

Demand for private supplementary tutoring: conceptual considerations, and socio-economic patterns in Hong Kong

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Abstract

Despite the fact that in some parts of the world private supplementary tutoring is a huge industry with far-reaching economic, social and educational implications, the topic has been neglected by educational researchers. This paper focuses on the nature and determinants of demand for private supplementary tutoring. It first draws on literature from a wide range of countries to identify some conceptual considerations, and then presents data on socio-economic patterns of demand for tutoring in Hong Kong. It highlights the complexity of the topic, and calls for further detailed research in multiple settings.

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1. Introduction

Worldwide, private supplementary tutoring has been a neglected topic for analysis but is increasingly recognized to be of major importance. In some societies it is a major industry, which on the one hand consumes huge amounts of household expenditure but on the other hand provides incomes for the tutors. Private supplementary tutoring may also have major social and educational implications. It appears to exacerbate social inequalities; and while it helps pupils to learn, it can interfere with educational processes in mainstream classes.

In many settings, private supplementary tutoring is a

shadowy phenomenon which is difficult to document (Stevenson & Baker, 1992; Bray, 1999a). Pupils may receive different amounts of tutoring at different seasons and at different stages of their school careers, and may receive different types of tutoring for different subjects. Further, pupils may be unwilling to expose the amounts and types of tutoring that they receive because the tutoring might seem to confer an unfair advantage in competition with their peers. The tutors may also be unwilling to expose their activities, especially when they take on such work unofficially and when their incomes are untaxed. Also, parents may want tutoring to remain confidential because school teachers could interpret the demand for supplementary tutoring as reflecting parents' lack of confidence in the schools.

Nevertheless, it is possible to secure some estimates of the scale and nature of private supplementary tutoring, and then to analyze the factors which underlie the demand for such tutoring. This paper presents such data

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from Hong Kong. While caution should always be expressed concerning the extent to which other parts of the world can draw lessons from specific places, the Hong Kong study is instructive in several ways. Hong Kong is commonly characterized as a meeting place of East and West, i.e. it is a Chinese society which, especially because of the British colonial period which ended in 1997, has many Western characteristics; and it is also firmly part of the global economy. Private supplementary tutoring has deep roots, as in other East Asian societies such as Japan, South Korea and Taiwan. At the same time, analysis of the Hong Kong situation might hold lessons for societies in which private supplementary tutoring is not currently a major enterprise but in which it is growing.

The paper begins with the broad literature, noting the scale and nature of private supplementary tutoring in a range of countries. It observes that the factors underlying demand for tutoring may be significantly different from those which underlie demand for private mainstream schooling, and thus that analysis of supplementary tutoring may add an important element to overall conceptual understanding. The paper then turns to the data from Hong Kong, explaining how the data were collected and what they show. The final section highlights the significance of the study and stresses the need for further research.

2. The nature and scale of supplementary tutoring: comparative perspectives

2.1. Nature

At the outset, some definitions are needed. Private supplementary tutoring, as defined here, means tutoring in academic subjects which is provided by the tutors for financial gain and which is additional to the provision by mainstream schooling. This definition may be elaborated as follows:

- *Academic subjects.* The paper is only concerned with academic subjects taught in mainstream schools, such as languages and mathematics. The focus does not include extra-curricular subjects such as soccer and ballet. It also excludes religious studies (e.g. through Sunday School) where they are not part of school mainstream curricula. These additional forms of learning are certainly important, but deserve focus separately from this paper.
- *Financial gain.* The paper is only concerned with tutoring provided by tutors (and the companies which employ the tutors) for financial gain. It is not concerned with extra lessons that are given by mainstream teachers to needy pupils on a voluntary basis outside school hours. Nor is it concerned with the voluntary help given by family members to other family members. Again, such forms of voluntary tutoring are certainly important, but they raise different sorts of issues from those covered here.
- *Additional to the provision by mainstream schooling.* The tutoring covered in this paper is provided outside school hours, mostly in the evenings, at week-ends, and during vacations. Most of the tutoring is also provided in separate premises, outside the school compounds.

The overall conceptual framework of the paper is mainly concerned with the subjects learned in primary and secondary schools, and the specific data for Hong Kong are from the secondary level. Supplementary tutoring certainly exists at the pre-primary and post-secondary levels. However, it is less vigorous at these levels, and the mechanics and issues arising are rather different.

Private supplementary tutoring may be received through many channels. Some tutoring is provided one-to-one in the homes of either the tutors or the tutees. Other tutoring is in small groups, in large classes, or even in huge lecture theatres with overflow rooms in which students watch on a screen what is happening in the main theatres. Some tutoring is provided by companies, which may have multiple branches and hundreds of employees. Other tutoring is provided by individuals, commonly on an informal basis and without written contracts. The curricula used by the tutors may be tightly structured or they may be somewhat ad hoc and dependent on the specific needs of tutees at particular times.

2.2. Scale

Partly because most supplementary tutoring is unofficial and unwelcoming of attention, data on the topic are scarce. However, a picture can be drawn from scattered studies in a range of settings. They include the following:

- In *Egypt*, a 1994 survey of 4729 households found that 64.0% of urban primary children and 52.0% of rural ones had received supplementary tutoring (Fergany, 1994, p. 75). A 1997 study estimated that household expenditures on supplementary tutoring in preparatory, primary and secondary levels accounted for 1.6% of Gross Domestic Product (World Bank, 2002, Fig. 15).
- In *India*, a 1997 survey of 7879 primary school pupils in Delhi found that 39.2% were receiving tutoring (Aggarwal, 1998, p. 65).
- In *Japan*, a 1993 survey found that 23.6% of elementary pupils and 59.5% of junior high school pupils attended tutorial schools (Japan, 1995, p. 6). A 1997

survey added numbers of pupils receiving other forms of tutoring, and found that among Primary 5 children 33.0% attended tutorial schools, 5.7% received help from tutors on a one-to-one basis, 24.5% studied on correspondence courses, and 17.9% received home-delivery study materials (Japan, 1999, p. 68). In urban areas, over 90% of children were receiving some sort of tutoring.

- In *Kenya*, a 1997 national sample of 3233 Standard six pupils found 68.6% receiving tutoring, ranging from 39.0% in North Eastern province to 74.4% in Nyanza Province (Nzomo, Kariuki & Guantai, 2001, p. 28).
- In *Malta*, a 1997/1998 survey of 1482 pupils in upper primary and lower secondary schools found that 50.5% had received private tutoring at some time (Fenech & Spiteri, 1999, p. 26). Some had first received tutoring at the age of four, though the largest number had commenced at the age of 10.
- In *Romania*, a 1994 study of Grade 12 pupils in a national sample found that 32.0% in rural areas and 58.0% in urban areas received private supplementary tutoring (UNESCO, 2000, Section 4.3).
- In *South Korea*, a 1997 study indicated that 72.9% of primary students were receiving private tutoring (Kim, 2000, p. 2). Among middle-school students the proportion was 56.0%; and among high school students it was 32.0%.
- In *Taiwan*, government statistics indicate that in 1998, 5536 tutoring centers had 1,891,096 students (Taiwan, 1999, p. 136). Other centers were unregistered, so total numbers were even larger.

This set of examples presents data from a wide range of countries. Partly for cultural reasons, private supplementary tutoring has long been prominent in many Asian societies. However, tutoring is growing in other parts of the world, including North America and Europe. In 2000, Canada's Council of Ministers of Education published a study of science learning based on a sample of 31,000 students in 2000 schools. The study indicated that 10.9% of 13-year-old students and 13.3% of 16-year-old students received 1 hour or more of extra school lessons or tutoring during a normal week (Canada, 2000, p. 53). Among 16-year-olds, in no province was the proportion below 8%, and in one province it reached 20%. Similarly, Russell (2002) wrote an article about the UK entitled 'The Secret Lessons'. She remarked (p. 10) that "almost unnoticed, a revolution has taken place in state education", adding that:

In London and other big cities, private tutoring is booming. It has become one of the most important, yet also unacknowledged, factors in a child's performance.

Baker, Akiba, LeTendre and Wiseman (2001) and Wolf (2002) presented data from national samples in a number of countries on the percentages of pupils in Grades 7 and 8 who reported receiving tutoring. The proportions exceeded 50% in Czech Republic, Russia, Romania, Slovenia, South Africa, Philippines and Slovak Republic; and in Latvia the proportion exceeded 90%.

3. The demand for tutoring: determinants in different contexts

At the outset it is useful to contrast demand for private tutoring with demand for private schooling. James (1987, 1993) has presented a model to explain why private school sectors are larger in some countries than in others. The core of her model is a distinction between excess demand and differentiated demand. In some countries, she points out, public schools are of adequate or good quality but are limited in capacity. Private schools then cater for excess demand. They may not be so good as the public schools, but they provide places for children of families who are unable to gain places in the public schools but can afford the costs of private institutions. Other private schools, by contrast, cater for differentiated demand. The pupils in these schools could secure places in public schools, but instead attend private schools because those schools are superior in quality and/or have different curricula, e.g. with a desired religious orientation. Differences in the scale and nature of public schooling thus have a bearing on the demand for private schooling.

While this model helps to explain the nature of demand for private schooling, it needs modification to fit private tutoring because such tutoring is supplementary rather than substitutive. In the case of private tutoring, demand may simultaneously be both excess and differentiated. It is excess when the students and their families feel that the mainstream system is not meeting all their needs; and may be differentiated insofar as the tutors provide a curriculum which differs from that in the mainstream classes rather than simply providing more of the same. In either case, the pupils' full-time schooling may be in either public or private institutions.

To understand the range of patterns more fully, it is necessary to distinguish between two rather different sets of arrangements for private tutoring. In the first, tutoring is provided to pupils by the same teachers who have responsibility for those pupils in mainstream classes. This type of pattern is found in countries as different as Cambodia, Mauritius and Romania (Bray, 1999b; Foon-dun, 2002; Popa & Acedo, 2003). It can lead to a form of blackmail in which teachers teach a portion of the curriculum during official hours and only teach the remainder to pupils who pay for the private lessons. The authorities in these countries tolerate the situation partly

because they have few weapons to prevent it, and partly because they know that official salaries are very low and that teachers are justified in seeking additional incomes. In this situation, demand is effectively created by the teachers themselves. Parents may have little choice over whether or not to pay for the extra lessons, especially when the teachers set and mark the end-of-year tests which determine which pupils will be promoted to subsequent grades. Parents may decide that it is less expensive to pay for the extra lessons than to suffer the costs of their children repeating grades. Yet although in such circumstances teachers effectively have monopoly controls over their pupils, social sanctions commonly prevent individual teachers from charging significantly greater amounts than their counterparts in neighboring institutions.

In the second type of situation, which is applicable in Hong Kong and therefore to the rest of this paper, teachers are prohibited from providing supplementary tutoring to their own mainstream pupils. Private tutoring is thus provided either by specialist tutors or by other classroom teachers who do not already have responsibility for the tutees whom they tutor. In this situation, parents have greater choice of action. They may still feel under pressure, e.g. from the fact that their children's classmates are receiving tutoring and therefore that their children are getting left behind in tests and other classwork; but the parents do have some choice first on whether or not to send their children to tutors, and second, if so, on which type of tutoring to purchase from which tutors.

Because a major purpose of tutoring is to help pupils to gain qualifications, demand tends to increase close to the major public examinations, and then abruptly to decline once the examinations are over. However, demand may not reach consistent levels for all school subjects. In Hong Kong, English typically has the greatest demand because it is important not only as a subject but also as a medium of instruction for other subjects. Mathematics and science are also high-demand subjects.

For some parents, tutoring may also have a child-minding function by keeping the children occupied in constructive activities when the parents are themselves unavailable. This element tends to be stronger at the primary than the secondary level, in part because the formal hours for primary schooling are shorter than for secondary schooling, and is particularly important in Hong Kong for families in which both parents are in wage employment. Such parents commonly undertake informal comparisons of the costs of tutoring and the incomes that the parents would sacrifice if they were to stay at home to look after their children.

Other determinants of demand are similar to those which apply to other services. At the basic level are the prices and the availability of tutoring at times and in places which are convenient to the consumers. Also relevant are the quality of the services and the anticipated

benefits, not only in pupils' learning but also in self-confidence and future earnings after leaving school. Some tutors have ways to stimulate demand through advertising, offering discount coupons in magazines, and providing rewards for tutees who bring their classmates and other clients. All these factors are relevant in the Hong Kong situation.

4. Private supplementary tutoring in Hong Kong: identifying patterns of demand

4.1. Collecting data

As noted above, research on private supplementary tutoring commonly encounters various obstacles. Perhaps the greatest is the unwillingness of the tutors to be researched. Many tutors avoid taxation on their earnings, and these tutors in particular do not welcome attention from researchers. The Hong Kong government has recently insisted that tutorial businesses which provide for 20 or more persons during any one day, or eight or more persons at any one time, should register with the authorities. However, some tutors still fail to register, and would not welcome exposure of that fact by researchers. Some tutors are also sensitive to the possibility of negative publicity about their qualifications and methods; and full-time school teachers who undertake private supplementary tutoring may not want their schools to know about their after-school activities because it could affect their school images and/or promotion prospects.

In this situation, it is generally easier and more reliable to collect data from households than from tutors. One study of 507 students was conducted in 1996 through a telephone survey of randomly selected households (Lee, 1996). This method did produce useful data, though was subject to shortcomings in the types of information that could be collected over the telephone. Rather more effective for those who have access to schools is to solicit information from the pupils themselves. This technique has been used on a small scale by Tseng (1998) and Wong (1998), who were classroom teachers who sought information from their own pupils. The technique was also used for the present study. Solicitation of data from households and from pupils has the added advantage over solicitation of data from tutors that it is possible to identify which sorts of pupils do *not* receive tutoring in addition to identifying their counterparts who do.

Most of the data which follow are taken from a study which focused on the secondary level of schooling, and which employed a combination of quantitative and qualitative techniques (Kwok, 2001). The researcher did not have capacity to survey pupils in all of Hong Kong's 450 secondary schools, and for the quantitative part of the study decided instead to undertake detailed investi-

gation of six schools which served a range of socio-economic groups and had diverse academic abilities in the student populations. Within each of these schools, one class was randomly selected during the 1998/1999 academic year from each of three class groupings: Secondary 1–3, Secondary 4–5 and Secondary 6–7. This generated responses from 630 pupils. The questionnaire was written in Chinese, and piloted before conduct of the main study. With the agreement of the classroom teachers, the researcher himself administered the questionnaires during class time, and was thus available to answer procedural questions and to ensure response rates of almost 100%. The findings were generally consistent with those of Lee (1996), Tseng (1998) and Wong (1998).

The quantitative study gave a useful portrait, but in some respects had limitations. To supplement the quantitative study, therefore, a qualitative study was organized. Semi-structured interviews were conducted of 47 teachers, 42 tutors, 34 members of the general public, 31 parents, 28 secondary school students, 12 principals or vice-principals, and three school inspectors. These investigations included 16 in-depth case studies conducted over a 3-year period of students, tutors, and tutorial schools undertaking different types of tutoring. The viewpoints of persons other than students are important because students may not have the same perspectives as their parents, teachers and other actors. The quantitative and qualitative studies generated huge quantities of data. Since the data cannot all be presented here, the remainder of this paper highlights some key findings.

4.2. *Quantitative findings*

Table 1 shows the proportions of sampled pupils receiving private supplementary tutoring at the time of the survey. Some variation existed between the schools, but this variation was within the bounds of expectation based on previous studies both in Hong Kong and elsewhere. Overall, 35.1% of the sampled Secondary 1–3 pupils indicated that they were receiving tutoring. In Secondary 4–5 the proportion was 46.6%, and in Secondary 6–7 it was 70.3%. In other words, at higher grades the

proportion of pupils receiving tutoring increased. This feature reflected the relative significance of the examinations at each level.

The greatest proportions of pupils attended large-scale examination-oriented mass tutoring classes rather than individual or small-group sessions, and mass tutoring became particularly popular in the higher grades. Thus 72.4% of Secondary 6–7 pupils received large-scale mass tutoring, compared with 33.0% of Secondary 4–5 pupils. At Secondary 1–3, 12.3% of pupils received more than one type of tutoring. This proportion increased to 29.4% in Secondary 4–5, and was 19.8% in Secondary 6–7. In Secondary 1–3, mathematics was the most popular subject, being taken by 89.7% of the pupils who received tutoring. It was followed by English (taken by 78.2%), Chinese (44.9%), and science (52.6%). At higher grades, the rankings depended on the pupils' specialisms, but English and mathematics remained particularly popular. The modal duration of tutoring in each group of grades was 6–10 hours per month, with 30.4% of pupils indicating that they received over 10 hours per month, and 6.5% indicating that they received over 25 hours per month.

Table 2 indicates the reasons given by students for receiving private tutoring. Overall, preparation for examinations was by a considerable margin the greatest motivation, but it was relatively weak in Secondary 1–3 and strongest in Secondary 6–7. Conversely, seeking guidance with homework was the greatest motivation in Secondary 1–3, but declined in significance with the higher grades. One third of pupils indicated that they received tutoring in order to meet parental obligations; but 10.1%, with a rather different orientation, indicated that they did so in order to make new friends.

On the other side of the coin, the strongest reason presented for not receiving tutoring was that those students were able to solve their own learning problems either independently or in conjunction with classmates. One third of respondents indicated that they did not need private tutoring because parents or relatives could provide the necessary assistance, but this proportion declined from 43.2% in Secondary 1–3 to 17.1% in Secondary 6–7, presumably in part because parents and relatives were less easily able to help with the more specialized studies in the higher grades. A few students declared that academic results were not important, and a very small number indicated either that they had received sufficient academic improvement after previous tutoring to be no longer in need, or that they had not received any academic improvement after previous tutoring and therefore did not consider it useful.

Also noteworthy is that 10.9% of respondents indicated that they did not receive tutoring because it was not affordable. This information may be considered in conjunction with data on fees and household incomes. One third of the students indicated that they spent less

Table 1
Proportion of sampled pupils receiving private supplementary tutoring

| | Number of pupils | % Receiving tutoring |
|---------------|------------------|----------------------|
| Secondary 1–3 | 231 | 35.1 |
| Secondary 4–5 | 234 | 46.6 |
| Secondary 6–7 | 165 | 70.3 |
| Total | 630 | 48.8 |

Table 2
Main reasons given for receiving private tutoring (%)

| | Secondary 1–3 (<i>n</i> = 73) | Secondary 4–5 (<i>n</i> = 108) | Secondary 6–7 (<i>n</i> = 116) | Total (<i>n</i> = 297) |
|---|-----------------------------------|------------------------------------|------------------------------------|----------------------------|
| Seeking guidance with homework | 60.3 | 43.5 | 37.1 | 45.1 |
| Examination preparation | 28.8 | 64.8 | 84.5 | 63.6 |
| Parental obligations | 57.5 | 37.0 | 12.1 | 32.3 |
| Daytime lessons not understandable | 32.9 | 55.6 | 48.3 | 47.1 |
| Lack of guidance on schoolwork from parents/relatives | 32.9 | 29.6 | 23.3 | 27.9 |
| Making new friends | 8.2 | 16.7 | 5.2 | 10.1 |
| Others | 1.4 | 4.6 | 2.6 | 3.0 |

than HK\$500 (US\$64) per month on fees; but 28.1% indicated that they spent over HK\$1000, and 8.5% spent over HK\$2000.

To help in estimation of the extent to which these expenditures were a burden on household budgets, students were asked about their households' monthly incomes. Recognizing that students might not be able to declare such information accurately, the researcher also asked students about the education levels of each parent, about the parents' occupations, and about the number of children and other members in the household, so that some sort of triangulation could be achieved. On the basis of this set of information, a rough estimate of socio-economic status was derived. The largest number of students from low-income households appeared to be spending HK\$301–500 per month on fees for private tutoring, while the most common range for middle-income households was HK\$701–1000, and for high-income households it was HK\$1001–2000. In addition were costs of materials and transportation, though most students indicated that the costs of materials were fairly modest and that the tutoring was received in locations close to their homes. For all income groups, the tutoring fees appeared to consume between 1.1 and 5.0% of monthly incomes (Table 3). However, for an estimated 3.6% of low-income families and 12.5% of middle-

income families, tutoring fees consumed between 15.1 and 20.0% of monthly incomes.

As might be expected, low-income households had lower participation rates in private tutoring than did their more affluent counterparts. For the low-income group (*n* = 333), participation rates were 10.2% in Secondary 1–3, 13.2% in Secondary 4–5, and 16.2% in Secondary 6–7. By contrast, for the high income group (*n* = 217), participation rates were 15.2% in Secondary 1–3, 22.1% in Secondary 4–5, and 19.3% in Secondary 6–7.

These proportions were correlated with the educational levels of the parents. Table 4 indicates that the proportion of pupils receiving tutoring rose with parental education levels. To some extent this was presumably a reflection of incomes, since lower-educated parents probably earned less than higher-educated parents. However, the pattern may also have reflected parental expectations of their children. The more highly educated parents were presumably in a better position to tutor their own children than were their less-educated counterparts, but many parents chose instead to pay for tutors perhaps because they felt that the tutors were specialists and could perform the task more cost-effectively.

Finally, it is useful to link the scale of tutoring to levels of academic achievement. While some people assume that most tutoring is received by low academic achievers

Table 3
Ratio of tutoring fees to monthly household incomes (%)

| Percentage of incomes consumed by tutoring fees | Low-income households (<i>n</i> = 84) | Middle-income households (<i>n</i> = 32) | High-income households (<i>n</i> = 64) |
|---|---|--|--|
| 0.0–1.0 | 3.6 | 9.4 | 14.1 |
| 1.1–5.0 | 51.2 | 53.1 | 51.6 |
| 5.1–10.0 | 31.0 | 15.6 | 29.7 |
| 10.1–15.0 | 10.7 | 9.4 | 4.7 |
| 15.1–20.0 | 3.6 | 12.5 | 0.0 |

Note: Data are only for the 180 respondents who gave apparently reliable figures on both tutoring fees and household incomes.

Table 4
Receipt or non-receipt of tutoring, by parents'/guardians' educational levels

| Parents'/guardians' educational levels | Number of pupils | Percentage of pupils receiving tutoring | Percentage of pupils not receiving tutoring |
|--|------------------|---|---|
| Primary education or less | 195 | 35.5 | 64.5 |
| Junior secondary | 182 | 44.5 | 55.5 |
| Upper secondary | 125 | 52.8 | 47.2 |
| Matriculation | 58 | 67.2 | 32.8 |
| University or above | 70 | 72.9 | 27.1 |
| Total | 630 | 48.6 | 51.2 |

Note: Where two parents/guardians had different levels of education, the higher of the two was used for the purposes of this table.

because they are most in need, research commonly shows that higher achievers tend to receive more tutoring than lower achievers. Thus, the families of students who are top in their classes may insist that those students receive tutoring in order to remain top in the class, while the families of students who are near the top insist that those students receive tutoring so that they can reach the top. At an institutional level, the quantitative study found that schools with higher-band ability intakes had higher levels of tutoring than the schools with lower-band intakes. One of the schools sampled was a prestigious English-medium institution. In that school, 71.2% of pupils were receiving private tutoring, compared with the average of 48.8% for all schools. Institutional culture and peer pressure were additional factors underlying the demand for private tutoring, and appeared stronger at higher levels of academic achievement.

4.3. Qualitative findings

While the quantitative survey provided an overall picture of patterns, it could only give limited information on contextual factors and interrelationships. Constraints were imposed by the format of the questionnaire; and even when students had space and time to write comments, they may have felt unwilling to provide full information in the school settings. As noted above, the students may have felt inhibited by the fact that receipt of tutoring could be seen to confer an unfair advantage over peers in their schools. Further, the respondents' statements in the questionnaires were limited by their own perceptions as secondary school students. The qualitative part of the research was conducted within a multi-level framework which considered students, families, institutions, and the system as a whole.

Because of constraints in the length of this paper, only a few insights from the qualitative findings will be sketched here. At the student level, personal factors included self-esteem, learning abilities, and motivation, with some highly-motivated students actively seeking tutoring and less-motivated students being pushed by

their peers, families, teachers or others. Parents were also influenced by peers, noting that other parents provided tutoring, and fearing that their children would get left behind in the competition.

The case studies also highlighted the significance of the demographic shift in recent decades towards nuclear families, which typically have at most two children. On the one hand this has reduced the number of relatives likely to be available for informal tutoring at home, but on the other hand it means that parents' incomes need only to be spread over two children and that the parents are therefore more easily able to employ tutors. It is perhaps significant that the mean number of school children per family ranged from 1.11 in families in which tutoring was being received to 1.90 in families in which it was not.

Turning to the institutional level, the case studies showed that the tutoring centers and individual private tutors were readily accessible because of excellent transportation links within the urban society. Some tutoring centers had been deliberately located close to the stations of the Mass Transit Railway. The analysis also indicated various ways in which the tutoring establishments were perceived to be more attractive than mainstream schools. Many of the particularly vibrant centers employed flashy 'idol' tutors, who increased their attractiveness to teenagers by wearing trendy clothes and using vocabulary which appealed to their clients. They stressed their academic credentials by displaying their higher education qualifications in the promotion pamphlets and on the walls of the centers; and they enhanced their reputation for effectiveness by advertising the brilliant examination results of former pupils. In some tutorial classes, students who achieved high grades in open examinations were awarded cash prizes and package holidays in neighboring countries. Some tutors who had been or still were teachers in mainstream schools explicitly stated that they saw themselves as catering to clients in a market place in a way that was not the norm in the school system. The market orientation was also evident in the names of the centers. Whereas most secondary schools were

named after districts, sponsoring bodies, or saints (for church-run schools), the tutoring centers had names like A1 Institute, Top Learning Centre, Cleverland, and New Target.

At the system level, Hong Kong was described in the qualitative analyses as a competitive city in which educational qualifications were a key component of economic advance. Hong Kong had experienced significant credential inflation in recent years, which required young people to gain higher qualifications than had been needed by their elders. Hong Kong is also strongly influenced by what some researchers have called the Confucian heritage culture (see e.g. Watkins & Biggs, 1999; 2001). This culture stresses effort for self-improvement rather than acceptance of in-born abilities and existing circumstances. Such cultural traits are arguably one reason why tutoring has been particularly evident in East Asia (Zeng, 1999; Foondun, 2002).

Concerning the curriculum, most tutees aimed for consolidation of the school curriculum. Some, however, particularly the ones receiving individual tutoring, went beyond the school curriculum to domains that could not be covered during school hours. In some cases consolidation was achieved through repetition and drilling, but in other cases it was achieved through a different language of instruction. Thus, some pupils in English-medium schools received tutoring through the medium of Chinese for general subjects. A few pupils even received tutoring in English through the medium of Chinese. In this aspect, the tutors were able to offer an approach which was prohibited in the schools, since even the schools which officially taught the majority of subjects through the medium of Chinese were required to teach English through the medium of English. The tutors felt able to go straight for what their clients wanted without the extra baggage that had to be carried by the school system not only in linguistic correctness but also in building civic awareness, national identity, all-rounded development, etc.

Finally, some tutors, particularly the ones who operated on a one-to-one or small-group basis, were able to give students more individual attention than was possible in the school system. Schools typically had 40–45 pupils per class in Secondary 1–5, and 28–30 pupils per class in Secondary 6–7; and some schools frowned on diversity when it implied inequity between pupils. Tutors were less constrained in these dimensions. On the one hand they could give more stimulating materials to the high achievers, and on the other hand they could give extra support to the low achievers. The mass tutorial classes were not able to cater for such diversity, since these classes were considerably larger than the schools' classes. However, the mass classes were to some extent graded by ability to match the standards of different clients.

5. Conclusions

This paper began by noting that private supplementary tutoring has been a neglected topic in the literature. This is regrettable, because such tutoring may be substantial in scale and far-reaching in its implications. Its supplementary role is to replicate daytime schooling and to compensate for insufficiency in daytime lessons. One reason for the neglect by researchers is that tutoring tends to be a hidden phenomenon which is rarely documented in official statistics. Also, while tutoring has long been a major activity in some parts of the world, particularly in East Asia, it has been less significant elsewhere. In recent decades, however, private tutoring has become more evident in all regions of the globe. This fact underlines the desirability of giving the phenomenon more research and policy attention.

The paper also noted at the outset that private supplementary tutoring may be of many types, and that determinants of its size and shape may vary in different societies. One important feature in Hong Kong is that school teachers are prohibited from receiving payment for supplementary tutoring of their own pupils. In the societies where such arrangements are permitted, teachers are able through quasi-blackmail methods to create demand for tutoring among pupils in their mainstream classes. Additional aspects in which Hong Kong may differ from other societies lie in its Confucian heritage culture, and in the fact that Hong Kong is a competitive urban society with excellent internal transportation which enhances access by tutors and tutees to each other.

However, Hong Kong may also have similarities to other societies, and may even indicate the directions in which those societies are moving. On the one hand are neighboring societies such as mainland China and Vietnam which are also influenced by Confucian heritage cultures but in which political factors have in the past constrained the emergence of a substantial private tutoring industry; and on the other hand are societies elsewhere in the world, such as North America and Western Europe, in which school systems are becoming more stratified and in which families increasingly use out-of-school strategies to enhance in-school success. The factors which influence demand for private supplementary tutoring in Hong Kong may have counterparts elsewhere.

The paper has also contrasted the determinants of demand for private supplementary tutoring with those which shape demand for private schooling. In particular, James' (1987, 1993) model of an excess/differentiated dichotomy cannot be applied to private tutoring in an either/or way. It may be added that the market for private tutoring is much more fluid than that for schooling. Clients of private tutors can much more easily select the types, durations and intensities of services that they desire, and can instantly cease enrollment at any time

that they are dissatisfied. Cessation of enrollment is considerably less easy in private school systems, since pupils, once registered, usually find themselves locked into the private system by its curriculum, and are correspondingly excluded from the public system by the fact that they have not been following its curriculum. Analysis of demand for private tutoring can thus expose an important dimension of the broader theme of privately-provided education.

When making decisions about private tutoring, households commonly undertake informal rate-of-return analyses. Through cross-national studies, analysts such as Psacharopoulos and Patrinos (2002) have shown that education is generally a very good investment that can generate high rates of return, and that it is usually wise for individuals to stay in education systems as long as possible. Few Hong Kong parents have read the studies of rates of return; but they can easily observe that more highly educated people in Hong Kong society generally have higher incomes than less educated people. Kwan-Terry (1991) has remarked on a similar phenomenon in Singapore, and has explicitly linked it to the economic returns that families can achieve from private tutoring. Many Hong Kong parents make similar rough calculations, either explicitly or implicitly.

However, such decisions depend on many additional factors, including affordability, accessibility, and general culture. Affordability of tutoring costs by individuals and families was measured in this study by the apparent burden on household budgets. The observations can be linked to the broader literature which stresses the importance of such costs, even in so-called 'free education' systems (see e.g. Bray, 1996; Mehrotra & Delamonica, 1998; Penrose, 1998). Concerning accessibility, the Hong Kong study indicated ease of transportation in the urban society. And cultural factors played a role insofar as pupils and their families were influenced by peer pressures, institutions were influenced by comparisons with other institutions, and the whole society was influenced by Confucian and other values.

This study has identified major variables in the demand for private supplementary tutoring, and has indicated a structure which could be followed by other researchers. More research on this theme, both in Hong Kong and elsewhere, is very desirable. Because supplementary tutoring has an impact on full-time schooling, such research would shed light on patterns and processes in school systems as well as on tutoring itself.

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