

Abstract

Over the past few years, increasing scholarly attention (Chee, 2018; Gao, 2017; 2018) has been paid to the low-enrolment of ethnic minority (EM) students in post-secondary education (PSE) in Hong Kong (HK), affirmed by official statistics and heated policy debate (CSD, 2017; HK Unison, 2015). Although education reforms and the massification of PSE have extended access to PSE, enrolment rates remain stratified. EMs are the least represented in local PSE institutions (EDB, 2017). Low PSE enrolment contributes to poor social integration and mobility which can increase unemployment and poverty within EM populations (Government of the HKSAR, 2017), and undermine the image of HK as “Asia’s world city” and as inclusive, diverse and equitable (Lam, 2017). Thus, finding ways to support EM students and reduce the disparities in PSE enrolment is a persistent, pressing social and economic problem for HK (EOC, 2017). In addressing low PSE-enrolment in sociology of education, the liberal status attainment tradition views the EM family and community as full-closure networks that consequently play a limited role in academic and informational assistance (Perna & Titus, 2005). For these EM youths, therefore, school is the dominant extra-familial institution that, in principle, gives them access to institutional resources defined as school-based social capital (SBSC) (Ceja, 2006). SBSC consists of “resources, opportunities, privileges, and services” embedded in one’s networks with school personnel (teachers, counsellors and other staff) for expected returns – health, academic success, and life chances (Stanton-Salazar, 2011, p. 17). Yet, few studies account for how SBSC is interpreted and enacted in secondary schools or identify mechanisms that condition EMs’ access to SBSC in PSE transition (Lee, 2014). SBSC remains under-theorised and less explored. This study addresses this significant research gap. Making use of the theories of SBSC (Lin, 2000; Stanton-Salazar, 2011) and school structure and culture (Conchas, 2006), we propose to employ multiple, qualitative case studies (Stake, 2005) to examine: a) institutional provision of SBSC; b) the resulting benefits and challenges that EM students interpret and experience as they navigate PSE decision-making and application processes; and c) the school structural and cultural factors that impede or facilitate EMs’ access and use of SBSC. This study will advance SBSC theory in the school-to-PSE transition literature. The findings will provide an empirical data base for advancing school interventions and policy reforms, thus widening PSE enrolment among EMs and helping to promote their well-being, economic and social inclusion for the longer term.