong                  | -0.801***<br>(0.067)                            | 0.975***<br>(0.066)                             | -0.231***<br>(0.065)                   | 0.704***<br>(0.065)                 |
| Cut point 1                        | -5.261  | -1.765  | -5.205                                 | -2.420                              |
| Cut point 2                        | -3.137  | -0.172  | -3.195                                 | -0.707                              |
| Cut point 3                        | -1.254  | 1.460   | -0.853                                 | 0.941                               |
| Cut point 4                        | 0.782   | 3.885   | 1.143                                  | 3.385                               |
| Pseudo R <sup>2</sup>              | 0.021   | 0.046   | 0.001                                  | 0.012                               |
| LR $\chi^2$ (8)                    | 215.32  | 508.49  | 26.35                                  | 127.39                              |

Notes: \*p<.05 \*\*p<.01 \*\*\*p<.001; figures in the parentheses are standard errors.

Finally, in the survey, there are several questions related to identity and political orientation, measured using a 7-point scale:

1. If 1 represents “I am a Hong Konger”, 4 represents “I am a Hong Kong Chinese” and 7 represents “I am a Chinese,” how do you regard yourself?
2. If 1 represents “supporting democrats,” 4 represents “neutral” and 7 represents “supporting government”, where do your stand?

3. The political standing can be divided in 7-point scale, with 1 representing “very open” and 7 representing “very conservative”. Where do you put yourself?

**Table 15. Ordinal Logit Model on Identity and Political Orientations (7-Point Scale)**

|                                    | 1. Hong Konger vs.<br>Chinese | 2. Democracy vs.<br>Institutions | 3. Open vs.<br>Conservative       |
|------------------------------------|-------------------------------|----------------------------------|-----------------------------------|
| Cohort<br>(1946-1959 [omitted])    |                               |                                  |                                   |
| 1960-1969                          | 0.122<br>(0.077)              | 0.008<br>(0.099)                 | -0.069<br>(0.081)                 |
| 1970-1979                          | 0.063<br>(0.088)              | -0.040<br>(0.113)                | 0.001<br>(0.092)                  |
| 1980-1989                          | 0.046<br>(0.097)              | -0.124<br>(0.124)                | <b>-0.265**</b><br><b>(0.101)</b> |
| Education                          |                               |                                  |                                   |
| Lower secondary or below [omitted] |                               |                                  |                                   |
| Upper secondary                    | 0.036<br>(0.080)              | -0.028<br>(0.104)                | -0.367***<br>(0.085)              |
| Associate/sub-degree               | -0.046<br>(0.093)             | -0.211<br>(0.118)                | -0.477***<br>(0.098)              |
| College degree or above            | 0.180<br>(0.098)              | -0.221<br>(0.125)                | -0.710***<br>(0.102)              |
| Female                             | -0.080<br>(0.060)             | 0.080<br>(0.077)                 | 0.080<br>(0.063)                  |
| Born in Hong Kong                  | -1.199***<br>(0.070)          | -0.330***<br>(0.087)             | -0.154*<br>(0.070)                |
| Cut point1                         | -2.640                        | -3.050                           | -3.768                            |
| Cut point2                         | -2.073                        | -2.532                           | -2.039                            |
| Cut point3                         | -1.644                        | -1.958                           | -1.463                            |
| Cut point4                         | 0.802                         | 2.523                            | 1.478                             |
| Cut point5                         | 1.201                         | 3.135                            | 2.378                             |
| Cut point6                         | 1.852                         | 3.727                            | 3.881                             |
| N                                  | 3982                          |                                  |                                   |
| LR $\chi^2$ (8)                    | 334.31                        | 36.29                            | 118.56                            |
| Pseudo R <sup>2</sup>              | 0.027                         | 0.005                            | 0.011                             |

Notes: \*p<.05 \*\*p<.01 \*\*\*p<.001; figures in the parentheses are standard errors.

Again, we run an ordinal logistic regression to see how the post-80s generation differs from others in answering these questions. Regarding the first question, whether the respondent was born in Hong Kong is a strong predictor of Hong Kong vs. China identity. Other than that, cohort, education and gender do not affect an individual’s identity. Regarding the second question, the post-80s generation does not have a clear

standpoint on whether they support the pan-democratic camp or the government.

However, they are more likely to describe their political attitude as “open” (rather than as “conservative”) in answering the third question.

Therefore, it would be misleading to treat Hong Kong’s young people born after 1980 as a homogeneous group with distinctive values, identities and political orientations. Much of the variations we observed, if any, can be explained by other factors such as education. It is true that the young people of Hong Kong have encountered some common problems in the transition from school to work and in career mobility, of which they are aware as suggested by their evaluation of their own socioeconomic status. On the other hand, they are still more optimistic than older people towards opportunities and fairness in the Hong Kong society. This might explain why they do not differ from older people in job and life satisfaction in general – because they have hope. It also explains why they do not have political preferences and act collectively in political processes for their own group’s interests.

## **VII. Summary and Policy Suggestions**

### **7.1 Summary of Findings**

Based on a series of census/by-census data from 1981 to 2006 and from a territory-wide household survey conducted in 2007, this report provides a systematic and quantitative analysis of the social profiles and economic predicaments of the post-80s generation in Hong Kong. Combining inter-censal analysis with inter-cohort analysis, we compare people of the same age across years and people of different ages in the same year to

separate the cohort effect from the age effect, and demonstrate the unique problems faced by the post-80s generation in the context of fundamental economic restructuring, rapid educational expansion and social changes since the 1990s. We also provide an empirical assessment of how the post-80s generation differs from other generations in their subjective well-beings, social attitudes and political orientations. We highlight the role of the interaction between tertiary educational expansion and structural changes in labour markets in shaping the youth's transition from school to work.

The key findings are summarized below:

- The young people of the post-80s generation are major beneficiaries of the expansion in higher education in the 1990s, and they have enjoyed more educational opportunities than those of the same age in earlier years. The educational gap has been reversed in favour of women since 2001.
- Improved education does not necessarily lead to more employment opportunities. Unemployment rates have been increasing over time for young people, even among those with tertiary education, and especially for the post-80s generation.
- Among those who are employed, highly educated young people have much less chance of obtaining managerial/professional jobs than before. This is especially true for the post-80s generation, who are increasingly crammed into associate professional and clerical jobs, and to some extent, sales/service jobs.
- The earnings of young people relative to the general working population is declining over time, although they seem to be able to catch up later.
- There is no evidence to suggest any decline in both intergenerational and

intra-generational mobility for the post-1980s, although their transitions from school to work are more precarious and unstable than before.

- Because of the uncertainties associated with bumpy transitions from school to work, younger people are increasingly delaying marriage, and living with their parents even after marrying.
- In terms of subjective stratification, young people are less likely to identify themselves as being in higher social strata than older people, but their job and life satisfaction do not differ from those of others. This may be related to their positive perception of opportunity and their relatively young age.
- There is no evidence suggesting that the post-80s generation has developed distinctive values and political orientations as a group, although they seem to be more influenced by western culture (as a result of globalization/colonization), and lean more towards a liberal political stance.

To sum up, the post-80s generation seem to be a heterogeneous group and their seemingly different attitude and behaviours compared with older cohorts can be explained by the higher education they received. On the one hand, the young generations are more likely to be educated, and education continues to be important in determining their labour market success. On the other hand, there are high differentials within higher education and having a tertiary degree can no longer guarantee a good job and a middle-class lifestyle. Labour market entry has become more casualized and having precarious/unstable jobs is a part of life for most young people nowadays, including university graduates. Higher unemployment rates, lower starting salaries, and insecure jobs have put many young people in disadvantaged positions, protracting the transition

from school to work and from childhood to adulthood. They are trapped in socioeconomic predicaments.

While the protests of a group of young social/political activists labelled as “the post-80s” generation are not a result of the young generations’ worse-off socioeconomic situations in recent years, their radical behaviours could be seen as warning signs for policy makers to seriously address the concerns of the young generation. Family and work commitments have long been associated with a reduction of risk-taking behaviours.

## **7.2 Conclusions and Policy Implications**

Youth problems are neither new to any modern society nor new to this particular historical era. Economic restructuring, together with educational expansion, in developed societies have made youths’ life stage transitions to work and adulthood more precarious than in earlier years. The vulnerability of youths is often associated with other social characteristics, such as class, gender, ethnicity, and immigration status. Social exclusion of groups of marginalized youths in many European countries have taken a toll on the youths’ mental health and increased their sense of having “no future” and being isolated from the adult world (Chisholm, Buchner 1990; Furlong and Cartmel 1997).

As a developed economy, Hong Kong’s young people encounter similar challenges in the strong social currents. Young people are now more vulnerable in labour markets than before. As pointed out in the report, the key issue for Hong Kong youths nowadays is the increasingly bumpy transition from school to work. While the social trend is hardly reversible, social policies to a large extent can help to smooth the transitions from school to work and facilitate their subsequent career development.

Policy recommendations:

- Labour markets. Effort should be devoted to both the creation of new employment opportunities in Hong Kong, particularly for professionals, and the embrace of new opportunities arising from the economic integration with the Pearl River delta. Industrial policies should take into account the employment growth and overhaul of the lopsided economic structures.
- Education. While conventional wisdom suggests that education is a key to upward mobility, this report reveals that tertiary education provides little help to address the overall inequality at the societal level. Curriculum reforms should better prepare students to meet the challenges in the labour markets in Hong Kong and beyond, rather than passively respond to the lopsided local economic structure.
- More career advice and services should be made available to provide better linkage between schools and labour markets. Better instructions, programs, and services should be designed to help young people to make the right career choices and successful transitions.

Youth issues are embedded in the entire social and economic structures. To address the problems faced by the current post-80s generation and maybe the youths in the future, a comprehensive youth policy is called for to include youths as stake holders of the society. After all, it is these young people who will determine the future of Hong Kong.

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