

The influence of the Chinese hukou system in motivating and shaping the geography of Chinese international student mobility

Erlil Kang 

School of Geography and Sustainable Development, University of St. Andrews, St. Andrews, Scotland, UK

Correspondence

Erlil Kang, School of Geography and Sustainable Development, University of St. Andrews, St. Andrews KY16 9AL, Scotland, UK.
Email: ek210@st-andrews.ac.uk

Funding information

None

Abstract

The hukou system (household registration system) is a long-established and significant institutional barrier to population movement within China and, accordingly, has been the subject of a great deal of research. What has received scant attention, however, is the influence that this system has on the considerable phenomenon of Chinese international student mobility (ISM). This paper is based on an analysis of 50 semistructured interviews with Shanghai-based returnee students. Utilising the notions of institutional barriers to migration and middle-category migration, it illustrates the important role that the hukou system plays in motivating nonelite Chinese students to study abroad and how this institutional barrier shapes their strategic decision making across various temporal phases of the ISM process. These findings are of significance as they highlight the largely unacknowledged role of hukou in the Chinese ISM system. Conceptually, they emphasise the importance of sufficiently accounting for institutional barriers to internal and international mobility in the experiences of international students in migration studies.

KEYWORDS

China, higher education, institutional barriers, internal migration, international student mobility

1 | INTRODUCTION

International student mobility (ISM) refers to the processes of movement of 'internationally mobile students', defined as people who leave their country of citizenship primarily for education (UNESCO Institute for Statistics, 2014). Scholars have found that institutional barriers significantly influence the ISM process (Lomer, 2018; Lulle & Buzinska, 2017). However, this understanding usually refers to international migration. There is little knowledge about how institutional barriers to internal migration affect ISM. To fill the important gap, this paper relates to the data from 50 semistructured interviews with

returning master's graduates in Shanghai to examine the effect of the Chinese hukou system, as an institutional barrier, on different stages of ISM experience among Chinese international students. Specifically, this paper asks whether the hukou restriction of internal migration may motivate some students to study abroad. If so, how does the hukou system affect the ISM experience of middle-class Chinese international students? The main contribution of this paper is the revealing of the thus far underacknowledged relationship between ISM and domestic institutional barriers to mobility.

The Chinese hukou system is an appropriate starting point for exploring how domestic institutional barriers affect ISM. This is partially

This is an open access article under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution License, which permits use, distribution and reproduction in any medium, provided the original work is properly cited.

© 2023 The Authors. *Population, Space and Place* published by John Wiley & Sons Ltd.

because China is one of the largest ISM-sending countries in the world (Wen & Hu, 2019). From the end of 1978 to 2019, more than 4 million Chinese students chose to study overseas (National Bureau of Statistic of China NBSC, 2019). These students came from different regions of China, but upon their return were concentrated in several developed coastal cities, such as Shanghai and Guangzhou (Chinese Service Center for Scholarly Exchange CSCSE, 2018). In other words, returnees were often internal migrants within China. The Chinese hukou system has long been regarded as an institutional barrier to Chinese internal migration (Montgomery, 2012; Qian et al., 2020), and has diverse influences on Chinese internal migrants, especially regarding their employment (Song, 2014; Wang & Moffatt, 2008; Xiao & Bian, 2018; Zhang, 2020). However, only a few recent studies have observed that the hukou system influences the ISM experience of Chinese students (Brooks & Waters, 2021; Zhai, 2020). Brooks and Waters (2021) noted that certain cities provide hukou privileges for returning students, allowing them to access the best job opportunities in the most buoyant local labour markets. Zhai (2020) compared the career outcomes of Chinese returnees and domestic master's graduates and indicated that returnees' hukou privilege provides better opportunities in their early career development. However, research has not yet examined whether overcoming domestic institutional barriers to internal migration via ISM can motivate young people to study abroad, and how the significance of the hukou system in shaping these processes varies temporally before, during and after migration for international students.

This gap is important considering the growing cohort of middle-class students pursuing higher education within China. However, the limited number of elite domestic higher education institutions has led to ISM becoming an option for these students, and they prefer less expensive destinations (Lan, 2019). Exploring the effects of the hukou system on ISM is beneficial to understanding the ISM experience of middle-class students. China is an unevenly developed country, where the more heavily developed coastal regions usually have the most job opportunities and can provide better social benefits (Song, 2014; Zhang et al., 2019). However, hukou restrictions present significant barriers to the movement of nonelite citizens to these favoured regions (Qian & Qian, 2017; Zhou & Hui, 2022). In recent years, hukou reforms have allowed returning international students to access hukou status in developed cities (Brooks & Waters, 2021; Zhai, 2020). These reforms provided enhanced potential opportunities for middle-class students in economically peripheral regions to access hukou status in core cities via ISM. The scale and mechanism of this process are the focus of this paper.

The remainder of this paper is presented as follows. First, this paper will introduce how the hukou system works and how it could theoretically act as an institutional barrier to internal migration and thus influence the ISM processes of middle-class Chinese international students. Then, this paper describes the data collection and analyses completed to answer two research questions: (i) how the Chinese hukou system affects different stages of ISM and (ii) what the impact of the hukou system on middle-class students in China is. The results section demonstrates that overcoming hukou restrictions is one reason for many Chinese internal students to choose to study

abroad. Furthermore, this study explores the thoughts of middle-class students at different stages of ISM. The final section reflects on the results and their implications.

2 | THE HUKOU SYSTEM: AN INSTITUTIONAL BARRIER TO MOBILITY BEYOND INTERNAL MIGRATION?

The hukou system is a household registration system in China that classifies the population according to two frameworks: hukou type (agricultural or nonagricultural) and place of registration (local or nonlocal) (Song, 2014). The modern hukou system was created in 1958 to control population movement and has a significant influence on internal migration in the country (Qian et al., 2020; Song, 2014). This impact derives, on the one hand, from the fact that the local government is the main provider of citizenship rights in China rather than the state, and hukou status is a means for residents of registered regions to access citizenship rights (Vortherms, 2021). It is difficult for internal migrants to access local citizenship rights, such as public education, employment, public housing and other welfare benefits, without local hukou status in their destinations (Wing Chan & Buckingham, 2008; Song, 2014; Zhou & Cheung, 2017; Zhou & Hui, 2022). Changes in hukou status are highly regulated and are difficult for individuals to achieve (Qian & Qian, 2017; Zhou & Hui, 2022). Local governments set their own criteria for accessing local hukou, which effectively screens for 'ideal' citizens in the form of a high level of education and wealth (Chan, 2010; Song, 2014; Zhou & Hui, 2022). Consequently, hukou-related policies are highly differentiated from one place to another (Song, 2014). Developed regions usually design more restrictive hukou policies because they can provide better public services and benefits than other regions (Song, 2014; Zhai, 2020; Zhang et al., 2019).

The constraints of the hukou system render it a significant institutional barrier to internal migration within China, with considerable consequences for those who are unable to achieve it. In 2020, nearly 500 million Chinese people lived in places different from the hukou regions where they were registered, and 3 million of them lived overseas (National Bureau of Statistic of China NBSC, 2021). In other words, nearly half of the population was more or less affected by nonlocal hukou status in China, which makes the hukou system an important perspective when examining both Chinese internal and international migration. The diverse negative effects of the hukou system on internal migrants include the fields of employment (Song, 2014; Wang & Moffatt, 2008; Xiao & Bian, 2018; Zhang, 2020), marriage (Lui, 2017; Qian & Qian, 2017) and even food security during the Covid pandemic (Xu et al., 2023). In contrast to the widespread recognition of hukou's significant influence on Chinese internal migration, the effect of this system on international migration is still underexplored. Considering the significant scale of Chinese international migration, including ISM, it is important to assess the unacknowledged role of the hukou system as an institutional barrier to internal migration in stimulating international migration.

In recent years, two scholars have made important contributions to examining how the hukou system influences Chinese international migration (Lynn-Ee ho, 2011; Liu, 2021). Lynn-Ee ho (2011) a geographer who conducted interviews with mainland Chinese migrants to Canada and returnees from Canada, found that difficulty integrating into Canadian society led some Chinese emigrants to choose to return. However, the prohibition of dual citizenship in China resulted in immigrants having to give up their Chinese citizenship and hukou status, which led to returnees' citizenship rights being side-lined even though they shared the cultural and national identity of China. More recently, Liu (2021), a sociologist, explored how the hukou system worked as a tool for the Chinese government to control overseas Chinese emigrants. By conducting interviews with local governors in an anonymous Chinese county of Wuse, returned migrants and migrants abroad, he found that the local government utilises the strategy of hukou deprivation and selective hukou restoration to extend state control to Chinese citizens overseas. However, thus far, no studies have explored how the hukou system affects ISM, which is a quantitatively significant subgroup of international migrants, especially in relation to China, which sent out more than 700,000 students only in 2019 (National Bureau of Statistic of China NBSC, 2021).

This gap in the research is remarkable because most developed Chinese cities, including Beijing and Shanghai, have designed specific hukou policies oriented toward returning international students in recent years, thus providing opportunities for them, in theory, to access hukou status in these developed regions (Brooks & Waters, 2021; Zhai, 2020). Therefore, accessing hukou status in developed Chinese cities via ISM could be a potential motivation for some Chinese people to engage in ISM, but there is no existing research on the scale or mechanics of this process. Furthermore, the hukou system potentially plays a significant role in shaping the extent and geography of ISM on a global scale, given the substantial size of ISM from China. The objective of this analysis is to better understand the role that the hukou system plays across various temporal phases of the individual ISM journey, including from predeparture to postreturn. However, it should be noted that the effects of the hukou system in developed Chinese cities are unevenly distributed among students from different socioeconomic backgrounds because local governments usually use individuals' education and wealth status as criteria to decide whether someone can access local hukou status (Chan, 2010; Zhou & Hui, 2022). The following section will discuss why the institutional barriers to mobility faced by middle-class international students are worthy of scholarly scrutiny.

3 | THE POTENTIAL EFFECT OF INSTITUTIONAL BARRIERS ON THE ISM OF 'MIDDLE-CATEGORY MIGRATION' STUDENTS

The number of internationally mobile students has increased rapidly in recent years, growing from 2 million in 2000 to more than 6 million in 2020 (UNESCO Institute for Statistics, 2021). Several factors

motivate students to study abroad. The most common is the good career outcomes often brought about by ISM (Findlay et al., 2012; Kommers & Bista, 2020; Waters, 2008). Other motivations include treating ISM as preparation for long-term migration to destination countries (Crossman & Clarke, 2010; Wintre et al., 2015), improving language skills, especially English (Brooks & Waters, 2011; Sánchez et al., 2006; Wu, 2014) and seeking adventure and experience abroad (Brooks & Waters, 2011). However, to date, no researchers have asked whether overcoming institutional barriers in ISM-sending countries could in fact be a motivation for studying abroad. This enquiry is based on the empirical finding that ISM could bring vast cultural capital to international students, such as proficiency in another language and intercultural communication skills (Beech, 2019; Findlay et al., 2012). Such cultural capital could potentially contribute to overcoming domestic institutional barriers and bring benefits to returnees. Zhai and Moskal (2022) conducted an online survey of 756 master's graduates educated in China and the United Kingdom and found that the cultural capital brought by ISM helped returnees access hukou status in the most prosperous Chinese cities, which had a positive effect on returnees' career development. Therefore, overcoming institutional barriers could conceivably motivate ISM, and thus, given the scale of Chinese ISM, influence the pattern of ISM on a global scale.

To understand how institutional barriers influence the pattern of ISM, this study explores how the hukou system influences the ISM of Chinese international students. This study believes that the hukou system is an appropriate empirical lens for two reasons. First, the hukou system is an important institutional barrier to internal migration in China. Second, similar institutional control of internal migration also occurs elsewhere, meaning that the findings have applicability beyond the Chinese context (Hatcher & Thieme, 2016; Turaeva, 2022). For example, the *propiska* system is a similar institutional barrier that aims to restrict internal migration in some former Soviet countries, such as Uzbekistan, Turkmenistan, Tajikistan, Kyrgyzstan and Russia (Turaeva, 2022). *Propiska* status authorises individuals to work and live in their *propiska*-registered place, and migrants only have limited social rights without local *propiska* status (Hatcher & Thieme, 2016). For example, in Uzbekistan and Turkmenistan, people without local *propiska* are excluded from the labour market and social service system in national capitals (Turaeva, 2022).

The institutional barriers faced by international students are often neglected in the literature, partially because most ISM studies focus on students' experiences from a relatively privileged background. Some scholars have reviewed the ISM literature in diverse regions and have realised that international students are usually economically and socially privileged (Beech, 2019; Brooks & Waters, 2011; Lipura & Collins, 2020). This is because barriers to ISM, especially the costs involved, mean it is mainly higher-income students who have opportunities to study abroad (Kommers & Bista, 2020). Even though some studies have realised that non-privileged students also participated in ISM in recent years (Lan, 2019; Mulvey, 2021), their ISM experience is still less examined. Lipura and

Collins (2020) argued that ISM studies usually treat international students as a homogenous group, which neglects their diversification in terms of factors such as their socioeconomic backgrounds, gender, nationality and age. They called for scholars to examine the experiences of students from diverse socioeconomic and sociopolitical backgrounds. In recent years, some scholars have noticed that nonprivileged students increasingly participate in ISM (Mulvey, 2021; Tuxen & Robertson, 2019; Waters & Leung, 2013; Yang, 2018). By exploring nonprivileged students' ISM experience, scholars have realised that they usually face more barriers, including institutional barriers such as immigration policies, than their more privileged peers (Tuxen & Robertson, 2019; Xu, 2021). However, an important but thus far neglected issue is how institutional barriers in the sending countries, such as the Chinese hukou system, influence ISM and how these affect especially nonprivileged students. By examining Chinese students' ISM experiences, this paper hopes to fill this gap by examining how the Chinese hukou system affects nonprivileged Chinese students across the various temporal phases of their ISM journeys.

To understand how the hukou system potentially affects the ISM experience of Chinese nonprivileged students, this study uses the concept of 'middle-category migration' from stepwise migration theory to describe returnees' social status (Paul, 2011). Stepwise migration theory is widely used to explain an international migration journey with at least two destinations, which presumes that there is a hierarchy of migration destinations in terms of attractiveness (Ortiga & Macabasag, 2021; Paul, 2011; Zabin & Hughes, 1995). Desired destinations are usually more difficult to access because they usually impose more restrictive immigration requirements and policies (Paul, 2011). Therefore, less-than-ideal destinations often work as stepping stones for migrants to accumulate capital for future migration to more desired destinations (Paul, 2015).

Using the framework of stepwise migration, Paul (2011), a sociologist, first raised the concept of the 'middle category of migrant' in her study of the migration experiences of Filipino domestic workers to indicate immigrants who have insufficient capability to move directly to the most desired destination, but have enough capital to initialise their migration to less desired destinations to accumulate capital for future migration to the desired destinations. This concept is well suited to the current study for three reasons. First, stepwise migration theory has long been used to understand a migration journey with at least two destinations (Conway, 1980; Croitoru & Vlase, 2021; Paul, 2011; Ravenstein, 1885). In the present study, some returnees hoped to move from other parts of China to Chinese-developed cities, such as Shanghai, by studying in the United Kingdom or Hong Kong because of hukou restrictions. Therefore, their migration journey included at least two destinations: the United Kingdom or Hong Kong, and the final destination of Shanghai. Second, there is a hierarchy between ISM destinations and internal migration destinations. For Chinese students, both the ISM destinations of Hong Kong and the United Kingdom are often less desired destinations compared with Chinese-developed cities, which are most returnees' desired ultimate destinations. Finally, the concept of

the 'middle category of migrant' provided a suitable reflection of returnees' socioeconomic background. Previous studies have usually measured the social status of international students through their economic background, such as their parents' occupations (King et al., 2011; Zhai, 2020). However, it should be noted that the definition of social background is different in different countries and regions (Koo, 2016; Mulvey, 2021). Mulvey (2021) researched international students from African countries studying in China and realised that many African middle-class students are not as affluent as the 'global middle class'. For these reasons, the concept of 'middle category migration' provides a relatively clear measurement of returnees' social status by evaluating their capability to overcome barriers to migration. Carling and Schewel (2018) maintained that people with different socioeconomic backgrounds have an uneven distribution of the capability to overcome barriers to migration. On the other hand, the institutional barriers to migration, such as hukou policies, usually provide a clear requirement of migrants' socioeconomic background (Chan, 2010; Song, 2014; Zhou & Hui, 2022). This helps readers to understand returnees' social status in the local context.

Overall, by investigating the effect of the hukou system on different temporal stages of the ISM journey among Chinese students, this study hopes to understand whether and how institutional barriers in sending countries influence the ISM system, particularly for students who belong to 'middle category migrants'.

4 | METHODOLOGY

In this study, 50 semistructured interviews with returning master's graduates were conducted in Shanghai between August 2021 and January 2022. Their profiles are shown in Table 1.

Each interview lasted for approximately 40–60 min, and topics covered returnees' experience of ISM and their return after graduation. All interviewees were recruited through the popular Chinese social media platform WeChat. Snowball sampling was employed to contact potential interviewees with the help of the researcher's social networks and gatekeepers (organisers of online informal returnees' communities). All interviews were carried out in Chinese and translated into English. All interviewees were located in Shanghai. This city was selected as the focus of this study because it is the most developed Chinese city in terms of economic development, making it especially attractive to returnees. Furthermore, it conditionally widened its hukou status toward returnees in 2010 (Government of Shanghai, 2010). As such, Shanghai is one of the most popular cities, with the largest population of students returning from overseas (Chinese Service Center for Scholarly Exchange CSCSE, 2018; Zhai, 2020). Therefore, Shanghai provides an ideal context for exploring the internal migration experience, via ISM, of Chinese returnees.

Most of the 50 returnees interviewed came from peripheral regions and most worked in graduate-level jobs in Shanghai. All of them either already had a Shanghai hukou or had applied for it. This

TABLE 1 Profile of interviewees.

	Returnees from Hong Kong	Returnees from the United Kingdom
Gender		
Female	12 (60%)	11 (37%)
Male	8 (40%)	19 (63%)
Age		
24–29	16 (80%)	22 (73%)
30–34	4 (20%)	8 (27%)
Current industry		
Finance	2 (10%)	6 (20%)
IT	4 (20%)	2 (7%)
Law	1 (5%)	N/A
Education	4 (20%)	4 (13%)
Manufacture	6 (30%)	3 (10%)
Construction	2 (10%)	5 (17%)
Consulting	1 (5%)	2 (7%)
Communication	N/A	1 (3%)
Marketing	N/A	4 (13%)
Civil servant	N/A	1 (3%)
Design	N/A	N/A
Human resources	N/A	N/A
Unemployed	N/A	2 (7%)
Place of work		
Foreign venture	5 (25%)	5 (17%)
Private sector	10 (50%)	11 (37%)
Joint venture	N/A	1 (3%)
State sector	3 (15%)	8 (26%)
Government	2 (10%)	3 (10%)
N/A	0	2 (7%)
Place of origin		
Dijishi	13 (65%)	7 (57%)
Shenghui	4 (20%)	9 (30%)
Fushengji shi	3 (15%)	3 (10%)
Zhixiashi	0	1 (3%)
Class of family		
Middle-upper	10 (50%)	14 (47%)
Middle-middle	8 (40%)	14 (47%)
Middle-low	2 (10%)	2 (6%)

study focused on master's graduates because they account for the largest share (65%) of Chinese returnees (Chinese Service Center for Scholarly Exchange CSCSE, 2018). The sample included 20 returnees from Hong Kong and 30 returnees from the United Kingdom. This

study chose students who returned from the United Kingdom because it is the largest ISM destination for master's study for Chinese international students (Chinese Service Center for Scholarly Exchange CSCSE, 2018). Hong Kong was included because it is also a very popular destination for Chinese international master's students (Chinese Service Center for Scholarly Exchange CSCSE, 2018). Furthermore, Hong Kong is geographically close to mainland China and shares a similar postgraduate education system with the United Kingdom.

Based on Wei's (2014) research, this study ranked returnees' original places of residence into a hierarchy with seven levels based on the administrative level and standing of the cities. In descending order in the hierarchy, the categories were Zhixiashi (municipalities directly under the central government), Fushengji shi (deputy provincial-level cities), Shenghui (provincial capital), Dijishi (prefecture-level cities), Xianjishi (country-level cities), Xiancheng (country towns) and Zhen (towns). The scale and resources are positively related to the administration level of the city. Most returnees originally came from Dijishi, and few came from Shenghui, Fushengji shi and Zhixiashi (Table 1). No returnees came from Xianjishi, Xiancheng or Zhen. In other words, they have a nonelite status in terms of their places of origin. Furthermore, this study examined returnees' social status by parental occupation. This is because most returnees relied on family to support their ISM. Based on Lu (2002) study, occupations in China are divided into five main socioeconomic categories: upper class, middle-upper class, middle-middle class, middle-low class and lower class. All returnees came from one of the middle classes in terms of economic background, which included the middle-upper, middle-middle and middle-low classes. This study contends that all returnees interviewed can be regarded as 'middle category migrants' because they have enough capital to participate in ISM, but must rely on ISM to overcome the hukou restriction. All the interviews were transcribed and then thematically coded using NVivo 12 software. The coding framework was developed by combining deductive codes derived from the research questions and inductive codes derived from the interview materials. All participants are given pseudonyms to protect their privacies.

5 | ISM MOTIVATIONS: INTERNATIONAL STUDY AS A STRATEGY FOR ACCESSING INTERNAL MOBILITY

The results of this study will be presented based on the chronological order of the individual journeys of returning international students. This is to explore the effect of hukou at different temporal stages of ISM, which includes predeparture, prereturn and postreturn. In this study, there was a significant proportion of ISM that was motivated by hukou consideration. Furthermore, hukou consideration becomes increasingly important across the student journey. As shown in Figure 1, more than one-third (38%) of returnees considered the factor of hukou before they even studied abroad; this proportion increased to less than half (42%) of returnees before their return and reached half of the sample after their return. The increasing trend is derived from more people understanding

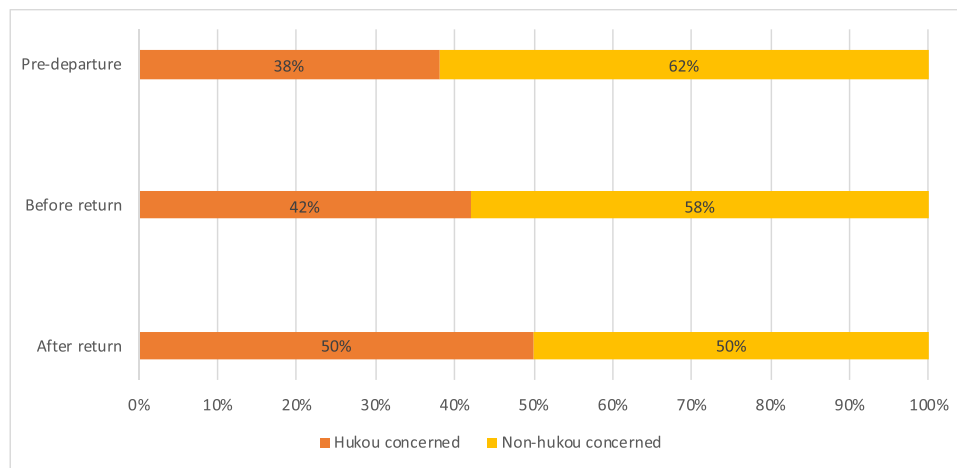


FIGURE 1 Returnees' hukou consideration in different stages of international student mobility.

hukou policies when they need hukou transfer. This section will first explore returnees' motivations for studying abroad and how hukou affects their decision making.

There were three common reasons to facilitate returnees to study master's programmes abroad: short study time (72%), access to hukou status in developed cities (38%) and a short distance from mainland China for returnees from Hong Kong (32%). A short study time is the most common reason for returnees to study postgraduate taught (PGT) programmes in Hong Kong and the United Kingdom because the PGT programme in both destinations requires only 1 year of study. The study time is shorter than similar programmes in mainland China and other destinations, such as North America. There are two perceived benefits of the short study time. The first is less investment in ISM, both in terms of time and money. Ally graduated from Hong Kong and maintained:

EK: *Did you consider the benefits of a short study time?*

Ally: *A short time is beneficial for me because I have a clear target. If I study in China, it will take two or three years. The time cost is higher. Therefore, I think a one-year programme is good for me. Additionally, a short time means less living costs.*

In contrast to previous studies, the economic cost of ISM has been emphasised (Beech, 2019; King et al., 2011; Xiang & Shen, 2009). This is because previous studies usually focused on elite international students, but this study focuses more on nonelite students. Time considerations made some returnees think that ISM in specific destinations is more affordable and valuable. Furthermore, some female returnees maintained that a short study time could help them avoid gender discrimination in the Chinese labour market. Bao shared why she chose to study in the United Kingdom:

Bao: *I thought the UK only required one year. A shorter study time means I can work earlier. Time is valuable for*

ladies. Graduating earlier means more opportunities. Additionally, the study cost was low. It is about work. I have to consider that I am older than my bachelor's classmates when I graduated and returned.

The concern about being qualified at a younger age among female returnees corresponds with previous studies showing that Chinese female returning students usually face of age or relationship status discrimination with Chinese employers (Zhai, 2020). Additionally, ISM is often used by women to overcome gender inequalities (Beech, 2019). However, it should be noted that the time consideration is based on returnees' understanding of the Chinese labour market, which means that they plan to return even before ISM occurs.

Hukou status in developed cities was another common reason motivating students to study abroad, which is a significant and novel finding in this study. Returnees proposed two reasons why they relied on ISM to access hukou status in developed cities. First, they hope to stay in developed cities over the long term and use ISM as a strategy to overcome institutional barriers to this internal migration. Alan demonstrated his ideas:

Researcher: *Did you consider going back to your hometown before going abroad?*

Alan: *My major is software engineering, and there are few job opportunities in my original place. I want to stay in a developed city. I studied in Shanghai, and there are more job opportunities here. Therefore, I want to stay in Shanghai for the long term and not consider other cities. However, I cannot access the Shanghai hukou because a bachelor's degree is not enough. My parents gave me two choices. First, if I choose to stay in Shanghai, I need to solve the hukou and property; actually, I need hukou status to buy a house in Shanghai. Therefore, my parents suggested that I obtain a master's degree abroad to access Shanghai hukou. Otherwise, I will have to go back*

home. I don't want to go back home. There was a high possibility for me to come to Shanghai when I decided to study. You can understand that my study in Hong Kong was preparation for coming to Shanghai in the future. I can say it was 70% to 80% for this reason.

Alan's quotation corresponds with previous findings that the mobility pattern of international graduates in China perpetuates the uneven development of its regions (Zhai, 2020). Furthermore, it demonstrates that aspiration for internal migration both predates and motivates ISM. Hukou motivated returnees to study abroad because the ISM was regarded by these 'middle category migrants' as the only accessible way to transfer hukou status to Chinese-developed cities. Nick studied in the United Kingdom and shared the following:

Researcher: *Therefore, you will not leave Shanghai after you get your hukou?*

Nick: *Even if I live in another city, I will keep my Shanghai hukou. We always discuss the value of the Shanghai hukou. We think it is valued at least 800 thousand yuan (approximately GBP 100,000). ISM is an easy way to access it. My boss's hukou status is in Guangzhou, and he is trying to access Shanghai hukou. His way is to pay more than one million yuan in taxed (more than GBP 100,000) within three years. It is very difficult [for me to do that].*

Reflecting on Nick's description, transferring hukou status to developed cities such as Shanghai has restrictive requirements regarding applicants' socioeconomic and academic backgrounds. In 2020, the Shanghai government opened its hukou status to graduates from Chinese universities, but only to the best-performing students from the highest-ranking institutions (Government of Shanghai, 2020). As a result, it was still viewed by interviewees as difficult to access Shanghai hukou as a domestic graduate student. In contrast, undertaking a strategy of studying at a foreign university allowed returnees to access the Shanghai hukou after returning. Therefore, studying abroad is perceived as a pragmatic way for students belonging to the 'middle category migration' to access Shanghai hukou and avoid these restrictive institutional barriers. This finding demonstrates that overcoming institutional barriers to internal migration can often be the motivation for ISM in China. This is a crucial novel finding of this study, which has not been acknowledged in the literature thus far.

6 | HOW INSTITUTIONAL BARRIERS AFFECT RETURNEES BEFORE THEIR RETURN

This section will explore two themes: returnees' reasons for leaving their ISM destination and their preparation for an imminent return. In this study, two-thirds (66%) of interviewees stated that they always

intended to return from their study-abroad location. For them, Chinese-developed cities are their most desired ultimate destination, and their ISM destinations in the United Kingdom and Hong Kong are the stepping stones to these most desired destinations. The remaining third (34%) of returnees considered staying in their ISM destinations when they studied abroad. However, all of them failed to stay at the ISM destination. Two significant reasons contribute to their difficulties in staying: career difficulties and tightened migration policies (in the case of the United Kingdom). Regarding career difficulties, some returnees (22%) maintained that finding an ideal job in their destination countries was difficult, prohibiting them from staying. Joe shared his experience of looking for a job in Hong Kong:

Researcher: *Did you consider staying in Hong Kong after graduation?*

Joe: *I thought about staying in Hong Kong and trying to find some jobs. The offers I can get are not relative to my educational background. If the job is related to my education, I cannot get an offer.*

In this study, career evaluations of prospects were important in deciding whether returnees stayed in ISM destinations, which corresponds with previous research that underemployment and education/job mismatches could push international students to leave the host country (Tran et al., 2022). In addition to career considerations, some returnees from the United Kingdom maintained that increasingly restrictive immigration policies pushed them to leave after graduation. The United Kingdom closed its 'Post Study Work (PSW)' visa in 2012, which made it difficult for some returnees to stay after graduation. Even though the United Kingdom restored the graduate visa¹ in 2021, its cancellation posed difficulty for returnees in this study because all returnees returned before its reinstatement. Katherine explains why she did not stay in the United Kingdom:

Researcher: *Did you consider staying in the UK after graduation?*

Katherine: *I had this thought, but I realised it was difficult when I knew more. Especially after the prime minister cancelled the PSW visa, we only got half a year to find a job. You know, the study time in the UK was only one year. If you would like to stay in the UK, you should have planned it first. When I prepared, it was too late.*

Katherine's data corresponds with previous research showing that tightened migration policies could push international students to leave host countries (Tran et al., 2022). However, Katherine's quotation reflected a different finding from Xu (2021) study, in

¹The United Kingdom reintroduced the graduate visa, which allows international students to work in the United Kingdom for at least 2 years after graduation, on 1 July 2021 (UK Government, 2021).

which some well-off Chinese international students relied on capital from family to establish a business as an instrument to access permanent residence in the United Kingdom. 'Middle-category migrants', such as Katherine, find it hard to undertake similar strategies to achieve their aspiration of staying in ISM destinations. Thus, socioeconomic status restricts the possibility of many international students staying in ISM destinations compared with their privileged peers.

Joe's and Katherine's descriptions demonstrate returnees' vulnerable status in the face of competitive labour markets and international immigration policies. This was in part derived from their status as 'middle-category' migrants: their options are constrained in terms of both internal and international migration, which leads to the strategic use of ISM to try and negotiate these restrictions.

Before finishing their studies abroad, returnees started to prepare for what is effectively internal migration after return. Except for some returnees (28%) who had not prepared for their return, two major preparations were made for this upcoming mobility: research into hukou policies (42%) and career information in China (30%).

Researcher: *Did you plan to come to Shanghai before or during your ISM? Did you make any preparations?*

Yang: *Yes, I followed hukou policies in several developed cities. I don't care about others. I want to move to developed cities, so I collect these policies. I must notice the right timing because hukou policies are always changing. I must research the latest one. It's around April, I remember.*

Yang's quotation illustrates that hukou is a crucial consideration among most returnees before and upon return. More returnees understand hukou policies at this stage than during the initial period of ISM planning. They collected information regarding hukou policies by communicating with peer returnees and via online information that is usually different from official government websites. Another preparation shared by some returnees was to collect career information in China. Yue returned from the United Kingdom and shared her comments:

Researcher: *Did you plan to come to Shanghai before or during your ISM? Did you make any preparations?*

Yue: *I didn't get much preparation. To be honest, it is hard to prepare. The most important aspect is knowing the industry situation in mainland China. There are few reliable sources, just social media like Zhihu [forum website]. I also asked some senior classmates to see if I wanted to do their jobs. It is more reliable to ask people.*

Reflected by Yue's quotation, this finding corresponds with previous research that, even though not all returnees understand the labour market in their original countries (Tran et al., 2022), career

opportunities in their original countries are still a significant concern among returnees (Brooks & Waters, 2011; Findlay et al., 2012; Waters, 2008). Their career concerns will affect their internal migration after return, which will be demonstrated in the next section.

7 | EFFECTS OF HUKOU AFTER RETURN: WHERE TO MOVE TO?

This section will examine the effect of hukou on the geography of return from ISM, mainly focusing on why they migrate to Shanghai. The analysis points to three main reasons: accessibility of hukou status, more and better employment opportunities and caring responsibility. Career opportunities were the most common reason (56%). Wendy used to study in the United Kingdom and shared her consideration of internal migration after returning:

Researcher: *What is your plan after graduating from the master's programme in the UK?*

Wendy: *I considered three places to move: Nanjing, Hangzhou, and Shanghai. At first, I didn't want Shanghai because I thought Shanghai was the most competitive place. I thought I should move to a second-tier city because I didn't think my educational background was good enough. However, then, I found many more job opportunities in Shanghai than in the other two places.*

Reflected from Wendy's quotation, Shanghai attracted returnees from less developed areas through its concentration of job opportunities. This finding corresponds with previous ISM studies in which most returning students choose to live in developed Chinese cities for promising career opportunities (Zhai & Moskal, 2022). However, this study also highlighted the effect of original places on returnees' internal migration after returning. As described in Section 5, less developed original places cannot provide returnees with promising career opportunities, leading to internal migration being an inevitable decision for returnees.

Internal migration planning that leads to hukou status is a necessary consideration. Half of the returnees interviewed argued that hukou status in Shanghai was their motivation to move there. This motivation is mainly derived from the relatively accessible nature of Shanghai hukou compared to other major cities. Cora explained why she finally came to Shanghai:

Researcher: *Why did you choose Shanghai?*

Cora: *I was between Beijing and Shanghai, but I finally chose Shanghai. I compared hukou policies in both cities. It is more difficult for hukou applications in Beijing. Beijing even has requirements for the length of stay abroad. It is more restrictive. Additionally, you must have*

more social capital to live in Beijing. I come from an ordinary family and have no excellent social capital. Therefore, I didn't choose Beijing.

Cora's quotation shows that hukou status not only motivates students to study abroad but also affects where to return. Previous studies highlighted that developed Chinese cities opened hukou status to returning students, which is beneficial for their early career development (Brooks & Waters, 2021; Zhai, 2020). However, this study noticed that hukou status is a conditional opening for returnees, which can still affect returnees' return decision making. Furthermore, this study noticed that returnees need to consider whether their socioeconomic background could support their hukou application and life after settlement in cities like Beijing. Therefore, returnees' hesitation to move to Beijing reflected the middle-class background of international students, which differs from the stereotype of a privileged group in previous ISM research (Lipura & Collins, 2020).

Ironically, four returnees indicated that the difficulty of accessing the Shanghai hukou was part of its attraction. Louis studied in the United Kingdom and used the difficulties of hukou to evaluate the city in terms of prosperity:

Researcher: *What was your plan after graduation in the UK?*

Louis: *In terms of returning, I considered three cities: Shenzhen, Shanghai, and Beijing. Actually, there is not much difference among the three options. I don't have a boyfriend, which means I don't have to go somewhere specific. I mainly considered the accessibility of hukou status. Beijing is the most difficult. Therefore, I chose Shanghai and Shenzhen. It is a family decision, not just mine. Shenzhen is a very young city. The people, infrastructure, and culture are not as good as in Shanghai. Even Shenzhen welcomes migrants and gives you economic incentives for coming. Shanghai never cares if you come. Additionally, I have lived in Shanghai before, but not in Shenzhen. Therefore, I decided to go to Shanghai. There must be reasons why Shanghai does not care if you came.*

Some returnees thought that the inaccessibility of hukou status reflected the gap in development between developed cities and other cities in China. Therefore, they believed some value came with hukou restrictions, which attracted them to try and access it. Therefore, the institutional barriers to hukou and the development gap together provide a perpetuating mechanism by which potential migrants use ISM to achieve their internal migration to developed cities after returning. This finding corresponds with previous studies showing that the uneven development gap between cities determines returning students' spatial mobility (Zhai, 2020). However, the findings highlight that returnees maximise their benefits by choosing

destinations under the restrictions of the hukou system. Therefore, the restrictions and benefits of hukou status in different cities make Shanghai a pragmatic destination for returnees with 'middle-category migrant' backgrounds.

The final motivation for many returnees (42%) to move to Shanghai is the responsibility to provide care to families. For some returnees, Shanghai was close to their original place of residence, which made it easier to take care of their families there. Ada returned from Hong Kong and shared her consideration:

Ada: *Being close to my place of origin is an important consideration. It is important because I can visit my parents often, or my parents can visit me. It is convenient. I am an only child, and my parents do not have a good relationship with each other. I have to spend more time accompanying them.*

Reflecting on Ada's quotation, this study realised that moving to a developed city near the original place of birth is some returnees' strategy to take responsibility for caring for family members in their hometown. There are two reasons why caring for older family members is an important factor influencing returnees' spatial mobility (Tu, 2016; Zhai, 2020). First, the one-child policy in China places a heavier burden on young people to care for the older generation (Zhai, 2020). Second, the traditional Chinese culture of filial piety means the care of ageing parents is regarded as the responsibility of Chinese young people (Kajanus, 2015; Tu, 2018; Zhai, 2020). However, unlike previous studies indicating that returnees need to return to their place of origin to take responsibility for care (Tu, 2018; Zhai, 2020), this study demonstrated a caring strategy that involved moving to the developed cities nearest to their place of origin. This strategy demonstrated a compromise between returnees' career opportunities and caring responsibilities. On the one hand, as described above, the underdeveloped place of origin cannot provide returnees with ideal career opportunities, which pushes them to internal migration to seek career development. On the other hand, the short distance between the developed city and the place of origin allows returnees to easily take up their responsibility for caring. This finding demonstrates how returnees compromise career development and caring responsibility through a calculated internal migration strategy.

8 | DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

The findings presented in this paper contribute to an understanding of how institutional barriers in China affect the different stages of ISM among Chinese international students. Based on an analysis of interviews with 50 returning students, this analysis generated three main findings that address important current limitations in understanding the effects of institutional barriers on ISM. First, overcoming restrictions from the hukou system motivates many Chinese students to study abroad. Young people hope to migrate from other parts of

China to developed Chinese cities because of the regional inequalities that have occurred in Chinese urbanisation in recent decades (Zhai & Moskal, 2022). Students who belong to the 'middle-category migration' participate in ISM to achieve future internal migration. Second, the data demonstrate that students emphasise being away for a short study time, with some choosing specific destinations that are closer to China, lowering the emotional and monetary costs of ISM. This finding indicates that hukou can impact the geographies of ISM destinations because students belonging to the 'middle category' of migration could access hukou status by paying less to study internationally in specific destinations. Finally, this paper found that distinctive requirements for accessing hukou status in different areas affect returnees' decisions regarding internal migration after returning. The implications of these findings are discussed below.

First, this paper highlighted the effect of institutional barriers on the geography of ISM, which shapes the geographies of both ISM destinations and return destinations. Previous studies have focused on institutional barriers in ISM-receiving countries (Tuxen & Robertson, 2019; Xu, 2021). Only in recent years have some scholars identified the hukou system as an institutional barrier that influences ISM (Brooks & Waters, 2021; Zhai, 2020). However, this is the first study to explicitly demonstrate how the hukou system affects the ISM process. This study found that some students belonging to a growing 'middle category of migrants' are participating in ISM to overcome hukou restrictions and achieve future internal migration. Therefore, the hukou system influenced the ISM process at various stages. The data demonstrate that students prefer to be away for a short study time, with some choosing a destination that is closer to China. This is because their background as the 'middle category of migrants' makes them consider those destinations that have lower costs for ISM in terms of money and emotion than other destinations, which makes it possible for them to access hukou status via ISM more easily. In terms of the geography of returning destinations, this paper found that developed regions had different hukou policies, which affected returnees' decisions regarding internal migration after returning. For example, the restrictive hukou policies in Beijing prevent some returnees from migrating there. Furthermore, this study observed that the Chinese hukou system and immigration policies in destination countries can work in tandem to guide returnees' migration journeys.

Second, this paper found that the hukou system helps scholars better understand the ISM experience of students from a 'middle-category migration' background. International students are usually regarded as a privileged group within ISM research. Students' diversity in terms of socioeconomic and sociopolitical backgrounds is usually disregarded (Lipura & Collins, 2020). The hukou system provides a tool to distinguish 'middle-category migration' international students from the commonly held viewpoint that ISM involves students of a particularly elite class. Hukou-related policies in developed cities such as Shanghai place strict requirements on applicants' socioeconomic backgrounds. However, interviewees maintained that the recent reform of hukou-related policies has led to ISM becoming a relatively easier way to access hukou status in

developed Chinese cities. Therefore, moving to developed Chinese cities upon return became a motivation for ISM for students from nonprivileged families. This connection between the hukou system and ISM sheds light on the motivations and restrictions faced by nonelite international students concerning the hukou system. This is beneficial for understanding the diversification of international students and their ISM experience, which is usually restricted by their family backgrounds and domestic institutional barriers.

Having established that hukou shapes ISM, this study noted that the hukou system influenced different stages of ISM and motivated students from 'middle-category migration' to study abroad. These findings explore the effect of institutional barriers in ISM-sending countries on ISM. However, a limitation of this paper is the absence of perspectives of policymakers, which makes it harder to understand the aims of ISM-related hukou policies and the associated policy-making process. Therefore, it is difficult to understand the intended and unintended effects of institutional barriers on ISM. Future studies could, on the one hand, investigate the effects of institutional barriers on ISM in other parts of world, such as the *propiska* system in some former Soviet countries. On the other hand, it could involve more policy designers' perspectives on the ISM-related institutional barriers.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to thank Dr. David McCollum (University of St. Andrews) and Dr. Sharon Leahy (University of St. Andrews) for their insightful feedback and suggestions on an earlier version of the manuscript. I also want to appreciate all participants that took part in the study and provide valuable data for this research.

CONFLICT OF INTEREST STATEMENT

The author declares no conflict of interest.

DATA AVAILABILITY STATEMENT

Data sharing is not applicable because of ethical restrictions. Due to the nature of this study, participants of this study did not agree for their data to be shared publicly, so supporting data is not available.

ORCID

Erli Kang  <http://orcid.org/0009-0003-5533-1413>

REFERENCES

- Beech, S. E. (2019). *The geographies of international student mobility*. Palgrave Macmillan. <https://doi.org/10.1007/978-981-13-7442-5>
- Brooks, R. E., & Waters, J. L. (2011). *Student mobilities, migration and the internationalization of higher education*. Palgrave Macmillan. <https://doi.org/10.1057/9780230305588>
- Brooks, R., & Waters, J. (2021). International students and alternative visions of diaspora. *British Journal of Educational Studies*, 69(5), 557–577. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00071005.2021.1948501>
- Carling, J., & Schewel, K. (2018). Revisiting aspiration and ability in international migration. *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies*, 44(6), 945–963. <https://doi.org/10.1080/1369183X.2017.1384146>
- Chan, K. W. (2010). The household registration system and migrant labor in China: Notes on a debate. *Population and Development Review*,

- 36(2), 357–364. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1728-4457.2010.00333.x>
- Chinese Service Center for Scholarly Exchange (CSCSE). (2018). *Zhongguo liuxue huiguo jiuye lanpishu [Blue book of China's returned employment]*. China Yanshi Press.
- Conway, D. (1980). Step-wise migration: Toward a clarification of the mechanism. *International Migration Review*, 14(1), 3–14. <https://doi.org/10.1177/019791838001400101>
- Croitoru, A., & Vlase, I. (2021). Stepwise migration: What drives the relocation of migrants upon return. *Population, Space and Place*, 28(2), e2492. <https://doi.org/10.1002/psp.2492>
- Crossman, J. E., & Clarke, M. (2010). International experience and graduate employability: Stakeholder perceptions on the connection. *Higher Education*, 59(5), 599–613. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10734-009-9268-z>
- Findlay, A. M., King, R., Smith, F. M., Geddes, A., & Skeldon, R. (2012). World class? An investigation of globalisation, difference and international student mobility. *Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers*, 37(1), 118–131. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1475-5661.2011.00454.x>
- Government of Shanghai. (2010, January 4). *Rules of international returnees to attain Shanghai hukou*. <http://www.shanghai.gov.cn/nw2/nw2314/nw2319/nw12344/u26aw24285.html?date=2011-01-04>
- Government of Shanghai. (2020, September 23). *Scoring measurement for Non Shanghai graduates applying for hukou status in Shanghai in 2020*. <http://www.ssme.sh.gov.cn/policy/knowledge!knowledgeDetail.do?id=2c91c29c74a0bc500174bb1c09c90287>
- Hatcher, C., & Thieme, S. (2016). Institutional transition: Internal migration, the propiska, and post-socialist urban change in Bishkek, Kyrgyzstan. *Urban Studies*, 53(10), 2175–2191. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0042098015587252>
- Kajanus, A. (2015). *Chinese student migration, gender and family*. Palgrave Macmillan. <https://doi.org/10.1057/9781137509109>
- King, R., Findlay, A., Ahrens, J., & Dunne, M. (2011). Reproducing advantage: The perspective of English school leavers on studying abroad. *Globalisation, Societies and Education*, 9(2), 161–181. <https://doi.org/10.1080/14767724.2011.577307>
- Kommers, S., & Bista, K. (Eds.). (2020). Study abroad and student mobility: From educational experience to emerging enterprise. *Inequalities in study abroad and student mobility* (pp. 1–8). Routledge. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9780367855130>
- Koo, H. (2016). The global middle class: How is it made, what does it represent. *Globalizations*, 13(4), 440–453. <https://doi.org/10.1080/14747731.2016.1143617>
- Lan, S. (2019). State-mediated brokerage system in China's self-funded study abroad market. *International Migration*, 57(3), 266–279. <https://doi.org/10.1111/imig.12515>
- Lipura, S. J., & Collins, F. L. (2020). Towards an integrative understanding of contemporary educational mobilities: A critical agenda for international student mobilities research. *Globalisation, Societies and Education*, 18(3), 343–359. <https://doi.org/10.1080/14767724.2020.1711710>
- Liu, J. M. (2021). Citizenship on the move: The deprivation and restoration of emigrants' hukou in China. *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies*, 47(3), 557–574. <https://doi.org/10.1080/1369183X.2020.1788381>
- Lomer, S. (2018). UK policy discourses and international student mobility: The deterrence and subjectification of international students. *Globalisation, Societies and Education*, 16(3), 308–324. <https://doi.org/10.1080/14767724.2017.1414584>
- Lu, X. (2002). *Research report on social stratum in contemporary China*. Social Sciences Academic Press.
- Lui, L. (2017). Hukou intermarriage in China: Patterns and trends. *Chinese Sociological Review*, 49(2), 110–137. <https://doi.org/10.1080/21620555.2016.1231570>
- Lulle, A., & Buzinska, L. (2017). Between a 'student abroad' and 'being from Latvia': Inequalities of access, prestige, and foreign-earned cultural capital. *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies*, 43(8), 1362–1378. <https://doi.org/10.1080/1369183X.2017.1300336>
- Lynn-Ee ho, E. (2011). Caught between two worlds: Mainland Chinese return migration, hukou considerations and the citizenship dilemma. *Citizenship Studies*, 15(6–7), 643–658. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13621025.2011.600063>
- Montgomery, J. L. (2012). The inheritance of inequality: Hukou and related barriers to compulsory education for China's migrant children. *Pacific Rim Law and Policy Journal*, 21(3), 591–622.
- Mulvey, B. (2021). "Decentring" international student mobility: The case of African student migrants in China. *Population, Space and Place*, 27(3), e2393. <https://doi.org/10.1002/psp.2393>
- National Bureau of Statistic of China (NBSC). (2019). *China statistical yearbook in 2019*. China Statistics Press.
- National Bureau of Statistic of China (NBSC). (2021). *China statistical yearbook in 2021*. China Statistics Press.
- Ortiga, Y. Y., & Macabasag, R. L. A. (2021). Temporality and acquiescent immobility among aspiring nurse migrants in the Philippines. *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies*, 47(9), 1976–1993. <https://doi.org/10.1080/1369183X.2020.1788380>
- Paul, A. M. (2011). Stepwise international migration: A multistage migration pattern for the aspiring migrant. *American Journal of Sociology*, 116(6), 1842–1886. <https://doi.org/10.1086/659641>
- Paul, A. M. (2015). Capital and mobility in the stepwise international migrations of Filipino migrant domestic workers. *Migration Studies*, 3(3), 438–459. <https://doi.org/10.1093/migration/mnv014>
- Qian, Y., & Qian, Z. (2017). Assortative mating by education and hukou in Shanghai. *Chinese Sociological Review*, 49(3), 239–262. <https://doi.org/10.1080/21620555.2017.1288066>
- Qian, Z., Cheng, Y., & Qian, Y. (2020). Hukou, marriage, and access to wealth in Shanghai. *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies*, 46(18), 3920–3936. <https://doi.org/10.1080/1369183X.2019.1592883>
- Ravenstein, E. G. (1885). The laws of migration. *Journal of the Statistical Society of London*, 48(2), 167–235. <https://doi.org/10.2307/2979181>
- Sánchez, C. M., Fornerino, M., & Zhang, M. (2006). Motivations and the intent to study abroad among U.S., French, and Chinese students. *Journal of Teaching in International Business*, 18(1), 27–52. https://doi.org/10.1300/J066v18n01_03
- Song, Y. (2014). What should economists know about the current Chinese hukou system. *China Economic Review*, 29, 200–212. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.chieco.2014.04.012>
- Tran, L. T., Bui, H., Tan, G., & Rahimi, M. (2022). 'It is not O.K to think that you are good just because you have graduated from overseas': Agency and contextual factors affecting Vietnamese returning graduates. *International Migration*, 60(6), 43–59. <https://doi.org/10.1111/imig.12954>
- Tu, M. (2016). Chinese one-child families in the age of migration: Middle-class transnational mobility, ageing parents, and the changing role of filial piety. *The Journal of Chinese Sociology*, 3(1), 15. <https://doi.org/10.1186/s40711-016-0036-z>
- Tu, M. (2018). *Education, migration and family relations between China and the UK: The transnational one-child generation*. Emerald Group Publishing. <https://doi.org/10.1108/9781787146723>
- Turaeva, R. (2022). Propiska regime regulating mobility and migration in post-soviet cities. *Cities*, 121, 103478. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.cities.2021.103478>
- Tuxen, N., & Robertson, S. (2019). Brokering international education and (re)producing class in Mumbai. *International Migration*, 57(3), 280–294. <https://doi.org/10.1111/imig.12516>
- UNESCO Institute for Statistics. (2014). *Higher education in Asia: Expanding out, expanding up—the rise of graduate education and university research*. United Nations Education, Scientific & Cultural Organization.

- UNESCO Institute for Statistics. (2021). Number and rates of international mobile student (inbound and outbound). <http://data.uis.unesco.org/>
- Vortherms, S. A. (2021). Hukou as a case of multi-level citizenship. In Z. Guo (Ed.), *The Routledge handbook of Chinese citizenship* (pp. 132–142). Routledge. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781003225843>
- Wang, W., & Moffatt, P. G. (2008). Hukou and graduates' job search in China. *Asian Economic Journal*, 22(1), 1–23. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-8381.2008.00266.x>
- Waters, J., & Leung, M. (2013). A colourful university life? Transnational higher education and the spatial dimensions of institutional social capital in Hong Kong. *Population, Space and Place*, 19(2), 155–167. <https://doi.org/10.1002/psp.1748>
- Waters, J. L. (2008). *Education, migration and cultural capital in the Chinese diaspora: Transnational students between Hong Kong and Canada*. Cambria Press.
- Wei, H. (2014). Administrative hierarchy and growth of city scale in China. *Urban and Environmental Studies*, 1(1), 4–17. <https://doi.org/10.1142/S2345748115500013>
- Wen, W., & Hu, D. (2019). The emergence of a regional education hub: Rationales of international students' choice of China as the study destination. *Journal of Studies in International Education*, 23(3), 303–325. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1028315318797154>
- Wing Chan, K., & Buckingham, W. (2008). Is China abolishing the hukou system? *The China Quarterly*, 195, 582–606. <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0305741008000787>
- Wintre, M. G., Kandasamy, A. R., Chavoshi, S., & Wright, L. (2015). Are international undergraduate students emerging adults? Motivations for studying abroad. *Emerging Adulthood*, 3(4), 255–264. <https://doi.org/10.1177/2167696815571665>
- Wu, Q. (2014). Motivations and decision-making processes of mainland Chinese students for undertaking master's programs abroad. *Journal of Studies in International Education*, 18(5), 426–444. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1028315313519823>
- Xiang, B., & Shen, W. (2009). International student migration and social stratification in China. *International Journal of Educational Development*, 29(5), 513–522. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ijedudev.2009.04.006>
- Xiao, Y., & Bian, Y. (2018). The influence of hukou and college education in China's labour market. *Urban Studies*, 55(7), 1504–1524. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0042098017690471>
- Xu, C. L. (2021). Time, class and privilege in career imagination: Exploring study-to-work transition of Chinese international students in UK universities through a Bourdieusian lens. *Time & Society*, 30(1), 5–29. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0961463X20951333>
- Xu, F., Crush, J., & Zhong, T. (2023). Pathways to food insecurity: Migration, hukou and COVID-19 in Nanjing, China. *Population, Space and Place*, 29(1), e2640. <https://doi.org/10.1002/psp.2640>
- Yang, P. (2018). Compromise and complicity in international student mobility: The ethnographic case of Indian medical students at a Chinese university. *Discourse: Studies in the Cultural Politics of Education*, 39(5), 694–708. <https://doi.org/10.1080/01596306.2018.1435600>
- Zabin, C., & Hughes, S. (1995). Economic integration and labor flows: Stage migration in farm labor markets in Mexico and the United States. *International Migration Review*, 29(2), 395–440. <https://doi.org/10.1177/019791839502900204>
- Zhai, K. (2020). Social mobility and international graduates in China [Doctoral dissertation]. University of Glasgow. <https://doi.org/10.5525/gla.thesis.81316>
- Zhai, K., & Moskal, M. (2022). The impact of place of origin on international and domestic graduates' mobility in China. *International Migration Review*, 56(1), 123–154. <https://doi.org/10.1177/01979183211026208>
- Zhang, D. (2020). The evolution of the wage gap between rural migrants and the urban labour force in Chinese cities. *Australian Journal of Agricultural and Resource Economics*, 64(1), 55–81. <https://doi.org/10.1111/1467-8489.12338>
- Zhang, J., Wang, R., & Lu, C. (2019). A quantitative analysis of Hukou reform in Chinese cities: 2000–2016. *Growth and Change*, 50(1), 201–221. <https://doi.org/10.1111/grow.12284>
- Zhou, J., & Hui, E. C. M. (2022). The hukou system and selective internal migration in China. *Papers in Regional Science*, 101(2), 461–482. <https://doi.org/10.1111/pirs.12651>
- Zhou, S., & Cheung, M. (2017). Hukou system effects on migrant children's education in China: Learning from past disparities. *International Social Work*, 60(6), 1327–1342. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0020872817725134>

How to cite this article: Kang, E. (2023). The influence of the Chinese hukou system in motivating and shaping the geography of Chinese international student mobility. *Population, Space and Place*, e2734. <https://doi.org/10.1002/psp.2734>