

Chapter 4

Locating the population: Hong Kong – Australia migration.

4a. Chapter introduction

This chapter will provide some background to Hong Kong–Australia migration, drawing mainly on material from social science migration studies. I present some general ‘facts’, theories and categories related to Hong Kong–Australia migration as a background to understanding the practical strategies of this migrant group in a particular historical time.

I concentrate on the characteristics of Hong Kong emigration to Australia in the period from the mid-1980s through the late 1990s. Most of my informants commenced official migration procedures during the 1990s, that is, in the last years of the period of British rule leading up to 1997. The material in this chapter traces how migrant strategies have flowed from shifting perceptions of Hong Kong and its future. The early nineties were the peak period of emigration to Australia, with a significant decline occurring after 1992. Hong Kong migrant ‘flows’ have been characterised by relatively high level of movement between places and a significant level of return.

I provide a demographic profile of migrant populations and settlement patterns relevant to settlement practices in Sydney and return migration in the remainder of the thesis. I also engage in a selective discussion of the way in which migrant practices have been interpreted. I will examine some of the theories and rhetorics that are invoked to characterise the dynamics of movements between Hong Kong and Australia. Finally I include some basic details about administrative procedures and requirements and entry categories.

At the same time, I will be introducing the small sample of migrant subjects I have worked with, in order to position them in relation to the more general context. Many

of my interviewees had returned to Hong Kong if not ‘permanently’ then for a considerable period.

4b. Identifying and enumerating ‘Hong Kong immigrants’ to Australia

In a study of people born in Hong Kong based on the 1996 Australian census, the Hong Kong-born population is described as ‘one of the youngest immigrant communities in Australia’ (Department of Immigration and Multicultural Affairs [DIMA] 2000: 2). This statement might seem strange if we view migration movements over a larger historical time frame. From the mid 19th century, Hong Kong was a major embarkation point for southern Chinese emigration to much of the Pacific, including Australia. At least 6 million Chinese emigrants apparently passed through Hong Kong to various parts of the world up to 1939. Shipping statistics tell us that some 10,500 departed from Hong Kong for Melbourne in just eleven months up to September 1855 at the height of gold rush emigration (Sinn 1995: 12, 21). Some 100,000 mainly southern Chinese entered the Australian colonies, many of them via Hong Kong. This movement came to a virtual halt with exclusionist policies coming into effect in various parts of Australia in the 1880s. The Immigration Restriction Act of 1901 effectively blocked permanent entry into the newly formed Australian nation for people of ‘Asian descent’.¹ The bundle of exclusionary laws and regulations generally known as the ‘White Australia policy’ kept the numbers of Asian immigrants at a relatively low level until the lifting of discriminatory legislation in 1973.

How much continuity is there between past Chinese migration and contemporary migration from Hong Kong? It seems that recent Australian intakes of people from Hong Kong had little direct connection with earlier migrations. In 1976 there were less than 9,000 Hong Kong-born people in Australia; there were 68,000 by 1996 (DIMA 2000: 4).² In a 1991 survey a much higher proportion of Hong Kong people claimed to have relatives in Canada (11.5 per cent) and the United States (10.8 per

¹ The racial groups which could be excluded were never explicitly named in the law – the Act granted absolute discretion for the state to refuse entry.

² Census data based on country of birth significantly underestimates emigrant numbers from Hong Kong because something like one third of Hong Kong’s resident population was born in China. The percentage born in China in 1991 was 34.4 per cent (Skeldon, Jowett, Findlay and Li 1995: 101).

cent) than in Australia (3.2 per cent) (Wong 1994: 384). This might suggest that there were weaker kinship connections with earlier migration in Australia than the North American case, despite the parallel existence of exclusionary policies in the US and Canada.

4c. Exiles or yuppies? Political and economic factors

Hong Kong emigrants are not refugees or exiles in a strict sense, although they were generally responding to a potential political emergency – the end of British colonial governance, and the uncertainties this engendered. But neither is Hong Kong's situation 'post-colonial'. There is no nation called Hong Kong or no real prospect of national self-determination, only the peculiar 50-year interregnum of the Special Administrative Region negotiated between China and Britain. From 1997, Hong Kong was returned to China, but is still effectively partitioned off from the rest of China. Its value for China, and to the rest of the capitalist world, seems to lie in its continuing separation and differentiation from the PRC, at least for the moment. Entry into Hong Kong from China is now being policed even more rigorously than prior to 1997.

The title of a 1994 book of essays on Hong Kong emigration characterised Hong Kong emigrants as 'reluctant exiles': a phrase that underscores the complexity and fuzziness of Hong Kong peoples' motivations to emigrate. Are Hong Kong emigrants political exiles? There is no doubt that migration was causally connected to the political events signified by the handover. However, the political element is not easily disentangled from other impulses for emigration. As Skeldon notes, the tendency was for the handover to become the principal explanation for emigration, along with every social manifestation of the change of sovereignty in Hong Kong. He characterises the dynamic of Hong Kong emigration as a political 'push' (out of Hong Kong) working against an economic 'pull' (back to Hong Kong). While political uncertainty may make remaining in Hong Kong problematic, the economic attractions of Hong Kong make exile problematic, hence the 'reluctance' of exile (Skeldon 1994: 3). A tension between political and economic factors was evident in

many of my interviewee accounts. Indeed migrant strategies can be seen as diverse attempts to negotiate these tensions, contradictions and uncertainties.

The structural forces apparently determining Hong Kong migrant practices are not as clear as they might seem. They are matters of social interpretation. The return of Hong Kong to Chinese sovereignty was not universally viewed as a negative event. A considerable proportion of Hong Kong people welcomed it. The interregnum of the SAR places a distance between Hong Kong and direct rule by Beijing, no matter how you interpret the degree of control actually exercised by the PRC. Yet who can predict future relations with China and the political situation in China generally? The Hong Kong case is unusual in that the economic attraction exercised by the 'sending country' is usually felt to be greater than that of the host country. Economic factors and other practical contingencies drawing migrants back to Hong Kong have perhaps eclipsed the initial political reasons triggering much of the emigration in the late 1980s and 1990s. This does not seem to be the behaviour of exiles.

Nevertheless, uncertainty about Hong Kong's political future *had* been a concern for almost all of my interviewees although few of them were overtly 'political' in outlook. They had nevertheless responded to the decolonisation of Hong Kong in terms of immediate interests and destinies, without identifying their actions with a specific political or national movement. This does not mean that Hong Kong migrants do not have some collective sense of political being.³ The 1989 Tiananmen Square massacre produced a major symbolic crisis in Hong Kong, triggering large-scale political demonstrations in Hong Kong, as well as a wave of applications to emigrate. Applications received by the Australian Consulate peaked at around 14,000 in 1989/90, with almost 11,500 in the following year (see table below). But further into the 1990s, the ominous view of China appeared to gradually ease. With the continued prosperity and growth in Hong Kong, a 'wait and see' attitude became evident amongst emigrants and prospective emigrants. This was evident in

³ I want to avoid the common typification of Hong Kong people as non-political or politically passive. The lack of a strongly focused political tradition is not due to any intrinsic Hong Kong ethic, as some scholars have claimed (See King 1975 and Lau 1982). The delay of democratic institutions until the very last phase of British rule and the lack of realistic political prospects did little to foster continuous political traditions and institutions. See Law Wing-Sang (1998), Chun (2000) and Chiu (1996) for counter arguments about the relation between Hong Kong's political history and the political dispositions of Hong Kong people.

interviewees' *post-facto* statements about their changing motivations as they strategically delayed moving to Australia, or returned to Hong Kong after a period of settlement in Australia. 'Hong Kong will remain OK for a few years' is a typical pragmatic and flexible pronouncement I heard many times. Such a viewpoint strategically combined optimism and pessimism – a delayed pessimism, with an optimism of the moment. Of course, the future scenario of China's relations with Hong Kong remains unknowable.

Year	Applications received (cases)
1988/89	6882
1989/90	14029
1990/91	11414
1991/92	5980
1992/93	3238
1993/94	3863
1994/95	5893
1995/96	6369
1996/97	3228
1997/98	1243

Table 1: Migration applications received from Hong Kong
(Source: Australian Consulate General, Hong Kong)

The 'twilight' decade or so of British rule up to 1997 brought with it surprises for those expecting a winding down culminating in the demise of Hong Kong in 1997. The scenario of abandonment and demise – 'Will the last one leaving Hong Kong turn out the lights?' – turned on the assumption that Hong Kong's success could be based only on colonial presence and administration, and on the notion that the interests of the mainland Chinese and of Hong Kong people were totally distinct and in opposition. Few in 1984 could have expected the degree of economic integration between China and Hong Kong that occurred in the decade prior to the handover. We could look at the example of real estate investment and industrial investment financed by Hong Kong capital. Leung notes that most major Hong Kong-based developers had set aside at least 10 per cent of total assets for PRC developments, presumably diverting substantial capital from property purchases in North America and other places. Hong Kong industrial investments in the Pearl River Delta are a major engine of Chinese growth. By the mid-1990s it was estimated that 5 million people were employed in Hong Kong financed factories in the delta region (Hall

1999: 23). At the same time, substantial Chinese investments were flowing into Hong Kong – with an estimated three to five per cent of Hong Kong real estate controlled by PRC based interests (Leung 1995: 144-8).

This economic interconnectedness was mirrored in social exchanges. 65 million out of a total of 99.8 million journeys from Hong Kong in 1996 were directed *into* China (Hong Kong 1997: 397). There was a huge increase in short-term visits between China and Hong Kong. In 1969 some 69,000 people left Hong Kong to visit China for the Lunar New Year. By the 1990s, the number was well over a million. PRC nationals visiting Hong Kong increased from a quarter of a million in 1990 to 1.5 million in 1993 (Leung 1995: 52). At the same time, the 1990s have seen heightened public fear about immigrants – illegal and legal – in Hong Kong.⁴

Shifts in orientation towards the PRC were evident in the everyday thinking of migrants. For instance, I interviewed an informant named Martha in Hong Kong in 1996. She had recently applied to migrate to Australia. She vividly described her feelings of grief and fear about the handover and Hong Kong's future, which took the form of fears of 'Chinese' cultural traits:

If I can choose, I want to live in a foreign country. I am afraid of living under the Chinese. Chinese people are very domineering.

But less than a year later Martha was taking lessons to improve her Mandarin and making plans to invest in real estate in China. As far as I know she had abandoned her plans to emigrate.

P: When I spoke to you last you were very worried about what would happen in 1997. Now that it's 1997 how are you feeling?

M: I think it should be all right for Hong Kong in the future ten years or so. I think it's all right to stay in Hong Kong, because the development in China is now more...um, fast, and the society is more organised. One day I may go to China, to

⁴ The everyday 'racism' of established Chinese immigrants against new immigrants from China is evident in such newspaper headlines as 'Mainland newcomers blamed for rising filth' (*SCMP* 22.1.93). Helen Siu (1988, 1993, 1996) has traced the recent history of Hong Kong attitudes and stereotypes of immigrants from the mainland.

buy a house there . . . hoping, you know, the price of houses will soar up a lot (laughs) in a few years time.

I don't know what happened to dissolve Martha's fears of China and mainland Chinese and prompted her to think of exploiting the economic opportunities presented by the situation. Or had Martha simply pushed back the horizons of the unknown from 1997 into the indeterminacy of the future – 'ten years or so.' The coexistence of apparently contradictory motivations and values, likely to be reversed at any time, is not so unusual. Ackbar Abbas's euphonious phrase 'doom and boom' might serve as an epithet for the handover period (Abbas 1992: 5). A major survey conducted in 1991 about the intention to emigrate from Hong Kong showed the prevalence of 'paradoxical' attitudes amongst Hong Kong people: fear and pessimism about the political future of Hong Kong coexisting with a general optimism about improved material outcomes, and better prospects for their children (Wong 1994: 378). During that time real prosperity as well as the representations of economic success had their effects on the thinking of ordinary Hong Kong people. Hong Kong's prosperity would continue to shore up its political and social prospects. This is one informant's retrospective account of the shift of thinking about migrancy and the prospects of Hong Kong:

A few years ago, many people they went out to Australia, or Canada, United States, especially after June 4th (incident), because it was a big tragedy, people worried about the Chinese. As time went on, when people looked from many other point of views, they got more information, because at that time it was such a big event, they didn't think too much and really consider all the factors. Now they got more information. And a lot of people have come back. Actually Hong Kong is a golden, golden place. Every week we see the Hang Seng Index...just shooting up.⁵

A golden place – images of Hong Kong as economic cornucopia recur throughout this study. Winston, a young immigrant who had come to Australia with his parents and who was considering returning to work in Hong Kong, put it this way in 1996:

⁵ This interview took place before the market collapsed in late 1997.

Everything depends on 1997. Like, I don't think it's going to change much. Because Hong Kong actually is a treasure box. You still can get a lot of money from there. And China, the government, won't mess it up seriously. They don't want to break the egg, because Hong Kong is so rich, because most of the big name companies are based there.

There is a complex interplay of political and economic dimensions in these representations of Hong Kong. However, it appears that economic attractions appear to have eclipsed political fears. Some commentators maintain Hong Kong subjects have little identity with their home site. Rather they pursue a kind of perpetual mobility in pursuit of economic opportunity. Aihwa Ong regards Hong Kong emigrants as fully globalized subjects oriented by economic opportunity:

(T)he Hong Kong subject seeks not to return to the cultural motherland, but to join the transnational world of capitalism that developed under European hegemony.

(Ong 1992: 131)

This orientation was inherited from Hong Kong's specific colonial background. For Ong, the belonging of Hong Kong migrants is not tied to place or culture, but to an internalisation of Hong Kong's historical role as a trading entrepôt. Wong Siu-lun asserts that Hong Kong migrants are opportunist and have no loyalty to Hong Kong, and will simply go to the place of greatest economic advantage. He labelled Hong Kong emigrants to Australia as 'roaming yuppies'. Wong writes of the 'dark side to their euphoria.' They are characterised as possessing a 'refugee mentality', instrumental motivations, self confidence bordering on conceit, 'short term orientation and brash behaviour' (Wong 1994: 373, 386). Hong Kong migrants are conceived as purely economic migrants, as free-floating entrepreneurs wandering the globe at will, unbounded by social or political limitations. (This particular paper is strongly animated by resentment over tales of migrants shaming Hong Kong overseas through displays of vulgarity and brashness.) In a sense these accounts merely echo truisms – 'Hong Kong people only care about money' – often expressed by Hong Kong people about themselves.

It is evident that there is a play of contending discourses about migration both into Hong Kong and out of it. Discourses about migration are usually entangled with struggles to define 'national' identity and attributes.⁶ My interest here is not in resolving these tensions with scholastic argument. I am more interested in locating some of these problematic elements in order to trace the way in which they are played out in the actions and affects of migrant subjects as they move between different places.

4d. Australian figures

Hong Kong migration must also be seen from the Australian side, as part of the general shift in Australia's migrant sources from predominantly European to Asian countries, over the past 30 years. This shift has been echoed in other 'Pacific Rim' countries like Canada, New Zealand and the United States (Inglis and Wu 1992: 193). Australia, along with other destination countries, actively sought immigrants – particularly skilled and business immigrants – from the emerging Asian economic centres. 'White Australia' lasted just as long as it could before becoming economically and geopolitically unfeasible. The economic and political 'turn to Asia' coincided with the loss of imperial preference in markets, which stretched into the 1970s and the emergence of East Asia, starting with Japan, as a major economic force. By 1995 almost three-quarters of Australian exports were destined for Asia-Pacific markets (Bell 1997: 193).

The 1984 agreement between China and Britain sealed Hong Kong's political form and destiny. In the period from the mid-1980s and into the 1990s Hong Kong became one of the major sources of immigrants for Australia, reaching a peak of 16,656 in 1991-92. This was a direct response to the June 4 incident of 1989. For a brief time, Hong Kong became the number one source of Australian immigrants, surpassing the United Kingdom.⁷ From this peak year there was a sharp decline in

⁶ The notion of Hong Kong nationalism is itself problematic given there is no national state or independence movement.

⁷ This is the case if we use measurements based on the country of last residence, rather than the country of birth, which tends to underestimate the extent of Hong Kong emigration (Kee and Skeldon 1994: 184-5).

numbers, and an increase in returnees. Numbers of recorded permanent departures from Australia to Hong Kong have increased steadily over the past decade. In 1994-95, 1,545 permanent departures to Hong Kong were recorded, making Hong Kong the fourth most popular destination for Australians (Bureau of Immigration Multicultural and Population Research [BIMPR] 1996: 6).⁸

The net emigration from Hong Kong migration has produced the 'new population' of Hong Kong born people in Australia, which numbered nearly 67,000 by the mid 1990s. According to 1996 census data only 19.4 per cent of Hong Kong-born people had arrived before 1981, and the remaining 80.6 per cent had arrived after 1981.⁹ Over 67 per cent had arrived between 1986 and 1996.

Census data does not accurately convey the number of immigrants because it also includes a significant proportion of people staying temporarily on student visas. From the 1980s, Australian government actively sought Asian students to study in Australian tertiary institutions. Hong Kong was one of the main sources of full fee-paying students, accounting for some 20 per cent of the total (DIMA 2000: 1). Prior experience of study in Australia is an important factor in the propensity to immigrate to Australia.

People from Hong Kong in Australia tended to be well educated. 32 per cent of Hong Kong born people in the 1996 census had 'higher qualifications', about twice the level for the total Australian population (DIMA 2000: 16). The proportion of Hong Kong born adults who were classified as professionals or 'associate professionals' was some 48 per cent, a much higher proportion than the total Australian population (29 per cent). Interestingly however, the industry that employed the most Hong Kong-born males was the restaurant and accommodation industry (18 per cent of men). Cooks and hospitality workers were amongst the

⁸ This would have included returnees and young 'second generation' Australians, as well as a considerable number of non-Hong Kong born emigrants attracted by Hong Kong's job opportunities and salaries.

⁹ By contrast 60.1 per cent of overseas-born persons in Australia had arrived before 1981 (DIMA 2000:10). Again there is an underestimation of immigrants from Hong Kong due to the high percentage of China-born citizens.

largest occupations.¹⁰ Health and community services was the industry category in which the most Hong Kong born women were employed (17 per cent of women). Hong Kong people in Australia are predominantly but not homogeneously 'middle class'.

This social profile is not a pure property of emigrants themselves. Immigrant characteristics are in large part a creation of the host state policies that select and encourage certain kinds of citizens. Australian immigration policies have historically shifted to meet the demands of post-1970s economies. Rather than requiring large numbers of industrial labourers and tradespeople as in the post World War 2 period, the Australian government now principally utilises emigration to enhance the nation's stock of skilled professional and entrepreneurial capital. This functional self-interest reached its high point of explicitness with the policies of the current conservative government, under its Immigration Minister, Philip Ruddock. 'If you can get an overall better skill-based immigration program it can significantly boost your GDP,' wrote Ruddock, noting that the government had cut family migration to less than fifty per cent of the total and advocating the continued reduction of family reunion migration (Ruddock in A. Smart 2000: 2).

4e. Sydney destinations

Not surprisingly for a highly urbanised population, Hong Kong immigrants showed a clear preference for cities as destinations, and particularly for the largest metropolitan cities. Sydney was home to over 95 per cent of Hong Kong born people in NSW, and Melbourne had an even higher proportion of Victoria's Hong Kong-born population. In the 1996 census, there were 37,100 Hong Kong-born people in Sydney, about one per cent of Sydney's total population. This was the highest proportion of any Australian city by far – Melbourne had less than half as many Hong Kong-born as Sydney (DIMA 2000: 6-7).

Hong Kong-born people may have been concentrated in major cities, although Hong Kong settlement was not particularly concentrated *within* cities. Burnley's

¹⁰ However, these figures are probably distorted by significant numbers of people on student visas who work in restaurants to support their studies.

comparison of 1991 census data showed that Hong Kong immigrants, despite its recent high growth had only a moderately high level of concentration relative to other groups (Burnley 1999: 1302-3).¹¹ Of the 12 local government areas (LGAs) in Australia which had a Hong Kong born population of over two per cent, all but one were in Sydney (DIMA 2000: 7). Since I am interested in how Hong Kong people interpret their place in a particular city – Sydney, it should be useful to be able to have some sense of the internal distribution of Hong Kong people in this city. The following table shows the main places of settlement in Sydney in terms of Hong Kong born population by local council areas.

LGA	population
Hornsby	3644
Ku-ring-gai	3001
Baulkham Hills	2701
Ryde	2488
Parramatta	2410
Randwick	2305
Willoughby	1883
Hurstville	1795
Canterbury	1484
Kogarah	1126
Rockdale	1072

Table 2: Sydney local government areas with Hong Kong born populations exceeding 1000 in 1996. (source DIMA 2000: 7)

Hong Kong born people were more concentrated in relatively affluent and expensive residential areas such as Ku-ring-gai, Willoughby, Hornsby, Baulkham Hills and Ryde in Sydney’s north. But there were also significant numbers in Sydney’s southern and western suburbs such as Parramatta, Hurstville, Kogarah, and Canterbury. (Chapter eight will examine perceptions of class difference in relation to how migrant subjects positioned themselves and others within Sydney’s suburban space.)

¹¹ This study was based on the comparison of ‘dissimilation indices’ of birthplace populations by statistical local area, or the smaller unit of the census collection district. With a dissimilarity of 40.2 (by SLA level) Hong Kong born people were placed between highly dispersed groups such as the UK-born (11.9) and more concentrated groups like Laotian (76.2) and Vietnam-born (67.1) (Burnley 1999).

4f. Migrant trajectories: a play of categories

Figures alone cannot capture the singular dynamics of Hong Kong migration and settlement. In this section I examine some categories and conceptions used to describe Hong Kong migrant strategies and trajectories. I examine some studies from the migration literature, which deal with contemporary migration between Hong Kong and Australia in terms of 'sojourners', migrants seeking 'insurance', and 'astronauts'.

The migration literature has at times generated and perpetuated typifications that are implicitly (and sometimes explicitly) linked to notions of racial difference. Asians and particularly Chinese characterised as 'sojourners' were assumed to have an essential orientation to a cultural home.¹² We might see the sojourner as an artefact of a view of Asians as unassimilable others – Asians and other groups were characterised as sojourners while Europeans were immigrants or settlers. The sojourner is an enduring image which, in my view, hinders the comprehension of a multiplicity of strategies not containable within the either/or conception of sojourner: settler. In the literature on Chinese migration the term still has considerable currency. As the editor of *Reluctant Exiles* notes, the majority of the contributors to the book employed the notion of the sojourner (Skeldon 1994: 5). Skeldon himself recognises the problem with such characterisations. Chinese rates of return were historically quite comparable to other European national groups. Political factors such as laws based on (implicit or explicit) racial exclusion also play havoc with the sojourner notion, since return can hardly be ascribed solely to the dispositions of returnees. Despite his critique of the sojourner conception, Skeldon ends up returning to another version of the sojourner. The 'modern sojourner' is characterised as 'the person who commutes or circulates over long distances with place of residence in Canada or Australia but place of business in both North American and Asian (or other) locations' (Skeldon 1994: 11). Skeldon seems caught between typologies,

¹² Sucheng Chan has traced the figure of the sojourner in the sociology of migration. It has been used to dichotomise European and Asian immigration, and has reinforced the notion that all Chinese migrants intended to return. It could also justify a view that Chinese lack of integration in America was based on the closed nature of Chinese culture, rather than on acts of social exclusion exercised by white America. In fact, research indicates that certain European groups historically had higher return

between the reluctant exile and the modern sojourner who just keeps coming and going.

The category of the sojourner has been criticised from a ‘transnationalist’ perspective. For instance Rouse, in discussing Mexican migratory practices where small farmers maintain their holdings by working in industrial jobs in the United States, critiques the ‘bi-polar’ framework of explanation as inadequate to comprehend the lived perspectives of subjects oriented to more than one national locale. The figure of the sojourner – oriented to the place of origin, unlike the settler who is oriented to permanent relocation – constituted a paradigm which was no longer adequate (if it ever was) to account for a long term orientation to more than one transnational locale (Rouse 1992: 42).

Through the dialectical interplay between these broad material developments [globalisation and ‘flexible accumulation’] and the culturally mediated agency of the migrants themselves, new arrangements have emerged during the last two decades that the bipolar framework is unable to contain. (Rouse 1992: 42-3)

Bipolar frameworks of understanding are not particularly useful in comprehending the play of large-scale historical conditions and the collective agency of migrants.

Conventional terminologies like ‘immigrant/emigrant’, ‘settler’/‘sojourner’ or ‘return migrant’ are no longer adequate analytical categories to describe migrant practices. They all revolve around a fixed directionality, a typical pattern of movement. Hence they cannot apprehend strategies grounded in simultaneity of places. For instance, the notion of ‘return’ becomes problematic in a time when rapid shuttling between transnational places becomes a viable migrant strategy. Chiu and Wong (1997: 14) point to the inadequacy of the notion of ‘return migration’ to the Hong Kong case. It is often unclear where subjects moving back and forth are actually ‘based’, and whether transnational movements are visits or returning. Which place is being returned to?

rates: for instance Italians migrating to the U.S. returned at a rate of some 60 per cent (Chan, 1990: 38, 68).

The standard typifications of migration practice remain in common use because they are creatures of state-centred discourses, and state administered practises. Who should be counted as returnees? It is difficult to establish who is a permanent returnee because many have often not made a final decision to stay in Hong Kong. There are many contingencies – Chiu and Wong provide 10 different scenarios of return to Hong Kong. Numbers of returnees are difficult for Hong Kong officials to calculate because of different situations, lack of relevant statistical data, and the incomplete and indeterminate nature of the process. Some subjects hold both foreign passports and Hong Kong identity cards which are not surrendered on emigrating from Hong Kong. Either could be used to re-enter Hong Kong. Many apply for visas outside of Hong Kong, thus evading figures kept by Hong Kong authorities. Estimates of return rates have ranged wildly from eight per cent to sixty per cent depending on what is measured and how (Chiu and Wong 1997: 2-4, 12-16).

Analyses of contemporary Hong Kong migration have imported some conceptions from the social field to augment the understanding of the specific dynamics of the Hong Kong context. One example is that of ‘insurance migration’. Insurance migrants are those who emigrated primarily to gain citizenship of a second country in the event of some form of political downturn. Insurance migration is not a form of exile, but a means of remaining by ensuring the possibility of exile. Rather than being a flight from Hong Kong it enables a continued existence in Hong Kong. The notion of insurance seems to date from the period following the Joint Declaration of 1984 when there was much public contention about the migration options of Hong Kong citizens. The argument emerged that holding the right of abode to a foreign country would serve as an ‘insurance policy’ to provide a sense of security for people so they could *stay* in Hong Kong. ‘Insurance’ became a common usage to describe a strategy of securing citizenship in order to return. One informant expresses the rationale of insurance migration:

Like many Hong Kong people do, I came to buy insurance. If Hong Kong has something happen, then I can go back to Australia.

Security is quite explicitly being ‘purchased’. If migration is an investment it is not necessarily conceived as an investment *in* Australia. Gaining Australian residence

provides an alternate trajectory if Hong Kong proves not to be viable. As another informant put it, 'We want to get political insurance because of the year 1997 . . . because of 1997 people want to move overseas, maybe to get the visa, then come back.' '1997' was often spoken of as a 'cause', as though it had a kind of agency of itself. (1997 was in the future at the time of this interview.) Many informants believed they had to complete their move by 1997, as they were uncertain about what would occur administratively from the date of the handover.

Most emigrants pursue elaborately calculated strategies of timing periods of entry and settlement. For 'insurance migrants', the objective is to stay for the required period to obtain Australian citizenship, before returning to Hong Kong. Various options are possible, from achieving the citizenship requirements as quickly as possible, to extending it over as long a period as possible and maximising time spent earning money or pursuing other goals in Hong Kong. Skeldon (1995b: 74) speculates that Australia has been the target for 'insurance migrants' to a greater extent than other destinations, due to its relatively flexible settlement requirements.

Another 'native' concept that found its way into the migration literature is the 'astronaut'. The word for astronaut in Cantonese (*taai hùng yahn*) has been adapted to describe emigrants who send family members off to emigrate while they maintain jobs and/or business interests in Hong Kong. The coincidence of sounds and meanings in the word for (outer) space (*taai hùng*), and 'empty wife' (wife = *taai*, empty = *hùng*), through a typical associative blurring in the semantic field, lends to the word connotations of men without wives, 'empty wife', or a person in between places (Skeldon 1995: 66; Pe-Pua *et al* 1996: 1). The astronaut is clearly a gendered figure: the semantic play in Cantonese implies that an astronaut is a man. Married women generally take up the role of maintaining a home and providing for children and their educational arrangements in a new country. (In keeping with the NASA imagery, one could characterise them as 'ground control.')

This may sometimes entail the abandonment of careers on the part of married women, although generally they try to keep working where possible while assuming greater domestic workloads.

A detailed empirical study of astronaut families connected with Australia by Pe-Pua (*et al* 1996) confirms the appropriateness of this cultural conception of the astronaut.

Sixty families (all nuclear) were interviewed and their movements traced. The study shows it was mostly men who played the astronauts, returning to Hong Kong to engage in business or career activities, with women generally assuming responsibility for ground control, the social maintenance of the household and the 'parachute children'. Out of 60 families, 59 fathers and only seven mothers were classified as astronauts (Pe-Pua *et al* 1996: 27). Men became breadwinners for families, although women had frequently been employed in Hong Kong, often in jobs of equal status. Astronaut life often entails a re-domestication of these middle class women. Women in Hong Kong have much easier access to both cheap domestic help¹³ and the assistance of relatives, particularly grandparents, in the care of children. Astronaut life places considerable strain on marriages and family life, with women experiencing isolation and the pressure of housework and domestic responsibility with little support. In some cases, women gain a sense of increased independence, autonomy, and decision-making power with the experience of prolonged separation (Pe-Pua *et al* 1996: 52-3).

Pe-Pua's study usefully details a diversity of migrant responses and strategies and provides a range of descriptive categories to deal with various 'types' of migrant strategy. Households remain objects of commitment and responsibilities despite being split in more than one national location. The household may be a 'commuter household', based around maintenance of two career bases in different places. More common is the 'shuttle household' with one primary breadwinner attempting to maintain solidarity and family linkages through frequent or at least intermittent visits. The range of astronaut strategies is condensed into a three part scheme:

1. 'Reluctant astronauts' intend to settle in Australia as a whole household, but change their plans because of circumstances like the inability to find adequate work, with one or more members returning to Hong Kong.
2. 'Willing astronauts' often intend to remain in Australia only temporarily in order to gain citizenship 'insurance', while one or more family members return to maintain their business or career.

¹³ Constable estimated that there were 150,000 'foreign domestic workers' (the term used by Labour and Immigration departments) serving Hong Kong households in 1995. Of these some 130,000 were Filipina women, largely unmarried and aged between 25 and 35 (Constable 1996: 448).

3. 'Ambivalent astronauts' describes a situation where a household may be split about where they want to be based, or uncertain of the place they want to be (Pe-Pua *et al* 1996: 65).

This typology of 'astronaut' practices can shed some light on the specificity of Hong Kong migration apart from the strictly defined demographic parameters of the 'astronaut family'. Migrancy encompasses different strategies and orientations to places as loci of a range of desires and expectations, favouring either Hong Kong or Sydney/Australia. These strategies are not purely rational choices, products of interest alone. There are different affective and psychological modalities. Indeed migrancy is a practice and an experience in which affect is a crucial dimension. The characterisations of reluctance, willingness and ambivalence in regard to astronaut strategies signal more than rational choices and economic fortunes.

Pe-Pua (*et al* 1996: 72) speculates on the extent of astronaut practices and whether it is a transitional feature linked to a particular set of historical conditions or a general shift towards greater mobility and post-national migration patterns. Although most migrants' level of resources do not permit the long term maintenance of such a high degree of mobility and autonomy from the constraints of being primarily based in a single place, many migrants may share certain characteristics with astronauts. These include an orientation to more than one nation state, the strategic negotiation of national and regional situations and opportunities, a high degree of fairly instantaneous communication between places, and uncertainty about 'final' outcomes and locations.

Amongst the people I interviewed, there was rarely a personal identification with astronaut status. Interviewees were concerned to distance themselves from astronauts, viewed as being the most privileged of immigrants. 'We are not like those astronauts who can come and go whenever they want', as one person put it. In other words, these people do not conceive of their movements between countries as effortless or gratuitous. The figure of the astronaut, the migrant who seems to defy the gravity of place, may be apt as a contemporary ideal type, even if it is rejected as a description by most Hong Kong migrants. The astronaut can be taken as a limit

case against which we can gain a sense of the specific ‘gravity’ operating on migrant subjects.¹⁴

Despite the range of strategies employed by migrants to Australia, it would appear that movement is generally restricted to movements between the two places – Hong Kong and Sydney – rather than being more broadly diasporic in scope. None of the cases above involve the establishment of a third base outside apart from Hong Kong and Sydney. Hong Kong-born returnees were relatively faithful to their homeland, and are less likely to re-migrate to another country than migrants groups in general. Some 91.8 per cent of Hong Kong born people permanently departing from Australia returned to their place of birth, compared to 79.7 per cent of the total persons who returned to their home countries (BIMPR 1996:18).

4g. Australian migration: policies and procedures

Ethnographic research on migration often omits or takes for granted the administrative details of migration processes. In examining the migration practices of Hong Kong subjects it helps to have some context of the administrative framework, in this case the migration rules and procedures. These rules and procedures form a temporal structure within which various movements and improvisations can take place. Most informants adopted some moderately elaborate strategies of timing to maximise their stay in either country. For some the choice of destination country was decided on the basis of the most suitable migration procedure, or the greatest likelihood of acceptance.

Ong (1998: 136-7) uses the term flexible citizenship – paralleling conceptions of flexible economic strategies – to describe the ‘localising’ strategies of migrant

¹⁴ We could compare the astronaut with another ‘local’ figure of speech – ‘airplane jumping’ – used to describe quite different migrant labour strategies. Nonini describes the journeys of Malaysian Chinese men working illegally in countries such as Japan and Taiwan. These stratagems were usually organised by contractors for firms to provide docile labour (Nonini 1997: 216). The working class men Nonini refers to are able to engage in a masculine fantasy of freedom, struggle and adventure, although the actual labour process is clearly exploitative, the work arduous and sometimes dangerous, and the social gains relatively short term. What is the point of this comparison, apart from the metaphors of aerial transcendence? Both are also metaphors of male separation from women and familial contexts (although it is not inherently a male strategy). Airplane jumping (*tiao feiji*) differs from astronaut strategies in its subaltern emphasis and lack of social legitimacy – airplane jumping is a limited and temporary strategy of seeking labour opportunities beyond national borders.

subjects seeking to take advantage of the rules of host states. Migrants do not only conform to policies and rules but also interpret and negotiate the ‘governmental’ agendas that rules imply. There is a complex interplay between policy and practice where the host state tries to maximise its gains from migrant subjects, who attempt to utilise the procedures to their own advantage.

From the mid 1980s there was a more systematic policy focus on maximising the ‘economic benefits’ of Australian immigration. This followed the publication of the report, ‘The Economic Effects of Immigration in Australia’ in 1985. In the past fifteen years or so ‘skill migration’ was established as the dominant plank of immigration policy. It was also the period of consolidation of Hong Kong interest in migration to Australia (this period also coincided with the handover period following the 1984 Joint Declaration). 1986-87 was the first year in which Hong Kong entered the top ten source countries.

1986 saw the introduction of ‘independent’ and ‘concessional’ categories. The concessional category allowed some types of extended family members to migrate provided they met certain criteria of employability, age, education and skills. People without family sponsorship could also apply based on their accumulation of points for the above criteria (Department of Immigration, Local Government and Ethnic Affairs [DILGEA] 1988: 84). The independent category was entirely based on skill criteria. The most important shift was to a combinatory points system rewarding qualifications, occupational skills and experience (for occupations in demand in Australia), English language proficiency, age (young people were judged to be more valuable because they had a longer working life ahead of them). Business migration schemes were also given greater priority.

The other major shift from 1986 was the introduction of multiple re-entry visas. Migrants were automatically issued with three-year resident return visas, allowing multiple re-entries during the first years of settlement after an initial ‘landing’. This policy was designed mainly to assist business migrants to gradually transfer their operations to Australia (DILGEA 1988: 84). This sets up a 5-year time cycle – only two years of which applicants need to actually spend in Australia to gain citizenship. Migrants could still spend a good deal of time in Hong Kong while in the process of

qualifying for Australian citizenship. After landing in Australia, settlers get a multiple-entry visa for three years, enabling them to return to Hong Kong for up to three years. As long as they return before this visa expired, they could return to Australia. If they stayed for at least 12 months they could obtain a further re-entry visa (DILGEA 1988: 84; Pe-Pua *et al* 1996: 23; Kee and Skeldon 1994: 190). Also applicants could apply to extend this period for a further 5 years if they could show 'compelling reasons' such as the presence of family or purchase of property in Australia, or difficulties with following career or business opportunities. These procedures made Australia the most flexible of major destinations in terms of coming and going at will.¹⁵ For instance Canadian regulations required entry into the country every six months.

Comparisons with other countries suggest that Hong Kong migrants to Australia utilised the independent category much more than family categories. Lary observed that over half of Hong Kong immigrants to Australia in the early 1990s were applying under the independent category as a basis for entry. At the same time Canada, which has similar entry categories, was taking in only about six per cent of its intake under the independent category. Lary concluded that these differences lay not so much in demographic differences between migrant groups in the two countries as in the highly strategic choices which could be based on, for instance, perceived chance of approval, time delays, and awareness of quotas (Lary *et al* 1994: 406,408, 439). It seems that many migrants saw Australia as more suited to 'insurance' strategies conducted independently of kinship networks.

Australian immigration policy has increasingly aimed to maximise human and economic capital and to implement the brain drain that Hong Kong people were so worried about. Australia has been quite successful in capturing a high proportion of businesspeople, degree holders, professionals and managerial personnel from Hong Kong. But there has been a marked decline in interest in Australia during the 1990s. As an immigration official remarked to me in 1999, regarding business skill migration, 'the glory days are over.' Hong Kong was no longer the largest source of

¹⁵ Interview with staff at the Australian Consulate in Hong Kong, 12.2.99

business migrants – a position it had held for some ten years – having been overtaken by Indonesia, South Africa and Taiwan.¹⁶

Australian immigration has retained similar entry categories from the mid 1980s to the present.¹⁷ The main changes have been in the adjustment of intake quotas and the resultant balance between the categories. The response to the recession of the early 1990s was to cut the annual target intake of places for all types of migration from around 120,000 in 1991 to 76,000 in 1993 (Skeldon 1995: 73). The overall program has not reached the same levels again. There were significant cuts to family migration during the 1990s. In 1998-9, 30,500 family migrants were projected compared to some 56,000 in 1995-6. This compares with 35,000 skilled migrants in 1998-9 compared to some 24,000 in 1995-6 (12.9.98 *Sydney Morning Herald* [SMH] Good Weekend: 16-22). The alteration of the overall balance between family migration and skilled migration is meant to further increase economic returns from immigration. But skilled migrants have families, and may well shun emigration to Australia if they think there is little chance of family members joining them. Another policy shift has been the removal of social security entitlements for immigrants through the imposition of a two-year waiting period. This has shifted the emphasis to self-supporting applicants and commitments to sponsorship by already established citizens. Another aspect which applicants have certainly noticed is increased fees for applications and appeals.¹⁸ This would no doubt make curious applications ‘just to see’ less likely.

These changes were well reported in the Hong Kong media. In the mid-1990s, news of contracting immigration quotas and more stringent policies has combined with reports of the emergence of the anti-immigration One Nation Party to produce a perception that Australia was becoming less friendly to immigrants. Nevertheless, it is difficult to assess whether declining numbers of Hong Kong immigrants were related to perceptions that Australia has become less welcoming.

¹⁶ Interview with the Immigration Consul, Australian Consulate in Hong Kong, 12.2.99

¹⁷ The Business Migration Program was suspended in 1991 due to a perception that it was subject to widespread abuse. It was replaced with a business skills category with a points test similar to other skill categories.

4h. Characteristics of interview subjects

Up to this point I have been attempting to supply something of an overview of migration between Hong Kong and Australia. In this section I want to locate and compare the sample of interviewees I worked with for this study. This selection of people was assembled through the agency of my ‘snowball sampling’. I simply started with a few contacts in Sydney and located others through these networks, which encompassed people in both Sydney and Hong Kong. A small number of subjects were located independently of these core networks, mainly in Hong Kong. I make no claim for the overall representativeness of this selection.

The following table shows the location of interviews. A larger number of subjects were interviewed in Hong Kong than in Sydney. As a result the sample perhaps reflects a greater proportion of returnees than would be the case for the whole population of Hong Kong-Australia migrants.

Location	N.	%
Sydney	15	34.9
Hong Kong	21	48.8
Both Sydney & Hong Kong	7	16.3
Total	43	100.0

Table 3: Interview subjects by location of interview/s

The subjects of my study were mainly ‘middling’ migrants – the majority are tertiary educated waged workers for government or corporations. Only a few were entrepreneurs or high status professionals operating autonomously or in executive positions. The following table shows the occupations of people interviewed for this study.

¹⁸ One informant whose application was knocked back was shocked to find that costs for his appeal amounted to A\$1500 not counting solicitor’s costs.

occupation	N	%
nurse	11	25.6
engineer	8	18.6
social worker/psychologist	5	11.6
finance/accountant	3	7.0
clerical	2	4.7
information technology	2	4.7
arts/cultural worker	2	4.7
management/admin	2	4.7
teacher/academic	2	4.7
lawyer	2	4.7
entrepreneur	1	2.3
Chinese medicine	1	2.3
student	1	2.3
trades	1	2.3
total	43	100.0

Table 4: Interviewees by occupation

As you can see, nurses, engineers and social workers are well represented. The concentration of subjects in a small cluster of occupations shows the partiality of selection by ‘snowball sampling’. Subjects tended to introduce me to others connected by work and educational background, rather than family or relationships outside of colleague networks. Connections amongst nursing and engineers seemed to be particularly strongly based on work connections and student friendships.

The interviewees were a highly educated group, with over 90 per cent having a university or college degree. I mentioned the effect of prior experience of education in Australia on the propensity to migrate. A significant number of people in my sample had undertaken tertiary study in Australia prior to immigration. A large proportion of this number were made up by a network of nurses who had mostly obtained nursing degrees (prior to migrating) in Australian universities.

Educational status	N	%
Qualification from Hong Kong	16	37
Qualification from Australia	19	44
Qualification from other country	3	7
No tertiary qualification	3	7
Not known	2	5
Total	43	100

Table 5: University or college degree by country of study.

The next table shows the areas where people settled in Sydney.¹⁹ They were quite widely dispersed across the suburbs of Sydney. The most notable clusters were around Willoughby and Hornsby in Sydney's 'north shore' and around Hurstville in southern Sydney, an emergent area of settlement by Asian immigrant groups. The areas of settlement bear some relation to the areas of greatest concentration in the 1996 census (see Table 2), although none had settled in the prestigious Ku-ring-gai area. Few had settled in the lower-cost areas west of Parramatta (e.g. Blacktown, Fairfield, Liverpool) where many other migrant populations are more heavily concentrated. Finding a place within a new environment is not an immediate and once-off act. It entails an assessment of how social status and distinctions are differentiated in the space of a city. (In chapter eight I will explore migrant interpretations of Sydney's suburban space and settlement strategies.)

Last place of settlement in Sydney	Informants
Willoughby	7
Hurstville	6
Randwick	4
Hornsby	4
Parramatta	4
Baulkham Hills	2
Canterbury	2
Ryde	2
Sydney city (CBD)	2
Bankstown	2
Kogarah	1
Blacktown	1
Woollahra	1
North Sydney	1
Moved outside of Sydney	4
	43

Table 6: Place of settlement in Sydney: By Local Government Area (LGA)

At the same time subjects were orienting themselves to the internal spaces of Sydney, they were often strategically negotiating passages on a larger scale between

¹⁹ Many informants had lived in a number of different areas before moving to these locations. The destinations shown are the most recent places of residence in Sydney at the time of the last contact. (A large proportion subsequently returned to Hong Kong). A few subsequently moved to other places in Australia, to other states or nearby cities in NSW.

Hong Kong and Sydney. The following table shows my attempt to classify the migration strategies of my informants. As a heuristic exercise rather than a ‘final analysis’, I have developed a variant of Pe-Pua’s scheme to characterise my main informants at the time of the most recent contact. Three migrant modes – settling, return and astronaut shuttling – were ‘cross-tabulated’ with two basic dispositions towards them – willingness and reluctance. One way settlers are people or households who basically moved to Australia and remained there. Shuttling settlers engage in quite long visits for domestic or career reasons while being primarily based in Australia. Willing returnees had usually returned to Hong Kong upon obtaining citizenship, i.e. their ‘insurance’. Reluctant returnees had hoped to settle in Australia but returned to Hong Kong due to reasons such as lack of work or health or family problems. Astronauts managed households and careers between Hong Kong and Sydney.²⁰ ‘Ground control’ refers to women interviewed who maintained families while their husbands worked in Hong Kong. The two reluctant astronauts had not intended to split their households but did so because of a failure to find work in Australia. In both cases women were able to find work in Sydney, but their husbands were not, forcing the husbands to return to work in Hong Kong.

Migrant mode	N	%
1 way settler	10	23.3
shuttling settler	5	11.6
willing returnee	12	27.9
reluctant returnee	5	11.6
willing astronaut	5	11.6
reluctant astronaut	2	4.7
ground control (astronaut spouse)	2	4.7
Migration application not accepted/did not complete migration process	2	4.7
Total	43	100.0

Table 7: Interviewees by ‘migration strategy’

This scheme gives some sense of the range of migrant strategies adopted. Some strategies proceeded roughly to plan, while others required unforeseen improvisations. These categories suggest a need for closer analytical attention to the

²⁰ Astronauts in my scheme did not necessarily have children, although they had to have spouses.

contingent dimensions of differing migrant trajectories and the affective states that accompany these cross-national trajectories. The ‘reluctant’ categories illustrate the potential for miscalculation in cross-national migration strategies. A considerable number did not achieve the outcome they intended. What is clear is the highly mobile nature of this population. Even ‘one way settlers’ made occasional trips to Hong Kong, while ‘shuttling settlers’ made regular trips (several times per year). Over half of the interviewees had either returned to Hong Kong or maintained ‘astronaut’ connections, living between two (or sometimes more) places.

This table is descriptive only of my momentary observations of a small group of migrants at different times, and at different stages of migration processes. The concreteness of this exercise in classification is misleading: these migrant ‘states’ cannot be considered definitive or final.

4i. Chapter summary

In this chapter I have presented some of the singular features of Hong Kong-Australian migration in order to supply a demographic and historical context for the analysis of migrant practices which follows. A confluence of political history (the end of British Hong Kong), Australian immigration policy, and the diverse strategies of migrant subjects has resulted in a new and distinct migrant population of Hong Kong-Australians in the past 15 years or so. The profile of a migrant group must be understood as a complex convergence of factors, not just as innate ‘characteristics’ of a population.

For instance, the high levels of tertiary education amongst migrants are directly related to Australian immigration requirements which seek to maximise human capital. But these high education levels are often themselves products of cross-national educational strategies. Many of my informants would have been unable to obtain university qualifications in Hong Kong. Overseas study has clearly been a major factor in Hong Kong interest in Australia. And study in Australia was clearly strongly related to subsequent migration.

The profile of the Hong Kong immigrant population is predominantly well-educated, professional and middle class. At the same time, my sense from my informants is that this is largely an emergent professional class, often the first generation of tertiary educated. So they often lack a secure sense of class positioning. Most of my sample are lower status professionals such as nurses and engineering technicians who do not occupy executive or autonomous positions.

Hong Kong people were strongly attracted to Sydney, the pre-eminent destination for immigrants to Australia. Although Sydney has long had the largest southern Chinese population of any Australian city, the preference for settlement in Sydney is apparently not based on established patterns of Chinese migration. Rather Sydney's attraction is connected to Sydney's reputation as a business and financial centre, as the most 'urban' of Australian cities, as the place most like Hong Kong. Similarities and contrasts between Hong Kong and Sydney will emerge as an important element in narratives of migration.

While Hong Kong migrants seemed to prefer the affluent northern suburbs of Sydney, relatively diverse settlement patterns attest to a wide range of spatial preferences and market capacities. In Chapter seven I will further investigate the hierarchies of desirable and undesirable urban space in Sydney generated by subjects attuned to Hong Kong's social/spatial organisation.

It is problematic to conceive of this mobile cross-national population as a localised 'migrant community', since a large proportion of subjects returned to Hong Kong or engaged in shifting arrangements between two places. It is equally problematic to conceive these movements in terms of Chinese trading diasporas (Cohen 1997: 92-93). The profile of these largely university-educated middling professionals simply does not support the image of Chinese entrepreneurs. Rather than pursuing business opportunities in a narrow sense, these subjects have followed new institutional channels. Having access to increased income and living standards, they have taken advantage of the greater availability of university education both in Hong Kong and overseas, in order to pursue middling career paths within corporate and state bureaucracies.

The categories of insurance migrants and astronauts point to the singularity of Hong Kong migrant practices. The use of these terms by informants themselves can supply more of a sense of the lived horizons of migrant possibility. The distance many subjects maintain from identification with astronauts suggests that few experienced the social and economic transcendence associated with astronaut status. Frequent travelling and the coordination of households and careers between national spaces are rarely 'weightless' experiences, as reluctant migrant accounts will demonstrate.

I have tried to give a sense of the shifts and fluctuations in migration from Hong Kong to Australia in the period relevant to this study. The decline in applications following the peak in emigration from Hong Kong in the early 1990s points to an uncertainty about migrancy as a strategy in recent years (although this was also related to Australian policies). My typology of informants' migration strategies does not aim to be definitive, but seeks to give a sense of the range of movement patterns between Hong Kong and Sydney, and to suggest something of the affective aspect which accompanies migrant fortunes.

I have not attempted to establish *the* social character of Hong Kong-Australian migrants, or of my small sample of subjects. Rather, I wanted to provide some background to the diverse horizons of migrant subjects, of the sense of limits and possibilities of migrant strategies linking Sydney and Hong Kong in different ways.

Hong Kong's colonial background has no doubt provided its people with connections or even affinities with some aspects of English-ness. The popularity of English-speaking and Commonwealth destinations (Canada, Australia and New Zealand) perhaps attests to this. However, access to 'English' capacities and cultural literacy is highly variable in Hong Kong, even amongst emigrants who tend to be tertiary educated.

The next chapter explores the significance of languages (Cantonese and English) and linguistic capabilities in negotiating migrant movements between places. The focus on bilinguality also provides a platform for a discussion of methodology, the problems of interviewing in English and the relation between language and spatiality encountered in the ethnographic interview.