

Mainland Chinese undergraduates' academic socialization in Hong Kong

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Research has confirmed that supportive social networks and the associated resources play a critical role in the adaptation of migrating international students to host communities. Access to such social networks and resources requires migrating students to invest in and make efforts for academic socialization, as mediated by various social processes. This paper reports on an examination of 26 mainland Chinese undergraduates' experiences of academic socialization in a major university in Hong Kong. Drawing on these students' experiential accounts, the inquiry identified a variety of linguistic, sociocultural and ideological challenges that undermine the participants' academic socialization with local students in Hong Kong. It also recorded strategic efforts undertaken by the participants to align themselves with their local counterparts linguistically and socially. These efforts helped some participants overcome various challenges in academic socialization but most of them chose to socialize with other mainland Chinese students and further alienate themselves from local students. In light of shifting contextual conditions, it may be increasingly difficult for migrant students to construct a cohesive university community with local students. Therefore, institutions need to invest more in facilitating and supporting different groups of students' engagement with each other in achieving mutual understandings through shared activities.

Introduction

Individuals crossing borders all need to adapt themselves for the new environment and their adaptation is mediated their interaction with contextual conditions (e.g. Kim 2001). It has been commonly assumed that well educated migrants, including 'elite' migrating students, 'face the *least* barriers linked to exclusion, domination, or economic exploitation' and thus have hassle-free adaptation to a given context (Favell, Feldblum and Smith 2004, 16). This assumption is now being increasingly challenged as globally mobile 'elites' also need to negotiate with various contextual complexities to advance their 'transnational career paths' (Beverstock 2002, 535) or academic adaptation (e.g. Montgomery and McDowell 2009; Tran 2011). Recent financial crises might have

added complications to the adaptation of migrating student talents in regions such as Hong Kong and Singapore, which rely on the influx of human talent to enhance their global participation (e.g. Dimmock and Leong 2010; Cheng, Ying and Yuen 2010). On the one hand, well educated migrant talents are becoming increasingly more valuable for these regions to thrive even during global recessions and economic uncertainties. On the other hand, local dissent against migrants including migrating student talents, in which they are regarded as threats to local job security, has become increasingly visible. For this reason, there has been an increasing number of instances of anti-immigrant protests in contexts such as Singapore and Hong Kong whose economic success has largely depended on talent migration (e.g. Kan 2011; Yeoh and Lin 2013). This is most unfortunate as such protests may profoundly mediate migrating students' perceptions of host communities, creating new challenges for these students' adaptation. To explore such challenges, this paper reports on a study that examined a group of 'elite' mainland Chinese undergraduates' experiences of academic socialization as mediated by various processes including recent 'anti-mainland Chinese' incidents in Hong Kong.

Though Hong Kong has a relatively small higher education sector in comparison with contexts such as Australia or UK, universities in Hong Kong have become popular destinations for 'elite' students from the Chinese mainland (e.g., Author 2010a; Bodycott 2009; Cheng et al. 2010; Li and Bray 2007). In order to study in Hong Kong's universities funded by the University Grants Committee ('UGC'), mainland Chinese applicants usually finish secondary education with excellent academic results in mainland China and go through a highly competitive selection process. The particular university concerned in the inquiry ('the University') usually has over 10,000 applications and recruits only 300 of them (mainland students) each year. Therefore, it can be argued that these mainland Chinese undergraduates are among the top academic

achievers in mainland China. The study explored answers to the following research questions concerning these students' academic socialization:

- 1) What challenges undermine these students' efforts to socialize and construct supportive social networks in Hong Kong?
- 2) How do they respond to these challenges?

By addressing these questions, this paper highlights how these cross-border students' academic socialization is mediated by their interactions with 'complex and overlapping communities' (Norton and Toohey, 2001, 312). To this end, the coming sections contextualize the inquiry within the literature on the importance of social networks for migrant students and 'anti-mainland Chinese incidents' in Hong Kong.

Social networks, community of practice and migrating students

Previous studies have drawn attention to the importance of social networks and the associated social capital in facilitating the adaptation of 'elite' migrants', including international students, in host communities (e.g. Beaverstock 2002; Montgomery and McDowell 2009; Xu 2014; Yu and Downing 2012). Social capital refers to the 'aggregate of the actual or potential resources' related to 'a durable network of more or less institutionalized relationships of mutual acquaintance and recognition' (Bourdieu 1986, 247, also see Lin 2001). Supportive social networks together with their associated resources have been regarded as crucial for migrant students moving from 'legitimate peripheral participation' to full participation in 'communities of practice' in the new contexts (Lave and Wenger 1991, 29). However, the internationalization process often transforms universities into 'complex and overlapping communities in which variously positioned participants learn specific, local, historically constructed, and changing practices' (Norton and Toohey 2001, 312). In the past, students of different cultural backgrounds and prior experiences have been socialized into various cognitive, perceptual and attitudinal dispositions or 'habitus' that guide their thinking and action

before they come together in particular universities (Bourdieu 1984). It is therefore problematic to theorize universities as communities of shared practices as such conceptualization exaggerates ‘the internal cohesion and cooperation of collectivities and [...] understating the operation of discourse and power through the communication of group norms’ (Morgan 2007, 1046).

Lin (2001, 39) points out that such ‘social interactions tend to take place among individuals with similar lifestyles and socioeconomic characteristics.’ In other words, it is shared knowledge and sentiments that ‘engenders closer and more supportive relationships,’ which allow migrant students to access valuable social resources in host communities for adaptation and academic learning (Montgomery and McDowell 2009, 463; Lin 2001). Bourdieu (1986, 249) emphasizes that a social network is not a ‘natural’ or ‘social given’ and access to its associated resource is ‘the product of investment strategies’, sustained by continuous exchanges of valuable resources. Lin (2001, 47) also notes that ‘it requires more efforts’ for individuals with different resources, ‘which can include wealth, reputation, power and lifestyle’, to interact with each other, ‘because of resource differentials and lack of shared sentiments.’ Wenger (2000, 227-228) contends that individuals may enhance their sense of belonging to and participation in particular communities through ‘engagement, e.g., doing things together..., imagination, e.g., constructing images of...[their] communities..., and alignment, making sure that [their] local activities are sufficiently aligned with other processes’ in these communities. As a result of these activities, migrant students may develop a shared repertoire of ‘stories, artefacts, tools, actions, historical events, discourses, concepts, and styles’ (Wenger 1998, 4) or ‘sentiments’ (Lin 2001, 39). Migrant students also need to invest resources in developing supportive networks and acquire more resources associated with these networks to access and mobilize social

capital for their own ends (Lin 2001). It must be noted that investment in social networks takes place within particular contextual conditions and processes, which may facilitate or constrain it. This is particularly the case with mainland Chinese undergraduates in Hong Kong's English medium universities, considering the increasingly hostile attitudes towards immigrants in many contexts, including Hong Kong.

Mainland Chinese, local Chinese and anti-immigrant sentiments in Hong Kong

Local Chinese residents share the same cultural and ethnic heritage with mainland Chinese, but they see them as different from their mainland counterparts because of the historical, linguistic, political and socio-cultural experiences they have in the last two centuries (Brewer 1999; Kim and Ng 2008; Law and Lee 2006). Hong Kong had been under British Colonial rule for over 150 years and there has been strict control of people's movement into Hong Kong from mainland China, especially after the founding of People's Republic of China in 1949 (Law and Lee 2006). In the second half of the last century, Hong Kong achieved remarkable economic successes when mainland China had been in socio-political turmoil and poverty for a few decades, leading to a large number of mainland Chinese immigrants in Hong Kong. Furthermore, there is a noteworthy linguistic divide between mainland and local Chinese residents. Most local residents in Hong Kong use Cantonese, a regional variety of Chinese as the lingua franca while mainland Chinese use Putonghua, the national standard spoken variety of Chinese, and other regional Chinese varieties, which are not mutually intelligible with Cantonese. For these reasons, mainland Chinese immigrants were often portrayed as 'backward', 'ill-mannered' and having a 'foreign accent' in Hong Kong's media and public awareness (Tsui 2007, 130; Ma 1999).

The perceived differences between local Chinese residents and mainland Chinese have not been attenuated by rapid economic developments in mainland China and increased socio-economic exchanges between Hong Kong and mainland China in the last two decades after the handover in 1997. Instead, local Chinese residents' dissatisfaction with mainland Chinese has been on the rise due to a variety of factors (Kim and Ng 2006; Yew and Kwong 2014). A daily quota of 150 mainland Chinese immigrants, mostly local residents' spouses and children, are granted residence for family reunion and they are often seen as competitors for welfare resources by other local residents in Hong Kong. A massive influx of mainland Chinese visitors and investors causes congestions in streets and the public transport system while it also contributes to rising prices of commodities, especially housing prices. Many local residents also blamed the mainland Chinese government's political handling for the lack of progress towards democracy in Hong Kong. Local residents' discontent with mainland China culminated in the publication of 'anti-locusts' advertisements in major newspapers (Liu, 2012) and public protests about mainland Chinese visitors in major shopping malls (BBC, 2015). It seems that 'the tightly knit system of communication and transportation... diminish physical boundaries', but they may also 'exacerbate ethnic and national rivalries, rendering the deeply fractious and unsettling landscape... [and] galvanizing many into "us-against-them" posturing' (Kim 2006, 283-284; also Kim 2001). In Hong Kong, there has been a 'rising local identity', which is 'evident in the resuscitation of a local identity through a renewed emphasis on what is unique to Hong Kong, a search for a *raison d'être* for the city and its inhabitants... as well as in local people's frequent protests of what they see as Beijing's transgressions and the erosion of the principle of "one country, two systems"' (Yew and Kwong 2014, 1109).

The anti-mainland Chinese sentiments have been affecting the tertiary education sector as well. With an aspiration of becoming a regional educational hub, tertiary institutions in Hong Kong have been confronted with the challenge that their pursuit of internationalization (‘國際化’) will not become mainlandization(‘大陸化’) in the end (Cheung et al 2010; Kan 2011). To attract and retain human talents, the government in Hong Kong also changed its immigration policy to encourage non-local university graduates to remain in Hong Kong upon graduation. For instance, the new Immigration Arrangements for the Non-local Graduates scheme (‘IANG’) launched in 2008 allows non-local (including mainland Chinese) graduates to apply for one-year visa extension without a job offer after graduation (Geng and Li 2012). The Immigration Ordinance also maintains that these graduates will be eligible for permanent residence after staying for seven consecutive years (including the years of study). It is not surprising that the increasing presence of non-local, especially mainland Chinese, students, has been scrutinized by the public in Hong Kong. Media reports on increasing public concerns about the benefits of having these students educated in Hong Kong’s publicly funded tertiary programmes have portrayed them as competitors for limited UGC-funded university places and other educational resources (Kan 2011). Such public discontent is not groundless and needs to be understood in the context that only 18% of the local school leavers enter the UGC-funded universities for tertiary studies (Waters 2008). These increasingly strong anti-mainland Chinese sentiments, together with the perceived socio-political and linguistic differences, may cause additional challenges for cross-border mainland Chinese undergraduates in their academic socialization in Hong Kong. For instance, the ‘anti-locusts’ posters were posted on university campuses and one university student magazine published special issues on Hong Kong nationalism, calling for Hong Kong citizens’ self-determination (Benitez and Lau 2015). At the

same university, a mainland Chinese candidate running for a social secretary position at the student union was questioned by the media whether her election campaign was part of Beijing's scheme to promote communist influence in the university (ChinaOutlook 2015).

The study

The inquiry examined mainland Chinese undergraduates' experiences in one of the leading Hong Kong universities to understand what undermined or facilitated their academic socialization efforts and how they responded to these strategically upon arrival in Hong Kong. It extends from the researcher's earlier studies on the role of languages in mainland Chinese undergraduates' academic socialization, which was conducted at a time when negative stereotypes of mainland Chinese immigrants were prevalent in the public awareness and discourses but anti-mainland Chinese sentiments were much less visible in Hong Kong (Author, 2010a & b). The researcher, being a migrant student from mainland China to Hong Kong, has witnessed the deterioration of local Chinese residents' dissatisfaction with their mainland Chinese counterparts in the last 10 years. The participants were 26 second and third year mainland Chinese undergraduates who had spent two or three years in Hong Kong. They were 'purposively and conceptually' selected for the inquiry as advised by Huberman and Miles (1994, 441). As informed by the researcher's earlier research, mainland Chinese undergraduates in business, finance and economics are more likely to stay in Hong Kong than those in other disciplines. Consequently, the researcher targeted potential participants from among those who were studying in the Faculty of Business and any other programs whose students were more likely to stay in Hong Kong. For this reason, the study included medical and language education students who can become medical doctors or teachers only with qualifications acquired in Hong Kong. All the participants

are 20 to 22 years old. Only two of them spoke Cantonese as first language before arrival in Hong Kong.

[Insert Table 1 here]

Data Collection

The researcher conducted in-depth narrative interviews with the participants, in which interview questions were used as prompts for them to recount and reflect on their experiences in Hong Kong (See Appendix 1 for the interview questions). During the interviews, the researcher also asked them to recall why they came to Hong Kong and what had their experiences been so far. They were also encouraged to share the difficulties and challenges they had experienced and how they addressed them strategically after arrival. In light of recent media coverage on ‘anti-mainland Chinese’ sentiments, the interviews particularly focused on their socialization with locals and their experiences of the ‘so-called mainland-Hong Kong conflicts’. The interviews, lasting about an hour, were conducted in Putonghua and were audio recorded. The recordings were transcribed and the transcripts were returned to the participants for confirmation. The researcher undertook email exchanges with the participants to clarify any confusions arising after data transcription and analysis.

Data analysis

The researcher adopted ‘paradigmatic analytic procedures to produce taxonomies and categories out of the common elements across the database’ to analyze the data. The analysis was guided by the research questions through multiple readings (Polkinghorne 1995, 5). The researcher reviewed all transcripts without any specific focus. The general impressions gained through this preliminary review prepared the ground for the

subsequent multi-stages analysis. In the first stage, the researcher generated a chronological narrative of experiences of each participant in Hong Kong, covering their pre-departure expectations and preparations, experienced challenges and adopted responses after arrival, educational and socialization experiences, and plans for graduation. In the second stage, the researcher focused on socialization with locals, including local students within the university and local people beyond, and other mainland Chinese students. Attention was paid to the challenges and difficulties that they encountered when socializing with locals and the kind of responses they chose. The analysis focused on what differences and similarities the participants experienced when socializing with local students, what efforts the participants undertook to align their activities with those of local students and what results they have achieved through such alignment efforts. It explored how lack of a shared repertoire of ‘stories, artefacts, tools, actions, historical events, discourses, concepts, and styles’ (Wenger 1998, 4) or ‘sentiments’ (Lin 2001, 39) undermined their alignment and engagement. It also examined whether or not the participants’ efforts could help them overcome these challenges as mediated by the contextual conditions. The following data extract from Ming, a Year 3 Accounting and Finance student, is used to illustrate this crucial stage of data analysis:

Extract 1

Researcher: Why do you think that mainland and local Chinese students belong to two separate groups and it is extremely difficult for the two groups to mix up with each other?

Ming: [...] Cultural differences are the most important cause for this separation. We grew up in different circumstances. They received British education and were exposed to Hong Kong culture since young [...] We took the so-called 9 year compulsory education in Mainland. [...] We have acquired different mindsets, languages and even communication styles. [...] We are not familiar with things that

they are interested in. They do not know what we like to talk about. [...] Moreover, we do not get used to socializing with locals [...] Maybe this is a mindset. We feel more secure and ourselves when working with other mainland Chinese students on projects [...] because we work much harder and are much more reliable.

The above extract contains Ming's reflection on the challenges that mainland Chinese students had when socializing with local students. Ming cited linguistic differences as one of the major challenges while he also used prior social and cultural experiences to justify his perception of mainland and local Chinese students being two distinctive social groups. In his imagination, mainland Chinese students developed similar 'thinking patterns' due to the compulsory education in mainland China while local Chinese students acquired different thinking styles because of their 'British style education' and 'Hong Kong culture'. Ming also presented the image of 'hardworking' mainland Chinese students and felt that the two groups of students aligned their learning activities to different norms. Subsequently, he believed that mainland Chinese students were likely to be 'more reliable' and felt 'more secure' when working with them. As a result, mainland Chinese students like Ming usually worked with other mainland Chinese students and did not work with local students in group projects during their studies, which caused further alienation from local students (e.g. author 2010b).

After analyzing each participant's experiences, further rounds of readings were undertaken to compare and contrast different participants' accounts of challenges and responses, before patterns could be identified. Such comparison helped the researcher identify whether a participant's perception is an idiosyncratic or a shared one. It also revealed that the perceived alienation between mainland and local students may be more than mere perceptions, i.e. it may have something to do with deeply entrenched perceptions that local students had of mainland Chinese as in the following exchange that Xin, a Year 2 medical student reported in the interview:

Extract 2

Xin: 90% of medical students had no experience of socializing with mainland Chinese students. I did not feel that we were different in the beginning. Once when we were practicing taking blood for tests among each other, I overheard my local classmate saying 'she is different from us after all' [...].

Researcher: What did she mean?

Xin: When taking blood from each other, my blood vein is too fine for them to take blood [...] A local student with whom we were very friendly commented 'why is she different?'. Then the other classmate responded that she was different from us after all. Hearing this conversation, I was quite puzzled. I did not feel bad but I did feel puzzled. It was the first time for me to realize that she had such perceptions of me.

As can be seen in the extract, a local medical student drew on the popular construction of mainland Chinese as different from local residents to explain why Xin's blood vein was different from that of local students. Though it might have been intended as a joke to deal with a stressful situation in which they found it difficult to take blood sample from Xin, the incident made Xin feel the brunt of local students' 'us-against-them' posturing, which likely undermined her socialization with them. It also draws attention to the profound mediation of contextual conditions on the participants' efforts to socialize with local students in constructing and sustaining supportive social networks, which explains the observed division of mainland and local Chinese students at the university. Since analysis is an ongoing and reiterative process, preliminary findings from the analysis of early interviews were often presented to participants in the later interviews for member checking so that preliminary conclusions drawn from the analysis can be verified.

Mainland Chinese undergraduates' academic socialization

Few participants in the study explicitly acknowledged that the increasingly negative societal attitudes towards mainland Chinese affected them and a close examination of

the Year 3 participants identified that most of them expressed uncertainties in whether to stay on in Hong Kong upon graduation (Author 2014). Nevertheless, the analysis revealed that most participants' efforts to engage with local students were undermined by different 'imaginations' of the two groups on the linguistic, socio-cultural, and ideological grounds. These 'imaginations' reflect significant 'resource differentials' that the participants had with their local counterparts (Lin 2001, 47). Some of these 'imaginations' are indicative of negative stereotyping that underscores the prevalent social attitudes towards mainland Chinese in Hong Kong (e.g. Kan 2011; Tsui 2007). To overcome these challenges, the participants were found to have invested in learning Cantonese and socializing with local students to enhance the sense of belonging immediately upon arrival but most of them gave up learning Cantonese later. A small number of them managed to have better integration into the host communities, but most of them failed to achieve a shared repertoire of 'stories [...] discourses, concepts and styles (Wenger 1998, 4) or 'sentiments' (Lin 2001, 39) with local students. Consequently, they became unwilling to engage with local students in shared activities.

Challenges: Linguistic, socio-cultural and ideological differences

The participants need to deal with a variety of challenges associated with the perceived differences in language use, cultural upbringing, ideological stances, and future aspirations, when socializing with local students. These perceived differences were related to the fact that mainland and local Chinese have been long constructed to be distinct from each other (e.g. Brewer 1999).

As mentioned earlier, it is not surprising to see that linguistic differences undermined the participants' socialization with local students. Language barrier is one of the most notable indicators of the lack of shared 'stories, artefacts, tools' between mainland and local Chinese students (Wenger 1998, 4; also Author 2010a; Xu 2014).

Extract 3

Cantonese is a big issue even though they understand Putonghua and we understand a little bit Cantonese. When we get together, they like to use Cantonese but we cannot follow their conversations. When they crack jokes and laugh together, we do not even know why they laugh. (Han, Year 3 Accounting and Finance).

The extract above indicates that Han does not share ‘sentiments’ with local students (Lin 2001, 39) as he could not share laughter with them. Without a shared language to construct their life and worlds together, the participants are unable to deepen their social interaction with local students. Apart from this language challenge, the participants like Ming cited prior cultural and life experiences as significant causes for their alienation from local Chinese students as reflected in Extract 1, in which he attributed the differences between mainland and local students to prior experiences.

Ming projected mainland Chinese students to be more ‘hardworking’ and ‘reliable’ in academic studies, while other participants portrayed some of their local counterparts as political radicals, who would even give up valuable learning opportunities to participate in political and social movements. For instance, although Jing was apparently appreciative of her ‘radical’ roommate, she distanced herself from local students like her roommate as they were ‘super super radical’:

Extract 4

My first roommate is [...] a radical girl in Hong Kong. We have pictures on our room door showing she participated in public demonstrations and sit-ins. [...] She quit her studies after one year. [...] At the beginning, I was curious about why she was so involved in these activities. We mainland Chinese students are also interested in political affairs but we will not be that radical. She is the kind of student who will skip examinations to participate in demonstrations. [...] She thinks that demonstrations are much more important than her studies. [...] we talked about June 4th but I found her knowledge of the incident quite biased. Maybe

my understanding of the incident is also biased (Jing, Year 3 Economics and Finance).

It was difficult for Jing to accept that a student could give up studies for political involvement. She also commented that local students were too obsessed with their ‘incomplete’ understanding of particular political issues such as the June 4th incident in 1989. As found in the inquiry, the issue of June 4th often becomes a dividing line that separates mainland and local Chinese students. Yuan, a Year 3 Economics and Finance student, recalled how a mainland Chinese student was confronted with critiques from his local classmates concerning his ‘political ignorance’.

Extract 5

Yuan: My friend took a course in which she is the only mainland Chinese student. She was sometimes criticized for being one of the ‘fooled’ generation and having no political freedom. We have quite different political views. [...]

Researcher: Maybe we have different political views here. I was wondering if you tried to understand some issues from their political perspectives or you just cannot accept their views?

Yuan: I do not like to discuss politics with them. I feel that they behave like religious people. It is difficult to change their views. I am afraid that we will quarrel instead of discussing. It is not necessary for us to quarrel. It is not worth the effort.

It is understandable that two groups of students have quite different perceptions and beliefs about particular political issues since they have had different exposure to the relevant information. Unfortunately, these political and ideological differences undermine the participants’ socialization with local students. As gathered from the above extract, local students’ attempts to educate mainland Chinese students about political matters might have backfired. Many mainland Chinese students like Yuan were unwilling to participate in relevant discussions with local students as they perceived that local students might have confused ‘politics’ with ‘religion’. It must be noted that the

University's Students Union and its subordinate organizations have made explicit political statements about the June 4th tragedy and as a result, mainland Chinese students usually organize themselves into independent associations to distance themselves from the relevant statements. Consequently, the political and ideological differences further set them apart (see the popular resistance against a mainland Chinese student's election campaign for a student union position in ChinaOutlook 2015).

Local students' involvement in political and social movements may reflect the different preoccupations and priorities that they had in comparison with those of the participants. Most mainland Chinese students prioritize academic studies as they need to get good academic results to ensure that they achieve better life through educational efforts. In contrast, local students had diverse expectations about university life.

Extract 6

When I just came to Hong Kong, I spent time talking to local students so that I could understand their backgrounds. Later, I do not think that we have had anything new to talk about. [...] I go to library every day for studies. Some of the local students do not understand why we (mainland students) spend the whole day in the library and why we regard university as the place only for studies. They ask questions which make me feel puzzled since I do not know what the university is for if not for studies. I think that we have totally different attitudes towards life (Can, Year 3, accounting and Finance).

It may be an exaggeration to say that local students do not work hard enough. Since the interviewed mainland Chinese students mostly live in students' residential halls, where local students are known to be active in sports and cultural activities, they must have acquired this perception about different attitudes towards life and studies as Fudan commented on his local hall mates

Extract 7

I feel that the best local students, the best Hong Kong students in my view, have all gone abroad for studies. Those who chose to study here, especially those who live in residential halls, come to university to enjoy themselves. They are not interested in studies. Therefore, it is difficult for us to integrate ourselves into this local students' community. Even if we do, this means that we will not have good academic results. [...] This is a regret. We do not become true friends and our socialization with local students is superficial and has no depth. We do not really have any conflict with them but we live in two worlds that are wide apart. We just respect each other. This is most regrettable. (Fudan, Year 2, Accounting and Finance)

Without interviewing local students, it is difficult to conclude whether local students had different motives for their educational endeavours in comparison with those of the participants. However, it is a widely held belief among local students, especially among those who live in the university's residential halls that sports and cultural activities were also part of a broader university education. Being local, they may have some advantages and do not have to be as driven as the participants. These may explain why the participants and local students had different 'lifestyles and socioeconomic characteristics' (Lin 2001, 39), creating challenges in their efforts to engage with each other in academic socialization. To overcome these challenges, most of the participants did undertake strategic efforts in socializing with local students upon arrival, which led to a variety of socialization experiences.

Strategic efforts to undertake linguistic and social alignment

The participants' narratives reveal that most of them attempted to adjust their linguistic and social practices to the local norms after arrival in Hong Kong. Unfortunately, these efforts did not help them overcome the above-mentioned challenges as most of them failed to achieve successful socialization with local students.

With regard to the learning of Cantonese, most participants (23 out of 26) attempted to learn it upon arrival but they did not necessarily find the environment conducive. For instance, Yu recalled how contradictory her experiences of learning Cantonese were:

Extract 8

I live in a residential hall and had to live with a local student during the first year. I was lucky to have a very nice local student. She speaks good Putonghua. I told her not to speak Putonghua to me because I wanted to practice Cantonese. She then spoke Cantonese to me and she was very patient. At the very beginning, I needed her to repeat every sentence she said three or five times before I could understand it. [...] She always praised my progress in speaking Cantonese. [...] Sometimes, if I try to speak Cantonese, they know that you are from mainland China and they will switch to Putonghua immediately. I always feel discouraged by this switch. It makes me unwilling to use Cantonese (Yu, Year 3 Economics and Finance).

Yu was particularly encouraged by a supportive local student who was ‘patient’ and willing to ‘repeat what she said three to five times’. This local student praised her progress in learning Cantonese, which boosted her confidence in learning. However, she encountered more of another type of local students who switched to Putonghua after recognizing her as a migrant from Mainland by her accent. These local students might have changed the use of language to facilitate their conversations, but such changes discouraged her from using Cantonese further (Author 2010a).

After the participants acquired an appropriate command of Cantonese, they soon felt obliged to put extra efforts in presenting themselves properly when speaking Cantonese, indicative of their self-consciousness as mainland Chinese on the campus:

Extract 9

Wei: Every time I chatted with local students, I paid particular attention to my language use. That is partly because I need to think about how to say something in Cantonese. [...] I still need more time to process it. I am particularly cautious in

using Cantonese because I do not want to create any misunderstanding. There are always some biased people, you know. For instance, when I speak with friends in Putonghua, I sometimes use foul language or some not-so-nice words. I will never speak such language to local students.

Researcher: What kind of biased people are you worried about?

Wei: These people always think that mainland Chinese have no manners. [...]

Researcher: Apart from the choice of language, what else are you cautious about? How about topics?

Wei: I do not talk about myself. Of course, they do not ask questions about myself. It seems to be always like this. I talk about myself with others but I do not talk about myself with local students.

As reflected in the exchange above, Wei (Year 3 Economics and Finance) felt that local students usually have negative perceptions of mainland Chinese (Ma 1999; Tsui 2000) and for this reason, she always had to put care in selecting appropriate topics when having conversations with local students. For this reason, these efforts mean that she seldom talked about herself in such conversations. Lack of self-revelation undermines the forging of close ties and might have discouraged mainland Chinese students from having in-depth engagement with local students. As a result, at least three participants admitted that they were never motivated enough to learn and use Cantonese. One of them claimed that he could understand Cantonese and had no urge to speak it for ‘three years’ because ‘most of my friends are mainland Chinese and we use Putonghua to socialize’ (Xiang, Year 3 Economics and Finance).

In addition to linguistic alignment, the participants also tried to socialize with local students by participating in a variety of social and academic activities. Participation in activities favoured by local students helped some participants develop bonds with them. At least three participants were highly involved in local students’ social activities and they had sustained their involvement throughout. For instance, Qun (Year 3, Accounting and Finance) became the first non-local student floor chief, the head student

for residents on the same floor in a residential hall. In his narrative, he stressed that he invested in developing good relationships with local students. The relationship extends from social activities within the hall to academic studies as he collaborated with them in academic projects.

Extract 10

I was a floor chief for a year. I am the first non local student floor chief in my hall. [...]I got to know my floor mates very well and have a good relationship with them. I also work on projects with them and we all get along with each other very well. They do not treat me as a typical mainland Chinese student. They always say that I am not like those mainland Chinese students we know of. I do not know whether this is true or not. But I like to socialize with them and play with them. Many mainland Chinese students are not willing to participate in local students' activities. (Qun).

As can be seen in the extract above, local students even regarded him as a 'non-mainland Chinese student', which means most mainland Chinese students had great difficulties in doing what Qun did. In contrast, Yiqi, a Year 2 Accounting and Finance student, who believed he invested heavily in building relationships with local students, did not find his efforts rewarding. He participated in a variety of social activities but he did not feel that he shared any private quality time with local students.

Extract 11

When I first came here, I really wanted to integrate into the local student community. I spent a lot of time and energy socializing with them. [...] then I realized that my efforts were not rewarded. [...] For instance, they will ask me to join if there are hall events. However, after you have a quiet time and the event is over, or you finish a day's studies, I will call my mainland Chinese friends to come together [...] for a meal or watch a movie during the weekend. [...] I have no private life together with local students except for hall events. After one year, I started asking myself why it is like this. We are good friends with each other, aren't we? We greeted each other when we see each other. Why have I never

thought of inviting them for a meal or for something else? Why have they never invited me for some personal activities? (Yiqi)

It disappointed Yiqi that he and local students never had the drive to invite each other for meals after all the hours he spent socializing with them. Moreover, the participants might have had clashes over what types of social activities they should attend with local students and they were unable to attend many of local students' social activities. As an example, Fudan mentioned that he attended 'some of their activities' such as 'day time sports activities or meals' but he could not 'attend others, such as those mid night activities'. Such clashes suggest that their unwillingness to participate might be associated with the perceived differences in 'lifestyles and socio-economic characteristics' (Lin, 2001, p. 39). They also explained why the participants were not willing to invest more time and resources in building and sustaining social relationships with local students.

Mixed results of engagement: Shared understanding and further alienation

Since the participants had limited success in aligning their linguistic and social practices with those of local students, it came as no surprise that they reported few shared activities and little engagement with them. However, it is worth mentioning that a small number of participants, who had extended engagement with local students, developed better understandings of local students than those who did not engage with local students.

The participants who had extended engagement with local students reported both joys and pains in their socialization with them. For instance, Xinhan, a Year 2 Accounting and Finance student, who joined the Executive Committee for one student society recalled his experience as follows:

Extract 12

It is a mixture of pains and joys. [...] I do not really understand their views. Whenever we plan something, they will consider many many issues. [...] they keep changing the plans [in light of new emerging issues], which takes a lot of time. I feel extremely bored by the process (Xinhan)

Xinhan's pains might have been caused by local students' working styles. Student society committees at the University are known to have long meetings. It is not unusual for a student society's committee to have a 72-hour non-stop Annual General meeting, which many mainland Chinese students cannot accept. However, Xinhan was not discouraged by local students' working style in his socialization with them, he persisted in working with them and developed a close relationship with many local students. In cases of other participants, their alignment efforts and deepened engagement with local students led to their changing perceptions. When Yifan (Year 3 Survey) had an opportunity to work with local students, she began to change her initial perceptions.

Extract 13

When I was working as an intern at an NGO last summer, I worked with three local students. They were quite reliable. I have never worked with local students before on particular projects. They were much more reliable than I expected. However, my friend had a few local students as team members and they were very unreliable. It depends on individuals (Yifan).

Following the changed perceptions recorded in the extract above, at least two participants suggested that not all mainland or local Chinese students are same. For instance, one participant recalled one of his local friends, who was open about his life and worked hard to achieve what he wanted to achieve. In his perceptions, this local student is no different from those 'hardworking' mainland Chinese students.

Extract 14

I know a Hong Kong student very well. He has been trying his best to find internship opportunities and lives under great pressure. He thinks about looking for jobs etc. [...] We came to know each other during exchanges. We did not have a lot of pressure when we came to know each other. We spent quite a lot of time going out and we do not have any conflict of interest. Hong Kong people are honest. They disclose a lot of things if we get along with each other well. [...] In contrast, mainland Chinese students are not inclined to talk about themselves willingly. My Hong Kong friend told me that he lives in Tin Shui Wai and what his parents are doing. I did not ask him about them. He shared these with me (Zhiying, Year 2 Accounting and Finance).

In the meantime, Chao felt that his mainland fellows were too ‘driven by materialistic gains’ and ‘overanxious about academic studies’. In other words, he distanced himself from these ‘hardworking’ mainland students and believes that it is necessary to appreciate local students’ attitudes towards life and work.

Extract 15

I feel that many mainland students here are particularly anxious about success. [...] It is very easy for them to feel anxious, such as low grades in a course. They really blame themselves seriously when they fail to achieve the most desirable academic results even though they are already excellent themselves (Chao, Year 3 Social Sciences).

These participants contended that it is impossible to generalize particular features about mainland and local students. Nevertheless, the perceived differences continue to undermine most of the other participants’ academic socialization with local students. They reported that they have few shared activities with local students.

Extract 16

I am more willing to work with other mainland Chinese students for group work because they are academically stronger and we have no language barriers. [...] we can talk about anything but we can not do that with local students. We grew up in different environments [...] we just talked about superficial topics such as eating,

drinking and travel etc. with local students. We talk about our future with mainland Chinese students (Jia, Year 3 Economics and Finance).

Like participants mentioned earlier (e.g. in Extract 2), Jia explained that different prior cultural experiences discouraged her from having in depth engagement with local students through shared activities. Jiayi also made it clear that the different agenda or objectives that the participants had (from local students) made it unlikely for them to have shared activities:

Extract 17

As a student, my major responsibility is to study well. This means that I have different agenda with those of local students. My agenda is to get my studies done [...] As a result, mainland Chinese students spend a lot of time together in the library, discussions, self studies or eating together. [...] I will not ask a local student to go to library with me (Jiali, Year 3 Economics and Finance).

The shared objective to pursue academic excellence as revealed in the above extract drives mainland Chinese students to spend ever more time together on academic studies. Therefore, their socialization with each other deepens in the process as most of the shared activities are related to academic studies such as spending time together in the library and having social chats after library studies. Unfortunately, this also means that they gradually spend less and less time with local students.

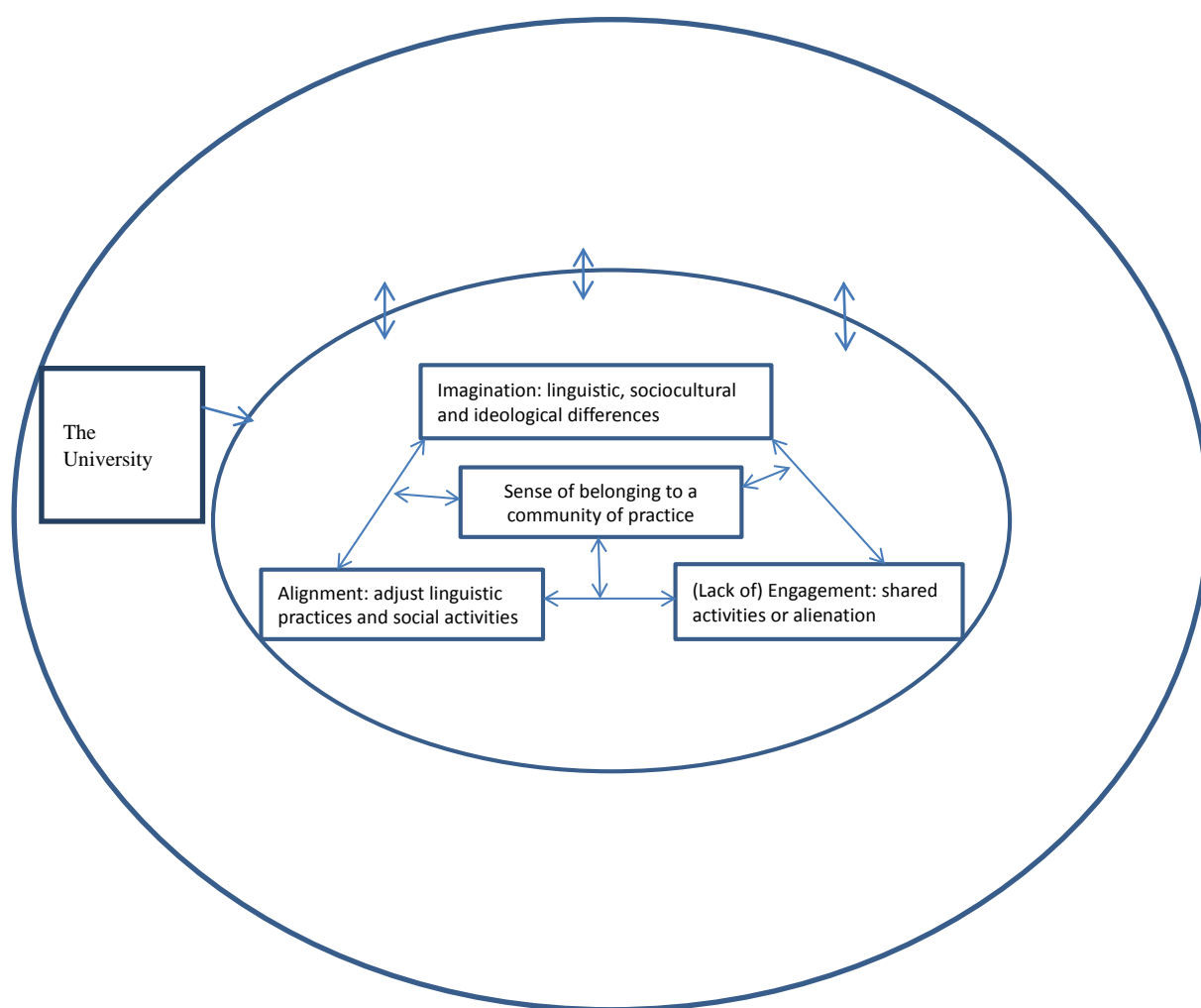
Discussion

The inquiry so far has identified a variety of linguistic, sociocultural and ideological challenges that undermine migrant mainland Chinese students' academic socialization in Hong Kong. It has also recorded strategic efforts undertaken by the participants to align themselves with their local counterparts linguistically and socially. These efforts were found to have led to a mixture of engagement results, some leading to the

participants' enhanced mutual understanding of local students and others further alienation between the two groups. Previous research has recognized the critical importance of supportive social networks for these migrant students in terms of academic adaptation and career advances upon graduation (e.g. Beaverstock 2002; Montgomery and McDowell 2009; Tran 2011; Yu and Downing 2012). The emerging findings from this study show that it is extremely difficult for migrant students to create and sustain social networks that involve local students or residents, even though they are of the same ethnicity and share some cultural heritage.

This paper has largely presented the findings in terms of differences as challenges, alignment efforts as strategic responses and engagement as outcomes (Wenger 1998). However, it must be noted that these processes interact with each other as experienced by the participants (as illustrated in Figure 1). Most participants' engagement with local students and their alignment efforts have been undermined by perceived 'resource differentials' in terms of linguistic, socio-cultural and ideological and political differences (Lin 2001, 47). The findings also suggest that at least three participants aligned themselves with local students' linguistic practices and social activities to significantly reduce the perceived 'resource differentials'. These alignment efforts helped deepen their engagement with local students through increased shared activities. They also contributed to a stronger tie between the two groups of students and strengthened their sense of belonging at the University. In the case of Qun, he was even considered by his local counterparts as one of them. In other words, many of these perceived differences can be overcome if the two groups engage with each other to develop mutual understandings or a shared repertoire of 'stories, artefacts, tools, actions, historical events, discourses, concepts, and styles' (Wenger 1998, 4) or 'sentiments' (Lin 2001, 39). Unfortunately, most participants took an easier option as

they chose to deepen their relationships with other mainland Chinese students or non-local students with whom they already shared similar ‘lifestyles and socioeconomic characteristics’ or life trajectories (ibid). It is also noteworthy that the perceived differences might have been substantiated by contextual conditions as ‘the tightly knit system of communication and transportation ... ‘[exacerbates] ethnic and national rivalries, rendering the deeply fractious and unsettling landscape... [and] galvanizing many into “us-against-them” posturing’ (Kim 2006, 263-264). In light of shifting sociocultural conditions, it may be increasingly difficult for mainland Chinese students to construct a cohesive university community with local students. This means that institutions need to actively create opportunities for different groups of students to work together and provide more support to sustain their engagement in shared activities.



Conclusion

It can be argued that the participants' socialization with other mainland Chinese students presents no significant problem for further discussion. Nevertheless, if a migrant student spends three or four formative years in a host community, it can be seen as loss for the host community if it fails to transform this student into a member of its expanding social network, irrespective of whether this student will stay on as its member or not upon graduation. The necessity to integrate migrant students more has become even more urgent since there have been heated public discussions concerning the benefits that the host community can have by having these students educated in contexts such as Hong Kong and Singapore (e.g. Kan 2011; Yeoh and Lin, 2013).

It must be noted that the inquiry involved a limited number of participants which makes it difficult to generalize its findings. It is also limited in that the study did not involve local Chinese students at the University, which may offer alternative perspectives on these mainland Chinese undergraduates' academic socialization. Therefore, future research needs to explore the issue from the perspectives of both mainland and local students and it should also involve larger number of participants. Despite these limitations, the study yield some important insights on these cross-border students' academic socialization. It is important to note that six participants (out of 26) in the inquiry had forged or were in the process of forging close and sustainable ties and friendships with local students. In the process, they questioned the stereotypical perceptions of mainland as 'hardworking' and local students 'fun-loving'. They also appreciated that they had many common challenges with each other even though they come from different cultural backgrounds and have different prior experiences. For instance, all of them face increasingly competitive employment market upon graduation or share the burden of familial expectations. Such shared concerns are usually a good

starting point for mainland and local students to realize that they are not that different from each other. Therefore, it is important for educators to support these cross-border students' academic socialization efforts by advising them to undertake strategic efforts to develop 'shared sentiments' and reduce 'resource differentials' (Lin 2001, 47). Efforts need to be made to ensure that perceived differences between migrant and local students do not galvanize them 'into "us-against-them" posturing' (Kim 2006, 284) while these students are also in need of support to make them more resilient in their socialization efforts. Any institutional and pedagogical effort to help migrant students socialize with local students will need to invite them to critically reflect upon the stereotypical perceptions of each other before they discover the common ground that they stand on. These critical examinations and discoveries are crucial for developing, building and sustaining mutually supportive social networks for migrant and local students for their career and life advances (e.g. Lave and Wenger 1991; Lin 2001; Wenger 1998).

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Appendix 1

Interview Schedule (a complete list of questions available upon request)

- 1) How do you feel about studying in Hong Kong?
- 2) Why did you decide to come here?
- 3) What challenges did you experience upon arrival in Hong Kong
- 4) What did you do to cope with them?
- 5) What challenges do you think that you are facing now?
- 6) How are you getting along with your local Chinese students?
- 7) How satisfied are you with your educational experiences in Hong Kong?
- 8) What kind of challenges do you foresee about your future endeavor if you are planning to stay in Hong Kong upon graduation)?
- 9) Any memorable individuals or things related to your pursuit of graduation goals in Hong?
- 10) How satisfied are you with your experiences in Hong Kong?

Table 1 Participants ($n=26$)

Gender		Study Programmes (undergraduate)		
Female	Male	Social Sciences (including Journalism and education)	Business (including economics, finance, accounting)	Others (medicine, surveying, architecture)
17	9	5	18	3