Beyond friends and foes: immigration policymaking in contemporary China

Speelman, J.T.

Beyond Friends and Foes: Immigration Policymaking in Contemporary China

Tabitha Speelman

Beyond Friends and Foes: Immigration Policymaking in Contemporary China

Tabitha Speelman

Leiden University

Cover images: Krish Raghav
Design: Ria von Hout | RiArrange
Printing: Ipskamp Printing

Notes:

1) This thesis was part of the 'Immigration and the Transformation of Chinese Society' research project, a China-Europe Collaborative Research Initiative. It was funded by the NWO (Nederlandse organisatie voor wetenschappelijk onderzoek), and received additional funding from the Confucius New Sinology Programme (2018-2020), and the Chiang Ching-kuo Foundation for International Scholarly Exchange (2022-2023).
2) With the exception of the introduction, the conclusion, and Chapter 3, the chapters in this thesis have been previously published as separate articles. See the footnotes at the start of the respective chapters for further details.

Beyond Friends and Foes: Immigration Policymaking in Contemporary China

Proefschrift

ter verkrijging van
de graad van doctor aan de Universiteit Leiden,
op gezag van rector magnificus prof.dr.ir. H. Bijl,
volgens besluit van het college voor promoties
te verdedigen op dinsdag 19 september 2023
klokke 10.00 uur

door
Jeannette Tabitha Speelman
geboren te Urk

Promotor
Prof. Dr. Frank N. Pieke

Copromotor
Dr. Katharina Natter

Promotiecommissie
Dr. Florian Schneider
Prof. dr. Erin Chung (Johns Hopkins University)
Prof. dr. Donglin Han (Renmin University)
Prof. dr. Biao Xiang (Max Planck Institute for Social Anthropology)

Table of Contents

Acknowledgements

A dissertation takes a good amount of solitude, all the more when its completion is accompanied by global border closures, public health emergencies and chronic illness. But in the past six years, I learnt how vital it was to both this research project and myself to balance writing and reflection with social contact and community. I am deeply grateful for the support I received from many individuals and communities, and for the broader sociopolitical environment that enabled me to do this work.

First, I want to thank my two thesis supervisors, Frank Pieke and Katharina Natter. This project was not smooth sailing, but it made such a difference to have two encouraging mentors who brought instant clarity to any research issue, and never any stress. Frank, since taking your classes in Leiden's MA program twelve years ago, your anthropological lens on Chinese society and political system has very much shaped my own. The way you pursue answers to questions rooted in real-world change, regardless of disciplinary or academic-policy boundaries, is very inspiring. Thanks for all the motivation, and for bringing me on board. Katharina, I feel so lucky that after I came across your work in 2019, you not only made me see a way forward for this thesis, but also agreed to co-supervise me until its completion. Thank you for your always amazingly helpful feedback, and for your generosity in sharing your time and experience.

Many others contributed to this thesis. My deep thanks, of course, goes to those who were willing to be part of this research, through sharing your thoughts in an interview or survey, helping me with contacts, or by otherwise supporting a foreign PhD candidate's research. It's so deeply appreciated. Thanks to Bingqin Shan, Zhongwei Chen, and Xueqian Zhang for your help in conducting the interviews with members of the public, and for making that part of the research so fun. I am very grateful for the collaboration on the online survey with Yuqin Huang and her team at East China Science and Technology University, and to the supervision by Yuan Ren at Fudan University during my 1.5-year stay there. Thanks to Maghiel van Crevel, for the best editing and mentoring at key moments, and to Heidi Haugen, Ivan Franceschini and Tianlong You for the opportunity to share research results in (co-)writing. To my committee members, thank you for your inspiring work, and for the kind and constructive feedback in the final phase of this project. Thanks to my paranymphs, Qing Wang and Kai Shmushko, for being by my side, and to Krish Raghav, for drawing cover art that transports me to the scene.

Thanks also to the academic communities, large and small, virtual and in-person, that provided much-needed sociality and structure to PhD life. These include: the 'Immigrant China' research consortium, the Fudan 'New Sinology' PhD cohort, the 移民研究小组 WeChat group, the LIAS PhD program, the 'Migrant China' Twitter account group (while it lasted), online feedback sessions with Jana Kapitz, the monthly discussion group with Ning Wei and Tianmu Hong.

Unexpected was the empowering community of patient groups, who shared experiences and knowledge of a new medical condition like long Covid, as well as post-viral illness more broadly. Thanks especially to the Long Covid Sessions podcast, and to the work of Gez Medinger, whose expert interviews and patient surveys provided me with the tools to pursue treatment and to complete this PhD. These are deeply inspiring examples of what the public dissemination of research can look like. For all involuntary migrants to the land of the ill, I hope your stay turns out temporary.

My social life reflects my own migrations. In these past years, I often wished for you to be all in one place, but also felt how these are ties that bind and support across borders and large distances. Reb, Qing, Kai, Lana, Cora, Elke – I don't know what I would do without you. To Inma, Xinrong, Junya, Yujing, Jeroen, Daan, Loz, Ruben, Jip, Yara, Seb, Kevin, Xiao, Melody, Emily, Fiona, Annelous, Joost, and the Stroom community, thank you for your friendship and for making life better in Amsterdam, Shanghai, Hong Kong, and beyond. Thanks also to my six dear siblings and their families. I always feel connected to you, but it's great when we are not so far apart.

Thanks to my parents, for their love and the joy they bring through their lives. And to Tom, for being in it with me. Your love of learning inspired me to pursue this project, and your selfless support (and hypermobility in these years) made it possible. I look forward to more of everything – and a bit more stability – ahead.

Like most of my adult life, this thesis, including the writing of these acknowledgements, was completed between China and the Netherlands. As geopolitical tensions have increased, I've been reminded of how special it was for an 18-year-old to start building a life that way. That period of deepening exchanges has of course shaped my interests and biases, and brought me to this point. I hope that those opportunities remain open.

CHAPTER 1

Introduction

1. Questions

On the evening of September 27, 2020, I called Dave, a Shanghai-based visa agent. That afternoon, during an appointment with the Chinese immigration authorities in Shanghai, I had received a written warning for overstaying on my student visa. The irregularity was an unintended outcome of my attempt to combine the regular rules for visa extension with Covid-19 crisis management that allowed most migrants to overstay for two months, and the official processing my claim had assured me it was no big deal. However, based on my research I knew that even a small blotch on one's immigration file could hurt later applications for long-term residency. Once I left Shanghai's immigration building, walking on the broad streets of Pudong, I was suddenly worried. I remembered Dave, who I had previously interviewed. A fast-talking immigration agent, he seemed to enjoy figuring out policy puzzles and had the most experience in assisting foreign nationals in Shanghai to obtain permanent residency out of anyone I knew. He might know how to interpret this situation. Did he think I had just jeopardized my future chance at receiving a long-term residency status in China?

It was a question I had not previously considered during seven years in China residing on various types of visa and permits as a student, tourist, intern, employee, journalist, and now as a PhD-candidate on a student visa. Following China's new focus on economic development since the 1980s, the number of international migrants had rapidly increased from a small base. The rise in incoming migration stood in sharp contrast to the previous decades in which international mobility had been tightly controlled. However, state responses to this new trend remained limited. Policy reform had been gradual and focused on accommodating economic migration, largely ignoring issues of settlement and integration. A permanent residency program established in 2004 in the context of the country's World Trade Organization (WTO) accession was barely

implemented. Instead, China's permanent residency was awarded on an individual basis, often as a political favor to economic investors and cultural ambassadors. With a total of an estimated 20,000 permanent residency holders on a registered 850,000 foreign nationals, Chinese permanent residency gained a reputation of being the 'hardest green card in the world' to obtain (Lin 2019).

Living in China, I had operated within the common understanding that the pathways to a more permanent status within China's immigration legal framework were simply too narrow to be feasible. The vast majority of immigrants in China rely on annual renewal of their (usually employment-linked) residence permit to maintain their legal residence, although for some groups, such as traders from the Global South, obtaining even that type of stability has been difficult. In the past decades, while immigrant communities in China's major cities and border regions became increasingly diverse and permanent, from a policy perspective they have remained temporary. In this context, the Chinese word for 'immigrant' (移民) is hardly used for foreign nationals residing in China, who are usually referred to as foreigners (外国人), also by state actors.[1]

But some of this seemed to be changing. During my fieldwork years (2018-2020), Chinese immigration authorities were expanding access to permanent residency and multiple-year work permits for some groups of migrants, as part of a broader effort to institutionalize and improve China's ability to attract 'talent' from around the globe. While the threshold for these policies remained very high, limited to certain high-income, highly educated groups, I now knew people who did or would soon qualify for these categories. On the phone with Dave, the visa agent, I realized that my frame had shifted. In the course of researching China's immigration policy reform, I had started to believe I might eventually be in a position to apply for a longer-term immigration status myself. Dave's reply to me was cautiously optimistic. In the thirteen years he had dealt with Chinese immigration authorities, their process had become more transparent, but in the end "it always depends."

In late October 2020, a month after my call with Dave, I left China from Shanghai's Pudong airport. The large terminal building was emptier than I had ever seen it, with just a couple of international flights announced on the large screens. It turned out to be the first year of a period of radically reduced international mobility, that outlasted pandemic travel measures in the rest of the world. Following decades of increase, border crossings sharply dropped compared to pre-pandemic levels, for Chinese and foreign

---

1 In this thesis, I do use the word 'immigrant' to refer to foreign nationals in China, in line with the inclusive definitions of international migration commonly used in migration research and advocacy.
E.g. the IOM definition of 'immigrant: "a person who moves into a country other than that of his or her nationality or usual residence, so that [it] becomes his or her new country of usual residence."
In: "Who Is a Migrant? Glossary on migration." https://www.iom.int/node/102743, accessed on 28 March 2022. See section 4.c for further discussion.

nationals alike: in 2022, the total number of border-crossings came to only 17% of the 2019 levels (4.6% for foreign nationals). Following periods of unpredictable quarantine measures and high barriers for international travel without an end point in sight, many long-term foreign residents left China. While the Chinese authorities have not published any relevant figures, foreign organizations estimate about half of Chinas immigrants have left since the start of the pandemic.[2] As China's borders reopen in 2023, the next few years will see some reversal of this decline. But the future of immigration to China remains uncertain. For those who left, the lack of long-term residency rights heightens the barrier for return. One thing, however, is clear. For the global power China has become, the question of how to respond to the country's emergence as an immigrant destination will not go away.

In this thesis, I examine the politics of China's immigration policy field, as the country develops into a global power. International mobility has been a defining aspect of China's reform and opening since the 1980s (Xiang 2016). Following a period in which foreign contact was interpreted within a politicized framework of 'friends' and 'enemies' of China's socialist revolution (Brady 2003), the country's integration into the global system has led to unprecedented levels of transnational exchange, presented by the state as an inevitable part of China's "increasing national strength".[3] At the same time, the Chinese Communist Party has remained wary of internationalization when deemed at odds with its aim of domestic control. In this vein, this thesis interrogates the tension between internationalization and control in China's state building by focusing on immigration policy, which lies at the nexus of domestic and global state concerns. As a policy field that "belongs to the realm of domestic governance, but, with foreign nationals as its management target, has a strong outward-facing (涉外)[4] component" (Zhang 2022), immigration provides a lens onto China's wider state-making, especially as it relates to its selective embrace of internationalization. Zooming into the political dynamics of contemporary Chinese immigration policymaking, it addresses an overarching question: What can Chinese immigration policymaking tell us about China's ongoing state transformation as a global power?

Arguing that China's immigration politics can serve as a magnifying glass on China's state transformation, this thesis examines different aspects of the Chinese immigration policy field. It is built around five strategically selected cases, which

---

2 E.g. Luna Sun, "EU chamber in China intent on getting Beijing to 'move the needle' as ideology curtails commerce," *South China Morning Post,* November 18, 2022, https://www.scmp.com/economy/china-economy/article/3200003/eu-chamber-china-intent-getting-beijing-move-needle-ideology-curtails-commerce.

3 "王勇：组建国家移民管理局" (Wang Yong: establish the State Immigration Administration), *Xinhua*, March 13, 2018, http://www.xinhuanet.com/politics/2018lh/2018-03/13/c_137035628.htm

4 Or 'involving the foreign': pertaining to foreign countries, affairs, institutions, or individuals, as opposed to internal or domestic, especially in public affairs.

zoom in on central-level, local-level and state-society immigration reform dynamics: first, a case study of national-level institutional reform, lays out key drivers and obstacles around the establishment of China's National Immigration Administration (NIA) in 2018 (Chapter 2). Then, complementing case studies on local-level policy experimentation discuss two ends of the spectrum of economic migration, the core of China's immigration system: high-income professional migration reforms in metropolitan Shanghai (Chapter 3), and low-income labor migration reforms in the Southwestern region of Guangxi, bordering Vietnam (Chapter 4). Because of their dynamism, China's major cities and border regions have attracted the vast majority of immigrants to China. With local-level experimentation a key driver of policy innovation in reform-era China, these locations are particularly meaningful sites for examining policy reform conditions. Finally, I examine societal immigration attitudes (Chapter 5) and elite-public interactions surrounding a controversial immigration reform (Chapter 6), which I argue are an increasingly relevant factor in Chinese immigration policy-making.

Together, these case studies provide unique empirical material and insight into the wider public opinion landscape on immigration and the dynamics behind the emerging politicization of immigration. Both individually and combined, they expand the existing knowledge base on Chinese immigration politics and how it is tied into China's state transformation, focusing on three cross-cutting sub-questions: 1) What factors drive change and continuity in China's immigration policy? 2) How do state actors manage tensions between developmental pragmatism and the increasing policy focus on governance and security? 3) What are societal attitudes towards immigration and to what extent are they a policy factor? Throughout the case studies, the thesis also situates China's immigration policymaking comparatively, asking: How does China fit with regional and global patterns of immigration policy-making in an early-stage immigrant reception context? As an immigrant-receiving authoritarian state, the case of China is essential to an emerging literature of immigration politics outside Western, democratic or high-income contexts.

2. Context

The People's Republic of China (P.R.C.), founded in 1949 after a prolonged period of war, aimed to build a sovereign nation, free from foreign interference. Wanting to leave behind China's 'Century of Humiliation', as the defeats to and invasions by imperialist powers since the mid-19th century were framed, the new socialist regime considered the control of foreign migrants an important aspect of what party Chairman Mao Zedong called the "cleaning of the house" of foreign influence (Gries 2004). Throughout the 1950s, most of Chinas foreign-born population – traders, investors, missionaries, and educators, many of Euro-American, Japanese, and Russian origin, who had populated the semi-colonial enclaves established by imperialist powers in coastal and Northern

China – left the country or was expelled (Gongan 2010, Bickers 2013). In the late 1960s, China's foreign population shrank even further, as international mobility and affiliation became highly politicized during the Cultural Revolution (e.g. Wang 2013). In these decades, China continued to invite groups of foreign experts, diplomatic delegations and tourists from countries with which it was politically aligned. However, overall this was a period of limited immigration, in which both in- and outgoing international mobility were viewed through an ideological Cold War lens. At the same time, the Chinese state controlled internal migration, as part of a development strategy in which rural areas supported urban industrialization (Chan 2019).

With the start of China's reform era in the late 1970s, international mobility was rehabilitated as part of a modernization strategy centered around industrial and technological development. Registered border entries by foreign nationals rapidly increased from an average of 200,000 per year in the 1949-1978 period to 5.6 million in 1991 (Gongan 2010). Economic developmental zones in China's coastal regions that started to attract foreign capital developed a demand for both internal and foreign migrants. Investors, managers and technicians of foreign nationality, many of Chinese descent, started moving to China (Ye 2009). Foreign language teachers soon followed, as Chinese demand for foreign language skills exploded. Steadily increasing throughout the 1990s, the growth of immigration to China accelerated following China's accession to the WTO in 2001. South Korea, Japan, and the United States, as well as bordering Vietnam and Myanmar became key migrant source countries, but China's position as an economic hub increasingly attracted migrants from around the globe, including traders and students from the Global South (Pieke 2011). In the 2010s, the number of foreigners in China continued to increase, but the growth rate slowed down. The 2020 census counted 1.4 million 'overseas residents' (境外人员) in mainland China—including 846,000 foreign nationals and 585,000 residents of Hong Kong, Macao, and Taiwan, which the Chinese state considers a separate category.[5] Almost one-third of these immigrants live in the southern province of Guangdong, the manufacturing and internal labor migration hub where national leader Deng Xiaoping launched China's economic reform policies. As opportunities in China increased, a growing percentage of the Chinese nationals who had moved abroad – around 10.5 million in 2020 - also started to return to China (Zweig et al 2008).

Alongside its economic reforms, China's political system underwent a transformation from a largely totalitarian state, in which society mobilized to fulfill the leader's revolutionary agenda, to a technocratic authoritarian regime overseeing an unprecedented development trajectory (Shirk 1993, Naughton 1995). To remain

5 Due to China's strict Covid-19 border restrictions and an exodus of immigrants from China at the start of the pandemic, this figure is lower than that in previous years. See Annex 2 for more data and a discussion of the fragmented sources available.

in power, the Chinese Communist Party radically adjusted the path to its long-term goals of making China prosperous and powerful by embarking on selective and gradual marketization. Revolutionary socialist rhetoric was supplemented by a technocratic jargon of economic development and modernization. While retaining core Leninist principles, such as the Party's leading role in society, the regime adopted many neoliberal governing techniques into its authoritarian context, from comprehensive administrative reforms to policy consultation mechanisms (Pieke 2016: 9-10). In China's Party-state, every level of Chinese government (central, provincial, prefectural, county, township) has parallel Party institutions in charge of key decision-making. Rather than weakening the state, the success of China's market reforms has gone hand in hand with significant state and Party building (Ang 2022).

Since the 1990s, the bureaucracy has gone through several rounds of reform and expansion, especially at sub-national levels. Central-local dynamics form a key axis of China's political system. In a vast country with widely varying local economic conditions, a fragmented central government and strong traditions of localism, the center cannot easily impose its agenda on sub-national governments. Instead, throughout the reform era, cycles of centralization and decentralization have followed each other (Lieberthal 1992, Landry 2008). The central state has often encouraged local state actors to be entrepreneurial in their pursuit of local development, and to design experimental policy pilots that might be rolled out more broadly (Heilmann and Perry 2011). Developing a dynamic policy style that also featured widespread corruption and power abuse, local governments have often been at the forefront of policy reform. Since the late 2000s, as China grew richer but also more unequal, the China's state has grown more concerned with losing control, and has progressively reined in both local government and the societal autonomy that had developed in this period (Economy 2018).

Meanwhile, China's immigration management underwent significant change. From a "hyperpolitical" task aimed at complete control, authorities shifted to a self-declared focus on "serving and managing" the country's foreign population (Brady 2003: 3, Yang 2012, Ye and Jing 2019). In 1983, China opened dedicated exit-entry and foreigner management offices, run by the public security authorities.[6] This step was followed in 1985 by the adoption of first national immigration legislation in the reform era, the Law on the Control of the Exit and Entry of Aliens (外国人入境出境管理法), normalizing the presence of foreigners in the country. However, even within the Chinese state apparatus, the immigration system is known for being especially fragmented across departments. The Ministry of Public Security and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs are the main departments responsible for foreigners' legal entry and residence in the country, but other foreigner management functions are spread out among

6 See Annex 1 for an overview of key events in China's reform era immigration management.

more than thirty government actors with large regional variation in implementation and priorities (Liu 2015). Added complexity comes from the distinction the Chinese state makes between mobility to and from Hong Kong, Macau, and Taiwan, considered cross-border but part of China, and other destinations, and unclear state terminology around ethnic Chinese and former PRC nationals with a foreign nationality. Since the 1980s, the immigration policy field has seen a proliferation of laws and regulations – many not publicly available – with key policy initiatives focusing on attracting skilled professionals, educated returnees and foreign students, and on controlling irregular migration.

In this context, both researchers and policy makers characterize China's immigration system as incomplete. Despite frequent calls for reform, formal changes have been slow to materialize. Currently the main piece of immigration legislation, the 2012 Exit-Entry Management Law (中华人民共和国出入境管理法) took over a decade to draft, and left those hoping for more comprehensive immigration legislation disappointed (Zhu and Price 2013, see Chapter 2 for more detail). China's visa categories have remained restrictive, with migrants on spousal or student visas unable to work, and foreign employees lacking robust labor rights (e.g. Ahl et al 2020). At a central level, the public security authorities that dominate decision-making have been largely silent on the issue of immigration, only rarely making public statements and publishing almost no national figures. Instead, localities with higher concentrations of immigrants have often been at the forefront of immigration policy reform, developing local legislation and formal and informal policy practices more suited to long-term settlement of migrants deemed beneficial to local development (e.g. Cheuk 2016, Xu 2018, Lehmann and Leonard 2019, Lin 2019). Interspersed by occasional enforcement campaigns, local authorities largely accommodated economic migration, with many long-term foreign residents residing in China on short-term visa or irregularly (Pieke 2011: 44, Habicht 2020).

China's immigration management entered a new phase in the last decade, after Xi Jinping became general secretary of the Chinese Communist Party in 2012. In 2016, China joined the International Organization for Migration (IOM), signaling a growing willingness to participate in international migration governance (Liu and Weng 2019, Zhang and Geiger 2020). The next year, new foreigner working regulations significantly updated China's policy framework for economic migration, introducing new categories for 'highly skilled,' 'professional,' and 'other' economic migrants, and reducing the role of individual officers' discretion in issuing visas (Ahl and Liu 2018). In 2018, Beijing undertook two institutional reforms that suggested international mobility had risen on the central leadership's policy agenda. First, the government established the country's first national migration agency, the National Immigration Administration (NIA), tasked with coordinating migration affairs government-wide. For the first time in the reform era, its officials acknowledged China's status as an immigrant destination, and called

for the urgent development of immigration management "with Chinese characteristics" in line with the country's rise in overall state power (NIA 2019). Second, the Overseas Chinese Affairs Office, responsible for diaspora affairs (including former Chinese nationals), was moved to the United Front Department, a key Chinese Communist Party department (Liu 2022). As this thesis shows, these reforms were part of a period of increasing momentum for immigration policy reform.

3. Contributions

This thesis argues that the politics of China's immigration policy, lying at the nexus of domestic and global state concerns, provides key insights into China's state transformation in the last decades. In contrast to these ways in which China's rise make the rest of the world "more Chinese" (Pieke 2016: 168), immigration policy offers a privileged vantage point into the ways the Chinese state responds to the 'foreign at home'. Indeed, the state's domestic approach to immigration reveals a tension between the unprecedented levels of transnational exchange it has welcomed and its concerns about internationalization. In any state, but certainly for a regime whose state-building mission has been to restore China's global status following a period of imperialist invasion, immigration reform relates to core aspects of nation-state ideology and identity. In the words of Algerian sociologist Sayad (1999: 6), in China, too, "thinking about immigration means thinking about the state".

While immigrants are affected by all public policy, in this thesis 'immigration policy' refers to the targeted formal and informal policy discourses and practices that state actors direct at governing and regulating the entry, exit, residential status and rights of incoming (including some groups of return) migrants (see also Czaika and de Haas 2013). I use the term 'immigration policymaking' to discuss the political processes and power relations underlying state decisions on how to govern and regulate the volume and rights of immigrants. This encompasses interactions between state and party actors in different bureaucracies, regions, and across political levels, as well as power relations between state actors and non-state actors – experts, public opinion - relevant to the shaping of immigration policy. Finally, 'immigration politics' encompasses these policymaking dynamics, but also includes what Natter and Thiollet (2022: 1518) call "structural political factors" relevant to the governance of immigration, such as the historical state formation process, institutional path dependencies, and narratives of national identity.

By exploring how shifts in Chinese approaches to immigration provide insight into China's wider state and developmental transition, this thesis builds on and contributes to scholarly debates on a) China's migration patterns, b) internationalization and c) policymaking, as well as d) global migration politics.

a. Integrating reform era migration policy in the study of China's migration patterns

Research on immigration to China has rapidly increased since the 2000s, as China's new identity as an immigrant destination rather than "a place where foreigners happen to live" (Pieke 2011: 62) became more pronounced. Pioneering researchers like Liu Guofu and Weng Li in immigration law, and Li Minghuan in overseas Chinese studies, began to develop comparative critiques of China's incomplete and fragmented immigration laws and policies (Weng 2001, Liu 2006, Li 2011). In the social sciences, geographers and anthropologists started to explore the formation of immigrant communities in China's most cosmopolitan areas (Li 2008, Li et al 2009, Bodomo 2010, Farrer 2010, Pieke 2011, Lü 2011). Building on this cross-disciplinary, multilingual field, this thesis centers Chinese state and societal perspectives on this development, and explores connections between migration to China and the governance of out-going and internal Chinese migration flows.

As the field consolidated, research into immigration to China has greatly expanded in scope and level of detail. With early work especially focused on Euro-American professionals in Beijing and Shanghai, and African traders in Guangzhou, now a substantial literature examines the lives of immigrants from different parts of the world, living across China, from traders, teachers, scientists and other professionals, to foreign spouses, students, border workers and returnees (e.g. Cheuk 2016, Leonard 2019, Lehmann 2014, Wang and Chen 2021, Camenisch 2019, Barabantseva 2015, Sier 2022, Wei 2014, Ho 2018). Emerging survey research, such as that by the Study of Foreign Residents in China (SFRC) survey conducted among foreign nationals in seven Chinese cities, has provided data on foreigners' social organization and settlement patterns, among other things (e.g. Wang and Cao 2019, Jin and Fan 2019, Huang 2019). There is also growing insight into the breadth of issues affecting foreigners in China, with publications examining foreigners' rights protection and second-generation migrant citizenship, as well as immigrants' social life, experiences accessing education, healthcare, or practicing their religious and cultural identities (e.g. Ahl and Czoske 2021, Jordan et al 2022, Barabantseva et al 2019, Ma 2019, Adebayo 2023, Haugen 2013, Castillo 2015).

Overall, the focus of this literature has been on migrant rather than Chinese perspectives. However, these case studies often provide much insight into local state-migrant interactions, and what Lehmann and Leonard call the "contradictions" migrants face as they deal with the complex bureaucratic processes governing their presence (2019: 2). These issues have been examined in most detail in the southern city of Guangzhou, where especially African economic migrants have been celebrated for their contribution to trade and diplomatic relations, but have faced structural marginalization after their presence became controversial in the late 2000s (Lan 2015). Studies of the subsequent crackdown show how police and exit-entry authorities tightened migration

control through instruments like targeted surveillance, registration requirements and restrictions on migrant areas of residence, leading to what Li et al (2012) describe as the "collapse" of these communities (see also Huang 2018, Haugen 2019, Wilczak 2018). Studies of border area migration, such as at China's border with Russia, or in its Southwestern region, note a similar discrepancy between the local state's celebration of migrant economic and cultural contributions and a growing emphasis on combating irregular migration from the late 2000s onwards (e.g. Barabantseva 2015, Pulford 2022).

Outside these localities, the study of China's immigration politics has lagged behind.[7] This is especially the case when it comes to the implementation of immigration law.[8] More recently, however, there has been a growing focus on studying China's wider immigration and border governance. Key examples include the work of Lü and Guo (2018) on the political risks of fragmented immigration governance, that of Habicht (2020) on the relationship between legal reform and regulatory campaigns, Plümmer (2021) on how state (media) discourse on these campaigns securitizes irregular migrants, Schubert et al (2021) on norm diffusion in several areas of Chinese immigration governance, Plümmer (2022) on subnational differentiated immigration governance practices, and Zhang and Geiger (2020) on China's ambitions in international migration cooperation. Recent studies of state media discourse on immigration also form a window into official discourse on foreigners and its boundaries amidst a wider state silence on the position of immigrants in Chinese society (Gan 2020, Huang 2021). In dialogue with this dynamic field, this thesis aims to provide a more comprehensive account of the key political dynamics structuring Chinese state responses to immigration.

In addition to its focus on Chinese state approaches to immigration, this study contributes to a growing body of work that looks at how China-foreigner societal interactions evolve as the country becomes a global power. In the reform era, migrants from high-income countries, especially those with white skin, have experienced an outsized labor market demand for their skills and identity that came with a "re-emergence of white privilege during the period of Chinese reform and a preference for values associated with Western modernity" (Camenisch 2022: 13, Farrer 2014).

---

7 Brady's important study of the foreign affairs system (2003), showing how principles of strict China-foreigner boundaries (内外有别) continued to influence foreigner management in the early reform era, became less relevant to ordinary migrants with the dismantlement of restrictions on foreigners' residence and mobility. However, the foreign affairs system remains part of the immigration policymaking system, and continues to play an active role in managing groups like foreign journalists and diplomats, as well as in the selection of foreign recipients for (local) state awards and other honors.

8 A significant body of Chinese policy literature does describe and critique existing immigration frameworks and their implementation. Often written by practitioners within relevant state institutions or long-term observers of the system, this literature provides valuable information on the otherwise highly opaque immigration policy process. I draw on this work throughout this thesis. However, primarily aimed at internal policy debate, these publications do not usually specify empirical or theoretical contributions and are not included here.

Immigrants have also been the recipients of developmentalist preferential state policies, such as full scholarships for foreign students and subsidies and tax-breaks for foreign professionals (Liu 2011). At the same time, an emerging literature on social incorporation finds that foreigners in China experience a range of obstacles to their integration, from "everyday othering" (Yang and Self 2020) to structural exclusion and racialization (e.g. Cheng 2019, Castillo 2020, Litman 2022). Importantly, recent research finds that these reception dynamics are changing as a more "Sinocentric' globalization" gains traction (e.g. Farrer 2019: 206, Lan 2022). With existing studies into Chinese attitudes on immigration largely focused on online discourse or local attitudes, especially towards African migrants in Guangzhou (e.g. Cheng 2011, Liang and Liu 2016, Ang and Fran 2023, for a key exception see Han 2017a), this thesis aims to investigate immigration attitudes among a broad cross-section of the Chinese population, with relevance to the study of Chinese changing self-perceptions as well as immigrants' possibilities to belong and integrate into Chinese society.

As immigration to China is receiving more dedicated research attention, the question arises of how it connects with the study of other Chinese migrations. Building on work by Elaine Ho and others who point out that in a country with a global diaspora as large and diverse as China's, those who emigrate, immigrate, and re-migrate might well overlap (Ho 2019: ix, Schubert et al 2021), I argue that the politics of immigration as described in this thesis offer many points of connection with the study of return migration, which traditionally has been part of China's diaspora studies field. While the Chinese state has encouraged return migration, in practice return migrants face significant barriers. For returning Chinese nationals, especially those without higher levels of education, the *hukou* household registration system – a key tool of population control that ties citizens' social rights to their place of registration – can act similarly to an international immigration regime "by precluding dual residency and selecting and documenting potential citizens" (Liu 2020: 2). Meanwhile, return migrants who naturalized elsewhere and gave up their Chinese citizenship in accordance with China's nationality law have to navigate life in China as foreign migrants. The exclusion they experience can lead to "dissonance" and re-migration among return migrants (Ho and Ley 2014).

As You (2020) points out, only an integrated Chinese migration field can do justice to China's extraordinary migration trajectory and the fact that, due to its rapid development, the country is experiencing significant out-going, return and other incoming migration all at the same time. This thesis shows how Chinese authorities' recognition of the needs of naturalized return migrants forms a key part of the impetus for immigration reform, and calls for more integration of research on the immigration and diaspora policy fields (Liu and Van Dongen 2016, Liu 2022, Van Dongen 2022, Richter and Habicht 2022, Xiang 2003). I also follow the lead of some researchers connecting Chinese state treatment of international and internal migrants (Lan 2017,

Wilczak 2018, Ishitsuka 2020, Xiang and Ma 2019, Zhu and Qian 2021). Extending this comparison to the study of Chinese views on immigration, I find that both emigration and internal migration, as paradigmatic aspects of reform era development, shaped knowledge of and attitudes towards immigration (see chapter 4). Finally, as Xiang (2016) has argued, the Chinese state's decision to facilitate mobility through a range of enabling and regulating policy measures has been instrumental to the rise of both internal and international reform era mobility, and made China "a space of flows and connections" (677) that could also accommodate incoming mobility. An integrated approach to Chinese migration politics can contribute to the larger question of change and continuity in reform-era state approaches to mobility.

b. Mobilizing immigration politics as a lens on the Chinese state's conflicted approach to internationalization

The significance of China's immigration politics goes beyond the issue of how the state manages increasing incoming and return migration to how it deals with broader issues of internationalization and changing self-Other relations. Worldwide, the governance of human mobility has proven more political than other aspects of globalization, like capital or trade flows (e.g. Sassen 1994, Kalm 2010). In the Chinese case, I argue that a reform trajectory of pursuing global economic integration while minimizing political liberalization has resulted in a conflicted attitude towards internationalization. My analysis shows how the Chinese state currently aims to expand its immigration system. However, the interplay between China's state-building program, domestic politics dynamics and national identity discourses limits the space for formal reforms, especially liberalizing ones. The growing focus on institutionalizing also renders existing internationalization rooted in informal policy practices more fragile.

The start of China's reform era coincided with an acceleration in global flows of capital, trade and ideas worldwide, also known as globalization. As leader Deng Xiaoping announced in 1980 that China should learn from the outside world, 'reforming and opening up' became a set phrase, reflecting a belief that as the country intensified its external relations, more domestic reform momentum could be achieved (Xiang 2009). Chinese society embraced international engagement, from an 'emigration craze' to a strong demand for products and scholarship from economically developed countries (Nyiri 2001, Chen 1995). As Shih notes, in this period, an image of 'the metropolitan West' as an object of emulation was prioritized over a critique of the colonial West (2001: 36). Central commitment to the developmental strategy deepened with China's entry into the WTO in 2001, and the subsequent organization of the 2008 Beijing Olympics. But despite the considerable depoliticization of international contact in this period, the domestic societal change - or internationalization - this global integration brought about also triggered elite and popular unease, from fears of Western 'spiritual pollution' to Leftist critiques of marketization (e.g. Miller 2011). The Chinese state has remained

especially conflicted on changes in China's cultural and ethnic diversity that do not easily fit with existing visions of 'the Chinese nation' (中华民族) as inherited from early 20th century nationalism, and has resorted to ethnocentric discourse at times of domestic instability (He 2018). While economic reforms were institutionalized, on these issues of diversity Chinese authorities have refrained from fundamental reform. Instead, "existing policies are reasserted, tweaked, or combined" (Pieke and Barabantseva 2012: 6, Zhou 2022). Now that China is an economically powerful global player, it is a good moment to examine Chinese state and societal views on an issue that can embody these tensions, like foreign migration.

Under president Xi Jinping, the Chinese state's attitudes towards internationalization have again become more openly conflicted. Researchers have analyzed the country's increasingly explicit ambitions to become a leading global stakeholder, from its growing clout in key international organizations to its emerging efforts to protect its citizens and wider interests abroad (Tan 2021, Fung 2019, Foot 2020, Ghiselli 2020). At the same time, these efforts have been accompanied by a revival of "ideological orthodoxy," or the idea that the Party needs to restore faith in its Leninist and cultural roots and maintain a starker demarcation between China and the West in order to survive (Gore 2022). China's foreign diplomacy has adopted a more aggressive nationalist mission "from seeking a peaceful international environment for domestic development to expanding China's global reach as a linchpin for the Great Rejuvenation" (Zhao 2022). Domestically, these trends have resulted in less space for cross-cultural exchange, for instance at universities or through the activities of "Western embassies, consulates, media operations, and NGOs operating inside China," who the state identifies as potential 'anti-government forces' (ChinaFile 2013).

This study contributes to a body of work that analyzes these tensions in Chinese state behavior and messaging by studying its domestic politics. These works highlight the variety of state and societal actors involved in producing China's external actions, from economic interest groups to nationalist public opinion (e.g. Weiss 2019a, Weiss 2019b, Ruhlig 2022, Wang 2022, Qin et al 2021). My findings provide insight into the institutional and ideological limits individual state actors can run into when it comes to internationalization. While many external observers tend to take Chinese state rhetoric at face value, studies of policy implementation are crucial to gain a grounded understanding of state action in this area. Research into China's 'talent attraction', the state programs that since the 1980s have aimed to make China more internationally integrated and competitive, illustrate this complexity. Studies on these efforts show that, while returnee and immigrant 'talent' have played an important role in advancing China's global integration (e.g. Zweig et al 2004), the success of state-sponsored talent programs and a variety of other subsidies has been limited by factors ranging from to unattractive research infrastructure to inflexible immigration policies (Zweig and Wang

2013, Zweig et al 2020). Returnee 'talent' brought symbolic capital and progressive views (Li 2006, Xiang 2011, Han and Zweig 2010), but also faced public criticism and resistance, as well as fluctuations in demand for their skills (Zweig and Yang 2014, Lu et al 2022, Hao et al 2016). Adding to these findings, this thesis' case study on the politics of skilled migration policy (chapter 3) points to implementation barriers of internationalization that intensify with politicization.

These complex implementation dynamics intersect with shifts in top-down incentives, and the extent to which central governance priorities rely on 'opening up.' As Shirk (1993) and Zweig (2002) detail in their discussion of China's early reform decades, the political logic of China's reform trajectory revolved around gradual, segmented change that advanced the country's economic transformation while limiting political change. As part of this focus on global economic integration, foreign connections, language skills and networks "dramatically" increased in value (Zweig 2002: 58). In this period, in which differentiated and relatively decentralized regulation regimes played a key role, informal practices and institutions, including corruption, thrived in the pursuit of the central aim of rapid development (Ang 2020, Zhou 2022), while institutionalization and bureaucratic control lagged behind. The constant negotiation of state-society boundaries also led to "new kinds of openness", as different societal actors stretched ambiguous policies and grey zones each for their own purposes (e.g. Weller 2017: 283). Building on the limited policy literature on informal practices in immigration policymaking, this thesis finds that an understanding of informal policy shifts, and the way they interact with formal changes, is key to understanding the current immigration policymaking environment. The politics of international mobility, in which "the quadruple forces of globalization, marketization, decentralization and deregulation in the reform period" (Li 2008: 395) come together, is a key place to examine these changes.

c. Illuminating Xi-era policymaking through China's immigration politics

In this thesis, I take the immigration policy field as a case study of how key policy trends in the Xi Jinping era play out on the ground. Reading out the final report of the 20th Party Congress in 2022, party secretary Xi Jinping portrayed China as a country under threat from both domestic "deep-seated problems" regarding reform, development and stability as well as "external attempts to suppress and contain China" (CPC 2022). The report included 80 mentions of the term 'security', a near doubling from the two previous reports, signaling a shift in which the Chinese state is rebalancing its development-first strategy to promoting 'development and security in equal measure'. As Wang (2022) documents, this shift, motivated by a domestic economic slowdown and perceptions of a worsening external security environment, took place over a period of about five years, with central leadership fully committing to it in 2019, in the face of growing US-China tensions.

This shift has also been visible in the immigration policy field. While China's legal framework on immigration has always been restrictive, its overall approach was developmentalist. As Chou et al (2016: 216) note, unlike in the case of its large-scale internal migration, often viewed through a lens of societal risk, there has been "relatively little political discourse framing immigration as a security threat". In addressing the question how the prioritization of security concerns plays out in the immigration policy field, this thesis builds on research examining how Xi Jinping's leadership in the past decade has changed Chinese policymaking and the main processes through which it operates. While the reform era has been characterized by cycles of centralization and decentralization and intense negotiation across a fragmented policy system (Lieberthal and Oksenberg 1988), the last decade has seen a sustained centralization drive (Zhou 2023). Personalized leadership and 'top-level design', a key term that was popularized following the 18th Party Congress in 2012 to refer to the "clearer steering from above", are replacing the more bottom-up, incremental reform style that has been so crucial to China's reform trajectory (Ahlers and Schubert 2022: 13). These trends are reflected in the institutional landscape, with new central-level commissions, such as the National Security Commission and the Foreign Affairs Commission becoming key decision-making bodies (e.g. Zhao 2022).

In terms of implementation, campaign-style policy initiatives such as those fighting corruption and poverty have dominated, doubling as exercises in power-consolidation (Li 2019). Scholars of policy innovation have noted that the number of experimental policies, allowing localities to try out policies that might be adopted more broadly, have declined (Chen and Göbel 2016, Heilmann 2018, Teets and Hasmath 2020). Remaining pockets of policy experimentation are subject to stricter supervision by higher levels of government (Teets and Hasmath 2020, Yu and Huang 2019). Disciplinary pressure within the system has intensified, most notably through the more assertive role of Party organs vis-à-vis the state (Shen et al 2020). Amidst all this change, however, there has also been much continuity (Ahlers and Schubert 2022). My findings add to a conversation on how this centralization plays out on the ground, and how different actors respond to the changing pressures and incentives. In addition to an aversion of risk, in which officials afraid to make mistakes choose inaction or "seek instruction higher up on every last thing" (Snape 2019), I also examine how centralization leads to strategically selective implementation and thwarted state agendas.

This centralization drive has been reinforced by the fact that economic performance became a less reliable source of legitimacy following the global financial crisis, and so the Chinese leadership has turned to "the improvement of bureaucracy, propaganda, rule of law and promotion of equality" as new strategies for maintaining legitimacy (Zeng 2014: 615, Yang and Zhao 2015). As Naito notes, Xi's centralization of power has gone hand in hand with "developing a high-capacity bureaucracy that can do what he wants" (2020:4). This development comes in the context of a gradual expansion of

Chinese bureaucratic power since the mid-1990s (Zhao 2023: 312). Apart from the state's advances in digital governance, Xi-era bureaucratic reforms, from 'red-tape cutting' to professionalization of the party-state workforce, have not received much research attention. Certainly not 'liberalizing', these political reforms are perhaps best seen as an investment in state-building that sometimes aims to prop up public legitimacy by improving efficiency and transparency (e.g. Papagiannes 2021), while at other times its primary purpose is to enhance state control, such as for the expansion of surveillance capabilities (e.g. Byler 2022).

Finally, the increase in centralization and securitization also affects Chinese state-society relations and public sphere. Following a period of relative pluralism in the 1990s and early 2000s, Party leadership has aimed to bring all parts of society more firmly within the orbit of the state, aided by ideas about social management and governance (Pieke 2012, Teets 2014). With 'social governance' as the key framework for state-society relations in the Xi Jinping era, independent media, civil society and scholarly voices have been increasingly marginalized, and confined to ever smaller (online) spaces (Lei 2016). Popular nationalists have been relatively exempted from this development, due to their overall nationalistic agenda and commercial viability to media companies navigating censorship rules (Zhang et al 2018). As Schneider (2018) shows, with digital politics increasingly important, complex "negotiations, collaborations, and persuasions" (15) in the digital realm now govern relations between state and societal actors, including nationalist groups. While nationalists' role as a loud minority that can defend as well as pressure the state is not new (Lagerkvist 2004), recent research looks at a new generation of aggressive online nationalists that localize global 'alt-right' discourse, including on immigration (Yang and Fang 2021, C. Zhang 2020). The Chinese government has arguably taken a 'populist authoritarian' turn in its management of the nationalist public sphere, with public responsiveness becoming increasingly important (Tang 2018). However, how (online) public opinion affects specific policy processes has not been much studied, with the exception of foreign policy (e.g. Zhao 2013, Weiss 2014).

In this thesis, I add to these debates by studying the positions of local state actors, elite actors, online nationalists and a broader public in the development of China's immigration policy. My findings add up to a larger insight into the immigration policymaking sphere, in which wider changes in policymaking incentives create a securitizing, risk-averse policy environment with heightened barriers for reform.

d. Positioning China in global migration politics

The case of immigration politics in China, a developing illiberal country that is now also the world's second-largest economy and a global power, also has significant contributions to make to the wider field of migration politics. As Boucher and Gest point out in their typology of migration regimes, while China's immigration levels

are negligible compared to the size of its total population, the absolute number of immigrants is "substantial enough to merit the examination of China as a case and significantly greater than many countries currently the focus of immigration research" (2018: 25). This thesis explores how China's domestic political dynamics and national identity trajectory together shape the immigration system. In doing so, it highlights the complex role of state capacity in migration reform implementation, and that of elite and public discourse in shaping immigration policy. Its findings speak to debates on regional, global and illiberal migration politics in the larger on-going effort to theorize migration politics beyond Europe and North America (Natter 2018, Adamson and Tsourapas 2019, FitzGerald and Cook-Martin 2014, Klotz 2013, Chung 2020). In its priorities and drivers as well as its constraints, China's authoritarian immigration regime offers more points of comparison than might be expected based on existing literature in the migration politics field.

Regionally, China is part of East Asia, one of the major hubs of international migration and mobility worldwide. Compared to other global regions, migration within Asia is characterized by an active role of the state and relatively rigid employer-based migration systems that often require a labor contract before entry (Battistella 2014). Levels of temporary, circulatory and return migration are high, while levels of migrant settlement tend to be low (Xiang et al 2013, Saxenian 2000). Japan and South Korea's immigration regimes have received much research attention, defying expectations within the field that high-income democracies would inevitably liberalize migration control. Scholarship on this issue has often been dominated by research on the influence of cultural determinants such as exclusionary 'ethnic' citizenship (e.g. Castles and Miller 2009). Others, however, highlight the importance of political and economic factors leading to divergent migration and citizenship policies over time, also with regard to co-ethnic migrants (e.g. Choe 2006, Seol and Skrentny 2009). Chung (2021), for instance, shows how Japan and Korea have designed multi-tier immigration system that have "institutionalized noncitizen hierarchies" (13), to manage economic migration in a way that serves the labor market without leading to widespread immigrant incorporation. As an East Asian developmental state that is not bound by democratic or liberal immigration norms, the Chinese case, which so far largely follows a similar pattern of a selective immigration framework with strict limits on settlement, can provide insight into these regional patterns.

Beyond East Asia, as a developing, authoritarian state, the Chinese case can contribute to a growing literature that challenges assumptions about the relationship between migration systems, developmental trajectories and political regimes. First, it helps expand knowledge on global variation in state migration management. As Adamson and Tsourapas (2019) have argued, such an effort is necessary, given that analysis of the 'migration state' (Hollifield 2004) as a key concept in the study of migration politics had in fact been limited to that of the 'Western liberal migration state'.

Second, it focuses on immigration reception dynamics, which remain understudied outside Western contexts, despite most migration taking place within the so-called Global South (Nawyn 2016, Norman 2020). Studying immigrant reception in countries with different political regimes and developmental contexts opens up the comparison of different migration policy factors, from domestic politics to foreign diplomacy and state-society relations (Natter and Thiollet 2022). Existing studies of migration management in other major authoritarian states, such as Russia and Saudi-Arabia, show great potential for comparative study of issues like the politicization and the role of the public in authoritarian migration management, who have been assumed to be insulated from public pressures (Schenk 2018, Thiollet 2021, Breunig, Cao, and Luedtke 2012). The relationship between development, state modernization and immigration politics I identify in the Chinese case can also generate hypotheses for immigration policy drivers in other rapidly-developing contexts, as it defies usual distinctions between 'Global North' and 'Global South' migration dynamics.

Finally, the Chinese case adds evidence to analyses of global trends in immigration policymaking, also outside of 'Global South' or 'authoritarian' contexts. As the Chinese state builds a more comprehensive framework for immigration management, it is clear that its policies are developing in line with global trends of increasing selectiveness, and make use of globally prevalent policy tools (Haas et al 2016). 'Talent visa', permanent residency options and integration services aim to attract and retain 'desirable' skilled migrants, while other economic migrants are kept increasingly 'temporary' as a way to balance development and security concerns. These reforms come in a context of very few settlement options, leading Boucher and Gest (2018) to categorize China as a 'quasi Kafala' immigration regime, referring to the restrictive migration management in Gulf countries, but with lower immigrant flows.

However, such quantitative macro-analyses of global migration regimes have been unable to explain why China's concrete articulations of global trends in immigration policymaking take such a conservative shape. They also tend not to consider policy implementation, and the gaps between policies on paper and their enforcement. This study, examining the politics of immigration policymaking in China, contributes to work that looks at how global diffusion interacts with national policy contexts beyond formal policy frameworks. I show how the development and implementation of China's immigration policy is shaped by domestic politics – institutional relations, state capacity, migration policy legacies and informal governance practices – as well as what Boswell calls an 'ideology of migration' or the "patterns of political and social thought which shape thinking on a range of questions linked to migration, such as concepts of citizenship and belonging, rights and responsibilities of members, and obligations towards non-members" (Boswell 2003: 6).

4. Methodology

This project departs from an area studies approach that takes 'China as method' (Yuzo [1989] 2016), centering and examining a variety of Chinese points of view. It is dedicated to a deeper understanding of the Chinese particulars – the what, how, why – of its immigration politics. This focus on Chinese immigration politics and its theorization is essential to integrating and furthering knowledge on how the world's foremost emerging power deals with immigration, one of the key issues of our time. Methodological nationalism, or a territorialized, narrow analytical focus "obsessed with describing processes within nation-state boundaries as contrasted with those outside" (Wimmer and Schiller 2002: 307), remains common within the migration politics field. However, while national case studies run the risk of reifying national boundaries, when it comes to previously ignored country cases, building up a knowledge base of immigration politics at the national level in fact opens up the possibility of cross-border comparison. In this sense, such case studies also form a foundational step for the field in correcting its Euro-American bias. While in-depth comparison goes beyond the scope of this thesis, throughout this research I point to ways in which the Chinese case relates to regional and global trends in migration politics. More broadly, this thesis aims to avoid China exceptionalism, instead viewing in-depth study of the Chinese context as instrumental to understanding its position in the world, or the ways China is embedded within, reflective of, and shaping broader global trends (Franceschini and Loubere 2022: 6).

In this thesis, 'China' refers to 'mainland China,' centering its domestic authoritarian political system, and not to other political regimes that can be called Chinese due to their position within P.R.C. governance (Hong Kong and Macao) or other parts of the Sinophone world. Similarly, its analysis is limited to the immigrants that are considered 'third-country' foreign nationals by the Chinese state. In some official statistics, this group is combined with migrants coming to mainland China from Hong Kong, Macao and Taiwan into a category named 'international residents.' However, the P.R.C. state's treatment of Hong Kong, Macao and Taiwan citizens, who it aims to integrate into mainland society (Tseng and Wu 2011, Rowen 2023), and of other immigrants, are increasingly diverging. While the politics surrounding all these migrants deserves further attention, for this reason my project limits itself to policymaking directed at 'third-country' immigrants.

a. Data collection

This project draws from qualitative traditions in area studies, political science and sociology and contributes to a larger trend in the study of migration policymaking towards the use of more ethnographic methods (Favell 2021). As methods involving "direct and sustained social contact" with research participants, ethnographic participant-observation and in-depth interviews are well-suited to studying different

layers of policy-making and the gaps between them, from policy discourse to policy development and implementation (Willis and Trondman 2000: 1, FitzGerald 2006, Schoenhals 1992, Snape 2020).

The study is primarily based on a body of over 100 interviews with relevant Chinese stakeholders, collected in mainland China between September 2018 and October 2020. First, I conducted 20 interviews and participant observation among immigration policy makers in Beijing, Shanghai and Guangxi (Nanning and two border cities). This included officials at the NIA, the exit-entry administration, foreign experts bureau, talent attraction bureau, commerce department, and the human resources and social security department. In Beijing and Shanghai, I also attended over a dozen government-organized immigration policy promotion events and training sessions. In Guangxi I joined local government inspections. Due to the tightening research environment, my access at the national level was limited. I compensated by interviewing more experts consulting on national-level policy development.

Second, I conducted 27 expert interviews with researchers of immigration to China and its governance, focused on their views of and involvement in policy-making processes. I also attended public and semi-public immigration conferences and events, which in China often bring together government representatives and researchers and are suited to observing agenda setting in the policy debate (Zhu 2011). In addition, I also interviewed 11 commercial migration intermediaries, 5 employers of foreign migrants, and 6 'expert migrants', who had in-depth experience with one or more of the policies discussed.

Lastly, I draw on 46 semi-structured interviews with a diverse sample of Chinese individuals, conducted in three locations with different levels of immigration (Shanghai, Jinan and Pinghu, Zhejiang). Respondents were selected based on age group, gender, education level and migration status (local resident or internal migrant). Interviews focused on personal experiences with immigrants, beliefs and opinions on the effects of immigration, immigrant treatment, and immigration control. To chart how my foreign nationality affected responses, half of these interviews were completed by three Chinese research assistants. However, as is detailed in chapter 4, no significant difference in responses was found, perhaps reflecting the relatively low levels of politicization around white female migrants like myself, or respondents' awareness of being part of a foreign national's research project, regardless of the identity of the interviewer.

In line with fieldwork conventions in authoritarian field sites, in which written informed consent forms can be associated with distrust and risk, I relied on oral informed consent (Glasius et al. 2018: 100). All interviews with members of the public, but not all expert interviews were recorded, in line with interviewees' personal preferences. All recorded interviews were transcribed and anonymized, with audio and written data saved in an online protected data repository. For non-recorded expert interviews, I took extensive

notes, which I transcribed on the same day. All interviews were anonymized – in line with previous findings in the Chinese academic field, anonymity has become the norm for any research participation (2018: 101). All interviews were conducted in Mandarin Chinese, with the exception of several public interviews in which the interviewee preferred English.

Throughout the chapters, I reference interviews using a number code that specifies the location of the interview, the category of respondent, and the month in which the interview took place. The respondent categories are: government or Party official (O), researcher (R), intermediary (I), employer (E), migrant (M), or member of the public (P). The location indicators are Shanghai (S), Guangxi (G) and 'national' (N), referring to interviews with officials and researchers that took place outside Shanghai and Guangxi. Most of these interviews took place in Beijing and Guangzhou. For example, the code (S-O3, 9/2019) refers to interview 3 with a government official ('O') in Shanghai that took place in September, 2019.

In addition to these interviews, I use original survey data on Chinese immigration attitudes, collected in July 2020. As part of a team at East China Science and Technology University, I contributed to the design and implementation of this pioneering online national survey on immigration policy. The non-representative nationwide sample (N = 1888) was stratified by age group, gender and educational level, and captures a diverse national population on key variables like age, gender, social class and international exposure (for more information on the sample and geographical distribution of completed questionnaires, see chapter 6). I also include previously unexamined data on Chinese immigration attitudes from the World Values Survey (Waves 2-7) and the Asian Barometer Survey (Wave 4), which have included occasional questions on immigration in their China survey.

Finally, I contextualize my fieldwork findings with policy and media analysis. To this end, I collected and analyzed policy information and government discourse by state actors, with a focus on the NIA, exit-entry authorities, and employment authorities, tracking the websites, social media and state media coverage of relevant departments for the 2018-2022 period. In addition, I compiled a body of policy analysis of over 250 articles and books, produced by researchers and practitioners within public security and other departments, as well as independent experts, going back to the late 1980s. For my case study on the 2020 permanent residency reforms, I also analyzed expert and (social) media discourse on that issue (see Chapter 6). These textual materials allowed me to triangulate and contextualize information obtained in the interviews. As Shi (2015) points out, employing data from multiple sources is especially advisable for researching difficult to access authoritarian regimes.

I adopted an "iterative analytical process" of moving between interview and survey data, other textual sources, and relevant theory, that allowed me to stay attuned to new developments and update my research process accordingly (Bretell 2022: 196,

Glick Schiller 2003). For instance, as the emerging politicization of skilled migration became more apparent in early 2020, following online media debate on the proposed permanent residency regulations, I decided to include related questions in my public interviews and remaining expert interviews, leading to my fifth case study. More detail on the methodologies of each of the sub-projects is provided in the case study chapters.

b. Fieldwork conditions

The conditions for conducting this fieldwork changed considerably in the course of this project and reflect the shrinking opportunities for foreign social science researchers working in China. First, while navigating the shifting boundaries of China's authoritarian state apparatus has been a constant concern for researchers conducting fieldwork, Chinese and foreign alike, the space for doing fieldwork has narrowed in the last decade as more topics are considered off limits and state surveillance over academic research has tightened (Thogerson and Heimer 2006, Harlan 2019). Foreign researchers have been relatively protected from state persecution by their nationality, but their research projects and domestic collaborators can face high levels of scrutiny by state actors or the hosting institution, due to vigilance against what state propaganda refers to as 'hostile foreign forces' and growing risk around research that is deemed politically sensitive to authorities. Access to the Chinese Party-state, especially, has declined. While in previous decades, some regime insiders chose to provide ethnographic access to foreign researchers and journalists (see for instance Kennedy 2008, Pieke 2009, Shirk 1993, Shirk 2007), the tightening of inter-Party discipline and repoliticization of foreign ties has heightened the threshold for officials to participate in academic research.

Second, the Covid-19 pandemic decreased opportunities for engagement in 2020. Officials who had been willing to meet in person were not available for online interactions, perhaps wary of leaving a record in China's online surveillance system. In addition, the crisis atmosphere around pandemic control activated a heightened level of political sensitivity around 'foreignness' within the Chinese political system. This institutionalized caution persisted after the initial societal fear of immigrants spreading the virus, that like elsewhere in China took the shape of discrimination and racism against migrants during the first Covid-19 wave in spring 2020. In October 2020, for instance, I was refused attendance at a key conference on immigration governance at a research institution that is part of the public security apparatus. "Someone like you will understand how things work here," the organizer told me apologetically.

While these developments deeply impacted my research, they were somewhat offset by the fact that the start of my fieldwork period in 2018 coincided with a window of opportunity for studying the Chinese immigration state. As I elaborate in chapter 2, a momentum in the immigration policy sphere starting in 2015/6, primarily sparked by a top-down mandate for improving China's skilled migration attraction, extended to the

academic study of immigration. Due to its embeddedness in the public security system, the lack of public data and access to the immigration system has arguably been the main obstacle facing the field (Liu 2015, Liang and Wang 2021). In the late 2010s, however, state representatives frequented immigration conferences, started releasing more public information (from a low base), and became more open to academic collaborations. New annual conferences and immigration research centers were established, and for the first time key national calls for research funding included immigration issues in their topic lists. While this trend has faced headwinds from the pandemic, as well as from the emerging politicization of immigration (see chapter 6), the research infrastructure and networking opportunities of these years has greatly benefited this research, in the form of interview connections, online community and resource sharing among China-focused migration, as well as the collaboration with migration sociologists at East China University of Science and Technology resulting in the online survey that informs chapter 5 and 6 of this thesis.

My identity as a white foreign researcher from a European university also shaped many aspects of this fieldwork, in more and less conscious ways. As a long-term migrant to China, I had personally experienced changes in Chinese policymaking as well as in public perceptions of migrants like myself. This prompted my initial interest in designing a study focused on the understudied 'Chinese side' of these debates, as part of the wider transnational research project 'Immigration and the Transformation of Chinese Society'. In the course of this research, I experienced the mix of privilege and precarity that a migrant with my background encounters in China today (Lan 2021, Camenisch 2022). In terms of access, it was my domestic affiliation to a well-known Chinese university that opened some doors (or ended late-night border checkpoint interrogations), while my foreignness tended to initially be viewed as a barrier or liability.

Once an interview took place, respondents tended to express interest in my views both as a foreign migrant and as a researcher of migration. Such "reverse interviews" (Glasius et al 2018: 61) on immigration policy in other parts of the world, and on sentiments among China's foreign community were common in all my interviews. However, they were especially prominent in interviews with officials, perhaps reflecting the limited information sharing and feedback mechanisms between state actors and immigrant communities (see chapter 6). During these conversations, I was often addressed as a foreign representative, but as a white female Mandarin-speaking migrant, I faced little hostility. This position of privilege became especially apparent when respondents would discuss other foreigners that were considered less welcome, sometimes in racist terms. However, despite respondents' candor it would be a mistake to assume I was able to access some 'foreign-neutral' position that did not deeply influence the social interactions in this research.

c. Terminology

Some important final notes on terminology: first, my choice to refer to foreign nationals residing in China as 'immigrants', following convention in the immigration research field, does not intend to bypass debate on the meaning of immigration in the Chinese context. As I discuss in more detail in chapter 2, emerging state usage of the term 'immigration' has so far mostly been limited to refer to 'immigration' at large, rather than to individual 'immigrants', for whom 'foreigner' remains the standard term.[9] Relatedly, chapter 5 includes information on societal terms for foreign migrants, while chapter 6 discusses Chinese perceptions of foreigners' permanent residency. I also return to the issue of terminology in debate on foreigners' belonging in the conclusion. The fact that the most common Chinese-language use for the word '移民' refers to emigrating or Chinese emigrants abroad, rather than to immigration or foreign nationals in China, is an indication of the relative marginality of immigrants in Chinese society, as well as of a continued self-understanding of China as first and foremost a country of emigration (see Natter 2023:14 for another example of this). To avoid confusion, in interview questions and in our survey, we therefore primarily spoke of 'foreigners living in China' (e.g. 居住中国的外国人) rather than of 'immigrants'.[10]

Second, while the survey contained more detailed questions on attitudes towards migrants from different geographical and ethnic backgrounds, in my interviews I asked open questions about 'foreigners'. This choice allowed respondents to freely interpret the question and provided space for bottom-up categorizations. In response, many of my respondents demonstrated nuanced understandings of the diverse identities of foreign migrants in China, which have not fully been captured by a field that has especially focused on Chinese interactions with foreigners racialized as black and white. While future study refining an understanding of Chinese attitudes towards different immigrant groups remain needed, the public views of immigration and related policies captured in this thesis provide important evidence on how China-

---

9 While 'foreigner' is the most common term for foreign nationals in immigration policy and legislation, a wide variety of other terms are used by state actors to refer to foreign nationals in the country. These include among others: 'foreign resident population' (外国常住人口), 'population of foreign nationals' (外籍人口), 'foreign floating population' (外籍流动人口), used in statistical analysis; 'foreign friends' (外国朋友) and 'foreign guests' (外国嘉宾), in the context of more informal state discourse and state propaganda, 'foreign ethnic Chinese' (外籍华人), which administratively refers to foreign nationals who used to have a P.R.C. passport but is also informally also used to refer to ethnic Chinese more broadly, and so on. The term 'three illegals foreigners' '三非外国人' as a shorthand for foreign nationals that irregularly enter, reside or work in China has also been adopted by public security authorities. For more detail on some of these terms, see Pieke (2011: 44-45), Liu (2018), Plummer (2020). In Chinese-language scholarship, 'foreigners in China' (在华外国人) is common, but so are 'international migrants' (国际移民) and 'cross-border population' (跨境人口), which in the context of these studies refer to foreign nationals living in China.

10 And other related terms, such as 'foreigners coming to live and work in China' (来中国生活工作的外国) and 'foreigners settled in China' (定居在中国的外国人).

foreign conceptualizations, which have been central to Chinese national identity narratives, are changing. In the conclusion, I identify future research avenues that can integrate these findings with existing research on Chinese subcategorizations of foreign migrants on the basis of racialization, ethnicity or nationality.

Finally, in its focus on state policymaking processes across several types of migration, this thesis includes a lot of migration policy language. From the way migrants are categorized as 'low' or 'high' skilled, to terms like immigration 'management' and 'control' or immigrant 'integration', usage of these terms risks naturalizing or even endorsing these categories and the view of immigration underlying them. While I do not always have space in this paper-based thesis to include critical reflection on the policy agendas discussed, I would like to note that, like elsewhere, in China migration management language is used in a technocratic manner that obscures the neoliberal values of economic maximalization these categories derive from (Geiger and Pecoud 2010). At the same time, while bureaucratic language depoliticizes migration in Euro-American contexts, in China's authoritarian system, without a clear separation between political power and public administration, "the bureaucracy is political" (Ang 2018: 2). The explicit developmental aims of China's immigration policy, which have been shaped around a 'catching up' modernization narrative, also highlight the deeply unequal global context that underpins current migration systems (Castles 2004). In that sense, I hope this analysis of Chinese policy aims and processes does provide some opportunity for critical reflection into the inherently political nature of all migration decision-making

5. Synopsis

This dissertation follows an article-based format. Apart from this introduction and a concluding final chapter, it consists of five substantive chapters, each in the format of a journal article. So far, three of these articles have been published in peer-reviewed area studies journals (they are reproduced here in largely unaltered form),[11] while one of the remaining two is under review and one will soon be submitted.

Chapter 2 (published in *China Perspectives*) discusses national-level institutional reform of immigration policy, focusing on the establishment of the National Immigration Administration (NIA) in 2018, which was considered a breakthrough in the Chinese state's governance of immigration. Drawing on interviews with immigration officials and experts and on policy documents, I trace the top-down reform to the central state's talent attraction agenda and global governance ambitions, and analyze the change and continuity in the first years of operation. I show how the NIA brought momentum and resources to immigration reform, introducing a more comprehensive state

11 Most edits in the previously published articles pertain to formatting. In a few cases, phrasing and sourcing have been adjusted for coherence and accuracy.

discourse and communication strategy that included an emerging official recognition of China's identity as an immigration destination country and a speeding up of legal reform in several areas, such as skilled migration management and border security. At the same time, the NIA's relatively low sub-ministerial ranking (under the Ministry of Public Security) made it difficult for the agency to take up its role as the main coordinator of China's fragmented immigration landscape. In this chapter, I argue that the new agency's mandate for a more professionalized immigration system brings key governance principles from the Xi era to the issue of immigration governance: As China's first national immigration agency, the NIA reflects a top-down vision to strengthen centralized command and the legal encoding of national interests, as well as China's international position with regard to migration governance. However, the agency's domestic political challenges – from bureaucratic resistance to a lack of consensus on strategy – also reflect broader, systemic issues in recent institutional reforms.

Chapters 3 and 4 examine two complementing case studies of local-level policy experimentation in the management of economic migration. Chapter 3 analyzes the selective implementation of Shanghai's 'new talent regime', a set of experimental policies focused on improving skilled migrant attraction, retention and integration. As part of a geopolitical competition for talent, China is often portrayed as especially proactive in its state efforts to attract skilled migrants from around the world. Shanghai, China's most international city, has been at the forefront of the country's efforts to attract skilled migrants from around the world, and to expand its immigration system to meet the needs of long-term incoming and return migrants. However, despite a strong mandate for reform, my fieldwork and policy analysis finds that while Shanghai has built an ambitious skilled migration program on paper, the extent of its implementation has been mixed. Enquiring into this implementation gap, I find that state actors differentiate between policies deemed in line with longstanding policy goals, which they implement proactively, and more innovative policies, which they implement mainly on a performative level. I argue that this risk-averse policy implementation can be traced to the centralization of policymaking under president Xi Jinping, disincentivizing policy experimentation, and an emerging (re-)politicization of immigration policy in China at a time of increased nationalism in the public sphere. Skilled migration policy, pertaining to perhaps the least controversial and most desirable migrant flow, has often been considered a primarily technocratic migration policy field with low levels of politicization. However, the case of Shanghai's skilled migrant policy implementation demonstrates the importance of considering the range of domestic political factors that can inform local state actors' motivations and barriers for implementing these globally popular policies.

Chapter 4 (published in *China Information*) investigates a policy trial to regularize cross-border labor migration in two Guangxi border cities, where Vietnamese migrant

workers alleviated a regional labor shortage. China faces a shrinking labor supply and rapidly ageing society, but – in a country that has long defined itself by its large population - there is little policy debate on filling labor shortages by recruiting more foreign workers, who generally need to have higher education and work experience to qualify for a work permit. China's underdeveloped border regions, where labor shortages have been acute and large numbers of foreign migrants work irregularly in factories and other sectors, have been at the forefront of this debate. The Guangxi trial acknowledges foreigners' role in the low-income segment of the Chinese labor market, while also reflecting state concern with irregular migration. Based on fieldwork and policy research, the chapter analyzes how local state actors balance conflicting development and security aims in the design and early implementation of this trial. It shows how local officials successfully framed their bottom-up demands for expanding Vietnamese labor mobility in the context of China's national strategy for border development. However, during implementation, local state actors were met with central demands to further control irregular migration, leading to a securitized trial that restricted migrant stay duration and location of stay, and disrupted circular labor migration flows. Situating the regularization trial within China's wider immigration reforms, the Guangxi case demonstrates the shift from primarily developmentalist to security-oriented policy. While some central state actors show a willingness to innovate in a sensitive policy area, a risk-averse policy environment makes policy innovation more difficult. Together, chapters 3 and 4, demonstrate the breadth of on-going policy innovation but also reflect bureaucratic bottlenecks and an overall risk-averse trend in policy reform in the Xi Jinping era (Teets et al 2017).

Finally, in chapters 5 and 6, I examine societal aspects of China's immigration reforms, which my thesis argues are an increasingly relevant factor in immigration policy-making. Chapter 5 discusses public attitudes on immigration, asking how a broad cross-section of Chinese individuals experience the increase in immigration in the last decades, and how their views on immigration policy issues have developed. Combining semi-structured interviews and original survey analysis, I find that in explaining their views on immigration, Chinese respondents mobilize a broadly shared frame of reference centered on the state of the nation, which emphasizes China's developmental trajectory – a rapid transition from poor and semi-colonized to emerging global power. Drawing on perceptions of immigration control in Global North countries, as well as on China's internal migration control practices, respondents describe how they consider the country increasingly attractive to immigrants but also more capable of integrating and controlling them. They describe a shift from viewing immigration as a necessary and largely beneficial aspect of the early phase of China's modernization, towards a multi-dimensional and more contested issue. While the salience of immigration seems to be increasing, especially among highly educated groups, overall, I find that moderate views occupy most of the spectrum of Chinese immigration attitudes. This forms an

important complement to existing studies focusing on online highly critical anti-immigration discourse. The connection Chinese respondents draw between immigration attitudes and perceptions of a nation's developmental status has wider significance for the study of immigrant reception in large parts of the non-Western world where national identity narratives feature a 'catching up' modernization logic (Tlostanova 2012).

Chapter 6 (published in *Journal of Contemporary China*) explores the emerging politicization of immigration policy in Chinese society through the case of a draft law on foreigners' permanent residency, which was published for public comment in February 2020. The release of the law, a long-delayed reform that would widen access to permanent residency for some high-income immigrants, triggered an unprecedented debate on the social impact of immigration and billions of largely negative online comments. Authorities responded by shelving the bill. Analyzing official, expert and popular discourse on the draft law before, during, and after the controversy, the chapter asks what factors contributed to this miscalculation of public sentiment, and what the permanent residency debate can tell us about the role of public opinion in Chinese policymaking today. It shows how 'ultranationalist' commentators, who have grown interested in the issue of immigration as part of their affinity with global 'alt right' populist trends, quickly dominated and politicized public debate on foreigners' permanent residency, in a wider context of opaque policymaking, deepening censorship, and low levels of public knowledge on immigration policy.

While I find that public attitudes towards immigrant permanent residency are in fact more nuanced than nationalist-dominated online debate suggests, the negative sentiment expressed in the permanent residency debate has been taken by elites as an important or even representative part of Chinese public opinion on immigration, stalling reforms and leading to a politicization of immigration policy that in turn constrains the space for research and policy consultation. This process highlights the relevance of public opinion to China's non-democratic immigration policymaking as well as an information gap on immigration between policy elites and the public. Finally, the permanent residency debate also opens up a comparative angle, as Chinese immigration policymaking seems to be undergoing a trajectory of gradual politicization similar to other early-stage immigrant-reception contexts. Together, chapter 5 and 6 provide insight into the rising importance and diversity of societal attitudes in Chinese immigration policy-making, complementing and challenging previous studies on these issues.

The concluding Chapter 7 synthesizes my findings and lays out the contributions of the thesis to the study of Chinese (im)migration and internationalization, Chinese policymaking and the wider field of migration politics. It also discusses some implications of my findings for public and policy debate on immigration to China and the country's global rise.

CHAPTER 2

Establishing the National Immigration Administration: Change and Continuity in China's Immigration Reforms[12]

1. Introduction

On April 2, 2018, Chinese officials standing along Beijing's Chang'an Avenue unveiled the name sign for China's first national-level agency dedicated to immigration affairs, the National Immigration Administration (NIA) (国家移民管理局). State media called the establishment of the agency, part of a larger government overhaul, an "important milestone" in the Chinese state's attitude towards immigration, which in the past decades has combined minimal legislation with a mix of restrictive and laissez-faire enforcement .[13] However, the NIA's name sign hangs under the ivy-covered gate of the Ministry of Public Security (MPS), the police authorities who have long dominated China's cautious post-socialist exit-entry regime.[14] Next to it hangs the sign of the national Exit-Entry Administration, previously the primary government organ dealing with immigrants, which continues to exist as an administrative entity under the NIA.[15] This institutional embedding made experts suspect that no radical change was to be expected from the NIA, and that responsibilities for managing foreign nationals' presence in China would remain divided between the public security authorities and various other government actors.

---

12 This chapter has been published as: Tabitha Speelman, "Establishing the National Immigration Administration: Change and continuity in China's immigration reforms." *China Perspectives* 2020/4, 7–16.

13 "成立国家移民管理局是大势所趋时代所需" [Founding the NIA is a need of our times], *Legal Daily*, April 3, 2018, http://www.legaldaily.com.cn/index/content/2018-04/03/content_7512892.htm

14 For a picture of the NIA opening ceremony, see: http://www.spp.gov.cn/zdgz/201804/t20180402_373305.shtml (accessed on April 29, 2020).

15 "国家移民管理局基本概况信息" [Basic information on the NIA], https://www.nia.gov.cn/n741430/n741506/index.html (accessed on April 29, 2020).

Over two years into its existence, the NIA has indeed maintained a low profile. It has not published formal planning documents on its announced tasks: drafting and implementing of immigration policies, exit-entry management and border control, controlling irregular migration and coordinating international migration cooperation.[16] Still, the agency's establishment and policy debates on the position of foreigners in Chinese society it triggered reflect changes in the Chinese state's approach to immigration. With the NIA, China officially recognizes its emerging identity as an immigration destination country. Long marginal policy debates on immigration issues like long-term migrant settlement are becoming more mainstream. Experts inside and outside the government apparatus have "gladly welcomed" the NIA as a sign of the rising urgency of migrant governance in Chinese society, while others considered it too "sudden", out of step with China's identity as a country defined by its large, mostly indigenous population (Zhang 2019).

This paper places the establishment of the NIA in the context of Chinese state attitudes towards immigration at the national level, understudied in existing research on China's immigration regime. Based on document research and expert interviews with policy makers and researchers, it discusses the NIA's establishment and priorities in the context of immigration management in the reform era and analyses its main challenges. Finally, it discusses the significance of the NIA for China's longer-term immigration reform.

I conclude that the NIA's vision for a more centralized, professionalized and legally encoded immigration system brings wider Xi-era governance principles to the issue of immigration. Its mandate premised on a strengthened state commitment to expanding China's global role, the agency promotes and normalizes a more comprehensive discourse on immigration. The establishment of a new national-level institution brings top-down momentum and resources to longstanding bottleneck issues in Chinese immigration reform. However, the NIA's current challenges, from an uneven state of reform implementation and a lack of consensus on a nationwide strategy, reflect both wider issues in Chinese institutional reforms and the difficulty of reforming a politically charged policy field.

2. The Chinese state and immigration

Human mobility has been a defining aspect of China's reform and opening. As Chinese citizens became "mobile subjects," able to move within and outside China's borders as individuals (Xiang 2016), their labor, networks and knowledge have fueled China's development, which coincided with a period of rapid economic globalization worldwide. Over the same 40 years, China has seen great changes in the inward mobility

16 "王勇：组建国家移民管理局" [Wang Yong: establish the State Immigration Administration], Xinhua, March 13, 2018, http://www.xinhuanet.com/politics/2018lh/2018-03/13/c_137035628.htm

of non-Chinese citizens, with foreign residents – most notably students, professionals and traders, returnees and cross-border migrants – forming increasingly diverse and permanent communities within the country (Pieke 2011).

The Chinese state has played various roles in this development. It accommodated the strong demand for international travel among the Chinese population by slowly opening up passport applications, encouraged labor emigration and developed strategies to attract overseas capital and human talent (Liu 2007). Following the 1985 Law on the Control of the Exit and Entry of Aliens (外国人入境出境管理法), which first legitimized the presence of foreigners in reform-era China, reforms of exit-entry legislation for foreign nationals have been cautious, a legacy of the early P.R.C. decades during which international mobility was limited and highly politicized (Brady 2003). A permanent residency program was established in 2004, but only a small minority of about 20,000 foreign nationals have obtained this status, which has long doubled as a political favor (Farrer 2014, Lin 2019). Culturally, too, foreign residents are mostly regarded as transient sojourners rather than as immigrants in the sense of full-fledged citizens of foreign origin (Lee 2014). (In this article, I use the term "immigrants" to refer to foreign nationals residing in China more broadly.)

According to the 2010 census, the first to count foreign nationals, China counted 593,832 foreigners residing in China for at least 3 months, or about 0.05% of China's population (excluding 170,283 Taiwanese and 256,130 Hong Kong and Macao residents). This figure, while likely an underestimate, shows how China's foreign population has ballooned since the early reform era, when around 20,000 foreign nationals lived in China, and since the start of the millennium, when roughly 150,000 foreigners were registered (Yang 2012). In the decade following China's entry into the WTO in 2001, the number of foreigners on average grew over 10% a year (Zou and Zou 2018). China now hosts a number of immigrants comparable to that of many mid-sized nations. As a percentage of its population, however, its foreign population, concentrated in its major cities and border areas, is among the lowest worldwide (Pieke 2014: 5). The central government publishes regular figures on the number of border crossings, but not on the size of the nationwide foreign population. In 2019, both the number of border crossings in and out of China by mainland citizens (350 million crossings) and foreign nationals (over 97 million) reached record heights.[17]

Compared to the study of China's emigration and internal labor migration, academic study of foreign migration to China has been marginal, reflecting the low absolute numbers of foreigners in the country. Research of this group and related policies has picked up over the last fifteen years, as China's new identity as a migrant-destination

17 "2019年出入境人员达6.7亿人次" [670 million border crossings in 2019], Xinhua, January 5, 2020, http://www.gov.cn/xinwen/2020-01/05/content_5466639.htm.

country became more pronounced (e.g. Pieke 2011; Liu 2011; Lehmann and Leonard 2019). In this period, the topic became less politically sensitive for researchers at mainland Chinese institutions. Pioneering researchers, such as Liu Guofu and Weng Li in immigration law and Li Minghuan in overseas Chinese studies, combine international comparison with critiques of China's foreigner-related laws and policies (Weng 2001; Liu 2007; Li 2011). For decades they have advocated a comprehensive legal framework and better rights protection for foreign nationals in China. Social scientists first focused on localities where the increasing diversity stood out, including state responses at that level (e.g. Li *et al.* 2009; Cheuk 2016; Farrer 2010; Lehmann 2019). Connections between local case studies and central-level reforms are increasingly studied too (Lan 2016; Haugen 2019; Barabantseva 2019). With the exception of some talent attraction and diaspora policies (e.g. Liu and Van Dongen 2016; Zweig and Wang 2013), the politics of central-level immigration policy development, including institutional relations and reforms, have gone understudied.

While the Chinese government considers controlled, skilled immigration beneficial to China's socio-economic development (e.g. Yang 2012), it has mostly avoided statements on migrant settlement and integration (Liu 2011). During the drafting of the 2012 Exit-Entry Management Law (中华人民共和国出入境管理法), currently China's key legal text on immigration, some consulted experts argued for a more comprehensive immigration law with more rights protections and discussion of long-term migrant settlement. Opponents, however argued China did not need laws for issues like integration, naturalization, and refugee settlement, and that China's "national conditions" – its large population and employment challenges – made more permanent immigration undesirable. Desirable skilled migration could be regulated through an exit-entry focused law combined with talent attraction policies (Zhang 2010).

With new sections on national security and illegal migration and employment, the 2012 exit-entry law, which went through more than ten drafts over nine years (Liu 2008; Zhang 2019), is considered an improved effort on previous legislation in protecting China's sovereignty and national interests (Weng and Shen 2014). However, experts advocating a broader immigration law were disappointed by a law "narrow in scope and minimal in content" (Zhu and Price 2013: 25; Weng and Xia 2015; Zou 2017). The law failed to strengthen vertical command or establish an independent immigration agency, reforms many considered necessary to address uneven implementation and corruption at the local level (e.g. Weng and Bi 2006; Wang 2009). As notable as the law's content has been the rise in legal enforcement post-2012, ending a period in which restrictive employment and residence regulations were enforced quite flexibly, outside temporary crackdowns (Lu and Guo 2018).

Administrative fragmentation also makes coordinating a more comprehensive immigration strategy more difficult. The Ministry of Public Security and the Ministry

of Foreign Affairs are the main departments responsible for legal entry and residence in the country (see MPS 2012, Article 4), but other foreigner management is spread out over more than thirty government actors with large regional variation in implementation and priorities (Liu 2015). Efforts to improve coordination date back to the nineties and a national-level coordination mechanism was established in 2007, but fragmented interests continue to hamper reforms (Pieke 2014; Liu and Weng 2019). The distinction the Chinese state makes between mobility to and from Hong Kong, Macau and Taiwan, considered 'cross-border' and subject to exit-entry management but not 'international,' and other destinations, adds further complexity.

Ten years after debating the exit-entry law, there is a consensus among policy makers that China's immigration reality requires more comprehensive governance, and that the legal framework, whatever its name, needs to be improved and expanded (e.g. Hu 2019; Shi 2019). Following the NIA's arrival, academic and policy debate on national-level immigration reform in Chinese universities and think-tanks has also picked up speed (Lu and Guo 2018; Liang 2019).

3. Methodology

For this analysis of the significance of China's first national-level immigration agency for the country's national immigration reform, I look at NIA policy documents, other public statements and related state media coverage in the first two years of the agency's operation (March 2018 – April 2020). Government discourse and reform are important understanding the migratory process (Castles 2004: 223). Paying close attention to government communication in various contexts seems especially important in studying the Chinese state, known for how it manages its power through strictly regulated formal language (Schoenhals 1992: 3).

The absence of public central planning documents can be seen as a sign of the NIA's continuity with the previous exit-entry authorities, which also rarely released such documents. By contrast, regular (social) media content published by the NIA reflects a shift in communication strategy worth studying. To gain further insight into a policy area in which most government policies are not made public (Liu 2007: 281), I also include discourse at (semi-)public events on immigration organized by think-tanks, universities or local government agencies, attended between June 2018 and December 2019. In China, these events offer opportunities to observe trends in policy debate as well as connections between officials, experts and other stakeholders (Gu and Goldman 2004, Cheng 2009).

Finally, I draw on eight interviews with government officials working in immigration management in Shanghai, Guangxi and Beijing, and 20 semi-structured expert interviews with China-based immigration experts, many of whom regularly interact with state actors. With the exception of three interviews by phone and one by email, these conversations took place in person between December 2018 and December

2019, lasting an average 1-1,5 hours over one or multiple conversations. While many of these interviewees have made public statements on China's immigration system, some quoted in this paper, the interviews have been anonymized to allow for more open discussion of perceptions of state attitudes. Where relevant, I provide detail on interviewees' professional background.

4. Building the NIA: New discourse, familiar politics

At a press conference discussing the NIA's first anniversary in April 2019, spokesperson Chen Bin noted that reforms were "basically complete" and that the agency had taken up its assigned roles.[18] However, progress had been less than smooth.[19] A reform strategy announced for June 2018 was never made public.[20] A national immigration service center announced for the first half of 2019 did not open during that period, integration with other departments was delayed, and in August 2019 state media wrote that the execution of the NIA's 2019 budget "seriously lagged behind," due to a lack of personnel and unclear lines of command.[21]

The first years of the NIA offer a mixed picture of change and continuity within China's national immigration management. Its establishment and mandate form a step towards a more integrated immigration system and concurrent legal reform. It has advanced the strengthening of immigration and border security, expanding policy options for the highly skilled, and stepping up China's role in global immigration governance. However, the NIA's set-up and lack of transparency exemplify the "stability" (Zhang 2019) of the PRC's institutional approach to immigration and border affairs over the last 70 years.

a. Establishment

When State Councilor Wang Yong announced the NIA in March 2018, he called the establishment of the PRC's first national-level immigration agency the result of China's growing "overall state power", and the "constant increase in the number of foreigners that come to work and live in China".[22] This rationale puts the agency in the context of China's rise and internationalization, two long-term trends the Chinese state presents as necessary parts of its development. However, it does not explain why the agency

---

18 "国家移民管理体制改革调整已基本完成" [NIA reforms are basically completed], *The Beijing News*, March 19, 2019, http://edu.sina.com.cn/a/2019-03-19/doc-ihsxncvh3761406.shtml .

19 E.g. Interview R2, April 2019, Hangzhou; interview O5, May 2019, Beijing.

20 Gao Di 高頓, "移民局成立，更多外国人能获得绿卡？" [With an immigration agency, will more foreigners get green cards?], *Caijing*, August 6, 2018, http://magazine.caijing.com.cn/20180806/4496898.shtml.

21 "国家移民管理局召开2019年预算执行推进视频会" [NIA holds video conference on the implementation of the 2019 budget], NIA, August 9, 2019, https://www.nia.gov.cn/n897453/c1125826/content.html.

22 "王勇：组建国家移民管理局" [Wang Yong: establish the State Immigration Administration], Xinhua, March 13, 2018, http://www.xinhuanet.com/politics/2018lh/2018-03/13/c_137035628.htm.

was established at this particular time. While border-crossings continue to increase, the number of foreigners coming to China is not rising sharply like in the 2000s, following its entry into the WTO, and the number of long-term residents might even be dropping (Liu and Weng 2019).

One explanation for this timing points to a subtle official mention of the need to "improve" the institutional set-up for immigration affairs in a 2015 draft of a central government policy document on reforming foreigner permanent residency (CPC 2016b). Making Chinese permanent residency more accessible to certain groups of 'talent' was part of a new strategy to improve China's retainment of highly skilled professionals, including foreign nationals. The policy shift can be traced back to a recommendation to renew China's commitment to attract talent made by the Central Leading Group for Comprehensively Deepening Reforms in 2015 (Zhang and Geiger 2020). NIA officials have referenced this new phase of China's nation-building talent strategy (人才强国战略) as a reason for the reform.[23] An expanded permanent residency program went beyond the capacity of exit-entry authorities, already overburdened by the steep increase in cross-border traffic (especially of Chinese nationals). As an effort in professionalization and institutionalization, including the training of a specialized staff, the NIA was introduced as an instrument for these reforms.[24] Suggesting that external voices in the talent attraction field reached central leadership, in 2016 president Xi Jinping and several other Standing Committee members endorsed a policy proposal on the subject of establishing a dedicated immigration agency by the Center for China and Globalization, a liberal thinktank specializing in talent attraction and immigration policies that had spent a decade lobbying for such an institution.[25]

A second explanation also traces the NIA back to 2015, when central leadership advanced a national strategy for the earlier announced Belt and Road plan, a policy initiative centered around China's priorities in other parts of the world that included a range of mobility-boosting plans.[26] The development strategy came with a more proactive commitment to globalization, adding urgency to the need to improve China's capacity to deal with related challenges, including incoming migration and the rights and security of Chinese citizens abroad (Weng and Li 2017). According to some researchers and officials, this is when central leadership decided on a dedicated immigration

---

23 "中国在移民管理事务上有了新格局" [China has a new set-up on immigration affairs], 中国日报网, June 12, 2018, http://world.chinadaily.com.cn/2018-06/12/content_36382483.htm.

24 Gao Ziping 高子平, "外国人永居条例：应对全球人才大变局的'中国方案'" [The foreigner permanent residency regulations: a 'Chinese solution' to solve the global talent challenge], 中国日报网, March 1, 2020, https://cn.chinadaily.com.cn/a/202003/01/WS5e5b5e15a3107bb6b57a34c4.html.

25 "CCG：一家社会智库为何能推动成立国家移民局？" [CCG: How can a social thinktank influence the establishment of a national immigration agency?], 中国慈善家，August 6, 2018, https://igongyi.ifeng.com/45105977/news.shtml?&back.

26 "Full text: Action plan on the Belt and Road Initiative", State Council, March 30, 2015, http://english.www.gov.cn/archive/publications/2015/03/30/content_281475080249035.htm.

agency, following international example (e.g. B-O5, May 2019; B-R2, April 2019). In 2016, China upgraded to full membership of the International Migration Organization, citing the growing importance of immigration issues to China's future development and the need for China to have more say in their global governance (Weng and Li 2017; Ge *et al.* 2019). The 2018 government reform, in which the NIA was one of three new agencies in a reform cycle that was focused on downsizing, provided the institutional opportunity for the agency's establishment.

The NIA is uniformly described as a top-down reform (顶层设计). Relevant departments, including the exit-entry administration, were "surprised" by its ad-hoc inclusion in the 2018 reform plan, as a researcher at an MPS-linked university put it (B-R12, September 2019, see also Zhang 2019). Proposals for a national agency to address decades of growing immigration, based on developmental or security perspectives, had long been debated in the immigration policy sphere (e.g. Weng 1996; Liu 2014; Liang 2019; Bai 2019). This time, however, central leadership decided the proposal fitted national strategy. Pinning down factors informing political decision-making in China is notoriously difficult (Duckett 2018: 29). An account emphasizing shifts in recent national strategy development rather than bottom-up demands fits with both official and expert statements. Its top-down nature also helps explain the drop in the pace of reforms following the NIA's establishment.

b. Structure

State Councilor Wang Yong spoke of "assembling" (*zujian* 组建) the NIA, rather than establishing it from scratch (Xinhua 2018). The agency merges the previously separate MPS departments of exit-entry administration and border control, a reform which was completed in December 2018. Its status as a semi-independent agency with sub-ministerial ranking managed by a ministry (rather than by the State Council with a ministerial affiliation) is relatively rare within the Chinese bureaucracy. The NIA publishes its own budget and hiring quota, but its lines of command fall under the MPS.[27] Head of the NIA Xu Ganlu is also a vice-minister of the ministry. Three out of four NIA vice-directors hail from exit-entry and border control at the MPS, while one previously worked as vice-director for the Foreign Experts Bureau.[28] Like two other current MPS vice-ministers, Xu hails from Fujian, a province that has seen more promotions to Beijing under president Xi, who spent his early career there. Xu led the exit-entry administration in the late 1990s, when a first phase of incorporating border control, previously part of the armed police forces, into exit-entry management was

27 "国家移民管理局基本概况信息" [Basic information on the NIA], https://www.nia.gov.cn/n741430/n741506/index.html (accessed on September 12, 2019).

28 "国家移民管理局局长、副局长等领导简历" [C.V. of NIA director, vice-directors and other leadership], 国务院部委人物库, http://www.ce.cn/ztpd/xwzt/2013bw/gjymglj/ (accessed on December 15, 2019).

piloted in nine cities. The reform, which the NIA now completes, is making border management more professionalized as its personnel is stationed for longer periods than armed police (N-O3, 5/2019; G-O3, 5/2019).

In accordance with its promoted ranking, the NIA is entitled to more resources. Its budget (24.7 billion yuan or $3.45 billion in 2019) is larger than previous exit-entry and border control expenditure.[29] However, its sub-ministerial status means it cannot issue laws and limits its abilities to coordinate with departments higher in ranking. A planned inclusion of part of the Foreign Experts' Bureau (the rest of which during the 2018 reform was placed within the Ministry of Science and Technology)[30] was stalled (N-R5, 4/2019). Most of the NIA's newly assembled staff of around 300 come from within the exit-entry and border systems or are hired from new cohorts of officials (N-O2, 5/2019).[31] While the 2012 exit-entry law lists both the MPS and the MFA as the main actors responsible for exit-entry management, with the NIA, the MPS consolidates its position as the key government actor on immigration, at least on paper.

The NIA's establishment solves the issue of who is responsible for immigration affairs within the Chinese bureaucracy, the absence of which previously hindered many reforms (Gao 2020). Now, a specialized department exists (归口管理). However, in its current form two aspects of the NIA's institutional make-up make taking up a role as a core department more difficult: its relationship with exit-entry management authorities at lower government levels, which continue to be horizontally managed as part of the public security apparatus, and its ties with other departments governing foreigner-related affairs. Both aspects point to continuity with previous management practices and the challenges of effective central-local and interdepartmental coordination they faced (Weng and Bi 2006). Following significant internal debate in its first year (Ding *et al*. 2019; Lin 2019), the NIA will not be complemented by 'immigration management' offices at the subnational level.[32] It should vertically "lead" border authorities, previously centrally managed by the MPS, and "guide" existing exit-entry management authorities.[33] This outcome leads to an "exceptional" (Zhang 2019) situation in the Chinese government system, in which a national-level administrative entity does not

---

29 "国家移民管理局 2019 年部门预算" [National Immigration Administration 2019 budget], Ministry of Finance, April 2019, http://www.mof.gov.cn/zyyjsgkpt/zybmyjs/bmys/bumenyusuan/index_2.html. Little detail is provided on the 2019 budget due to "incomplete reforms". It is much higher than earlier exit-entry management budgets (e.g. $328 million of the central-level MPS budget in 2014). However, since the border management budget, now included in the NIA figure, was previously not published, it is unclear by what amount total resources for immigration management increased under the NIA.

30 In March 2023, the Foreign Experts' Bureau's mandate to "recruit foreign expertise" was moved again to the Ministry of Human Resources and Social Security.

31 "国家移民管理局2019年度公务员招考简章" [NIA 2019 recruitment guidelines], http://www.sh-immigration.gov.cn/uploadfile/201810241049792e5G.xls (accessed on September 12, 2019).

32 "Immigration service centers" are planned for areas with relatively high concentrations of foreigners.

33 国家移民管理局基本概况信息 [Basic information on the NIA], https://www.nia.gov.cn/n741430/n741506/index.html (accessed on September 12, 2019).

share a name with lower-level entities. The continuation of a mixed management arrangement for local immigration authorities is considered necessary to effective local police functioning, but also signals that the NIA's mandate for centralization of local exit-entry work is limited. Researchers and local exit-entry officials note that this outcome reflects regional and local disparities in the existing capacity and perceived need for specialized immigration work (N-O1, 11/2019; N-R14, 12/2019).

Second, it is unclear how the NIA fulfills its role as a coordinator of government-wide immigration affairs, a core task. It has set up a new coordination mechanism for visa affairs, previously primarily the domain of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, with others planned (NIA 2019a). The main difference with previous interdepartmental coordination is that the NIA will act as the leading department on most immigration-related affairs. Previous coordination mechanisms were each led by the department most involved in a policy area (N-R14, 12/2019). The NIA's relatively low bureaucratic ranking makes the transferal of coordination tasks that this organizational shift requires difficult.

Still, the NIA's stated aim to strengthen and coordinate top-down command, or to manage the "over 100,000" people working within nationwide exit-entry and border systems, as one NIA official put it, does not go unfelt. Exit-entry officials in Shanghai, with the largest number of foreigners in China an influential local player, speak of more directives coming from "above" (S-O1, 3/2019). In the border region of Guangxi, officials and other experts note tightening border management (G-O3, 5/2019). (A plan to centralize border control was among the NIA's first (internal) publications (Liu 2019).) In Beijing, an NIA-introduced information system replaced a superior local system, leading to "administrative conflict" (N-01, 11/2019).

The NIA's national-level institutionalization reflects the strong hold public security authorities maintain over the management of Chinese immigration affairs, following an unexpected top-down reform. Its relatively decentralized subnational management structure points to the continued centrality of local variation in foreigner management.

c. Discourse

More than institutional reforms, it is the NIA's name and policy language that have stood out. Since its establishment, the Chinese government has started to use the term 移民 (*yimin*) to refer to international 'immigration' (or 'immigrant(s)', depending on the context). Prior to April 2018 the term had only appeared several times in policy text.[34] Now it is a key term in NIA statements: the agency will improve "immigration service" and build a "efficient, transparent, humane and open immigration management

34 First in the 2016 "Opinions on strengthening service and management for foreigners' permanent residence" （关于加强外国人永久居留服务管理的意见）See State Council (2016).

environment" (MPS 2019). A national immigration service center will explore services to boost "social integration" – another newly popularized term – for "incoming immigrant settlers."[35] Legal documents continue to refer to "foreigners" rather than "immigrants," but "移民" is increasingly added on to other terms, replacing previously common combinations like "foreigner management". In daily referral to the NIA, the "national immigration management agency" to which its Chinese name literally translates usually goes by a simple 移民局 (*yiminju* immigration agency).

Despite its frequent use, '移民' remains undefined, and appears in no existing law on foreigner management. While experts have long used it, one reason it was not included in the 2012 exit-entry management law were its previous usage conventions (Zhang 2010). Rather than referring to international migrants, in China the term was more common in academic discourse on internal migration and in state discourse on Chinese citizens displaced by state projects requiring large-scale relocations like the Three Gorges Dam (Zhang 2010). Local government "immigration bureaus" in charge of relocation affairs still exist throughout the country.[36] In the search results of Chinese web search engine Baidu, the word is more likely to occur in the context of relocated Chinese citizens (e.g. 水库移民) and emigration (e.g. 移民海外) than as a term for foreigners in China.[37]

This context makes the discursive shift the NIA has introduced all the more significant. As NIA official Shen Yibo put it at a 2018 conference on immigration law: using 移民 in the context of international immigration is a new 提法 or set formulation in official discourse. According to Shen, new term meant that the Chinese government now acknowledges the country is a "destination country" (目的国) for foreign migrants. However, this did not mean the government considers China an "immigration country" (移民国家).[38] The distinction, recurring throughout my interviews, shows the continued sensitivity of the term 'immigration' and especially the 'immigration country' label. Officials and experts routinely contrast China with Western immigrant-receiving countries with large migrant populations. Including 'immigration' in the NIA's name, they note, puts China's approach to immigration more in line with international practice and legitimizes efforts to develop an immigration law, which would require a definition of the term that fits the Chinese context.

---

35 "国家移民管理局启动移民事务服务中心筹建工作" [NIA starts preparation work for immigration affairs service center], *Xinhua*, January 24, 2019, http://www.xinhuanet.com/politics/2019-01/24/c_1124038981.htm

36 For an example, see the website of the Nanyang city immigration office (南阳市移民局): http://ymj.nanyang.gov.cn/ (accessed on December 15, 2019).

37 Baidu.com (accessed on December 12, 2019).

38 "The 2018 Conference on Global Talent Mobility, Migration, and Migration Law 2018," Center for China and Globalization, June 9, 2018.

A product of political reform in the Xi era, the NIA sounds more proactive and political than previous immigration authorities (e.g. Yang 2012). In a January 2019 speech, MPS minister Zhao Kezhi speaks of the NIA as a "beautiful name card" and calls for policy thinktanks to produce immigration management theory and policy research that fits Chinese socialism. The NIA's mission is to explore a "new path for immigration management with Chinese characteristics" (MPS 2019). An NIA spokesperson emphasized the agency's role boosting the country's "big power image" by sharing information and cooperating internationally.[39]

The agency's online self-presentation matches this new tone. Since early 2019, the NIA publishes daily articles and messages on its social media accounts. These Chinese-language posts range from news on new policies and official responses to immigration-related public controversy to cartoons on how to stay on the right side of the law ("A foreign friend visiting?")[40] and music videos produced by border control stations. When a foreign employee of the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences was fired over racist remarks, the NIA wrote on Weibo that "mutual respect" is the precondition of China's open borders.[41] Articles emphasize the agency's "holy task" to protect the border and select the right migrants ("bringing in talent, kicking out trash"), while also noting the "normalcy" of migration in an era of globalization.[42] A video published on the occasion of the NIA's first "birthday" ends a summary of exit-entry policies stating that "I am still very young, I am working hard on my service, although I am not perfect yet."[43] The alternating playful and patriotic tone is typical of the way the Chinese government is adapting government messaging to social media (Repnikova and Fang 2018), a strategy that for immigration policy forms a marked difference with the regularly outdated websites of the exit-entry apparatus.

d. Policy agenda

Reflecting its merge of exit-entry and border authorities, NIA policy statements so far emphasize border security, selecting and serving the foreign migrants China needs, and building new immigration management systems and mechanisms befitting the 'new era' (MPS 2019; NIA 2020). An overview of 70 years immigration management

---

39 "用心擦亮"国门名片" [Carefully polishing 'the national gateway's name card'], 经济日报, May 15, 2018, http://www.gov.cn/xinwen/2018-05/15/content_5291015.htm.

40 "家里来了位外国朋友?" [A foreign friend visiting?], NIA, July 7, 2019, https://mp.weixin.qq.com/s/QEHXcNJ8WmmscFF1j9By-g.

41 "中科院辱华外国人被责令离境，移民管理局的留言亮了！" [CASS foreigner who insulted China is expelled – NIA offers excellent response!], *Beijing Daily*, November 8, 2019, https://news.sina.com.cn/o/2019-11-08/doc-iicezzrr8193513.shtml.

42 "国家安全的第一道防线上，2019年将发生这些大事！" [At the frontline of national security, these big things will happen in 2019], 长安君, January 26, 2019, https://mp.weixin.qq.com/s/dk594QBtZITbobD_9QZItw.

43 "这是我一年来的成绩单，请查收!" [This is my report card for this year, have a look!], NIA, April 13, 2019, https://mp.weixin.qq.com/s/-ZPmJ_XWaxe32seEb2Bt_g.

published at the occasion of the PRC's 2019 anniversary puts the agency in the historical context of protecting China's sovereignty against foreign threat. It notes that in addition to "traditional" issues of safety and rights, its agenda now includes promoting development and integration, and deepening rule-based governance (NIA 2019a). Goals become most concrete on the issue of legal reform, which should include revising and integrating "over 130" relevant laws and regulations (NIA 2019a).

Policy reforms have been focused in traditional exit-entry policy areas, that target both foreign and Chinese citizens. The NIA's first annual policy review emphasizes improvements in exit-entry services for mainland Chinese citizens include shorter lines at customs, more online services and nationwide passport application (NIA 2019a). In 2019, policies maintaining "political and border security" received more emphasis (NIA 2020), including increases in the detention and deportation of illegal foreign residents. Another area of emphasis has been the national integration of information technology systems, in 2016 still considered a major bottleneck within exit-entry management (Bai 2019). Databases for foreigners, such as the temporary residence registration system for foreign nationals (searchable nationwide since 2018), have also been upgraded (G-O3, 5/2019). Media reports also highlight border searches and detentions of non-PRC nationals at border crossings.[44]

The NIA's commitment to a broader immigration agenda has been most visible in a range of policies relaxing visa requirements and expanding services for highly skilled foreign nationals. This included the country's first "immigration service center" opening in Shanghai in September 2019, and the introduction of a salary threshold to qualify for multi-year of permanent residency. While local exit-entry and human resources officials note the increased importance of foreign management and talent attraction to their work evaluations, an on-going trend to which NIA oversight contributes, local discretion on how proactively these measures are implemented remain significant (Speelman 2019). The NIA's first foreigner-related legal proposal, new regulations for foreign permanent residency opening up the status to a larger pool of long-term foreign residents, was released for public comment in February 2020. Following a critical public response to the draft regulations, the agency noted that worries about a rapid increase in immigration would be considered in a revised draft.[45]

---

44 e.g. Hilary Osborne, and Sam Cutler, "Chinese border guards put secret surveillance app on tourists' phones," The Guardian, July 2, 2019, https://www.theguardian.com/world/2019/jul/02/chinese-border-guards-surveillance-app-tourists-phones; Simon Cheng, "For the Record: An Enemy of the State," November 20, 2019, https://www.facebook.com/notes/cheng-man-kit/for-the-record-an-enemy-of-the-state/2490959950941845/

45 "两部门:对外国人永久居留管理条例将广泛听取认真吸收公众意见" [Two departments: Public input on the draft regulations on foreigners' permanent residency management will be widely heard and actively considered], 新华, March 7, 2020. http://www.xinhuanet.com/2020-03/07/c_1125676901.htm.

Finally, the NIA has started to participate in international migration activities, previously primarily the domain of the MFA. One NIA official enthusiastically shared their experience joining the Chinese diplomatic delegation that signed the 2018 UN Migration Pact summit in Marrakesh, a mission that experts say illustrates growing Chinese interest in international migration cooperation (N-O2, 5/2019; N-R2, 2/2019). Chinese diplomats have said the new global pact will influence the country's future immigration agenda (Zhang and Geiger 2020: 163). While research of international immigration cooperation on China's policy development has just started (Zhang and Geiger 2020: 160), state discourse on the inevitability of engaging in global immigration governance and the NIA's policy emphasis on border security and market-led talent migration[46] line up with trends in globally dominant discourse on migration management (Pécoud 2020: 15).

5. Evaluating the NIA: "Overdue" and "controversial"

Most China's immigration experts operate within a shared reform-minded framework. All agree that China is transitioning from primarily being an immigrant-sending country to also being an immigrant destination (a view that became official with the establishment of the NIA), and that the state has not yet adjusted to this new role. Part of a small and interconnected base of specialists, their evaluations of the NIA provide insight into what is at stake for Chinese immigration reforms following its establishment.

The NIA's arrival is seen as progress by experts working both in and outside the state system. As a dedicated institution adopting an updated discourse, the NIA brings China's approach to immigration more in line with international standards. Its arrival raises the need for an integrated management system to a "state-level" issue that can spur reforms despite the current lack of an immigration law or long-term strategy.[47] However, many express disappointment that the NIA was placed under the MPS, rather than directly under the State Council. In a common response, police academy professors Ye and Song suggest this is temporary and that the agency should eventually become independent to work effectively (2019).

Researchers from various backgrounds note that structural reform of central-local relations within the exit-entry administration has once again been shelved. They say this reflects both different institutional interests between levels of government, and different needs between regions with different types and quantities of foreign migrants. As the delay in integration with other departments shows, existing difficulties with coordinating

---

46 "国家安全的第一道防线上, 2019年将发生这些大事！" [At the frontline of national security, these big things will happen in 2019], 长安君, January 26, 2019, https://mp.weixin.qq.com/s/dk594QBtZITbobD_9QZItw.

47 Niu Jicheng 牛继承, "从我们不熟悉的"永久居留权"谈起" [Discussing the unfamiliar 'right to permanent residency'], *MigrationView*, March 1, 2020, https://mp.weixin.qq.com/s/rptXLXhHy6f9Np0uzLmkYQ.

different government agendas will persist in the absence of a supra-departmental leadership mechanism (such as a leadership small group) (N-R14, 12/2019, email). Zhang et al (2019) note that it would aid immigration reforms if services for foreign nationals were institutionally separated from Chinese citizens' passport and exit-entry services. Fitting with the findings in this analysis on the NIA's policy agenda so far, they argue that in the past decades, exit-entry management for Chinese nationals in has often been prioritized over foreigner exit-entry management ('重中管，轻外管'), due to the numerical size of the Chinese population requiring exit-entry services, as well as the relative political sensitivity and complexity of immigration work. However, while the current reforms "signal" a rebalancing towards immigration reform, it is unclear if these longstanding practices, which extend to resource allocation, will be changed.

The NIA's lack of a legal mandate also makes taking up its roles more difficult, as its responsibilities, or even the term 'immigration,' are currently not mentioned in any law.[48] Updating the legal framework for immigration is therefore urgent, but also the NIA's "biggest challenge" (N-R5, 11/2019). It requires tackling the issue of defining China's stance on incoming migration, an issue that would have would have "long-term impact" (Shi 2019). As law specialists Liu Guofu and Weng Li, both among the first to study China's immigration law, write in a co-authored article: despite the NIA's establishment and China's signing of the UN Global Compact for Migration, "relevant authorities have not yet established a concept of international immigration" and mix terms like 'foreigner' and 'immigrant' and 'exit-entry management' and 'immigration management' without defining them (2019: 5).

While more liberal experts draw on international experience to argue China is missing out on globalization benefits,[49] critics of the current reform direction are less visible in the public sphere, making their views harder to access (N-R14, 12/2019, email). But it is clear that the NIA's establishment has led some to emphasize the sensitivity of foreign migration, both within the bureaucracy and among the general public. Some consider the term 'immigration' too confusing in the Chinese context, especially given that it cannot necessarily capture the Chinese state's position on mobility to and from HK, Macao and Taiwan (e.g. Zhang et al 2019). Others point to European and American immigration controversy to argue for caution. Demography expert Huang Wenzheng

---

48 Following the publication of this chapter, this has changed with the adoption of the Land Borders Law (陆地国界法) and the Anti-Organized Crime Law (反有组织犯罪法) in 2021, both of which reference 'immigration management institutions.' A revision of the Exit-Entry law is still in progress. See also Zhang Baoping 张保平, "移民管理机构已入法，移民法治建设需提速" [The immigration management institutions are now codified in law, efforts to build a legal immigration framework should now speed up], 边海境界, April 8, 2022, https://mp.weixin.qq.com/s/AlDqXPqR1aIzzcWe2mTiAw

49 E.g. Wang Huiyao王辉耀, "技术驱动全球化竞争中的中国应对" (China's response to technology-propelled global competition), 北京青年报, April 7, 2019, http://www.chinanews.com/gn/2019/04-07/8802013.shtml.

suggests deleting the term 'immigration' in the NIA's name to appease critics,[50] while Mei Xinyu, a popular analyst affiliated with the Ministry of Commerce, writes that the NIA should avoid giving the impression that it encourages immigration.[51] The context of China's recent history of controlling its domestic population size adds complexity to any significant liberalization of immigration (Li 2011: 323).

In the short term, some advise strengthening public education and more guiding of immigration-related public discourse to prepare society for immigration reform without unnecessarily "problematizing" them (e.g. Zhang 2019; Liu and Weng 2019: 6). Experts, especially those based at institutions with MPS ties, note the opportunity for developing a "Chinese" approach to immigration, with Chinese "immigrant introduction values" (Liang 2019). NIA officials have announced their interest in more expert input (e.g. Ge *et al.* 2019). In a first for national exit-entry authorities, the agency commissioned a detailed reform strategy from thinktank CCG, which explicitly aims to further China's global integration. Several new or expanded research institutes also explicitly focus on international mobility into China, advertising their policy relevance and ability to "localize" international experience.[52] But while experts appreciate how NIA is stimulating debate, for now the absence of a long-term strategy which might kickstart legal and institutional reform is considered a key weakness. As one long-time legal researcher put it: "it was an opportunity without a plan" (N-R4, 4/2019).

6. Conclusion: The significance of the NIA for China's immigration reform

The case of the NIA shows how international migration is rising on the policy agenda of the Chinese government, which has started to view incoming migration in the context of its overall rise and global profile. Rather than seeing immigration as an inherently sensitive policy area, an attitude rooted in a tradition of controlling foreign influence, some parts of the bureaucracy now frame immigration issues as specific security and service challenges which expertise and experience can solve. An instrument in the execution of several Xi-era policy priorities, the NIA's establishment opens a window for a more thorough reform of China's immigration system, for which the emerging official vision is increasingly in sync with that of immigrant-receiving societies in other parts of the world: strengthened border security, more policy differentiation between wanted, tolerated and unwanted types of immigration, and concerns about how the

---

50 Huang Wenzheng 黄文政, "Closing remarks," Center for China and Globalization 2019 Conference on Global Migration and Talent Mobility, July 13, 2019.

51 Mei Xinyu 梅新育, 新组建的国家移民管理局应汲取前车之鉴 (Newly formed NIA should learn from the experience of others), 爱思想, March 18, 2018, https://cj.sina.com.cn/articles/view/1642482194/61e64a120200055x1

52 See for instance this introduction to the Guangdong University of Foreign Studies Center for International Migration Studies, established in 2016: https://gjymyj.gdufs.edu.cn/zxjj/zxjj.htm.

public receives immigration policies. However, as a top-down reform reflecting foremost a shift in national strategy, the NIA faces considerable institutional barriers, which hinders its ability to lead a conversation on a government-wide vision for immigration work.

Second, the development trajectory of the NIA provides an example of administrative reforms under president Xi Jinping, which have been ambitious but also face obstacles. The NIA displays many characteristics of reforms under Xi Jinping. Inspired by a top leadership vision to strengthen China's international position, its discourse ticks the boxes of increasing regime confidence and developing indigenous approaches to a particular policy area, in this case immigration (notably while remaining open to international expertise when useful). It could contribute to centralized command and the legal encoding of national interests, both priorities of current leadership. But during implementation, fundamental reforms are slow, with much visible effort going to improving government services and cutting red tape. Fragmentation of authority between different government departments and a risk-averse attitude within the bureaucracy under Xi contribute to this (Heilmann 2018; Teets *et al.* 2017). The national aid agency, also established during the 2018 State Council reforms, has run into similar issues.[53] The dynamics of establishing new government institutions in the Xi era can benefit from further study.

The NIA's uncertain bureaucratic clout and cautious implementation dynamics both contribute to a lag in on-the-ground effects on immigration governance. As discussed in this article, the first years of the NIA's operation show some evidence of more efficient policy implementation in priority areas and increased centralization. Its media output, targeted at Chinese nationals, is increasingly part of societal debate on foreign nationals in China. However, the new institution's policy mandate has mostly been limited to advancing already on-going governance trends, such as the increasingly restrictive immigration management for most foreigners (Cheuk 2019b: 5). How foreign migrants in China experience the NIA's arrival depends on the way domestic power dynamics, shifts in public opinion, and external trends are incorporated in future policy development and legal reform. Recent developments, from the politicization of US-China mobility to the public backlash to the NIA's legal proposal for an expanded permanent residency program, add to a climate in which security-oriented immigration reforms have more momentum than those aimed at deepening the country's economic globalization. During the COVID-19 pandemic, the NIA's "utmost priority" is epidemic control, with borders shut to a large majority of foreign nationals, suggesting other

53 Marina Rudynak, "The ins and outs of China's international development Agency", Carnegie, September 2, 2019, https://carnegieendowment.org/2019/09/03/ins-and-outs-of-china-s-international-development-agency-pub-79739.

reforms are put on hold.[54] While longstanding characteristics of Chinese immigration management such as local variation in law enforcement remain, foreign migrants are facing an increasingly standardized, tightly managed immigration system.

Both the implementation of NIA-developed policies and the influence of individual factors on their development need further study. The same goes for policy debates on the future of immigration policy, which suggest that China's immigrant-receiving status is here to stay and might be studied both alongside other aspects of China's internationalization as well as trends in immigration politics worldwide. As this preliminary analysis of the NIA hopes to have shown, China's immigration politics provide a productive lens through which to study tensions between the country's official commitment to continued 'opening up', including to foreign migrants, and the security-oriented governance model emphasizing distinctions between 'foreign' and 'Chinese' spheres under president Xi Jinping.

54 "移民管理部门要把防范境外疫情输入作为当前头等大事和最重要工作" (Immigration management authorities should take the prevention of imported cases as their utmost priority and most important work), NI*A*, April 10, 2020, https://mp.weixin.qq.com/s/lMhChyem3NeBpBI_aJF9-A.

CHAPTER 3

Skilled migrants wanted? Policy tensions in the implementation of Shanghai's 'new talent regime'

1. Introduction

At the second-to-last stop of Shanghai's subway line 13, about 45 minutes outside the city center, lies China's first immigration service center. The beige three-story building is located in Zhangjiang Science City, a national-level industrial zone tasked with trialing science and innovation policies. When the service center opened in September 2019, surrounding roads were not yet finished, and city workers were planting young trees lining them. The center, which is a collaboration between the industrial zone authorities, Shanghai's exit-entry immigration administration and a human resources company, provides services targeted at 'foreign talent'. This policy category includes high-skilled professionals – also called 'foreign top talent'— as well as foreign entrepreneurs, students and graduates. In the center, migrants can sign up for services such as Chinese language testing, enquire about private healthcare in the city, or gain information about the 'integration stations' spread out across the city. But its main function has been the processing of permanent residency (PR) applications by 'top talent', in line with a relaxation of China's stringent permanent residency rules that Shanghai pioneered since 2015. In the first years of its implementation, the number of Shanghai-based PR tripled from 2404 to 7311.[55]

As China's most international city, home to about a quarter of the country's foreign population, Shanghai is at the forefront of reforms of Chinese skilled migration policies. A state priority since the 1980s, president Xi Jinping's 2017 call to "attract

55 These figures are from the Shanghai 2019 statistical yearbook (上海统计年鉴), table 2.11 "主要年份在沪国常住人口" (Shanghai foreign resident population in key years). http://www.stats-sh.gov.cn/tjnj/nj18.htm?d1=2018tjnj/C0211.htm. More recent figures have not been published. However, according to my interviews, the number of permanent residency permit holders has since continued to grow.

talent from all under heaven and use it"[56] has given renewed urgency to the attraction and retention of skilled migrants. Its desire to retain foreign talent has led the Chinese state to explore a more comprehensive view of migrant needs. Typical of China's experimental approach to policy learning, in which some localities are authorized to gain implementation experience prior to formal legislation, Shanghai has been given a mandate to pilot skilled migration reforms, both by developing and testing new policies in its 'experimental zones' and through its early implementation of experimental national regulation (Heilmann 2018).[57] This has led to innovations like the new service center, which focus on previously largely ignored policy areas like long-term migrant settlement and migrant integration. However, despite ambitious targets, the scale and 'quality' of attracted talent have been limited, with, for instance, the number of foreign PhD-holders living in Shanghai lagging behind the national average. Researchers find Shanghai's talent attraction policies "underutilized" (Wang and Chen 2019).

This paper examines the implementation of recent skilled migration reforms in Shanghai. Focusing on the perspective of local state actors responsible for attracting and providing services to 'foreign talent', it examines the 'implementation gap,' i.e. the disparity between policies on paper and their implementation (Czaika and De Haas 2013), asking: What factors contribute to the variation in local state actors' implementation of experimental skilled immigration policies?

Since the late 1990s, when consultancy firms started to promote the concept of a global 'talent war', with states competing for skilled and especially 'high-skilled' migrants, talent attraction and retention has become a priority of immigration policy makers worldwide (Czaika 2018). Two thirds of OECD countries have now adopted high-skilled migrant attraction policies, with the BRICS and Gulf countries following suit (Cerna and Czaika 2021). This mobility of desirable migrants that benefit host economies is often portrayed as largely frictionless, with states proactive in increasing these flows. Much of the literature on talent migration focuses on issues of migrant supply, demand and retention, giving the impression of a technocratically governed migration flow largely unaffected by the politics of migration control prominent in study of other types of labor migration, from bureaucratic bargaining to managing public perceptions.

---

56 Following several variations on this phrase in the preceding years, it was included in the 19th Party Congress report: "聚天下英才而用之，加快建设人才强国"，号召"把党内和党外、国内和国外各方面优秀人才聚集到党和人民的伟大奋斗中来" (Attract talent from all under heaven and use it, speed up the construction of a nation that is strong on talent, rally all kinds of excellent talent from within and outside the party, domestically and from abroad to participate in the great struggle of the Party and the people). For the full report see http://www.gov.cn/zhuanti/19thcpc/ .

57 The China (Shanghai) Free Trade Zone (established in 2013) and the Zhangjiang national demonstration area (first established in 1992). In 2019 Shanghai was also designated a national pilot zone (先行先试区) for immigration and exit-entry management, as part of a new partnership between the city of Shanghai and the National Immigration Administration.

However, drawing on interviews and policy analysis, this article foregrounds a case of contested implementation of skilled migrant liberalization policies. It finds that, while Shanghai has in recent years built an ambitious skilled migration program *on paper*, the extent of its *implementation* has been mixed, with some policies being implemented much more proactively than others. It shows how local state actors prioritized the implementation of policies they considered in line with longstanding policy goals, such as increasing the share of so-called 'top talent', while limiting the implementation of more innovative policies on which no definitive government consensus exists, such as the goal to grow a more diverse foreign talent base. I trace this risk-averse policy implementation of skilled migrant policy to 1) a centralization of policymaking under president Xi Jinping that alters incentives for policy experimentation, and 2) an emerging (re-)politicization of immigration policy in China at a time of increased nationalism in the public sphere.

Examining the policy tensions in the differentiated implementation of skilled migration reforms in Shanghai can speak to the fields of skilled migration policymaking and Chinese (immigration) policymaking. I argue that political pressures activate policy habits that push forward low-risk process-level policy reform, while limiting more experimental policy innovation. The case shows the importance of local and national policy legacies – from state treatment of foreign professionals as symbolic resources of internationalization rather than as long-term local citizens, to an immigration bureaucracy oriented towards employers rather than migrants – in a policy area that has been considered largely uniform in its aims. Crucially, it demonstrates the importance of paying attention to the politics of a migration flow that has often been considered primarily technocratic and apolitical. It also highlights shifts in Chinese policymaking in the Xi Jinping era, in which experimental policymaking is increasingly aimed at optimizing national policy rather than breaking new policy ground, while campaign-style, performative aspects of policymaking have been reinvigorated.

2. Literature review: Attracting and retaining skilled migrants

With immigration policies worldwide increasingly focused on migrant selection, high-skilled migration emerged as the least controversial immigration flow (Weimar et al 2020, De Haas et al 2016). Internationally, high-skilled migration came to be seen as a key resource for global cities wanting to boost productivity and innovation, with minimal impact on domestic employment and low political cost (Sassen 1991, Hainmueller and Hopkins 2015). At the local level, the ability to attract and retain skilled migrants has developed into an important indicator of city and regional competitiveness (Czaika 2018).

As researchers have pointed out, the often-used categories for this type of migrant 'talent' and of 'skilled' and 'high-skilled' migrants are unstable, with definitions of who is considered 'skilled' or 'talented' changing according to local economic needs. The

terms are also problematic in reinforcing gender and racial connotations around different categories of labor (see for instance Boucher 2020). Migrant-sending countries often differentiate between returning 'talent' and other skilled migrant groups, as for these countries skilled migrant attraction has long been linked to efforts to soften the brain drain of educational and professional emigration (Cerna and Czaika 2021). In addition, in the last decades states have increasingly included foreign students into skilled migration policy frameworks, allowing study-to-work transitions to build a long-term talent base (Hawthorne 2018). In this paper I adopt these terms and categories in spite of their limitations, as part of a dialogue with the literature on migrants with higher education levels and/or working in certain in-demand and high-earning professions.

As the attraction of skilled migrants became a policy priority, the effectiveness of these measures has generated much research. Quantitative analyses show for instance that supply-driven systems like a points-based system, which selects incoming migrants based on their qualifications, are more effective in attracting and selecting high-skilled migrants compared to demand-driven systems that require an employment offer or a labor market test before entry (Czaika and Parsons 2017). Still, "hybrid systems" that combine elements of both have become the norm as high-income countries have aimed to fine-tune and increase their control over migration flows (Papademetriou et al 2008).

Other research has shown that policies have a different effect on the attraction and the retention of skilled migrants. While many migrants do not consider skilled migrant policies in their decision to first move somewhere, when it comes to the decision to settle or develop a career, post-entry rights such a path towards permanent residency or the ability for spouses to work are influential (Toma and Villares-Varela 2018, Hao et al 2016, Oishi 2012). Alongside generally limited immigration systems, migrant-sending states such as China, India and South-Korea have implemented talent programs offering financial incentives to scientists and other 'top talent', with some programs open to anyone while others explicitly target diaspora groups. However, countries encouraging return knowledge migration struggle to attract returnees back permanently, leading to new forms of 'brain circulation' and demand for more flexible migration policies and a more attractive environment for long-term settlement (Gaillaird et al 2015). More generally, the wider socio-economic environment has increasingly been considered a key factor in retaining skilled migrants, leading to states' increased focus on a wider range of policies that include attempts to improve their social integration (Czaika and De Haas 2013).

Compared to the effects of skilled migration policies on migrant flows and skill composition, implementation practices on the ground have not been studied much, especially outside high-income contexts. Existing studies show that policies like the EU-wide Blue Card for skilled migrants vary in implementation within different national policy contexts, depending on local institutional legacies, such as the political economy of the domestic labor market, and historical immigration trajectories (Cerna

2013, 2014, Massey 1999). Immigration bureaucrats can use their discretionary power to experiment with policies before their codification or delay implementation to resist a shift from long-standing policy objectives, as happened when Canada implemented the world's first 'merit-based' points system in the 1960s (Tradiofilopoulos 2012, Elrick 2022). In Japan, Oishi (2012) finds that disappointing results of actively implemented pro-skill policies were due to the deterring effect of local business practices, as well as a lack of wider integration policies. However, as a 'desirable' migration flow, 'street-level' (Lipsky 2010) implementation of skilled migration policies has gone understudied.

Overall, the research on skilled migration points to a growing tension in the global migration system: states worldwide welcome skilled migrants, investing in their retention, but also design increasingly elaborate selection systems to make sure only the most desirable come in. More recently, skilled migration has also become more politicized in some contexts, with skilled migrants in Singapore facing public backlash, leading to tightened regulation and precarity among these generally considered privileged groups (Zhan and Zhou 2020). The case of Shanghai, as a city that is experimenting with liberalizing its conservative skilled migration policy, is well-positioned to examining local state actors' motivations and barriers for implementing these globally popular policies.

3. Background: Trialing China's foreign talent attraction and immigrant employment in Shanghai

By encouraging both outward and return migration as part of its development strategy, China has become a "key player" in talent attraction worldwide (Li et al 2019). Since the early 2000s, it has invested extensively in state-led 'talent programs', aiming to attract successful returnees and other 'top talent' with financial subsidies and other support (Wang and Zweig 2006). However, while the percentage of returning migrants has increased, especially since the global financial crisis, the country has been less successful in attracting and retaining 'top talent' (Zweig et al 2020). For instance, about 90 percent of Chinese emigrants obtaining U.S. PhD degrees in the natural sciences between 2000 and 2015 remained in the United States (Corrigan et al 2022). China's 'top talent shortage' is seen as an obstacle to its economic transition to a global innovation economy.

In response, experts have advocated reforms of China's skilled migrant attraction for decades. The need for dedicated 'skilled migration' legislation has been mentioned in government plans since 2002, but progress has been slow (Liu 2012). There has been growing criticism of the 'talent attraction programs', participants of which have been treated as a separate labor migration category receiving customized support, ranging from large subsidies to dedicated file managers. Compared to the rest of China's migration framework, in which issues of social integration and long-term settlement have been largely absent, the talent programs could be considered the most

"progressive" part of the immigration system (Liu 2018). However, the expensive programs, in which participants are largely hand-picked by national or local authorities, have been considered too opaque and not suited to the selection of skilled migrants that China needs (Liu 2018). At the same time, requirements for other working foreigners in the country, who generally require a job offer before entry, as well as a university degree and two years of relevant work experience, are seen as too stringent.

Since the 2016 Chinese Communist Party strategy on reforming talent work, talent attraction reform has gained momentum. While making clear that the Party wants to remain in charge (党管人才), the strategy recognizes the need to 'professionalize' talent attraction, including the relevant employment and residency policies (CPC 2016a). This reform direction was consolidated by the 2018 establishment of the National Immigration Administration, which was supposed to coordinate and speed up skilled migration reforms (see Chapter 1). Another important development was the streamlining of China's work permit system in 2017, introducing a scheme that covers all working foreigners with the aim of improving talent attraction (Liu and Ahl 2018). The system divides labor migrants into three categories: 'A' ('high end foreign talent', encouraged), 'B' ('regular foreign talent', controlled according to market needs), and 'C' (other foreign workers, restricted). The revised work permit system integrated 'talent programs' and other foreign experts, which are part of the 'A'-category.

Starting with the 2016 talent strategy, national authorities have recently started to use the term 'integration', reversing a longstanding trend of not commenting on foreigners' long-term settlement in the country (CPC 2016b). The National Immigration Administration has adopted it as well. In January 2019, it announced a national immigration service center which would explore social integration services, while in June 2019 it announced the establishment of immigration service centers and stations in areas with higher concentrations of foreigners, providing "social integration services such as policy, travel, legal, language and cultural information" to "resident foreigners" (常住外国人).[58] But beyond these initial policy announcements, the concrete terms and aims of such direct immigrant policies, which do not yet appear in any legislation, have been left undefined in this experimental phase of implementation.

In Shanghai, policymakers have played an active role in shaping these reforms. Shanghai's experience with talent attraction has informed national policy strategy, with current policy innovations long mentioned in Shanghai policy planning documents. As the space for national reform grew after 2015, Shanghai has also been proactive in trialing new policies. Attracting foreign talent is considered important to both Shanghai's

58 "国家移民管理局启动移民事务服务中心筹建工作" [NIA starts work on an immigration service center]. *Xinhua*, January 24, 2019. http://www.xinhuanet.com/politics/2019-01/24/c_1124038981.htm

domestic and international competitiveness.[59] Officials call developing the right mix of human capital the "core" of Shanghai's effort to become a 'global innovation center' and an 'excellent global city'.[60] Domestically, the city prides itself in outranking other Chinese cities on most measures of internationalization. It claims a uniquely tolerant immigration culture (海纳百川), based in its 20th century immigration history, when the percentage of foreign residents was higher than it is now. However, compared to the global cities it aims to compete with, Shanghai's foreign population of around 200,000 is still very small, making up less than one percent of its total population. Furthermore, Shanghai's foreign labor population stopped growing after 2015, when the city counted over 91,000 long-term foreign residents on an employment visa.[61] Local officials emphasize that the scale and "quality" of talent attracted remain limited (Zhang 2019, Wang and Chen 2019), raising the question of why this is the case. Returning and foreign migrants also face an increasingly educated and competitive domestic labor supply, in which foreign credentials are less valued than they used to be (e.g. Farrer 2019).

In this context, local state actors' attitudes towards skilled migrant attraction are evolving. Aimed at improving talent attraction at various levels of government, Shanghai's 'new talent policy regime' (人才新政), as it was dubbed, consists of a sprawling number of policy plans, strategies, and announcements developed by many different actors. While widely publicized, not all of these announced policies materialized, and as this paper shows, even among adopted policies, implementation varied. Rather than giving a comprehensive overview, I focus on three prominent policy goals in this set of reforms that aim to expand target groups and to improve settlement conditions for skilled foreign migrants: 1) the expansion of 'top talent' policy categories and settlement options for this group, 2) the opening up of 'study-to-work' transitions and work visas for young and entrepreneurial talent, and 3) the development of migrant integration policy. Table 3.1 provides an overview of the main policies that were trialed in Shanghai and later adopted by national immigration authorities.

---

59 A 2017-2035 municipal urban development strategy (上海市城市总体规划（2017-2035年）) sets a target of 800,000 foreign residents by 2035, although this figure has not been widely advertised.

60 "上海出台人才高峰工程行动方案" [Shanghai puts out 'Peak Talent' action plan], March 27, 2018. http://www.shanghai.gov.cn/nw2/nw2314/nw2315/nw4411/u21aw1297861.html

61 上海统计年鉴2019年.

Table 3.1: Selected 'new foreign talent regime' policy measures (NIA 2019b)

Permanent residency and 'top talent' visa and permits	1. Permanent residency for high-level talent or urgently needed foreigners, as recommended by relevant zone, provincial or national authorities
	2. Permanent residency for tax-paying employed foreigners who have worked in China for four years, earning salaries 6 times the average local wage
	3. Permanent residency for naturalized former Chinese citizens who hold PhD degrees, or have worked in a national zone for four years
	4. Visa on arrival and five-year multiple-entry visa for selected top talent, technical talent and invited foreign experts
	5. Maximum five-year residence permit for top foreign talent and their entrepreneurial team members working in key sectors
	6. Part-time work annotation for foreign top talent working at key universities, research institutes or companies
'Young talent' visa and permits	7. Residence permits (2-5 years) for excellent foreign university students holding degrees from key Chinese universities (BA and up) engaging in entrepreneurial activities
	8. Residence permits (up to 2 years) for foreign graduates from foreign key universities engaging in entrepreneurial activities
	9. Visa (1 year) for foreign interns invited by well-known Chinese companies
Integration	10. Building immigration affairs service centers (or stations) in areas with higher concentrations of foreigners

4. Methodology

The case of Shanghai can be considered an extreme case within China's immigration system. Its strong mandate to attract more foreign talent as a designated 'global innovation center', compared to most of the rest of the country, can yield more information into the policy tensions that lead to limited implementation. Given the difficulties of long-term participant observation of Chinese government actors, semi-structured interviews, in which officials articulate their attitudes towards policy changes and discuss their daily realities, offer a way into studying policy implementation or "policy making in action" beyond document research (Heilmann 2018: 31).

In this vein, the paper is based on field research that took place between December 2018 and October 2020. The fieldwork consisted of semi-structured interviews with 13 Shanghai-based officials responsible for making and/or implementing employment and residence policies for foreign professionals. A letter of introduction stating my status as a visiting PhD researcher at a Chinese institution helped me gain trust, in several cases further aided by a personal introduction. These exchanges, in which I asked open questions about officials' work responsibilities, policy priorities, successes and challenges, lasted between thirty minutes and three hours, with most lasting about an hour. While their job descriptions varied from heads of department to case and desk workers, most interviewed government workers were directly involved with implementation decisions on a daily basis. They were based at the municipal Exit-Entry

bureau, district-level Human Resources and Social Security, Foreign Experts bureau and Talent Attraction bureaus, community-level government service buildings, or the SEZ-based service centers including the Talent Haven in the Free Trade Zone, and the Immigration Service Center in the Zhangjiang area.

In addition, I interviewed 14 local experts of Shanghai's foreign talent attraction policies, including policy researchers involved in advising state authorities on talent attraction and experienced immigration intermediaries, and attended 11 policy information events, most of which were state-organized or supported. At these events, I gained further insight into state messaging, while also interacting with dozens of foreign nationals in attendance about their experiences in the Shanghai skilled migration policy environment. Finally, I tracked and analyzed key policy documents and official discourse on foreign talent attraction and skilled migration between 2015-2021, both at the national and the Shanghai level. These included over 50 policy strategies and regulations at the district, city and special economic zone level, and related promotional materials. I collected these online, on government portals and state media websites, and through my fieldwork, and analyzed them to map out Shanghai's talent policy reform landscape, with special attention to discrepancies between policy planning and implementation.

5. Case: Managing political risk in the implementation of skilled migration reforms

Shanghai's 'new talent regime' builds on decades of national and local talent attraction policy, accompanied by cautious immigration reforms. In this section, I examine three areas of policy reform: high-skilled talent attraction, young talent retention, and migrant integration. All three areas are characterized by risk-averse, limited implementation, although the precise dynamics vary from bureaucratic caution and pathway dependency to fear of controversy and a lack of vision.

a. Growing the high-skilled foreign talent base

Under the 'new talent regime', Shanghai policy officials had a clear incentive to increase the share of 'top talent' in the city's immigrant population. They were proactive in streamlining policy processes and shifting the focus of talent selection from political to market-based criteria. This resulted in significant policy innovation, especially at the process-level, with officials working in a more transparent manner and with improved interdepartmental coordination. However, the focus on increasing participant numbers in 'top talent' categories made officials less interested in addressing resulting policy tensions, such as the impact of the new work permit system on other skilled migrants. Policymakers also did not prioritize addressing recognized bottlenecks in 'top talent' attraction, such as a traditional focus on state-company relations, rather than providing policy information to migrants directly.

Previously, management of 'top talent' had been little regulated in written policies, with a significant role for political discretion. As part of the reforms the talent selection process became more 'policy-based' (政策化), i.e. with more transparent and unified policy categories and selection criteria. Officials appreciated the more detailed new work permit categories, in which the talent programs made up just one of the categories for high-skilled foreign talent. Most popular were the 'market-oriented' options, for which the applicant should earn at least six times the average local salary.[62] Someone who meets these salary requirements for four years is qualified to apply for permanent residency through their employer. Multiple officials noted that this had been the biggest category of 'top talent' since the introduction of the policies in late 2016 and 2018, respectively. As one human resources official based in the Zhangjiang zone in Pudong put it: "This is the biggest change. Previously we did not value high-income foreigners very much. Now the companies' selection is more important" (S-O2, 3/2019). By comparison, participants in national or Shanghai talent plans, previously the main group of foreigners receiving preferential treatment, now made up a smaller portion of 'top talent'.

Policy officials described growing 'top talent' groups as their top priority, and proudly cited the increased numbers of A-category work permit holders and permanent residency applicants in their zone or district, or the improved processing times. The increased urgency around improving foreign talent attraction had also improved interdepartmental cooperation. Officials from the foreign experts bureau and the human resources department in Changning and Pudong noted that cooperation with their local exit-entry department had gotten "closer," and that previous frustrations around such cooperation had decreased (S-O2, 3/2019; S-O9, 1/2019). Several 'single-window' counters for processing migrant work permits were now jointly operated by the Human Resources and Social Security and Exit-Entry bureaus. Visa agents noted that the increase in transparency of policy processes had been a major shift. Policies were applied more uniform across Shanghai, application requirements were clearer, and personal connections or under-the-table transactions now hardly played a role (S-I3, 6/2020; S-I4, 6/2020)). For permanent residency applications, especially, there had previously been a lot of unstated requirements, such as company financial statements.

The new focus on "optimizing the make-up" (优化结构) of foreign professionals had wider consequences for the overall skilled migrant population. Work permit application requirements for B-category applicants had gotten stricter after 2017, requiring more original and notarized application materials. Unlike 'high-end talents,' who were encouraged without an upper limit, these 'professional talents' should only be admitted "according to market needs," a criterion that was increasingly selectively applied (SAFEA

62 "Shanghai sets the requirement higher than this national baseline at 600.000RMB annually before tax and 120.000RMB a year in taxes.

2017). Foreigners, agents and officials all noted an increase in application rejections, due to the more stringent qualification checks. As one official from a policy research unit at the Exit-Entry Bureau noted, there was a risk that only the needs of 'top talent' would be considered in policymaking, while they should in fact "serve all foreigners" working in Shanghai (S-O1, 3/2019). However, most officials noted that increasing the number of 'top talents' was more important, arguing that A-category requirements could be further relaxed. The new point-based application option, in which a score determined your category based on criteria including age, education level and income level, was hardly used because of its high threshold for A-category status.

According to policymakers I spoke to, the narrow focus on growing applicant numbers led to some contention on how to best do this, and to what extent existing modes of migration management needed to be reformed. Traditionally, talent attraction officials had mainly interacted with companies hiring foreigners. As key state partners, these companies might receive customized policy information or leniency as needed (S-O7, 12/2018). Indeed, this was still the case, as I witnessed in the training sessions for company human resources representatives at the talent hubs. But this focus on the employer no longer seemed sufficient now that some new policies, such as the path towards permanent residency for foreign PhD-holders with a Chinese background, were aimed at individual migrants. As one official put it: "How do we let people know about these policies, and how do they know which categories there are?" (S-O8, 12/2018) Some officials noted the growing need for direct outreach to migrants, for instance in the form of accessible websites and translations of the detailed policy requirements and procedures. Now, it was difficult to find reliable policy information, some of which differed per district, and much of which was not available in foreign languages. However, others did not think it was their task to inform the foreign public, noting that they were not in control of the effect of the policies and the government's powers are limited. Despite their proactive attitudes towards implementing the policy relaxations targeting high-skilled talent attraction, officials thus remained wary of more substantial policy innovation at the implementation level.

b. Experimenting with young and part-time talent

In addition to boosting the share of foreign 'top talent', the 'new talent regime' also expands the target groups of talent attraction policy, hereby reversing longstanding work permit policy. Chinese companies can now hire "excellent university graduates" from Chinese or foreign institutions, in a departure from the usual requirement of two years of work experience.[63] Other policies allow students and graduates to start

63 National regulations for hiring recent graduates with MA degrees came out in 2017, published by the Ministry of Education, while the Shanghai 2017-2021 'Juying jihua' talent plan also allows BA-graduates to be hired in Shanghai's special zones.

businesses (while part-time work has generally not been allowed on a student visa), and permit part-time work for scientists working in the special zones, breaking with the rule that migrants can only work for the employer sponsoring their work permit. For this group of innovative policies, the implementation was markedly different from that of the high-skilled migrant policies. While on paper, Shanghai policy makers now have several policy routes through which to grant excellent university graduates work permits, both at the BA and MA level, in practice officials have adopted a risk-averse approach, maintaining a low level of implementation while they waited for higher levels to evaluate the trial.

Considering recent graduates 'foreign talent', especially, was controversial. Some officials pointed out that allowing graduates directly onto the job market ran counter to legislation requiring foreign candidates to have urgently needed skills, and the overall policy direction of favoring highly skilled professionals and limiting others. To signal their caution, officials sometimes distanced themselves from this policy by noting that it was not their idea but came from the national or municipal level. One human resources official called the policies a "contradiction" which they had long debated, and noted the tight labor market for domestic graduates. Others were less negative, noting that the policy should be seen as a "breakthrough" in thinking about foreign employment and that the small number of qualified foreign graduates were hardly able to influence China's domestic employment situation. An official at a newly opened Overseas Talent Center in Pudong considered the policy's merits:

> *"The C-category… is meant for short-term and temporary labor. It is not completely open, because employment here is not especially strong, and it might cause conflict. So we only open it for graduates… it sounds reasonable when you think about it. International students study here and gain an understanding of Chinese culture. To send them back right away does not sound very reasonable." (S-O8, 12/2018)* [64]

Opening up part-time work for foreigners was similarly controversial. For both policies, officials believed that they could be used by undesirable applicants, who would cause problems (S-O2, 3/2019; S-R1, 4/2019). This situation resulted in a paradox: officials would say that the goal of implementing these experimental policies was to better understand demand for them, but also concede that they were not promoting the policies, and limiting implementation. For instance, only some candidates from prestigious Shanghai universities, such as the NYU-Shanghai branch, would be considered. These rare approved cases would be promoted on

64 As these students without work experience do not meet the requirements of the A or B categories, they fall in the C-category of the work permit system for those who "fulfill a need in the domestic labor market, and meet national policy requirements" but do not fit anywhere else.

state media, in articles that emphasized Shanghai's increasingly ideal employment climate for foreign graduates from Shanghai universities, without mentioning the application restrictions.[65]

Agents and individual migrants who wanted to make use of the policies ran into these limited implementation dynamics. Officials at the counter were often insufficiently informed about the policies, or referred to unpublished application restrictions. One European student who wanted to make use of a 2018 policy trial to legally set up a business in the Free Trade Zone while studying at a Shanghai-based university had to show a clip from state media to human resources officials at the FTZ talent service center to demonstrate that the policy existed. He ended up as their first successful applicant, receiving an "entrepreneur" annotation on his residence permit, but not without bending the rules for the required documentation. "It is very difficult to be completely legal", he found (S-M2, 3/2019).

While the departments issuing work and residence permits to working migrants in China had long focused on high-skilled migration, now they were also encouraging new types of foreign employment. The inclusion of foreign students, typically managed by educational authorities, in the skilled labor market was considered especially controversial. For these policies, street-level officials saw more potential problems than advantages in actively implementing them. Without a clear consensus, even Shanghai officials could be "very conservative" (S-I3, 6/2020). At the same time, as these policies had become part of national skilled migrant policy discourse, they did not completely reject them, instead implementing them at a low level. As one policy researcher put it: "It is always better to develop a policy than to evaluate it. Who wants to say things are not working? Saying a policy is bad is not a very good thing" (S-R2, 3/2019).

c. Defining immigrant integration

A third policy area that has undergone changes in Shanghai is migrant 'integration'. Shanghai played a significant role in the agenda-setting of and subsequent experimentation with integration policy. Debate on this issue started in 2016, when one researcher's policy proposal to establish 'social integration service stations' aimed at foreign migrants was picked up by the Shanghai municipal government, before being integrated into national policy discourse (S-R1, 8/2020). This culminated in Shanghai hosting China's first immigration service center in Zhangjiang, with six "integration stations" spread out throughout Shanghai. However, in the absence of a wider government vision or legal basis for immigrant integration, Shanghai officials were unclear about the scope and target group of current integration policy, resulting in

65 "Global talents gravitate to Pudong," China Radio International, May 30, 2019, https://chinaplus.cri.cn/chinaplus/mychina/life/35/20190530/296011.html; "Shanghai witnesses new heights of Sino-US cooperation," Xinhua, November 8, 2017, https://www.shine.cn/news/metro/1711086086/.

limited and performative implementation. For these integration measures, like for the earlier discussed skilled migrant policies, implementation focused on an elite migrant group with which Chinese immigrant officials are most familiar.

'Integration work,' as officials also called it, was most developed at the Gubei integration station, located in an affluent area of Shanghai with a history of immigration. Here, in this officially recognized 'international community', officials felt comfortable with the concept, which built on their experience in dealing with local immigrants that dated back to the 1990s. Since 2018, this work had been rebranded as 'integration services' and expanded to include more practical and policy-related topics. Previously focused on organizing cultural events, they now provided bilingual information sessions on topics from how to apply for a Chinese driver's license or start a business. A new counter in their community service center could process foreigners' work and residence permits. The Expatriate Centre (TEC), a newly founded state-funded social organization run by migrants, allowed for more migrant-centered and "free" service provision, for instance in organizing events around religious holidays on which Party members faced restrictions (S-O13, 8/2020). Activities were not limited to any migrant group, but in practice most attendees were high-earning local residents. Gubei officials emphasized that foreign residents were a permanent feature of their community, and community regulations included clauses on 'social integration' specifying residents' rights and duties.[66] "When they leave and return, they are coming home," as one Gubei-based public official put it (S-O10, 9/2019).

The Zhangjiang immigration service center also targeted its integration services at a limited group of foreign talent. As a staff member explained, the center's integration services referred to the help and information they provided to top talent. "That is what integration policy means right now" (S-O3, 6/2020). The company had also developed a website and other materials with information about Chinese culture and history, from food culture to information on Shanghai's history. However, as an estimated 70% of permanent residency applicants visiting the center were former Chinese nationals, this information was admittedly "not so relevant" for them (S-O3, 6/2020). This mismatch reflected a wider issue in the targeting of integration services: the center would invite immigrant representatives to attend policy announcements with a focus on candidates that "looked foreign" rather than Chinese, despite a majority of Shanghai-based 'top foreign talent' having a Chinese and/or East Asian background.

The lack of a broader vision for migrant integration beyond these initial initiatives was leading to a "bottleneck" in migrant integration. As a researcher advising local authorities put it: the goal of these services was unclear as no one knew "what

66 For instance, Article 10 of the regulations notes that differences in nationality, skin color and religion should never lead to unequal treatment, but that the celebration of immigrant holidays should not disturb the daily life of other residents.

successful integration would look like" (S-R1, 8/2020). Rather than addressing this issue, local authorities focused on putting on regular events announcing new services or policy procedures, which would be framed as integration work and widely covered in Shanghai state media. At one such event at the Gubei service center in October 2020, announcing expanded online application options for skilled foreign talent, the audience largely consisted of elderly local residents, invited to attend by their neighborhood committee to fill up the venue.

A further complicating factor for the development of integration policies was the emerging politicization of skilled migration. A public backlash against proposed permanent residency regulations in February 2020 had led to widespread caution within the bureaucratic system. A 2020 survey evaluating migrant response to Shanghai's social integration services was hardly promoted for fear of attracting negative attention from the public (S-O3, 6/2020) (see also Chapter 6). Even prior to this controversy, some talent attraction officials expressed discomfort with the term 'integration services' itself. They associated it with the preferential policies for foreign talent, or with a tendency within Chinese society to treat foreigners "better than national citizens" (S-O6, 12/2018; S-O9, 1/2019). They stressed the larger trend of a fading distinction between foreign professionals and Shanghai's significant domestic talent base. In this context, any new migrant-specific policies should avoid being "unfair" or "controversial".

Shanghai authorities had started a process, new to Chinese immigration management, in which "the issue of integration is formulated as a problem" for which concrete policy measures are designed and implemented (Penninx and Garces 2016). Their experimentation had led to new discourses, services and institutional arrangements, such as the establishment of immigrant service centers and social organizations. To avoid attracting unwanted attention from superiors or the public, they interpreted the new policy mandate within the city's legacy of service provision to selected elite migrants. However, underlying questions of who should be integrated into Chinese society, and what such integration should look like, remained largely unaddressed.

6. Discussion

Based on the analysis of implementation dynamics across three key policy areas, this section teases out the uneven implementation of Shanghai's experimental policy reforms in the area of skilled migrant attraction and retention. As the case shows, the Shanghai 'new talent regime' provided an opportunity for local state actors to liberalize parts of its skilled migration framework, incentivized by a central-level policy push on talent attraction and special economic zone development, as well as longstanding local policy goals on innovation and internationalization. Despite this favorable policy context, implementation of these policies has been cautious and risk-averse, albeit to different degrees. I argue that political calculations activate policy habits that allow

low-risk process-level policy reform to proceed, while limiting experimental policy innovation that carries more political risk.

While the implementation of skilled migration policies is often considered largely exempt from political pressures, the local-level implementation dynamics of skilled migration reform in Shanghai show that this is not always the case. In fact, Shanghai's reforms are shaped by the wider Chinese policy context, particularly1) a centralization of Chinese policymaking, resulting in shifting incentives for policy experimentation and a performative, campaign-like policy implementation style, and 2) an emerging re-politicization of immigration policy, in which China's global integration is increasingly questioned by parts of the Chinese public and policy establishment.

a. Centralizing Chinese policy innovation

In Shanghai, officials were most eager to implement experimental policies that fit with longstanding policy goals around which there was no controversy. These included the push to increase 'top talent' migrant flows in line with national talent strategy, aided by process-level bureaucratic innovations that were encouraged by other on-going bureaucracy-wide efforts, such as that to cut red tape and increase cross-departmental cooperation. There was an emphasis on implementing policies earlier and more thoroughly than in other localities, rather than pioneering more exploratory policies.

This finding fits with earlier research on experimental policy under president Xi Jinping. Since 2012, Chinese policymaking has been characterized by considerable centralization (also called 'top-level design'), which has resulted in a reduction in experimental policymaking (Teets and Hasmath 2020). As Han (2020) points out in his study of Chinese higher education, Chinese policy experiments vary in the balance between central involvement and local autonomy. They can be more 'directed' or 'authorized' or more 'exploratory' or 'retroactively authorized'. In Shanghai, the experimental talent policies were all authorized 'on paper' and embedded in national policy guidance. However, at the level of implementation, officials differentiated between experimental policies they felt comfortable fully implementing, and policies considered more contested or undefined. This was accompanied by reduced time for testing policy, with the interval between early implementation in Shanghai and national implementation increasingly short.[67] Rather than gaining bottom-up experience over a period of time, the central government now "assigned" (点名) Shanghai to finetune a policy for a few months before nationwide adoption (23).

One effect of this centralized policymaking has been that different localities are under pressure to achieve the same central goals. The post-2015 push for talent

67 A multiple-entry visa for high-end talent, for instance, entered a trial period in Shanghai on January 1, 2018 but was adopted nationwide on March 1 of that year; the work permit regulations were trialed in Shanghai and other locations in November 2016 and implemented nationwide on April 1, 2017.

attraction reform has led to more competition for talent domestically, as more Chinese cities introduce their own 'talent regimes'.[68] In this context, Shanghai's implementation was increasingly aimed at standing out from other localities, and showcasing its more effective bureaucracy. This could be seen in the frequent mentioning of nationwide records in the number of permits processed or 'top talent' attracted, or in comments on the difficulty these reforms would face in locations with less experience in immigration management.

Furthermore, as the central-local relationship had become more hierarchal, local officials were more focused on being perceived by superiors as producing the right kind of results. Xi-era policy making has oscillated between bureaucratic regularization and the frequent use of top-down campaigns mobilizing bureaucrats to achieve ambitious targets. This campaign-style policymaking was also prevalent in talent attraction post-2015, where it reinforced 'performative' policy habits, such as the development of policy plans at a high speed and the production of evidence of policy development and output in forms visible to superiors, such as propaganda. These dynamics, in which authorities were primarily concerned with the short-term evaluation of their superiors, were at odds with the stated aims of some of the reforms, which required cultivating new bureaucratic habits, such as a more migrant-centric policy approach. Concerned with avoiding accidental unwanted outcomes, more exploratory policy experiments were implemented much more passively. While such 'playing it safe' behavior has been criticized by central leadership as a new form of corruption (Tu and Gong 2021), my fieldwork confirms that the current policy environment does not encourage reformers, even in a global city like Shanghai.

b. An emerging (re-)politicization of immigration policy in China

Within a more centralized policy system, local officials aim to minimize the occurrence of negative feedback from superiors. As part of its legitimacy strategy, in the reform era Chinese leadership has become fixated on social stability and highly responsive to public criticism, especially in policy areas outside the regime's core interests (He 2018, Tang 2016). With the state increasingly unwilling to share power, public perceptions of state responsiveness have arguably become even more important to central authorities (Gries and Wang 2021: 138). In this context, any occurrence of public controversy around a policy area can backfire for local officials.

For decades, talent attraction in China, as well as the broader issue of increasing immigration from a small base, was a largely uncontroversial developmental agenda. However, while understudied, there are clear signs that the saliency of immigration policy has been increasing in recent years. One example is the vocal online media

---

68 "20余城掀起"人才争夺战"" [Over 20 cities enter a 'talent war'], *Xinhua*, March 29, 2018, http://www.xinhuanet.com/city/2018-03/29/c_129839097.htm

presence of ultranationalist groups, whose strong anti-immigrant sentiment caused authorities to stall the implementation of new permanent residency regulations in 2020 (see Chapter 6). At a time of high youth unemployment and record numbers of Chinese graduates, foreign participation in the labor market has also become more controversial. Finally, a deterioration of US-China relations since 2018, in which skilled migrants on both sides were targeted as security threats, and the Covid-19 pandemic border restrictions, led to intensified nationalist state propaganda on China's self-sufficiency, including in talent policy.[69] Even when not directly linked to skilled migrant policy, this mix of factors state actors needed to balance heightened the political sensitivity of migration policy, heightening a historical level of caution towards work concerning the 'foreign' (涉外) within the Chinese bureaucracy (Pieke 2011: 61).[70]

These politicization dynamics informed the implementation of Shanghai's skilled migration reforms, creating uncertainty about the public response and long-term policy goals that local officials aimed to manage through muted and "performative" policy implementation (Si 2020). For policies that might attract controversy, implementation was kept at a minimum and officials generally chose to not actively promote the experimental policies. This caution also affected experimentation in the development of social integration services, a new policy area on which no blueprint exists. For the 'top talent' attraction, however, U.S.-China political tension was cited as an extra reason to move away from state-led 'talent programs', which had attracted U.S. scrutiny.

On paper, the 'new talent regime' opened up space for state actors to reconsider the increasingly permanent and diverse position of working foreigners in Shanghai society, raising questions such as: Who counts as 'foreign talent'? Should foreign university graduates be allowed a chance to compete for local jobs? Should the government provide integration services to migrants and, if so, what should those look like? In practice, however, there was not much space to have that debate. Instead, local officials interpreted the often vague and inconclusive national policy guidance in conservative ways, guided by bureaucratic experience and path dependency.

Shanghai's history of catering to talent program participants and other 'top talent' and 'foreign experts', as well as the experience in high-end migrant enclaves form a foundation for decisions on how to design new migration services, including so-called

---

69 Qiu Yong邱勇, "自觉履行为党育人为国育才的使" [Conscientiously carrying out the mission of training people for the Party, talent for the country]. *People's Daily*, April 19, 2022, http://paper.people.com.cn/rmrb/html/2022-04/19/nw.D110000renmrb_20220419_2-09.htm.

70 The term '涉外' can refer to both matters related to foreign countries and to foreign nationals. The fact that immigrant management is considered '涉外' exemplifies the lack of conceptual differentiation between foreign migrants living in China and foreign nationals more broadly. It also helps explain the risk perceptions of cases related to foreign nationals to attract public attention or internal scrutiny. See Li and Jiao (2020) for a discussion of how these factors can influence Chinese police interactions with foreign nationals.

'integration'. In addition to limiting the space for policy innovation, the repoliticization of immigration policy reinforces longstanding policy practices in this policy area, including the state's treatment of foreign professionals as symbolic resources of internationalization rather than long-term local citizens, an immigration bureaucracy oriented towards employers rather than migrants, and a putting off of long-term strategy. Propaganda narratives of carefully selected migrants praising the Chinese state remain a dominant source of skilled migration policy information, invoking the 'foreign friends' rhetoric and imagery from the socialist era (Brady 2003). These practices offer an example of how historical understandings of immigration continue to inform skilled migration policy implementation. However, in doing so, authorities reinforced confusion about their policy targets, and inadvertently misinform the Chinese public by spreading unrealistic images of immigrant lives. In its focus on reproducing 'overseas talent' as a political symbolic resource, rather than a long-term part of Chinese society, this continued emphasis on the "ritual" (Xiang 2011) aspect of talent attraction work, too, impedes reform of China's skilled migration system.

7. Conclusion

The case of Shanghai's talent attraction reforms highlights the impact of local policy dynamics on skilled migration policy implementation. This analysis finds that Shanghai policymakers implement globally popular talent attraction policy principles in a differentiated manner, limiting the implementation of more progressive policies and focusing on policies aligned with low-risk administrative reforms. Given the consensus in literature on the importance of social integration and long-term settlement options for talent attraction, Shanghai's limited implementation of these policies suggests that it will be difficult to grow its skilled migrant population as planned. The narrow focus on 'top talent', while neglecting the policy needs of other labor migrants, will further impede the formation of the type of labor market associated with a 'global city'. There is a parallel here with China's internal mobility policies, in which an emphasis on population control and a bias towards attracting 'elite' migrants at the expense of integrating other migrants has arguably worked against urbanization goals (Ren 2016).

The case of Shanghai's 'new talent regime' also underlines the importance of researching the politics around skilled migration policy implementation – and of moving away from the assumption that it is a purely technocratic, unpoliticized policy field. As Cerna and Czaika (2021) argue, too little is known about the effectiveness of increasingly global talent attraction policies. Such research can provide a more in-depth understanding of the 'implementation gap', taking into account variations between central and local policy, on paper or unwritten, or the rigor with which a policy is implemented. Zooming out from these bureaucratic practices to the broader policy environment points to the range of political factors that can inform skilled migration

policy implementation, from central-local relations and bureaucratic relations to local migration governance history and public opinion.

Finally, Shanghai's talent attraction also provides insight into the development of China's overall immigration regime. While there are incentives for skilled migration policy liberalization, propelling more cities across the country to adopt such policies, the conservative implementation of these policies in China's most international city demonstrate the difficulty of substantial immigration reform in the absence of a more unified government vision on the role of foreign migration in Chinese society.

CHAPTER 4

Guest workers and development–security conflict: Managing labor migration at the Sino-Vietnamese border[71]

1. Introduction

About a dozen Vietnamese men and women are eating lunch in front of their Chinese labor agent's office, when Wang (a pseudonym), an official with the human resources department of this border city in south-west China, stops by for an impromptu inspection. Wang disapproves of the scene, claiming that it poses a public safety risk, but does not take action against the informal restaurant. He knows that the workers from Vietnam have to spend hours waiting for the approval of a monthly Chinese residence permit allowing them to legally work within the town and adjacent economic development zones. Monthly permits are a feature of the cross-border labor migrant regularization trial in this area.[72] The trial, launched in 2017, allows two Guangxi border cities to welcome migrants who previously were irregular migrant workers. These migrants alleviate the labor shortage in the area's large sugar cane processing sector and in manufacturing plants.

The tension between commercial and security interests, previously less prominent at the Guangxi border with Vietnam, has intensified. On the one hand, the regularization trial, highly anticipated by officials like Wang, "fits with central government priorities" such as deeper integration of China with Southeast Asian economies under the China-led Belt and Road Initiative (G-O6, 12/2019). On the other hand, central authorities remain ambivalent about the entry of ordinary foreign labor into the Chinese labor markets at a time of growing state concern with irregular migration.

---

71 This chapter has been published as: Tabitha Speelman, "Guest workers and development-security conflict: Managing labour migration at the Sino-Vietnamese border, *China Information* 36(3), 2022, 363-384.

72 Lin Hao 林浩, "广西出台《跨境劳务合作试点工作方案》" [Guangxi releases 'Pilot work plan for cross-border labor cooperation'], February 15, 2017, http://caijing.chinadaily.com.cn/2017-02/15/content_28213266.htm.

Foreign labor migrant management is a relatively new issue for the Chinese state, since domestic low-income labor has largely catered to China's developmental needs. Following the rapid increase of foreign migration after China's accession to the World Trade Organization in 2001, the state has focused on attracting highly educated professional talent which is considered beneficial to China's economic transition; China's immigration framework does not permit most forms of low-income migration labor. However, as China's working-age population shrinks, labor market demand for less-educated foreign nationals to fill niche markets and local labor shortages has emerged, from Japanese call center workers and Filipino domestic workers to Southeast Asian agricultural workers.

China now faces a dilemma in the management of labor migration: how to increase control over incoming temporary labor migration, while maintaining a flexible, low-cost source of labor (Castles 2003)? This study asks the question of how Chinese state actors resolve conflicting developmental and security concerns in their management of temporary labor migration. Specifically, to what extent do policy tools such as legal limits on duration and location of stay allow them to reconcile these tensions? The study investigates these questions through the case of special economic zones (SEZs) along Guangxi Province's border with Vietnam. China's emerging policy response speaks to the wider literature on temporary labor migration policy design and implementation.

There has been a distinct developmentalist bias in China's reform-era immigration regime, with the state paying relatively little attention to immigration security. This started to change following the growth of immigration and the well-documented politicization of African trader communities in Guangzhou, which led to more restrictive local immigration control (Lan 2015). The 2012 Exit and Entry Administration Law, China's main immigration management law, reflected growing interest in immigration control as seen by the inclusion of sections on national security and irregular entry, residence, and employment (Zhu and Price 2013). The National Immigration Administration, China's first national-level immigration agency, was established in 2018, and the administration has prioritized strengthening border control and centralizing the management of borders (see Chapter 1).

This increased central state interest in managing international mobility has reached Chinese border areas which have experienced long-standing cross-border labor mobility, much of which is short-distance and circular. Prior to the increase in cross-border labor migration in the south-west over the last decade, cross-border unregistered marriage migration was the primary target of immigration control (Barabantseva 2015). The arrival of economic integration strategies such as the Belt and Road Initiative in the borderlands show the tensions between these top–down development plans and local mobility practices, where an increase in investment accompanied by added control can interrupt existing cross-border social and economic ties (Rippa 2020).

This article situates the regularization trial in the context of China's ongoing state immigration management reforms. As with temporary labor programs in other parts of the world, the Guangxi trial was developed in response to increasing security concerns around irregular migration. Like those schemes, the trial shows the tensions between commodifying labor and increasing limits on cross-border mobility. The dynamics have changed circular border mobility patterns, leading to hiring problems for employers and stricter bifurcation between regular and irregular labor flows. I show how these unintended outcomes of the trial are aggravated by national security authorities' use of short-term residence permits to signal and maintain control over a newly visible and controversial migration flow. The case of the Guangxi trial demonstrates that, in the context of political negotiation and conflicting policy goals, security-oriented actors' use of policy tools such as temporariness severely impedes developmental goals.

I argue that the development–security policy conflict is more difficult to resolve in China's risk-averse policy environment, which favors security-oriented immigration measures. My findings contribute to the literature on Chinese migration, including border migration, Chinese policy implementation in the Xi Jinping era, as well as to previous findings on the development–security nexus in recent temporary labor migration programs: while researchers have documented the negative effects of increased securitization on migrant rights and circular movement, limits on migrants' duration of stay are generally not seen as hurting the developmental aims of receiving countries.

In the following, I review relevant labor migration research before introducing the Guangxi case. I then use policy and interview data to analyze development–security dynamics during the planning of the regularization trial and its first years of implementation. Finally, I conclude with a discussion of the implications of these findings for the fields of temporary labor management and Chinese immigration border policy.

2. Development and security in state responses to labor migration

States around the world consider foreign labor migration management to be a balancing act between developmental and security concerns. While including foreign migrants in the lower tiers of the labor market is associated with social and political costs, economic incentives for these schemes remain strong due to factors such as demographic change and labor market segmentation, leading states to balance employer interests against opposing actors. Giving migrants temporary or 'time-delimited' migration status has been a major "tool" for nation states to control labor migrant entry and settlement (Cook-Martin 2019).

Early post-war temporary low-income labor migration or 'guest worker' programs primarily focused on supporting businesses' access to low-cost foreign labor. These programs are generally considered to have 'failed' at keeping migrants temporary,

leading to unintended large-scale migrant settlement or increased irregular migration flows, with research documenting how policymakers failed to grasp the complex social nature of migrant behavior (Castles 2006). To prevent such outcomes, a new generation of temporary labor migration programs, starting from the 1990s, has generally been smaller in scale and scope, with more state involvement. They combine the search for these economic benefits with stricter conditions attached to residence and tend to have a dual aim of alleviating labor shortages and reducing irregular migration (Ruhs 2006).

This new type of temporary labor schemes, also called 'circular' when it includes policies on rotation and repeated movement, has been presented by policymakers as an optimal or 'win-win' solution for solving the tension between development and security: they seem to reconcile the interests of actors who want to control or limit migrant settlement, while providing employers with flexible labor. Though research has mainly focused on how temporary labor migration programs have made migration management in Western Europe and settler states such as Canada and Australia more restrictive, such programs have also become widespread across Asia, with temporariness of contracts and stay, usually in the range of several years, as their key features (Surak 2013).

However, research into these programs has found that – as with earlier schemes – considerable gaps between intention and reality remain. Firstly, high expectations of control require temporary migration to be increasingly "securitized" (Cassarino 2013). States can accomplish this by making use of non-state actors such as employers and brokers to further monitor migrant mobility or by embedding temporary labor programs in special legal regimes within economic zones, thereby adding another layer of migrant selection and further limiting the risk of unexpected sociopolitical impact (Park 2006). Despite the considerable investment this requires, there is little evidence that these programs reduce irregular movements, while limiting the duration of legal stay tends to decrease migrant circularity compared to that in areas of free cross-border movement (Castles and Ozkul 2014). More convincing is the large body of evidence documenting a trade-off between the level of restrictions and the protection of migrant rights, with workers in highly securitized programs more vulnerable to exploitation (e.g. Cassarino 2013: 39, Cook-Martin 2019: 1390).

Secondly, the security–development nexus is affected by the politics surrounding temporary labor migration programs. The tension between admitting foreign labor migrants and the aim of fully controlling their movement can mean that state actors responsible for temporary labor migration control tend to be confronted with 'often incompatible goals' (Boswell 2007). Changing national security priorities, administrative rivalries or conflict, and public opinion can exacerbate such tensions, leading to the variety of policy designs and outcomes that have marked these schemes in recent decades. Depending on local political circumstances, states choose to restrict temporary labor migration to migrants from particular ethnic or cultural groups or from

countries that are considered a lower security risk, to particular economic sectors, or states tighten oversight of migrant return following any controversy (Kalicki 2019).

Compared to the documentation of the impact of restrictive policy tools on migrant rights and security outcomes, the ways in which relevant state actors use these tools in policy development and implementation, including during policy testing and adjustment, have been relatively understudied. Less attention has been given to the developmental impact of recent temporary labor migration policies, with programs generally considered able to recruit enough migrant workers to fulfil economic aims. The case of the Guangxi regularization trial, as a new temporary labor migration program in China that strengthens immigration control in a border region with previously relatively free circular migration, puts state actors' use of these tools and their effects center stage.

3. Border mobility and foreign employment in China's south-west

China's rapid and uneven development has been fueled by large-scale internal migration to coastal regions. As China's domestic labor force becomes older, more mobile and increasingly educated, labor-intensive agriculture and manufacturing sectors in the north-east and south-west border regions of the country face labor shortages. Guangxi, a province-level autonomous region in China's south-west with the third-lowest GDP per capita among Chinese provinces in 2019, is home to the fourth largest domestic outmigration population in China. Employers in the region increasingly rely on seasonal or longer-term labor migrants from bordering countries such as Vietnam (Wei 2014).

The China–Vietnam border displays the permeability of many Asian borders, which divide people who often share deep cultural and socio-economic ties (Van Schendel and De Maaker 2014). Heavily militarized in the decade following the 1979 Sino-Vietnamese border war, border management was relaxed following the normalization of diplomatic relations in 1991, with numerous mountainous border crossings gradually reopening in the following years "as land mines were removed" (Wu and Liang 2020). To regularize post-Cold War cross-border mobility in a period when it was difficult to obtain personal passports, administrative border zones were established nationwide. Local residents registered in these areas can apply for border resident passes that allow them to legally cross the border and stay in a neighboring state's border regions for one to seven days at a time, depending on the locality.

These local exit–entry regulations have provided the Sino-Vietnamese border population with economic advantages during decades of rapid growth. In recent years, registered border crossings by residents living close to land borders made up about a third of the total of border crossings in and out of China. Economic activity is facilitated by dozens of border checkpoints opened specifically for Vietnamese and Chinese border resident pass holders. While foreign nationals working in other parts of China generally hold work visas linked to an employer and are required to have a university education and relevant work experience, in border areas foreign nationals usually use

their border resident passes which permit some types of economic activity but not long-term employment, or they work irregularly. Easy cross-border mobility and loosely enforced duty-free import quota have brought about significant cross-border economic integration, with Guangxi regularly generating the highest cross-border trade value of any Chinese border region. In the 2000s, a boom in Southeast Asian mahogany red wood trade attracted significant migration from other parts of China to the Guangxi borderlands.

The Guangxi–Vietnam border has a relatively small manufacturing sector but is strategically located between the Pearl River Delta – China's manufacturing powerhouse – and Southeast Asia. Since the early 2000s, China's south-western border zones have been included in several national economic strategies aiming to close the development gap between inland and coastal areas. Policies for regional economic integration, such as the Belt and Road Initiative, also include border development as a goal. SEZs provide the regulatory environment for investment from coastal regions to these areas. Despite frequent diplomatic tension between the two nations, policymakers consider the mostly stable and predictable China–Vietnam land border more suited to government-sponsored development plans than Myanmar's conflict-ridden border (e.g. Luo and Lei 2018).

By framing policy requests within these central initiatives, local government actors can lobby for a special economic zone or a specific policy – a key feature of China's reform-era policy development. Two cities – Dongxing (pop. 160,000), located on the shores of the Gulf of Tonkin, and Pingxiang (120,000), which is connected to Vietnam by land and rail – were designated 'key development and opening-up experimental zones' (重点开发开放试验区) in 2012 and 2016, respectively (see Figure 4.1).[73] Pingxiang was granted further policy innovation privileges in cross-border investment and trade in 2019, when it became part of the Guangxi Free Trade Zone. The cross-border labor regularization policy was pioneered in these two cities.

Since 2010, the number of border area labor migrants working in non-seasonal jobs has sharply increased to accommodate growing demand for manufacturing labor (He 2019). Migrants increasingly come from areas further away from the border. While not much data are available, a survey completed in the Yunnan border city of Ruili, where cross-border dynamics are similar to those in Guangxi, found that only 28 % of a sample of cross-border labor migrants were from borderland areas. Whereas women from nearby areas previously dominated circular labor migration in Guangxi, this 'new pattern of migration' is more diverse (Zhou 2021). In addition, increasing numbers

73 Dongxing and Pingxiang are county-level border cities. They fall under the jurisdiction of the cities Fangchenggang and Chongzuo, respectively. Parts of Fangchenggang and its harbour, four counties, and one city district of Chongzuo are also part of the regularization trial. The trial area has varying names for partially overlapping geographical areas. For clarity, I refer to all zones included in the cross-border labor policy trial as 'special economic zones'.

of foreign labor migrants have migrated beyond border provinces to China's coastal provinces, where their irregular immigration status is more precarious but salaries are higher. One credible source estimates that there are about 100,000 irregular Vietnamese labor migrants in China (Chu et al 2018). Meanwhile, local residents' outward labor migration has increased following an economic downturn in the border region due to tightened anti-smuggling law enforcement, combined with rapid improvement in infrastructure. This trend consolidated demand for cross-border migrants in the region's large agricultural sector and emerging manufacturing zones.

The Guangxi regularization trial's recent start makes it well-suited for studying the development and initial implementation of a pioneering policy. While this was to change with the start of the Covid-19 pandemic, the relative absence of border security restrictions at the time of research allowed me, a foreign researcher, to conduct field research among local government actors in this region.

Figure 4.1. Guangxi border area[74]

4. Methodology

This research uses a variety of qualitative data – 45 interviews combined with policy analysis – to gain insight into the trial and its complex sociopolitical embedding. First, I conducted 25 interviews with local stakeholders (7 officials, 8 labor brokers, 6 employers, and 4 researchers), which took place in experimental sites Dongxing and Pingxiang, the border city Chongzuo, and the Guangxi regional capital Nanning in

74 Source: Billie Wong, "Guangxi: An update on cross-border economic co-operation," Hong Kong Trade Development Council, June 7, 2017, https://hkmb.hktdc.com/en/1X0AABDQ/hktdc-research/Guangxi-An-Update-on-Cross-border-Economic-Co-operation.

May 2019 and December 2019 to January 2020. A letter of introduction stating my status as a visiting PhD researcher at a Chinese institution helped me gain access to border city-level employment and border security officials. However, interview access to security officials was limited. I compensated for this limitation by interviewing two immigration policy researchers working within public security research institutions who were familiar with the regularization trial.

In addition to these interviews, I conducted semi-structured short interviews with 20 residents in the Pingxiang area, focusing on their perceptions of Vietnamese labor migration and the ongoing policy trial. For these interviews with residents, which helped me triangulate findings, I sought out people in different urban, semi-urban, and rural parts of the trial area. I also talked with Vietnamese migrants at government service centers and employment sites who spoke Mandarin. However, this analysis focuses on Chinese perspectives on the trial, rather than Vietnamese migrant experience or the make-up of migrant communities.[75] Shortly after my last visit, the policy trial was suspended due to Covid-19 border disruptions.[76]

Finally, I analyzed policy documents and official discourse on the trial in government and state media between 2015–20. Official debate, when accessible, is a key source for gaining insight into the political process that plays out during Chinese policy experimentation. Shifting state discourse is also an important aspect in the securitization of immigration, making such discourse relevant to the study of immigration management.

5. Developing a temporary labor migration program at the Guangxi border (2015–17)

Over the last two decades, Guangxi authorities condoned irregular labor migration to improve regional economic development. As a result, reliance on Vietnamese migrants increased in labor-intensive sectors. My experience on the ground was that local populations and officials generally welcomed this new labor force, describing migrants as culturally similar, hardworking, and willing to work in undesired jobs. However, central authorities perceived the increase of non-seasonal labor migration into the border zones, and further into China, as a security risk. Local authorities in Guangxi responded by framing labor migration as a tool to achieve national development goals. They successfully lobbied national authorities to launch a policy trial regularizing these new flows of labor migrants.

---

75 For more on the Vietnamese migrants' identity, see Wei 2014.

76 The Covid-19 border restrictions were lifted in the first months of 2023. As of April 2023, border city authorities are applying for provincial permission to reinstate the trial.

a. A laissez-faire approach to Vietnamese migrants in the border area labor market

As local workers moved away in greater numbers, Vietnamese migrants became a key part of the labor force at the Guangxi border. Migrants mostly work in labor-intensive jobs that Guangxi locals are no longer willing or available to do. The locals would only consider doing the same jobs for higher pay in the coastal areas. Border residents are more inclined to go into business as cross-border traders or retailers, economic activities that interviewees described as more desirable due to their relative independence. Locals associate agricultural and factory work with 'cheap' Vietnamese labor migrants willing to do exhausting work. Only one interviewee saw young Vietnamese employed in service jobs as competing with local workers. The cross-border migration flow shows how, even in a relatively underdeveloped part of China, "social borders" around different types of labor solidify to create a demand for outside labor (Anderson 2013: 79).

This segmented labor market solidified as labor recruitment networks expanded. Building on earlier waves of Vietnamese marriage migrants and business travelers, cross-border kinship networks which were created facilitated seasonal agricultural work and expanded into an intermediary market recruiting workers from neighboring provinces and other parts of northern Vietnam for hundreds of Guangxi processing and manufacturing companies. In a typical year prior to the start of the regularization trial, about 10,000–15,000 Vietnamese labor migrants worked in the Pingxiang area, with the figure multiplying during the sugar cane harvest. Compare this with "about 20,000–30,000" employable locals (G-O6, 12/2019). Circular migration was considered the norm for both agricultural and other workers. While many migrants work in China for multiple years and local economic planners count on their labor supply, permanent settlement was not usually considered an end goal, except in the case of marriage.

Policymakers and members of the public cite cultural proximity with Vietnamese migrants as the main rationale for a lack of tension surrounding the labor trial. According to the same official Wang mentioned earlier, there would be more conflicts between locals and migrants if migrants did not share a similar "Southeast Asian culture". However, only part of the rural cross-border population can communicate with Vietnamese border residents in a similar dialect. Outside rural areas, daily interaction between migrants and locals is limited. In the last decade, increased demand for migrants in manufacturing plants has increased this divide. As in Yunnan, more workers now work and live at employment sites at the Guangxi border and speak little or no Mandarin (Wang and Yang 2020).

Around 2010, Guangxi's laissez-faire approach to the increase in Vietnamese labor migration came to the attention of regional- and national-level public security authorities and attracted criticism for its 'soft' approach towards irregular migration (Zhang 2019). Local authorities were held responsible for 'chaotic' labor recruitment, which led to unregulated fees and labor conflicts, and for the increase in Southeast

Asian migrants taking up irregular residence in border areas and other parts of China (G-R1, 1/2020; G-R4, 12/2019). Public security officials estimated that Guangxi led the nation in irregular migration and that a majority of irregular Vietnamese labor migrants entering the country in Guangxi ended up in Guangdong, creating extra work for public security there. These complaints led to pressure on Guangxi border authorities to control irregular migration, with arrests of irregular labor migrants increasing an average of 20 % annually from 2010 onwards (Chu et al 2018). In response, some Guangxi officials started to consider regularization as a solution for controlled labor migration, inspired by Yunnan's Dehong Prefecture, where cross-border labor has been managed through local regulations since 2014. To maintain economic stability and cross-border labor flow without running into continuous conflict with higher-level authorities, they had to break with previous "non-policy" (G-O6, 5/2019).

b. Guangxi's developmentalist framing of Vietnamese labor regularization

In Chinese policymaking, experimental policies are the outcome of negotiations between central policymakers and subnational actors, often in response to a regulatory failure. Experimental policies do not have a fixed timeline, and their impact on future policy varies case by case (Lim 2019). In the Guangxi cross-border labor trial, local officials framed their demands for expanding Vietnamese labor mobility in the context of China's national strategy for border development. In their requests, they offered a mix of economic and security-based rationales: SEZs would require growing labor supply; relatively cheap foreign labor could enhance the competitiveness of these traditionally 'left-behind' areas; and regularizing existing migrant labor would address growing border security concerns. Because China's existing immigration laws do not allow for foreign low-income labor, securing central-level approval for labor regularization would be a significant policy innovation.

National-level research delegations to the Dongxing SEZ, at the time the only national-level zone in the region, became aware of local-level interest in securing the regulation of migrant labor. A mini-trial of 10 employers in Dongxing provided 'first-hand experience' for a State Council Development Research Center team to evaluate.[77] This led to the inclusion of a single-line statement in the 2015 State Council strategy for border development 'allow[ing] the employment of foreign nationals in accordance to regulations' in border region SEZs, with the Ministry of Human Resources and Social Security as the responsible government authority (State Council 2016). This national-level document was subsequently invoked at every step in the regularization trial's development.

---

77 "东兴试验区跨境劳务合作试点工作有序推进" [Trial implementation of cross-border labor cooperation in Dongxing pilot zone makes orderly progress], September 11, 2017, http://www.fcgs.gov.cn/zxzx/syqzc/jj/201709/t20170915_45629.html.

The early phase of the regularization trial focused on its developmental potential. After cross-border labor regularization received central approval, local government actors started to openly discuss the key role that previously irregular Vietnamese workers were playing in areas of their economy, calling for speedy implementation because the "labor dividend" accruing from cross-border migrants willing to do tiring work for salaries 20–30% lower than the local average might run out in a decade (e.g. He 2016). Demand for such workers will continue to rise, one official with the department of commerce writes, to fulfil the development goals of the SEZs.[78] They also calculated that lower salaries and social insurance payments for foreign workers would allow employers to save RMB 1454 and RMB 779 a month per worker – as compared to the cost of hiring a worker from China's eastern provinces or a Guangxi local, respectively.

In 2016, a bilateral cooperation mechanism between Guangxi and its four bordering Vietnamese provinces (Quảng Ninh, Lạng Sơn, Cao Bằng, and Hà Giang) became active at regional and city levels. A subsequent 2017 Guangxi regional work plan detailed the regularization trial, ending a period in which regional authorities had remained passive to local-level requests for policy support (Guangxi 2017). The region's commercial authorities, also in charge of SEZ development, were made responsible for overseeing the policy.

The 2017 strategy strikes a balance between economic development and border security. It describes Vietnamese migrants as a "beneficial complement" to Guangxi's local labor market, who should receive "maximum convenience," while also requiring local authorities to exercise "maximum control" over irregular mobility. The plan stipulates that workers are eligible for half-year residence permits, and it requires employers to police migrant employees. If successful, the regularization trial was slated to be scaled up to the entire border region by the end of 2018.

In this phase, officials who were interviewed recalled a sense of optimism and described the trial as a step forward in China's evolution to becoming an immigration destination (G-O2, 5/2019; G-O7, 5/2019). "2017 was kind of a big year for us as the autonomous region started to make policies," the already-mentioned human resources official Wang told me (G-O6, 12/2019). The national-level experimental status of the SEZs made it possible to receive various policy benefits, among which the regularization trial was considered the most noteworthy. Following central approval, local and regional leaders "highly prioritized" it.[79] However, the policy's momentum also meant local migration management would be subject to increased higher-level government surveillance. In what interviewees described as a shift towards a "subtler" relationship

78 Huang Jiasheng 黄家生, "广西跨境劳务合作大有作为" [Great potentials for cross-border labor cooperation in Guangxi], 广西经济 10, 2016: 45–7.

79 东兴试验区跨境劳务合作试点工作有序推进.

with higher levels of government, local authorities balanced local commercial interests, such as the demand for flexible cross-border agricultural labor, with the expectations of superiors who decided the trial's future (G-R1, 5/2019).

6. Implementing cross-border labor regularization (2017–2019)

Human resources, exit–entry, and special zone management authorities were the main actors implementing the regularization trial in the border cities. While a large amount of cross-border labor migration has been regularized since 2017, implementation varies within the trial area and irregular migration persists. I show that central public security authorities wanted local authorities to further strengthen control over migrant mobility, rejecting requests for policy relaxation. This emphasis on immigration control destabilizes the existing circular labor migration dynamic, making it harder for employers to hire migrants and paradoxically creating new irregular networks.

a. Post-trial mixed effects on cross-border labor migrant flows

In 2019, two years after the implementation of the regularization trial, its effects on the ground were mixed. State media and government reports enthusiastically cited examples of coastal businesses that relocated to Guangxi for its affordable Vietnamese labor, but economic development had not been revitalized by the SEZs' advantageous policies. Officials described economic development as "alright," "not great," or, at best, in a "stable" state (G-O3, 5/2019; G-O5, 5/2019; G-O6, 5/2019). Implementation was difficult because national public security authorities refused to issue the half-year work permits that the 2017 plan had announced. Instead, migrants continued to cross the border and apply for a new residence permit on a monthly basis. The planned scale-up of the trial area in 2018 did not materialize, indicating that central authorities considered expansion premature.

For employers, the regularization trial made hiring Vietnamese employees "legal but harder" (Wu and Liang 2020). Enforcement efforts focused on bigger employers, such as the sugar cane processing factories, and new companies moving to the SEZs. Workers had to leave their company for several days a month to renew their permit, leaving less time for work, while the monthly cost of renewal (RMB 120) was significant for low-wage workers. The turnover rate was high because each month migrants could choose whether or not to return to the company, or even whether to return to China at all. The strict mobility management of workers resulted in migrants frequently quitting within a month. Companies that had relocated to Guangxi because of the special zone incentives and cheaper labor costs had difficulty training and retaining Vietnamese employees (e.g. G-E2, 12/2019).

Despite strengthened management over the Vietnamese working population – "we now know their identity and what they are doing," as one official put it (G-O7, 5/2019)– work permit enforcement varied throughout the trial zone. According to

researchers' estimates, most Vietnamese workers in the Pingxiang City area now have work permits, and authorities claimed that the regularization trial has greatly reduced hiring difficulties. In 2018, 145,000 monthly permits were issued to workers at over 500 companies, although monthly numbers highly fluctuated. Work permits were less common among Vietnamese working in agriculture and construction outside the Pingxiang urban area. As a 30-year-old native of adjacent county Longzhou explained: "We are not Pingxiang. They are a city, and . . . they have these policies. We just smuggle."[80] Reflecting the leniency of Vietnamese authorities in issuing border resident passes, a migrant woman in Pingxiang interviewed and quoted in a state media report stated that she was from Hanoi, officially not part of the trial area.[81] Regularization rates in Dongxing were much lower, likely due to differing border pass regulations that allow border migrants to stay for three days at a time (versus one day in Pingxiang).

Another impediment to successful implementation was identifying eligible workers. There was confusion over whether workers in agriculture, the sector with the largest labor shortage, qualified for the trial. In May 2019, officials told me that farms with a legal representative could participate in the trial, but by December the trial applied to industrial and service workers only. Central authorities required the trial to be limited to industrial activities in line with economic upgrading goals for the area, and local officials claimed that there had never been Vietnamese workers engaged in agriculture in China. However, intermediaries explained that for these types of work, local employers continued to rely on irregular migrants, or used work permits registered at another type of company.

During the regularization trial, residents and intermediaries noted intensified border management in urban and rural trial areas. More employers were fined for hiring Vietnamese workers without permission, and unregistered migrants were detained unlike in the past when police issued warnings to unregistered workers before dropping them off at the border. A new border information system, part of a nationwide upgrade of border equipment, detected overstaying on a border resident pass automatically. "If you're still working illegally and you get caught, you are put on a blacklist and can't enter China for five years," explained one intermediary (G-I4, 5/2019). Controls at checkpoints policing the inland border of the border area were also tightened. While it became more important to meet the legal residential requirements of a border

80 Public interview on January 6, 2020.

81 Li Zong 李纵, "广西与越南边境四省深化合作" [Guangxi boosts cooperation with four Vietnamese border provinces], 人民日报, January 10, 2020, http://paper.people.com.cn/rmrbhwb/html/2020-01/10/content_1966094.htm.

resident pass, monthly work permit or a passport visa, the enforcement of irregular employment regulations remained uneven.[82]

Some migrants were positive about the regularization. A middle-aged migrant from Lạng Sơn who had worked in a wood processing plant in Pingxiang for about 10 years summarized her experience of the change, saying: "I no longer need to be scared of the police" (G-M2, 5/2019). Previously border crossings were often communally organized for safety, but now workers were able to go back home for a holiday or into town for the night. Overall, the changes in labor and border management increased the difficulty of border crossings, making a negative impact on migrant flows. As the risks of overstaying on a border resident pass increased, circular workers who previously crossed the border frequently now had to follow permit rules. Intermediaries noted that the most qualified Vietnamese workers had options beyond Guangxi, for instance switching to newly opened factories on the Vietnamese coast (often Chinese-owned). Others tried to stay under the radar altogether by going 'irregular all the way' and staying in China for longer periods, especially if they planned to seek work in other parts of China. The trial deepened an on-going trend of bifurcation between regular and irregular border migration, with those unable to maintain regular status – previously they were mostly brides – limited in their mobility and rights while in China.

b. Securitizing the cross-border labor trial

In the first years of the trial's implementation, the developmental benefits of an increase in cross-border labor were limited. Local actors complained that border security concerns were outweighing economic goals. However, as the trial progressed, central authorities asked for further control measures over migrant mobility. Most notably, the National Immigration Administration had to be convinced that local authorities had sufficient control over irregular recruitment practices before extending the duration of residence permits. National immigration authorities were said to worry about increased regular migration in the border zones leading to more irregular migrants moving toward China's coastal regions: "Once they are in, they will move throughout the country. Who will be responsible for that?" (G-R1, 5/2019; also G-O2, 5/2019). National-level employment authorities also expressed concerns about guaranteeing minimal interference with local employment and migrant rights.

Addressing central authorities' concerns became a key priority for local government actors, leading to "constant changes in the rules" (G-I5, 12/2019 GI6, 12/2019). In January 2019, the Pingxiang City government published a new plan to further co-opt labor intermediaries and employers – who had partially persisted in their previous

82 National quarterly figures on border crossings by border residents, centrally collected since 2016, have fluctuated significantly in recent years, following an increase in border crossing registration. See the NIA statistics page: https://www.nia.gov.cn/n741440/n741567/index.html, accessed 1 May 2021.

roles in the informal migrant labor ecosystem – into the policy trial, by increasing their responsibility for migrant behavior and movement in China (Pingxiang 2019). Intermediary companies could be given one of four statuses: (A) recommended, (B) regular, (C) warned, or (D) suspended. It became common for both agents and firms to temporarily lose their hiring qualifications due to violations. SEZ authorities developed a smartphone app through which authorities, employers, and intermediaries would be able to track workers. The new plan also featured migrant rights such as equal pay more prominently. Because foreign ordinary workers currently have no way to participate in Chinese social insurance, employers continue to save on labor costs. A newly developed commercial insurance for cross-border workers covers compensation and treatment in case of injury for RMB 23 per month, a fraction of social insurance payments (for comparison, payments in Guangxi are equivalent to a quarter of salary costs).

Besides adjusting implementation, some local officials continued to lobby for policy relaxation. An article by two Dongxing officials in an influential Beijing-based party policy journal authors argued that the regularization trial offered broad lessons to China's approach to labor immigration. The authors criticized the national labor migration regulations as "seriously outdated" in their focus on highly skilled immigrants and that the regulations restricted small businesses from hiring foreigners.[83] Pointing to Japan, Korea, and the EU, the officials called for an overhaul of national foreign employment regulations and simplified procedures for current border area cross-border labor trials.

By the end of 2019, Pingxiang's tightened management of the regularization trial started receiving recognition from regional and national authorities. Delegations from the State Council, National Immigration Administration, and the National Development and Reform Commission visited the trial area. During a December 2019 visit, the Commission praised Pingxiang's human resources department for developing commercial insurance for Vietnamese workers.[84] In the same month, Guangxi's border management, previously criticized for being soft on irregular migrants, was praised by the Guangxi party leadership for its control of irregular migration.[85] In 2019, delegations from Yunnan and Inner Mongolia and an international delegation from Mongolia visited Pingxiang to learn about the trial. The border city of Jingxi was expected to be included

83 Chu et al 2018: 130.

84 "国家发展改革委在广西凭祥召开沿边重点开发开放试验区建设现场会" [National Development and Reform Commission holds a meeting at the construction site of the key pilot zone in border areas for development and opening up in Pingxiang, Guangxi], November 27, 2019, https://www.ndrc.gov.cn/fzggw/jgsj/kfs/sjdt/201911/t20191127_1205035.html.

85 "广西壮族自治区党委常委,政法委书记黄世勇对广西边检总站工作作出批示" [Huang Shiyong, a member of the standing committee of the party committee and the secretary of the Political and Legal Affairs Commission of Guangxi, issued instructions on the work of Guangxi's general station of exit and entry frontier inspection], December 20, 2019, https://www.nia.gov.cn/n897453/c1196376/content.html

in the trial, and several bigger cities along the border, such as Qinzhou and Beihai, also expressed their interest.

Border city officials were hopeful that permit restrictions would be relaxed, and that the regularization trial would be expanded and eventually regularized. However, security concerns remained. A regional-level official involved in the trial described the situation as a matter of "security interests over economic interests," and that these were unlikely to be resolved quickly (G-O2, 5/2019). At the local level, central instructions to treat cross-border labor mobility as a security risk sat uneasily with local experience in these areas. The prioritization of border security over local development risked alienating locals and migrants who were used to decades of flexible cross-border mobility. Local economic officials were uncertain about the developmental benefits of the special economic zones and managed "both upper-level requirements and the demands of the populace" through selective implementation (Ahlers and Schubert 2015: 394). However, it is only when central security concerns are met that policy space for temporary labor migration can be safeguarded.

7. Discussion

Though small in scale, by experimenting with temporary labor migration China has joined the ranks of countries that actively recruit foreign migrants for temporary employment in specific, less compensated parts of the labor market. The very existence of the regularization trial showcases central authorities' willingness to innovate in a sensitive policy area. Although China, often defined by its large population, is considered unlikely to relax restrictions on foreign labor migration nationwide any time soon, the trial is an official acknowledgment of foreigners' role in the lower segment of the labor market in parts of the country. However, in the first years of the trial, as different state actors negotiated its terms, they failed to resolve the development–security conflict, resulting in a partial, securitized implementation of the trial at the expense of developmental goals. Placing the Chinese case in a comparative context helps explain this outcome, while illuminating the limits of temporary labor migration policy tools such as migrant temporariness and legal exemption regimes.

Firstly, the Guangxi regularization trial shows how globally prevalent policy tools in managing the tension between developmental and security concerns are also part of the policy repertoire of Chinese state actors, who conservatively adapt them to Guangxi's border context. The trial's 2017 design features a doubly restrictive 'zoning' of the trial area, superimposing the legal exemption regime of the new SEZs on the existing exceptional regulatory context of the borderland area by allowing only Vietnamese border residents working in the special economic zones to participate in the trial. While social unrest has not been significant, the bilateral set-up allowing only Vietnamese nationals from border regions to apply for worker permits is an instance of limiting temporary labor to groups deemed to be a lower security risk. The trial's

planned six-month permit length put it at the short end of common time-delimited work permits.

During implementation, the national immigration authorities continued to require monthly renewal of workers' residence permits, unwilling to extend their length of stay to six months. In doing so, the National Immigration Administration, whose mandate includes both development and security-related immigration affairs while remaining part of the public security apparatus, prioritized the goal of reducing irregular migration. Development-oriented state actors, especially at the local level, in turn resorted to security measures to secure the immigration agency's approval. The locally developed 2019 regulations strengthened management over private actors such as employers and intermediaries, while the trial was restricted to industries considered to be in line with economic upgrading plans, rather than those with the most urgent labor needs.

Secondly, confirming earlier findings, these policy restrictions had an impact on migration flows. In its pre-regularization phase, Vietnamese border residents and other migrants who overstayed were able to move back and forth either independently or with help from the irregular intermediary industry, maintaining a relatively high degree of spontaneous circularity. Requiring migrants to renew permits on a monthly basis, however, resulted in an extremely managed form of circular migration. Given international experience on how temporariness interferes with employers' need for labor force stability, it is unsurprising that, as an extreme case of securitized temporary labor migration, the high regularization threshold led to high migrant turnover, dissatisfied employers, and other unintended 'substitution effects' (Czaika and De Haas 2013), such as selective implementation, increased irregular migration and redirected migration flows to other areas.

Taken together, the first years of the Guangxi trial show that state actors, in their efforts to address conflicting policy aims, advanced a security-oriented approach that negatively impacted developmental outcomes. In the context of the policy trial, control-oriented policy instruments became moves in an on-going policy negotiation 'game' between the National Immigration Administration and other state actors (Stone 2012: 15). Development-oriented actors further securitized the trial, accepting short-term developmental costs, with the aim of a more liberal long-term outcome once the border policy ecosystem was considered sufficiently secure. Reflecting the increase in central oversight of border area development and control within the SEZs, a return to the local state's previous role in facilitating irregular labor was no longer possible. Instead, development-oriented actors had to accept the uncertain long-term impact of extreme migrant temporariness on migration flows**.**

However, whether central security authorities will allow the length of work permits to be extended depends on uncertain factors in China's wider policymaking context. In terms of immigration issues, these include an increased concern about the security risk of irregular migration at the national level, and the progress of controversial

institutional reforms around the military-to-civil transition of China's border guards. Overall, a generally risk-averse policy environment that has resulted in reduced policy innovation and increased centralization, a well-documented trend under the Xi Jinping administration, plays a role (Teets et al 2017). Risk-averse immigration management results in new resources and influence favouring security goals, while liberalizing aspects of the state's immigration agenda are repeatedly stalled or face limited implementation. The Guangxi labor trial, as a legally indeterminate experimental policy, illustrates this trend, highlighting the increased incentives to securitize rather than promote economic development.

Finally, the Guangxi labor trial provides further evidence that border area successes in achieving transnational economic integration invite increased central state scrutiny. In the case of Guangxi cross-border mobility, local state actors were willing for years to re-purpose the existing border migrant regime by tacitly including new flows of labor migrants, even those not from border zone areas. Relatively under-regulated in the past compared to China's north-western and north-eastern borders, the Guangxi border is now transitioning to a more standardized national border management, further shifting the power balance from local officials to central officials. This trend intensified when the COVID-19 pandemic broke out and managing irregular migration became a top national priority, speeding up the ongoing securitization of irregular border migration documented in this article.[86]

As tensions between nation-building and local cross-border cultures at China's south-western borders are transformed by new economic, geopolitical and demographic realities, it is important to go beyond the "border resident perspective" (Wang and Yang 2021) dominating Chinese border migration literature to study how these new trends impact border migration and its governance. The Guangxi regularization trial contributes to the global study of temporary labor migration by highlighting the risks of overly relying on securitizing policy measures during policy development. As China's immigration management system expands and modernizes, it increasingly displays a global tendency towards "securitization and marketization [to go] hand in hand" (Dobrowolsky 2007: 636).

---

86 |移民管理部门要把防范境外疫情输入作为当前头等大事和最重要工作" [Immigration administration authorities should take the prevention of imported cases of COVID-19 as the utmost priority and most important work], April 10, 2020, https://mp.weixin.qq.com/s/lMhChyem3NeBpBI_aJF9-A, accessed 29 December 2020. In 2020, many border crossings were closed, while more irregular migrants have been apprehended.

CHAPTER 5

Immigration attitudes, national identity and development in mainland China[87]

1. Introduction

Following decades of nation-building accompanied by limited immigration, China's immigration policy changed radically in its reform era starting in the 1980s, when immigrants were welcomed as harbingers of economic development and cosmopolitanism. Their inflow was gradual and limited relative to China's population, but since the 2000s, increasing immigrant numbers in China's big urban centers, industrial hubs and border areas have established it as an emerging destination country (Pieke 2011). China's 2020 national census counted 850,000 foreign residents, a diverse population of professionals, students, traders, spouses, border residents, and other migrants. This paper investigates how Chinese citizens experience the increase in immigrants in China and what their policy priorities towards immigration are. It asks: How do Chinese citizens view the role of immigration in their society as China transforms into a global power – and an emerging immigrant country?

Studies of Chinese immigration attitudes have focused on public controversies around immigration, such as the largely negative social media response to the growth of African trader communities in southern China in the 2000s, or the question of whether China should adopt a more open refugee policy (e.g. Gan 2020). Critical online discussion on immigration has attracted research into the (political) structures of racist attitudes in China and the transnational connections of such debates (Cheng 2019, Zhang 2019). Scholars have also explored local-migrant relations in localities with relatively large immigrant populations, such as the cities of Guangzhou and Yiwu. These studies showcase that, even in the context of highly racialized discourse around

87 This chapter has been published as: Tabitha Speelman, "Immigration attitudes, national identity and development in mainland China," *IMI Working Paper Series*, 177, 2023.

Black immigrants, a variety of Chinese attitudes towards these immigrants and their impact on local society exist (e.g. Lan 2016, Zhou et al 2016).

However, there has been little research on Chinese opinions of immigration outside specific online or offline communities, or at a national level. There are also few studies of Chinese attitudes towards immigration policies. An exception is Han (2017a), who, based on national survey data from 2008, finds that 43.4% of respondents support an increase in economic immigrant numbers, without significant differences between attitudes nationwide and those in China's largest cities (vs. 25.2% supporting a decrease, and 31.3% in favor of maintaining the status quo). However, more recent data on national immigration attitudes have not been published, and there have been no qualitative accounts that can provide more in-depth insight into societal attitudes and policy priorities on immigration.

Based on 46 interviews with a diverse group of respondents, as well as a national online survey (N=1888), this study explores how members of the Chinese public present their opinions on issues of immigrant membership, selection and control, providing insight into ways individuals make sense of immigration outside the context of specific controversies. Drawing on literature on immigrant reception, this paper analyses such immigration attitudes in the context of China's developmental trajectory and narratives of national identity. The paper finds that respondents with moderate views occupy most of the spectrum of Chinese immigration attitudes and that, like in many other countries, Chinese respondents emphasize ideas about their nation in their views on immigrants and immigration policy. In particular, respondents systematically connect China's developmental success to immigration policy goals and outcomes. This connection between immigration attitudes and perceptions of a nation's developmental status has wider significance for the study of immigrant reception in large parts of the non-Western world where national identity narratives feature a "catching up" modernization logic (Tlostanova 2012).

2. Contextualizing China in the broader debate on immigrant reception

A large body of interdisciplinary literature has focused on native attitudes towards immigrants in migrant-receiving societies. A key finding of this scholarship has been that ideas about the 'state of the nation' and host society identity have greater explanatory power than factors related to natives' individual interests (Hainmueller and Hopkins 2014). While most of this research has been done in Euro-American contexts, recent studies in Asian developmental states have confirmed and expanded these insights (e.g. Denney and Green 2021).

There has also been an effort to broaden the scope of research to the entire spectrum of attitudes towards immigration that exist among populations. For decades, research has focused largely on anti-immigration attitudes, mostly studied in Western contexts (Freeman 1995, Lucassen 2018). By comparison, moderate, neutral or positive views

on immigration have gone understudied, despite the fact that in most of these countries a majority of the population reports feeling ambivalent or unsure about immigrants (Dempster et al. 2020: 19). In general, immigration attitudes have been studied much less in Global South countries, although many developing countries have seen growing immigration in recent decades (Gisselquist and Tarp 2019).

While the immigration attitudes literature has been largely quantitative, focused on factors predicting anti-immigrant sentiment, much less is known about how people frame or explain their views on immigration (Parks-Yancy et al. 2009: 286). As Waldinger puts it, describing the field in the United States, the research focus has been on "them, not us" (2018: 1413). This has also been true for studies outside Western contexts. For instance, critical 'expat' literature in post-colonial developing societies in the Global South importantly shows the "problematic reproductions of the colonial past" at work in the reception of migrants from Western backgrounds. However, these studies usually center migrant experience rather than the societies receiving them (Fechter and Walsh 2010).

A limited number of in-depth qualitative studies of host society understandings of immigration (the 'us') confirm that individuals often hold views that are more neutral, ambivalent and flexible than political or media discourse suggests. Using thematic and linguistic analysis, interview-based studies on immigration attitudes highlight the connections individuals make between their views on immigration and beliefs they hold about national identity and development (Parks-Yancy et al. 2009, Strauss 2011). Qualitative studies outside Euro-American contexts contribute to our limited understanding of the social incorporation of immigrants and host society responses in Global South countries, showing how debates on specific immigration policies are shaped by unique national circumstance, even when patterns seem similar. For instance, Japan's anti-immigrant sentiment is largely rooted in controversy over the incomplete social incorporation of ethnic minority groups, most notably the Korean population that stayed in Japan post-WW2, and not a backlash against open immigration policies (e.g. Chung 2019: 220-221).

The case of China, a developing country that is now also the world's second-largest economy, is well-suited to exploring diverse responses to immigrant reception. Like in many other young nation-states with histories of Western imperialist interference, international migration was seen as a threat to independence in the first decades following the PRC's establishment. From the 1980s onwards, the Chinese state started to embraced the "capabilities-enhancing potential" of migration (de Haas 2010, 256). Large-scale internal and outward migration ensued. Despite many not returning, China entered a positive cycle of what de Haas describes as the "mutually reinforcing interactions between migration and development" (de Haas 2010, 256) that can occur when migrants contribute to take-off development. Emigrants, especially, were celebrated as participants in the national modernization project, in what formed a sharp

break with the allegations of disloyalty they had faced during the Cultural Revolution (Nyiri 2006, Thuno 2001).

While small in scale by comparison, immigration became part of China's new relationship to mobility, with immigration liberalization directly linked to China's increasing economic global integration. Although structural reforms of the immigration system have been limited – with permanent settlement options largely absent – in the 2000s a developmentally oriented, pragmatically enforced immigration regime emerged (Pieke 2011). China's immigration authorities, part of the country's opaque public security system, do not regularly publish data on the number of foreigners residing in China, making precise trends in incoming migration difficult to track.

However, fragmented data sources show that foreign communities grew by over 10% annually in the 2000s, with growth slowing down in the 2010s (Yang 2012). Annual registered border crossings by foreign nationals surged from 16,7 million in 1999 to 97,7 million in 2019. According to national census figures, which first included foreign residents in 2010, key migrant origin areas are East Asia, South-east Asia and North America (see Table A.4.1 in Annex 4). China's immigration policy framework focuses on professional migration that could support its modernization, with labor migration almost completely restricted. However, irregular migrant labor flows are common in some (border) areas. In addition, China now attracts a significant foreign student population, hosting over 492,000 foreign students in 2018 (up from 141,087 in 2005), almost 60% of which come from Asian countries.[88]

Given the importance of national identity perceptions and developmental trajectories for immigration attitudes, as well as the strong connection between mobility and development in China's reform era, I expect that Chinese immigration attitudes are undergoing significant change in the context of China's rapid socio-economic transformation in recent decades. In particular, the uneven internationalization of Chinese society, as well as China's emphasis on independence from foreign influence in its national identity narrative suggests that immigration will be perceived more ambivalently compared to the celebration of reform era emigration.

3. Methodology

This paper draws on a combination of qualitative interviews and quantitative data on Chinese immigration attitudes. The qualitative data aims to deepen understanding of how Chinese respondents interpret, answer, and frame key questions on the role of immigration in society. For this paper, 46 semi-structured interviews were conducted

88 教育部 (Ministry of Education, "2018年来华留学统计" [2018 foreign student statistics], April 12, 2019, http://www.moe.gov.cn/jyb_xwfb/gzdt_gzdt/s5987/201904/t20190412_377692.

between June and October 2020 (20 by author, 26 by three research assistants).[89] Interviews lasted on average 30-60 minutes and explored personal experiences with immigrants, beliefs and opinions on the effects of immigration (both at a local and at a national level), immigrant treatment, and immigration control.

The interviews were done in three locations: Shanghai, the mega-city with China's largest foreign population (roughly 1% of the 25 million inhabitants are of foreign nationality), Pinghu, an industrial town in Zhejiang province with a history of attracting foreign investment, and Jinan, the provincial capital of Shandong province, with little immigration and a more conservative ideological profile. Respondents were selected with an aim for diversity in terms of age, gender, education level and personal migration status (local or internal migrant) (see Annex 3, Table A.3.1). They were found through the personal networks of the author and research assistants, or through chance encounters. With the exception of one ethnic Hui respondent, the respondents were members of the country's Han-Chinese majority (91.1% of the population in the 2020 census). Interviews were recorded and transcribed by the author and the research assistants. The author analyzed the transcripts using manual coding for common and distinct themes, as well as speech patterns.[90]

While limited in its scale and statistical representativeness, the interview sample reflects a broad cross-section of Chinese society and its vast socio-economic spectrum and thus complements analyses of online debates on immigration, which tend to amplify the strongest views as well as those of university-educated, urban and male internet users (Dempster et al. 2020: 26). Self-censorship of less socially acceptable opinions cannot be excluded, but by working with three research assistants who were Chinese nationals it was possible to check for variation in responses given to a foreign researcher and to a fellow national. No major differences were found, except in the terms used to describe immigrants.[91] Interview questions did not use the term for 'immigrant' and 'immigration' (移民), but terms like 'foreigner', 'foreigner who lives in China' and 'long-term settlement' (定居), which are more familiar in the Chinese context. While 'immigration' in the sense of permanent settlement is unusual given China's incomplete immigration policy framework, in this article I do use 'immigrant' and 'immigration' to refer to foreign nationals residing in China and their act of moving there, following academic convention and definitions of international organizations.

---

89 As they all took place between June-October 2020, for the public interviews referenced in this chapter, I do not include the exact month in the interview code. I also do not specify the location, although more information on the respondent and their place of residency is often mentioned in the running text.

90 The interview data were anonymized at all stages of the research and saved in an institutional data repository. It complies with institutional requirements for approval at the time of the study's commencement. Participants were fully informed of the study's affiliation and purposes and oral consent was obtained prior to the start of each interview.

91 See section 4.b for more analysis on this point.

I compare and contrast these interview data with data from an online survey on immigration attitudes I designed and administered in July 2020 as part of a research team at East China University of Science and Technology. It contained detailed questions on immigration policy and salience that had previously not been asked in a Chinese context, such as attitudes towards immigrants of various skill levels, and on current levels of immigration management. The non-representative nationwide sample (N = 1888) was stratified by age group, gender and educational level, with student assistants monitoring survey completion, improving the rate of completed surveys (94%) and data reliability. While the resulting sample, like many online surveys, has a bias towards higher levels of education, it captures a diverse national population on variables like age, gender, social class and international exposure (for more information on the sample and geographical distribution of completed questionnaires, see Annex 3, Table A.3.2 and Table A.3.3).

In addition, I use data from the World Values Survey and Asian Barometer Survey that have included occasional questions on immigration attitudes in their nationally representative surveys in China since the 1990s (see Annex 3, Table A.3.4 for details of surveys used). Drawing on these sources allows me to validate and triangulate interview findings, strengthening the paper's conclusions on Chinese (national) narratives on immigration. It also adds valuable descriptive statistics on a subject on which few data have been published.

4. Analysis: From immigrants helping China "catch up" to China helping immigrants prosper

In the following sections, I draw from the semi-structured interviews and national survey responses to analyze on-going changes in Chinese immigration attitudes in depth. I show that these attitudes are best explained through on-going changes in perceptions of China's status in a global developmental hierarchy. In fact, respondents put their views on China's rapid socio-economic development front and center in their evaluation of their personal interactions with foreigners, and of the different immigration policy areas discussed. In contrast to the earlier reform era, when the country was seen to be 'learning' from the outside world and 'open' in an indiscriminate manner, China is now considered powerful enough to exercise more control over immigration, whether that entails increased selectivity at the border, eradicating policy privileges for immigrants, or developing into a more full-fledged immigrant society with more options for permanent residency. Among the broad cross-section of the population I examine, I thus find a broadly shared frame for interpreting immigration issues, structured by a widespread shift in perceptions of China's national identity. I also find significant variation in attitudes, but less anti-immigration sentiment than existing studies done within subgroups of the Chinese population suggest.

a. The historical roots of Chinese attitudes towards immigrants

In the 19th century, following a series of military defeats at the hands of Western countries and Japan, Chinese officials and intellectuals started to see their country as a latecomer to modernization. The West and Japan became reference points for China's development strategy, while at the same time intensified imperialism from these areas forced China to open parts of the country to foreign immigrants and trade, contributing to a chronic sense of foreign threat. In response, China's identity vis-à-vis developed countries became a core part of its nation and state-building project. This identity frequently took on an explicit ethno-racial component, in which a 'yellow race' was portrayed as competing in a racial hierarchy with 'white' developed nations ahead of it and 'brown' and 'black' peoples behind (Dikotter 1997).

In the early 20th century, the idea emerged that standing up to and expelling foreigners was "the very definition of patriotism in modern China" (Lee 2014: 250). Reflecting this sentiment, the writer Lu Xun noted that Chinese people only had two polarizing terms of address for foreigners: "either 'beasts' or 'majesties'" (cited in Huang 2021: 112). At the same time, the increase in immigration to China from Japan, Russia and Western powers during this period resulted in significant Chinese-foreign exchange in a setting that has often been called "semi-colonial" (Bickers 2011). Following the establishment of the P.R.C. in 1949, opportunities for such exchange sharply dropped together with immigrant numbers as the Chinese state focused on eradicating imperialist influence and foreign ties became highly politicized. In 1955, the Chinese state imported a Soviet-style system of dealing with foreign visitors, aimed at both hosting and controlling foreign 'friends' and 'experts,' as welcomed foreigners were categorized (Brady 2003).

In the reform era, from the 1980s onwards, international mobility resumed at a speed that revealed the latent enthusiasm of the Chinese population for global engagement. 'Importing' foreign expertise through hiring foreign skilled professionals became a state priority. Other types of migration – from marriage migrants to traders and students – also increased as border controls relaxed. Dealing with immigrants became more quotidian in big urban centers and coastal and border areas with higher concentrations of foreigners. Data from the World Values Survey and Asian Barometer Survey shows a drop in anti-immigration sentiment in the 2000s compared to the 1990s: In 2007, only 15% was in favor of "strict limits" on foreigners in the labor market, vs. 40% in 1995. In these decades, educated, younger respondents were significantly more positive about immigrants than older and less-educated groups.

Although most immigrants came from East Asian and bordering countries, Chinese popular discourse has focused most on the white and black migrants deemed "most foreign" (Mathews 2015: 11). White Western migrants were associated with China's development aspirations and featured widely in advertising and popular media (Schein 1994). African trader communities that developed in Guangzhou, China's southern

manufacturing center, were initially welcomed for their economic contribution but soon attracted public controversy (Li et al 2012). Despite these communities' collapse in the 2010s, racist media discourse exaggerating their numbers has remained common (e.g. Lan 2016). While public displays of anti-immigrant sentiment have been uncommon, black African migrants have been more likely to trigger protest and xenophobia throughout the reform era (e.g. Sautman 1994), with processes of racialization taking place against the backdrop of power relations between Africa, China and the West (e.g. Monson 2015, Lan 2016, Castillo 2020). Outside scholarly debate, these issues remain underexamined. In his study of Chinese discourses of race, Yinghong Cheng (2019) analyzes how "a conscious or subconscious Chinese exceptionalism" that naturalizes a Han-centric racialized Chinese identity impedes public discussion of racism in the Chinese context.

While Chinese society was rapidly diversifying, the state has remained largely silent on the long-term impact of immigration on Chinese society. In the reform era, it has refrained from reforming immigration laws to accommodate permanent settlement but adopted many preferential policies focused on attracting certain types of professional migrants (called 'talent') and foreign students, including by offering tax breaks and scholarships. In the 2000s, especially, China's restrictive visa regulations were enforced loosely, except for occasional crackdowns, a management practice that was replaced by increased enforcement and control in the 2010s (Habicht 2020). In 2018, China established its first national immigration agency, which has largely continued the trend towards increased enforcement (see Chapter 1).

Despite the vast changes in China's global status and integration, its approach to internationalization has retained a tension between opening up and controlling foreign influence, which impacts how immigrants are seen and governed. At a state level, president Xi Jinping calls for more economic globalization, while also propagating a national identity that is built upon a 'myth of homogeneity' and does not include immigrants (or many members of Chinese minority groups) (Gan 2020). At a societal level, nationalist sentiment has strengthened in the last decade, while at the same time, China's internationalization continued to accelerate. Domestic consumption became increasingly global and international study and travel became much more accessible (Ma 2020). These contradictory developments affect societal views on immigration to China, leading in particular to a normalization of immigrant perceptions as well as a rise in saliency of some immigration issues.

b. The normalization of immigrant perceptions

An attitude of "worshipping the foreign" (崇洋媚外) was seen as an important component of the outward orientation of China's early reform period, when political caution towards the outside world, while not abandoned, was greatly reduced. It was especially extended to 'Western,' often white, immigrants, but also reflected a more

general sharp division between Chinese and foreigners. In the last two decades, whatever the details of people's experiences with immigrants, the "halo" (public interview P-26) around them had faded substantially.

Illustrating this shift in perception, respondents point to their personal experience. They describe how encountering an immigrant no longer feels "special" (e.g. 稀奇，新奇). This contrasts with earlier memories, when the norm was to "form a crowd," either literally or in a figurative sense by showering the immigrant with attention, and treat them as a representative of a different world. Sometimes such memories were colored by suspicion, or by negative narratives from schoolbooks about foreigners' historical treatment of China, but more often respondents remembered seeing foreigners as "VIPs" (高人一等). As immigration to China diversified and spread to smaller cities, having a foreigner sit next to you at a restaurant in Jinan is now commonplace, whereas ten years ago one might have "continuously stared" (P-33).

Now, more and more Chinese have had personal experience or know people with experience living or traveling abroad. As a student who had studied in Japan put it: "After coming back, I started to think about what it would be like as a foreigner in China" (P-30). The increase in international mobility in both directions dismantled the idea that immigrants were in any way special. This extended to people who had not traveled abroad themselves. "I am no longer intrigued when I see a foreigner because when we Chinese go abroad, we are foreigners as well. Same thing," said one Shanghai-based shop-owner without personal experience of traveling abroad (P-12).

Respondents incorporate this normalization of mobility and exposure to immigrants into their wider views of how Chinese society has changed. Many remember growing up thinking that while many Chinese wanted to emigrate to improve their lives, it was difficult to imagine what foreigners might want to do in China. As material conditions in China improved, it made sense that there would be a counter flow of immigrants. The improved situation in China resulted in a rebalancing of the perceived social position of foreign migrants vis-à-vis Chinese nationals. As a Shanghai local working in finance put it:

> *"10-20 years ago, we thought that all foreigners did pretty well, as long as they were white, for instance, their income would be quite good. Now foreigners who come work here make about the same ... and we don't just judge them by material standards, but also by their speech and behavior, ways of thinking etcetera. Evaluations of immigrants are now increasingly objective." (P-24)*

This idea of perceptions of foreigners in China becoming more "objective" or "comprehensive" was widespread in interviews in all three locations and extended to a diversity of migrants. Asked about 'foreigners,' respondents self-categorized immigrants in their answers. Like in the above quote, white Western foreigners have

often been considered the quintessential foreigners in reform era China. But many respondents also centered Asian and African immigrants in their responses. For all these groups, they reported a process of habituation that had changed their views, increasing their ability to go beyond overly negative or positive immigrant stereotypes. In Zhejiang villages, too, respondents noted, an African-American English teacher at the local high school or a transnational marriage of a villager and a Southeast-Asian wife would now hardly raise an eyebrow.

However, this shift, which many describe as a necessary corrective on the previous period, did not imply a homogenization of attitudes towards migrants across Chinese society. One divide was generational. Older people – for whom personal contact with foreigners used to simply be out of the question – were more likely to describe migrants as "guests" to be welcomed, invoking the polite high-socialist state discourse that reified a sharp China-foreign contrast and that remains common in state media (Brady 2003). In contrast, respondents in their twenties and thirties emphasized that their views differed from those of older generations, who they saw as stuck in a type of inferiority complex rooted in China's less prosperous recent past. In the words of a Pinghu recent university graduate: "We are not curious anymore … and I have never thought of China as backward. [Foreigners] are just from a faraway place" (P-42).

In addition, 'normal' does not equal 'close'. Many note that they perceive little in-depth interaction with immigrants in their communities. In our 2020 survey, 57% of respondents report not knowing any foreigners personally. Some also expressed ideas about a hierarchy of the perceived 'foreignness,' of different migrant groups that echo a long history of racialized migrant categorization. As a Pinghu-based entrepreneur puts it: "I always feel Westerners are a bit more foreign" (P-36). In line with previous research, immigrants of Asian backgrounds are more likely to be referred to by their nationality, while other foreign nationals are more likely to be described as *laowai*, a well-known informal term for foreign nationals. The term is more strongly associated with white and, to a lesser extent, black immigrants, and other foreigners whose appearance and behavior seems further removed from that of native Chinese (Mao 2015). Its connotations are ambivalent, "on a continuum centering on neutral meaning but extends to two extremes of complimentary and derogatory meaning" (Mao 2015, 2136), perhaps explaining why this term was more common in the interviews conducted by Chinese researchers.

There are also indications that negative feelings surrounding local-foreign interactions are on the rise. In the World Values Survey (WVS) Wave 7, for which data were gathered in mainland China in 2018, 26% of Chinese respondents selected "foreigners" as a category of people they would not want living next to them, the highest percentage out of all six waves asking this question (in 2013 it was 12%). To a question about the level of trust for foreign nationals, the percentage of respondents that

answered "not much" jumped to 56% (vs. 30% in 2007 and 2013).[92] In our interviews, some respondents mention that as China's relations with a particular country deteriorate, people can feel more hostile, making "nationalist, conservative" sounds on immigration more prominent.

Overall, while many still hardly ever encounter foreign migrants, the narrative has changed. Across a range of demographics, as Chinese citizens feel more confident about the outside world and China's position in it, Chinese-foreign interactions became less special and are experienced as more equal. This change, often described as on-going, informs debate on the effects of immigration and related policy issues.

c. Diverging views on the effects of immigration

In evaluating the effects of immigration, a common reply was that the positives outweigh the negatives. However, the balance between positive and negative effects was changing, many noted, as China's perceived need for foreign expertise and investment decreases. While past immigration is put primarily in a developmental framework, in thinking about current and future immigration, respondents also go into its social and political impact.

The historical arrival of immigrants is bound up in the larger narrative of China's "reform and opening up" since the 1980s, which included an official call to participate in global exchanges. Economic immigrants especially from more developed regions were welcomed as part of this national development strategy. "They came to join our development efforts – that's a good thing," said a Shanghai-based TV-producer (P-2). Many connect the beneficial effects of foreign companies and investment, trade and technology, management practices and improved working conditions to economic immigration: "At the start of the reform period the change was the biggest… their advanced technology helped us develop, while opening new markets. Without these exchanges, development would have been less fast," noted a middle-aged manager of a state-owned enterprise (P-29).

These widely mentioned economic benefits of incoming migration were considered less important as education levels and transnational expertise among the Chinese population increased. "This is the big trend," said a Shanghai-based human resources officer at a German company who had been replacing foreign employees by local candidates (P-1). Previously, foreign candidates might have brought unique cultural and technical skills to a position (Farrer 2014). Now, however, Chinese and foreign candidates compete for the same positions, although such competition remains limited due to low overall immigrant figures. ("The issue is not the foreigners, but tightening employment," as one Jinan-based respondent puts it.) The shift in perceptions of

92 See Annex 4 for further selected survey data.

foreigners in China's labor market seems reflected in our 2020 survey. Respondents are divided on the question of whether China's need for foreign expertise is shrinking (31% agree, 23% disagree), while 41% express some worry about foreign professional migrants adding pressure to the job market. Other survey questions reflect an overall neutral to positive evaluation of the developmental impact of immigration, with 56% of respondents evaluating immigrants' impact on China's development as positive (vs. 35% neutral, 9% negative).

Reflecting the diversification of immigrant flows to China in the last two decades, respondents go beyond economic effects to mention a broad range of cultural and societal advantages and risks of immigration. Benefits mentioned include immigrants' contribution to English language education, international perspectives in workplaces and universities, and a general increase in cultural diversity. Views on immigrant effects displayed regional patterns. Shanghai-based respondents especially feel immigrants personally benefit their lifestyle. Some were positive about the extra options the gradual uptick of foreign migrants in professions considered 'lower-skill', such as domestic workers or restaurant staff, might provide. Outside Shanghai, respondents were more likely to point to China's 1.4 billion population as a reason against labor migration. There, too, responses mentioning foreign marriage migration as a partial solution for China's gender imbalance were more prominent.

When it comes to perceived negative effects of immigration, concerns are usually framed as moderate given the currently limited scale of immigration. As one 55-year-old respondent puts it, "China is strong now, it can take a bit of a challenge" (P-42). Relatively prominent concerns revolve around political issues (spying, separatists), unemployed foreigners, or social unrest caused by larger immigrant communities. These latter concerns are strongest among respondents outside Shanghai, five of whom focused on the perceived negative social effects of African migrants. Some cited media accounts on African migration to China, many of which have exaggerated its scale. In our survey, respondents estimate Africa to be the second-largest region of migrant origin (after Asia), when in reality migrant numbers from most other regions are higher. Student respondents also singled out ill-integrated South Korean students, the top country of origin for foreign students in China. In addition, fitting with the findings of Lan (2021) on the changing meaning of whiteness in urban China, some Shanghai-based respondents complain about entitled white migrants.

In addition to these socio-political concerns around immigration, Chinese respondents believe that immigration might have a positive aspect on cross-cultural communication. Respondents point out that personal interactions with immigrants allow them to go beyond nationalist education in forming their views of the world. At the same time, they believe immigrants living in China can help correct perceived international biases against China, for instance by spreading the message that "China is no longer a place with just straw huts, but also has villas" (P-19). In our survey 64%

of respondents agreed that immigrants improve mutual understanding, with only 6% disagreeing. These attitudes fit with state media discourse on foreign migrant 'friends' who are favorably disposed towards China, within an otherwise hostile environment that is ignorant of China's developmental success (see Pulford 2021). However, evidence for this perceived effect has indeed been found, with Han (2017b) finding foreign students in Beijing universities improve their evaluation of China. As Chinese respondents consider their country an increasingly attractive immigration destination, widely shared policy priorities emerge across demographic groups on the need for immigration control and, especially, selection.

d. Widely shared views on the need for immigrant control and selection

When it comes to immigration control, survey data show that moderate opinions in favor of the status quo continue to dominate. The minority share in favor of reducing immigration has been largely stable over the last decade: Our 2020 survey finds a minority of 24.9% of all respondents in favor of reducing immigration, where Han (2017a) found 25.2% in 2008. The 2014-2016 Asian Barometer Survey (ABS), using slightly different answer options, finds 28.4% in this camp. However, the make-up of those advocating more control has changed significantly. While WVS results show that proponents of immigration reduction in the '90s and early '00s were largely older and less formally educated, in recent surveys this group is diverse in terms of age and education background.

This trend primarily reflects increasing polarization among the highly educated. In the 2014-2016 ABS, about twice as many Chinese university-educated respondents wanted to reduce immigrant inflows, compared to those in favor of an increase. In this survey, the level of highly educated respondents in favor of immigrant reduction is 5% higher than the national average. In our 2020 survey, too, the previous pro-immigration slant of university- educated respondents that Han (2017a) for instance found in the 2008 China General Social Survey, has disappeared. Now, overall findings and those among the highly educated largely overlap. This emerging polarization of the highly educated unusual given the established relationship between higher levels of education and favorable attitudes towards immigration, can also be found in some European polls on immigration attitudes in the last decade. In Russia, for instance, those with university degrees are more negative than demographic groups with lower education levels.[93]

This recent convergence across levels of education helps explain the relative lack of generational divides in our interviews on discourses on control and especially immigrant selection. Regardless of location or age, respondents argue for stricter selection of immigrants on skills and/or political and cultural traits. "I think we don't

93 Neli Esipova, Anita Pugliese and Julie Ray, "Europeans most negative toward immigration," *Gallup*, October 16, 2015, https://news.gallup.com/poll/186209/europeans-negative-toward-immigration.aspx.

need to control quantity, but we should control for the quality of people who come in," as one young professional puts it (P-46). The main frame for immigrant selection is that of highly skilled, highly educated immigrants being welcome, regardless of nationality, as the threshold for admitting economic migrants should be raised as the country develops. "The United States is very demanding too…we have to be stricter," said a middle-aged Pinghu resident (P-41). In addition to economic selection, a diverse minority of respondents emphasized political and cultural views in immigration selection, including "liking" and "approving of" (认同) the country and its cultural customs, as well as the absence of overly hostile views of the Chinese government.

Globally prevalent 'talent' discourse, which has been widely adopted by Chinese policy makers since the 2000s (Zweig and Wang 2013), overlaps with the Chinese concept of *suzhi*, a common if contested measure of population 'quality' that mixes connotation of skill levels and character traits. Some argue that as Chinese population *suzhi* has improved, the country should attract foreigners of a higher 'caliber' as well, and avoid admitting people who come to China because they were unsuccessful in their home countries. *Suzhi* discourse has been widely used, including by the state, to discuss internal migration, justifying structural education inequalities and restrictive settlement rules by emphasizing individual ability and striving (Kipnis 2006).

Chinese internal migrants connected immigration policy to their own experience migrating to Chinese cities. As Chinese cities set their own settlement requirements in accordance with the country's tiered residential registration system, many internal migrants retain a temporary residential status in the place they work, not fully qualifying for citizen benefits unless they can meet big cities" high threshold for settlement (for instance in terms of education and income). Because of the economic opportunity of these cities, many make do with this differentiated treatment. A 48-year old long-term internal migrant to Shanghai suggested foreign migrants do the same: "For us migrants in Shanghai, we also can't settle. If we lose our jobs and can't survive in Shanghai, we just go back to our home region" (P-8). Some advocate differentiated immigration rules for Chinese regions, making it harder for immigrants to move to cities like Shanghai and Beijing, just like it is for Chinese citizens.

Some interviewees singled out immigrants from developing countries and specifically black migrants for stricter immigration control, but less strongly than some of the previous research suggests. In my interviews, the minority that did so usually qualified their view by mentioning that these communities were generally unproblematic, or that it was a *suzhi* issue, "unrelated with the fact that they are foreign," as a 29-year-old researcher emphasized (P-23). In our survey, we similarly find a negative bias towards migrants from African countries, with 22.5% feeling negative about African migrants coming to China. Unlike in the interviews, survey results also highlight more negative attitudes towards migrants coming from China's geopolitical adversaries such as the United States (29%) and India (35.7%). By contrast, the share

of respondents feeling negative about migrants from Western Europe (10.1%) and East Asia (3.7%) is much lower.

Whether to justify immigration liberalization or restriction, respondents refer to China's development to justify their policy position: for those who do not want to reduce immigration, as China grows stronger, maintaining or increasing immigration can help make its companies, universities and cities globally competitive. But for people in favor of reducing migration, China's increased domestic competitiveness or internal development gaps are referenced to argue that economic migrants are less needed or should be more strictly regulated.

e. The growing salience of eradicating foreign privilege

Unlike internal migration, immigration has generally not been considered a key societal issue in the reform era. The salience of immigration policy, or its relative importance among public concerns, has even hardly been studied but fragmented reports indicate it has been low. As Han (2017a) notes, "immigration is a topic that is not of great concern to either the Chinese government or the public" (127). However, there are indications that here too things are shifting. In our survey, 55% of respondents say controlling immigration is a higher or much higher priority for China than it was ten years ago. This percentage is higher in places with more foreigners, like Shanghai (77.5%) or Beijing (66%). Immigrant-related controversies also get bigger than they used to, with the debate surrounding a proposed permanent residency law in February 2020 running in the billions of online comments. In our interviews, respondents said that immigration topics seem to be "overrepresented" (P-16) online, leading to debate that is described as polarized and emotional, as well as "largely conservative" (P-25).

Besides the need for immigration control and selection, the most salient concern is that with 'privileged treatment' (优待) of immigrants living in China. In its everyday use in China, the term 'privileged treatment' includes a range of issues: it can refer to a type of voluntary 'VIP'-like treatment of foreigners by ordinary Chinese – helping them find their way in the city or giving them better service in a shop or restaurant – to labor market preferences for foreign nationals resulting in higher compensation, or to state policies such as state-sponsored scholarships for foreign students or tax benefits for foreign professionals and lenient treatment by police. Our survey results confirm that these concerns are widespread, with over half of respondents answering that foreigners are treated better (26%) or much better (29%) by state authorities.

These different types of 'supercitizen' treatment (超国民待遇), as it has been called, are all seen as historical products of an era in which immigrants were privileged because of their foreign identity (e.g. Brady 2003). In our interviews, four respondents recounted a tale of a Japanese migrant losing his bike and, aided by Chinese police, swiftly retrieving it, something that they considered unlikely in the case of a Chinese citizen losing their bike. China's development status now necessitates change,

respondents across regional and educational backgrounds note. As a security guard in Jinan puts it:

> *"I feel that compared to other countries, in its quest to improve cultural exchange China has gone a bit overboard with accommodating foreign students. .... There was a stage in which foreign students were put first, and Chinese students were treated as second-rank ... Perhaps because otherwise they did not want to come. But now slowly it is all equal, and that's how it should be, just like they would in the US." (P-36)*

To many interviewees, the persistence of preferential state policies for some immigrant groups seems out of step with China's current developmental status as a global power. However, their salience seems primarily connected to the politicization of the issue by online nationalists, who increasingly dominate China's online public opinion sphere (Schneider 2018). The case cited in our interviews of the Japanese national retrieving his bike, for instance, can be traced back to 2012, when according to media reports at the time, the stolen bike was returned after the new owner learnt about the theft on social media. Friendly internet users, rather than Chinese police, played a key role, but in many online articles it has since been reframed as a textbook case of foreign privilege.[94] The case is typical of the limited information environment on this topic, in which nationalist blogs and social media posts highlight immigration-related content that fits a frame of foreign privilege, without providing relevant context.[95] At the same time, complex regulations requiring Chinese police to report cases related to a foreign national to different departments can lead to lax law enforcement, as police "don't dare, don't want to, and don't know how" to handle immigrant-related cases (Li and Jiao 2020). In the view of a Pinghu-based official: "You can't deny that in China, the state pays special attention to things that pertain to foreigners (涉外) .. but there is also a lot of online hype" (P-40).

As a contrast to foreign privilege, some respondents also saw immigrant discrimination, especially of Black people in China, as an urgent social issue. According to a Shanghai-based lawyer, common practices of privileging foreigners and of discriminating against them could be seen as two sides of the same coin: "It is rooted

---

94 "日本小伙环游世界单车武汉被偷 网友接力找到车" [Japanese world traveler's bike stolen in Wuhan – Netizens retrieve it], 凤凰新闻, February 22, 2012, https://culture.ifeng.com/8/detail_2012_02/22/12690320_0.shtml.

95 In the case of foreign students, such context might include the fact that they are not allowed to opt out of more high-quality, expensive accommodation, or that a majority of foreign students funds their own study in China. For an analysis of why policy differentiation between Chinese and foreign students remains persistent, see 张端鸿, "来华留学生教育为何难以实现管理趋同化"(Why it is hard to integrate the education of foreign students coming to China), 中国科学报, July 17.

in the same issue of seeing foreigners as different from us" (P-16). He expressed an interest in moving beyond such dichotomous thinking, given China's emerging identity as an immigrant destination. In our survey, we see a related interest: 55% of respondents agreed or strongly agreed with the statement that China needs to strengthen education on racial discrimination (vs. 6% disagreed, and 36% neutral).

f. Immigration as part of Chinese national identity

While today China is generally not considered an 'immigration country,' looking into the future, respondents differ on whether that might change. To some, this is unlikely ("China is still very traditional" (P-33)), while others see a connection between immigration and development that makes this seem all but inevitable. As one Shanghai-based programmer put it: "As China becomes a global power… the country will have to consider how to define itself, as a Chinese nation [Zhonghua minzu], or as a global nation – encompassing hundreds of *minzu*" (P-6). Statements such as these showcase how debates and positions on immigration are inherently related to broader perceptions of Chinese national identity.

In contrast to the polarized online debate on citizenship and permanent residency, interview and online survey respondents were largely accepting or positive on the issue of increasing permanent residency options for long-term immigrants. On other integration-related policy issues, too, survey respondents are less restrictive than current Chinese immigration policy, with only small minorities opposed to opening up employment for foreign spouses, or allowing foreign students to search for employment after graduation. Their answers reflect how, to Chinese citizens uninformed on the specifics of current immigration regime, China's de facto immigrant settlement has to some extent shifted a previous paradigm in which foreigners were "invariably sojourners" (Lee 2014: 283). Many referenced the large number of Chinese emigrants in the reform era to make the point that foreigners settling in a migration destination long-term was normal. While foreigner naturalization hardly exists in China, some cited the trend of naturalizing athletes, including some without a Chinese ethnic background, as an example of how even China's strong norm of ethnic citizenship might change over time (see also Sullivan et al 2022).

Respondents offered both international and homegrown models of what such a future might look like. In addition to references to the US and to Silicon Valley, three respondents mentioned China's Tang dynasty (618-907 AD), remembered at its height as a prosperous multi-ethnic empire, as a historical reference point for China's ability to deal with large numbers of immigrants. The Chinese leadership presents China's current rise as a 'return' to Tang-like glory, leading some to extrapolate that this should come with similar levels of internationalization. The on-going integration of internal migrants in cities like Shanghai, and of ethnic minorities are also cited as examples of how China has experience managing diversity. They note that Chinese state and

society will have to address immigration management more proactively, as much of its social infrastructure is not well-suited to immigrants, and improve citizen education on immigration

At the same time, immigration is considered an issue on which public awareness is low. It can be conflated with foreign policy issues, to the extent that "ordinary people will change their views of foreign residents from that country when political relations change," as a Pinghu-based professional put it (P-46). Other aspects of China's internationalization, including emigration of Chinese, have developed faster, so that public discourse on emigration is considered more informed and sophisticated than that on immigration. "People are not as aware of the foreigners living right by them," as one student explained. Chinese society, she added, is still primarily "Chinese": "It is a bit hard to imagine what it would be like if foreigners became very visible and prominent members of society" (P-30).

Some of this social distance shines through in vocabulary. Formal terms for foreign nationals with a history dating back to the early reform era or even the 50s and '60s, such as "international friends" (国际友人), "foreign friends" (外国朋友), and to a lesser extent "foreign experts" (外国专家) have been kept alive through state categories and common usage and also feature in interviews, especially in Jinan and Pinghu. Outside Shanghai's metropolitan environment, respondents were also more likely to question China's attraction to immigrants. According to the Pinghu-based official "it will take another 20-30 years of development" (P-40) before China will start to attract enough immigrants to become an immigration society. Contrasting their views with those of Shanghai-based respondents who were "very fed up" (P-15) with the number of immigrants they encounter emphasizes how regionally varying perceptions of China's development influence immigration attitudes, within a broadly shared frame of reference.

5. Discussion: A developmental lens on immigration attitudes and policy preferences

While often discussed in tandem with nationalist sentiment and perceptions of foreign nations and globalization, ordinary people's views on immigration cannot be conflated with these issues. This paper has focused on immigration attitudes in China, where there is a tradition of defining the nation against foreign enemies but immigrants only arrived in significant numbers in recent decades. It finds that, overall, the emerging immigration attitudes in Chinese society are moderate and multi-faceted. This finding stands in contrast to literature that suggests xenophobic sentiments dominate Chinese immigration attitudes, due to historical, ethnocultural or political reasons (e.g. Dikötter 1997, Cheng 2019).

This research finds that Chinese respondents approach immigration through the lens of the country's development. In explaining their diverse views on immigration,

Chinese respondents mobilize a broadly shared frame of reference centered on the state of the nation, which emphasizes China's developmental trajectory – a rapid transition from poor and semi-colonized to emerging global power. Evidence from interviews and survey data suggests that in the 1990s, a decade in which immigrants' presence in most of China was slowly increasing from a low base, public sentiment was cautious and to some extent divided on this trend. This changed in the 2000s, in which 'connecting with the world' (与世界接轨) was a key developmental focus of the Chinese state, and when anti-immigrant sentiment in surveys drops significantly and moderate attitudes dominate, as immigration in this period was considered most beneficial to China according to respondents. This shift has been accompanied by more outspoken anti-immigration attitudes among parts of the population in the 2010s, a decade characterized by Xi Jinping's projection of China as a confident, globally competitive power.

In 2020, respondents consider China's development to have entered a new stage. In this developmentalist national identity narrative, China's rising status has made it a more attractive immigrant destination. As a result, the increasingly developed country should be able to set and enforce its own immigration agenda, whether this includes a lower threshold for immigrants' permanent residency or enforcing more selective admission standards. In this respect, respondents largely model their views on perceptions of immigration control in Global North countries, although internal migration practices also play an important role.

A popular concern with catching up to the rich nations that had imperialized the country has been central to China's nation-building. Some have argued that contemporary Chinese society "has not fundamentally changed" in its attitudes towards foreign nations since Lu Xun's observation over a century ago, either looking up to or down on other countries and unable to see them as equals (2021: 126). By contrast, I find that while a developmental hierarchy continues to inform immigration discourse, the fact that China is now perceived to have risen to a higher position enables a more relaxed discourse. The study finds continuities in Othering practices, such as when White migrants are described as more foreign and in the stigmatization of Black migrants. These racialized perceptions, and their impact on attitudes towards different immigrant groups, have more recently also been found by Shao et al (2023), who examine racial and gender bias using survey experiments, and require further study. However, my findings highlight that they are not the only dimension in respondents' evaluations of immigrants and immigration policy, and exist next to ideas about economic, political and cultural development in the reform era. Some of these are usually left out in studies of Chinese immigration discourse, such as the enthusiasm for foreign contact that also characterized this period (Lee 2014, Chen 1995).

Perceptions of China's development also explain what is currently the most salient immigration issue: the unacceptability of policies privileging immigrants. Informed by (social) media critiques of these policies, respondents reject the policy tradition

of state actors treating foreign nationals as 'guests,' who are sharply demarcated from local society and receive superior material treatment or services (Brady 2003), as incompatible with China's current level of development. For some, controlling immigration also directly connects to another key national identity narrative: that of China's historical semi-colonial victimhood at the hand of foreign enemies, which has been kept alive in nationalist propaganda and education (Callahan 2015: 222). In addition, concerns with China's image abroad, which immigrants should help improve, echo long-standing Chinese discourse on the outside world's unwillingness to recognize China's development. Alongside the spread of Chinese versions of globally common nativist discourse, especially among educated internet users, these strands of historical symbolism help explain rising anti-immigration attitudes among university-educated Chinese.

The Chinese case strengthens findings in the immigration reception literature emphasizing the relevance of 'state of the nation' concerns in determining immigration attitudes (Hainmueller and Hopkins 2014). The exceptional speed of China's development trajectory makes it an interesting case of early-stage immigrant reception and adds to literature on the importance of national history and development trajectories in shaping immigration reception (Brubaker 1992, Zolberg 2006). It also emphasizes change over time. As my findings show, and complementing previous findings on the shifting social position of foreign migrants in China's urban centers (e.g. Farrer 2019), Chinese individuals remember how recently they felt very differently about China's relation to the outside world, resulting in a specific set of immigration attitudes and priorities. Lastly, in a context in which 'nation-building' and 'economic development' were all but synonymous for several decades, evaluations of immigrants' economic contribution continue to dominate.

A developmental lens on immigration attitudes thus highlights host society responses that seem less present in countries whose citizens mostly consider their country 'developed', and where the immigration attitudes debate departs from the assumption that their country is a highly attractive immigrant destination. By contrast, my findings on China highlight pride in the country's increasing ability to attract immigrants, confidence in increased state capacity to control immigration risk, as well as frustration with some immigrants being privileged over local residents and with the country's global reputation. While the concrete content of national identity narratives will vary, my findings suggest a relationship between immigration attitudes and the 'catching-up logic' of modernization discourses that might have broader relevance to the study of immigrant-reception beyond high-income, especially Western contexts.

In China, recent developments such as the polarization of immigration attitudes among highly educated groups, and the politicization of some socio-cultural immigration issues suggest that immigration attitudes might continue to change. As China's economic development slows and perceptions of the country's identity further develop,

diverse socio-cultural aspects of immigration might start to outweigh socio-economic reasoning, as they have in many Western countries (Hammar 2011). While I suggest there might be patterns to immigration attitudes that set apart so-called developmental contexts from so-called developed ones, the Chinese case reminds of the contingency of these categories and of "the interconnections of South and North" (Nawyn 2016).

CHAPTER 6

How China's nationalist online sphere constrains policymaking – The case of foreigners' permanent residency reform[96]

1. Introduction

On February 27, 2020, China's Ministry of Justice published a draft version of new regulations governing foreigners' permanent residency in mainland China for public comment. The draft regulations would be China's first immigration legislation since the establishment of a national immigration agency in 2018, and represented a significant step towards a more comprehensive legal framework on immigration. However, by the next morning, the draft had become the subject of intense public debate. Overnight, the topic had received over 130 million views on social media platform Weibo, a number that would rise to more than 4 billion views over the next week (Zhang B. 2020). Comments were overwhelmingly negative, expressing fear that the regulations would lead to increased immigration with negative impact on Chinese society. The top-voted comments below many posts were simple expressions of opposition, such as "no no no" or "resolutely opposed."

In response to the raging online debate, immigration experts and officials rushed to explain the state rationale for the law in hundreds of media articles and op-eds. That week, one mid-ranking official at China's national immigration agency, who usually only shared occasional family pictures, posted fourteen media articles on the regulations. In one article that he posted, three experts pointed out that improving China's permanent residency for foreign nationals was a key step in making China competitive in a global

96 This chapter was published as: Tabitha Speelman, "How China's Online Nationalists Constrain Policymaking – the Case of Foreigners' Permanent Residency Reform, *Journal of Contemporary China*, 2022.

race for 'talent' and the trajectory of the country's rise.[97] Others emphasized that the regulations adjusted but did not fundamentally reform China's existing immigration system – and that China's notoriously high threshold for permanent residency largely remained in place. However, the intensity of the outrage – with 3,5 million people posting on Weibo even as censors were limiting their number – had made the draft untenable to state leadership. On March 8, 2020, the Ministry of Justice and National Immigration Administration (NIA) published a report stating that the public's "high level of concern" would be seriously considered, and that the draft would be revised.[98] Ever since, the regulations have been shelved.

This article analyzes elite-public interactions leading up to, during, and after the controversy around the permanent residency draft regulations (MoJ 2020). The debate surrounding the permanent residency regulations ('the P.R. debate') constitutes one of the largest public responses to any Chinese public consultation procedure. Its scale has been described by experts as surprising to immigration state actors, who had proved themselves to be out of touch with public immigration sentiment. This study asks: What factors contributed to this miscalculation of public sentiment, and what can the P.R. debate tell us about the role of public opinion in Chinese policymaking today?

The public pushback against the P.R. regulations stands out for its occurrence in a relatively marginal policy area. Chinese citizens' previous mobilization in response to public consultation procedures has mostly happened in key domestic policy areas such as healthcare reform, education, or the regulations around marriage and divorce (Balla and Xie 2021). By contrast, immigration policy has previously received little attention from policymakers and the Chinese public alike. While China's development has resulted in rapid growth of immigrant numbers in the last two decades, overall numbers are small relative to the population size and policy reforms have been gradual and technocratic, with a small number of influential policy makers and advisers dominating policy debate (Pieke 2011). Policymaking has focused on facilitating economic immigration, while long-term strategy on issues like immigrant settlement and integration has been kept minimal, as foreign migration retained some political sensitivity to a ruling party basing its legitimacy on liberating China from foreign imperialism. As a result, official public discourse and communication on immigration has been largely absent, while media coverage remains dominated by formulaic state propaganda.

---

97 "国际移民研究中心专家热议《中华人民共和国外国人永久居留管理条例（征求意见稿）》" [Experts from the international migration research center debate the 'P.R.C. Regulations for the management of foreigners' permanent residency' (draft for public comment)], 国际移民研究中心, February 28, 2020, https://mp.weixin.qq.com/s/R6jmUrxdgJzo7fVpzU4OoQ.

98 "国家移民管理局召开座谈会就《中华人民共和国外国人永久居留管理条例》（征求意见稿）听取意见" [National Immigration Administration meeting discusses 'P.R.C. Regulations for the management of foreigners' permanent residency' (draft for public comment)], March 8, 2020, http://www.gov.cn/xinwen/2020-03/08/content_5488632.htm.

A permanent residency law adopted in 2004 was hardly implemented, with only 10,200 immigrants awarded the status in the 2004-2016 period. It was only with the renewed top-down push for talent attraction under Xi Jinping that the development of a more comprehensive immigration system started to rise on the policy agenda, with a series of policy plans and local policy trials rolled out since 2015. At the same time, public concern with (perceived) irregular migration, especially in connection to African migrant communities in southern China, has increased in the last decade (e.g. Lan 2017). But perhaps given its limited absolute scale compared to China's internal migration, the salience and securitization of immigration has been low, with state actors – until recently – rarely engaging the public on the issue (Chou et al 2016).

However, since the 2015-2017 refugee surge to European countries, often framed as a 'crisis', Chinese 'ultranationalists,' a group that increasingly dominates online Chinese public debate, has grown interested in the issue of immigration as part of their affinity with global 'alt right' populist trends. This group combines Western 'alt right' groups' concerns with a majority identity under threat with previous forms of nationalism and racism in Chinese cyberspace (Zhang 2019, Yang and Fang 2021). As a result, anti-immigrant rhetoric in the Chinese online sphere has increased. During the P.R. debate, this group's extreme anti-immigration views found a wider online public, with state and media sources competing with more moderate viewpoints. While I find that public attitudes towards immigrant permanent residency are in fact more nuanced than nationalist-dominated online debate suggests, the negative sentiment expressed in the P.R. debate has been taken by elites as an important or even representative part of Chinese public opinion on immigration and indeed of the national character (国情). This has resulted in stalled reforms and a reshuffling of state-elite and state-public relations in the immigration policy field.

Previous scholarship has demonstrated how "a strident turn" in China's foreign policy solidified as the interests of state and popular nationalists increasingly converged (Zhao 2013). The permanent residency debate provides an example of popular nationalism thwarting a domestic policy reform. In addition to their relatively influential position on familiar hot-button issues such as China-Japan relations, popular nationalists can play a bottom-up politicizing role on previously marginal policy issues such as immigration, hereby surprising the state. I argue that the on-going deepening of state control over the information environment further limits public debate and state information gathering while empowering a vocal nationalist minority. The issue of immigration, a domestic policy issue with foreign policy dimensions, also showcases the contradictions within current Chinese state strategy between fueling nationalist sentiment as a means to legitimate Communist Party rule and a continued commitment to deepening China's global integration.

At the same time, the Chinese permanent residency debate demonstrates the relevance of public opinion to immigration reform in a non-democratic policymaking

process. Understudied in autocratic policy environments (Natter 2018), my analysis shows how reform-era China follows a trajectory similar to other early-stage immigrant-receiving contexts, in which immigration policymaking undergoes a transition from being a technocratic policy realm, dominated by a small number of policy makers and advisers, to becoming more politicized and capable of generating a high level of public interest (Scholten 2011).

2. Literature review: Public opinion and popular nationalism in Chinese policymaking

Responding to public concerns – or showcasing such responsiveness – has become a growing priority for Chinese state actors in the reform era. While the need for elite support has traditionally been considered more vital for authoritarian regime survival, Chinese leaders frequently emphasize the importance of public opinion, with president Xi Jinping stating in 2013 that "winning or losing public support is an issue of the CCP's survival or extinction."[99] Following the fall of the Soviet Union and China's CCP legitimacy crisis in 1989, especially, the Communist Party has gradually placed more value on public accountability as a way to manage the demands of an increasingly heterogeneous society and avoid, as one top official put it, "isolation from the masses" (Göbel 2013). Such state responsiveness is important both at a strategic level, with Chinese leadership incorporating salient concerns in policy planning to strengthen public support (e.g. Stepan et al 2016), and with regard to specific controversies, on which the desire to maintain social stability and legitimacy dominates (Chen et al 2016). This aspect of Chinese political culture leads Wenfang Tang to describe the Chinese regime as "hyperresponsive," with a populist instinct integral to its political survival (Tang 2016).

As public pressure has been able to influence policy more directly and more frequently, sometimes resulting in major policy shifts, scholars have noted that the Chinese public is now "seriously involved in the agenda-setting process" (Wang 2008: 59). The rise of the internet, allowing public contention to spread fast and wide, is widely considered to have strengthened these dynamics. As a more vibrant public sphere emerged online, the number of 'public opinion incidents' (舆论事件), or contentious public events in which the state considers public expression to go beyond the bounds of its 'safety valve' function, increased (Lei 2016). In this context, the Chinese government has increased its investment both in understanding and controlling public attitudes and concerns.

---

99 "Study history, be close to the people," *China Daily*, July 25, 2013, http://english.cri.cn/6909/2013/07/25/53s777949.htm.

As a result, the Chinese policy process has become more open to external voices, giving rise to policy networks advocating for elite interests and channeling public concerns in areas on which the state is insufficiently informed (E.g. Mertha 2009). Public consultation on legal proposals became institutionalized in 2000, following the adoption of the Legislation Law (Balla and Xie 2011). A commercial industry providing public opinion polling and monitoring services assists the state's censorship apparatus, but also provides state actors with policy input (Creemers 2017). An ever-increasing amount of resources have been invested in 'guiding' public opinion, for instance by repressing dissenting voices while increasing the production of state voices online (e.g. Göbel 2013). Given the states' obsession to both know and control public sentiment, in the Chinese context public opinion (舆论) can be seen as a "utility for authority to rule" (Wu 2020), rather than a representation of the will of an autonomous society.

The way in which these policy-opinion feedback loops play out on concrete policy issues has been most studied with regards to the effect of popular nationalism on Chinese foreign policy. After 1989, the CCP's propaganda strategies fostered the rise of contemporary Chinese nationalism, appealing to deep-rooted nationalist sentiment and developing patriotic education campaigns to establish nationalism at the core of its legitimacy narrative (Zhao 1998). Scholars vary in their assessment of the state's ability to control the new generation of vocal nationalists that these efforts helped produce. However, there is significant evidence that through their ability to mount large-scale offline or online protest, popular nationalists at times constrain policymakers, who face an audience cost when foreign policy is considered too 'weak' to parts of the Chinese public (Gries 2004, Shirk 2007, Chen Weiss 2014). To what extent such public sentiment drives foreign policy decisions independently remains unclear, as popular nationalist views can converge with elite interests (Zhao 2013, Jie 2016). In fact, public opinion in China seems particularly impactful on issues outside the regime's core interests on which top policymakers "lack a strong preference or are not in agreement" (Fewsmith and Rosen 2001, Steinberg et al 2021).

What parts of the Chinese public are represented in 'public opinion' on a given issue, and to what extent Chinese authorities are aware of population-wide attitudes, can be difficult to determine. Studies of specific policy issues, such as the death penalty, show that national survey results can differ significantly from the way public opinion on a policy issue is construed in policy debate (J.Z. Liu 2021). Some believe mapping the often 'unexpected breadth of views' (Mazzacco and Kennedy 2022) found in surveys on many political issues can help scholars assess Chinese state claims about domestic pressure (Chen Weiss 2019). However, others emphasize the overrepresentation of vocal minorities in state understandings of public opinion. Given the state's high level of concern for social stability, such minority opinion can have an outsized influence on policy (Lagerkvist 2005: 128).

As a domestic policy issue on which popular nationalists have strong opinions, but which has so far remained outside of China's core interests, the P.R. debate is well-positioned to explore how public opinion can shape and constrain its authoritarian policymaking. With power centralizing under Xi Jinping, central leadership has arguably become subject to more direct pressure from public criticism, making responsiveness more important (Chen Weiss 2019, Gries and Wang 2021). However, this dynamic has also strengthened state resolve to further control media narratives and limit independent voices. Given the usefulness of popular nationalism to the state, popular nationalists have been relatively spared by state censors and have instead flourished in the increasingly controlled media environment (Schneider 2018).[100]

This analysis of an attempt to reform China's immigration system contributes to a growing body of literature on the way nationalism in China's public sphere interacts with policymaking, as well as the role of public opinion in Chinese policymaking more broadly. By dissecting the dynamics around the permanent residency debate, this study provides insight into the politicizing role of ultranationalists and its effect on policy. It shows how nationalist discourse can overwhelm public debate on a new policy issue, in the absence of a variety of (state) perspectives and public knowledge. This politicization has repercussions for the wider policy field, limiting the space for research and policy dialogue and empowering conservative voices. Through its showcasing of an especially immediate state response to an unexpected audience cost, the critical case of the P.R. policy debate can provide insight into a wider trend in Chinese policymaking beyond foreign policy, in which online nationalists exploit the tension in Chinese state strategy between strident nationalist messaging and a range of global and domestic commitments to influence an expanding range of policy areas.

3. Methods

This paper draws on interviews, survey data and media analysis to comprehensively map the permanent residency debate. First, the author analyzes a mix of media and policy sources from the time of the controversy. In addition to the draft text of the regulations and related policy announcements, these include 50 pages of online comments below a state media announcement of the public consultation procedure

100 "China's nationalistic cancel culture is out of control", *Protocol*, December 30, 2021, https://www.protocol.com/china/china-nationalism-cancel-culture.

posted on social media platform Weibo on February 27, 2020,[101] 75 media articles on the controversy, collected between February 27-March 8 2020, and over 200 pages of Chinese-language expert commentary on the debate.[102] For the online comments, a sentiment and an inductive thematic analysis was conducted (see Table 6.1 and Table 6.2) (Saldana 2015).

Second, the article draws from a body of 14 expert interviews with immigration officials and scholars addressing permanent residency, China's wider immigration reform and the role of elite and public consultation in the immigration policymaking process. These interviews, which took place between April 2019 and September 2020, provide insight into the policymaking dynamics of a notoriously opaque policy area. Semi-structured expert interviews, allowing for articulation of and reflection on discursive strategies, have previously been used successfully to study relations between the Chinese government and other societal groups (e.g. Kennedy 2008). A number of these interviewees also participated in the P.R. regulations drafting process and contributed to the debate. However, quotes from the interviews are anonymized, as part of the agreed interview conditions.

Finally, to contextualize the online response to the P.R. draft regulations, the article mobilizes data on Chinese public immigration attitudes. The author draws on data from a pioneering national online survey conducted in July 2020 as part of a team at East China University for Science and Technology. The non-representative nationwide sample (N=1888) was stratified by age group, gender and educational level, with student assistants monitoring survey completion, improving the rate of completed surveys (94%) and data reliability. While the resulting sample, like many online surveys, has a bias towards higher levels of education, it captures a diverse national population on variables like age, gender, social class and international exposure (for more information on the sample and geographical distribution of completed questionnaires see Annex 3). The survey, as well as an accompanying qualitative study consisting of 46 semi-structured interviews on immigration policy with a diverse sample of Chinese

---

101 Following the online outcry, like for other government announcements of the regulations, the comment section below this post was closed off to the public, on whom the irony of a public consultation procedure limiting public comment was not lost. For more online comments from the debate, see Kenrick Davis, "Proposed Residency Changes Spark Racist Backlash in China," *Sixth Tone*, March 5, 2020, https://www.sixthtone.com/news/1005267/proposed-residency-changes-spark-racist-backlash-in-china; Tan Enru谭恩如, "中国网友抵制外国人永居权立法" [Chinese netizens resist foreign permanent residency legislation], The Initium, March 1, 2020, https://theinitium.com/article/20200301-internet-observation-foreign-permanent-residence/.

102 Published in traditional media outlets, academic publications as well as WeChat public accounts of migration thinktanks and research centers.

residents, included questions on permanent residency and the saliency of immigration management, previously not studied in the Chinese context.[103]

4. The 2020 permanent residency debate

a. Permanent residency reform in mainland China: A compromise policy

Immigration to China rapidly increased in the reform era, with more diverse and permanent immigrant communities forming in large cities and border areas. However, legal pathways towards permanent residency have remained very limited. Most long-term immigrants reside in China on annual residence permits, contributing to an image of immigrants' transient 'sojourner' status in Chinese society. Foreign migration retained some political sensitivity to a ruling party basing its legitimacy on liberating China from foreign imperialism. As a result, policymaking has focused on facilitating economic immigration, while long-term strategy has been minimal. While policy-making elites consider public opinion important to immigration policy, official public discourse and communication on immigration has been largely absent. Media coverage remains dominated by formulaic state propaganda.

While permanent residency for foreigners was first mentioned in the P.R.C.'s 1985 foreigner management law, which reestablished immigration in the reform era, dedicated P.R. regulations were only published in 2004, prompted by China's accession to the World Trade Organization. The establishment of a P.R. program was heralded as a sign of China's increased global integration, but its stringent and unclear application criteria led to limited, case-by-case implementation. Rather than becoming a standardized bureaucratic procedure, foreign nationals with P.R. status generally received it as a token of official appreciation for their contributions to China's development. (American billionaire Elon Musk, for instance, was awarded permanent residency status by China's premier Li Keqiang after he opened a Tesla factory in Shanghai in 2019.) The reluctance to deal with issues of long-term settlement and integration is also illustrated by the absence of these topics in China's main piece of immigration legislation, the 2012 Exit-Entry management law.

The 2020 draft regulations were the culmination of a decade of efforts to make China's P.R. system more operational. Discussion of its reforms has been embedded in the growing demand for a more flexible immigration status, most notably among (former) Chinese nationals who naturalized elsewhere. While immigrant lobbying in

---

103 Relevant survey questions: 'To what extent do you agree with the following statement: Foreign migrants who meet relevant criteria should be allowed to obtain permanent residency?', 'In your opinion, how long should foreign migrants minimally reside in China in order to qualify for permanent residency?' (Fill in the blank.)
Relevant interview questions: 'Have you heard of the draft permanent residency regulations published in February of this year?', 'What do you think of permanent settlement for foreigners as a policy direction?' 'In your opinion, what criteria should immigrants meet in order to qualify for Chinese permanent residency?'

China has been limited by restrictions on foreign-led organizing, with foreign business organizations the main conduits,[104] diaspora demands have been better represented (Liu and Van Dongen 2016). Diaspora lobbying efforts have focused on China's ban on dual nationality.[105] Since 1999 at least 5 applications to amend the Nationality Law were made by delegates of the Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference (Habicht and Richter 2022). Prominent thinktanks like the Center for China and Globalization (CCG) have also long lobbied for double nationality, and for a Chinese diaspora I.D. card, modelled on the Indian Overseas Citizenship immigration status.

However, the issue of whether or not China should start allowing dual nationality became divisive among immigration policy elites. Largely formed in the drafting process of the Exit-Entry law, China's immigration policy advising circle consists of researchers and expert practitioners most of whom have a legal and/or public security background, with some diaspora affairs. While this group agrees on the need to reform China's highly incomplete immigration system, they differ on the extent to which systems in established immigration countries provide a model for China. While pro-liberalization immigration advocates, like legal scholar Liu Guofu, argue that opening up dual nationality contributes to China's diaspora strategy by solving practical issues for returning emigrants, other immigration policy advisers have criticized these views for being overly individualistic and going against China's geopolitical interests (e.g. Gao 2013). As this debate remained in stalemate, a reform of the permanent residency system has emerged as a politically acceptable policy alternative.

Although central government resolve to reform the P.R. system can be dated back to at least 2012, the 2020 draft regulations were first announced in a 2016 'Opinion' published by the Central Party Office and the State Council on strengthening the system (CPC 2016b). Part of a wider top-down campaign to improve China's talent attraction, this formed the start of a period of rapid policy activity. The 'Opinion' states that a reformed permanent residency system requires more full-fledged "immigration management departments" resulting in the establishment of China's first dedicated immigration agency in 2018. It primarily contextualizes China's need for "a more open and confident permanent residency policy" in the state's talent attraction effort, but also acknowledges the role permanent residency could play in "fostering diaspora

---

104 While I did not find evidence of foreign business associations being part of the policy debate on permanent residency, the role of these associations in immigration policy deserves further study, at the local level – as demonstrated by case studies like Cheuk (2016) but also at the national level. See for instance, the case of tax cuts for foreign nationals that were prolonged following resistance from foreign business: Frank Tang, "China's Expat Tax System: Who pays and how does it work?" *South China Morning Post*, January 9, 2022, https://www.scmp.com/economy/china-economy/article/3162559/chinas-expat-tax-system-who-pays-and-how-does-it-work

105 Adopted in the 1950s as a foreign policy gesture towards Southeast Asian post-colonial states in which Chinese diaspora loyalty was politicized, China has maintained its ban on dual nationality (although de facto dual nationality has become more common).

resources." In a press conference at the time, the director of the Overseas Chinese Affairs Office puts it more bluntly, stating that the 'Opinion' "responds to the demands of foreign ethnic Chinese friends."[106] Following the 'Opinion', a drafting process was started, aided by policy trials in several cities. In Shanghai, the key trial location, the total number of P.R. permits tripled from 2404 in 2015 to 7311 in 2018 (on a registered foreign population of 172,000).

In this context, the 2020 draft of the 'Regulations on the Administration of Permanent Residency for Foreigners' was welcomed by (most) immigration experts, many of whom had been consulted on its development. In line with expectations, China would formally expand the pool of immigrants that could qualify for P.R. to a still select but larger group of high-income or highly educated long-term migrants. Although the scale of the liberalization was limited, the draft regulations could be considered a "breakthrough" or "leap" in China's immigration development (S-R1, 8/2020; S-R4, 8/2020). Rather than as a political privilege, it presented permanent residency as a right for any tax-paying foreigner who meets the salary and residential requirements. In addition to the familiar categories for individuals 'outstanding contributions' to China's economic and social development, the draft introduces a link between length of stay and salary threshold. Professionals who have resided in China for four years need to earn six times the average salary in their area of residence to qualify, while with six years of residential stay at the time of application face a lower salary threshold of three times the average local salary. PhD holders working in certain sectors would not face any salary threshold (Article 15).

As is usual for Chinese laws and regulations, the draft also contained several 'catch all' clauses. Article 19 allows for 'other legitimate reasons' leading to permanent residency status. The draft also introduces possible future selection mechanisms without much detail, to be set up by the National Immigration Administration together with other relevant departments, such a "possible quota system" (Article 7), and a point system to be established "at an appropriate time" (Article 8). This vagueness of the draft – which read to some as strategic and to others like a rush job– became one of many points of public criticism in the unexpected debate following its publication.

b. The P.R. debate: Selling out the country to (fake) foreigners

While for immigration experts the draft regulations were an overdue update to China's permanent residency system, many Chinese citizens did not even know their country had such a system. Social media posts show internet users unaware of the details of the current restrictive P.R. system, with many worried that the regulations would lead to immigrants settling in China indefinitely in large numbers. Confusion about the topic

106 "国侨办主任裘援平：目前尚未考虑出台"华裔卡" [Currently not considering a 'Chinese diaspora card'], 中国新闻网, March 14, 2016, http://www.gov.cn/guowuyuan/vom/2016-03/14/content_5053211.htm.

was also common. In the words of one internet user: 'Can the government give more context for this? I do not think we have sufficient information to go on.' However, the social media debate quickly became dominated by strongly negative, ethnonationalist sentiment, often expressed in highly emotional terms ("As a Han Chinese, I am crying softly," as one top-voted comment reads). Like in previous studies of Chinese right-wing discourse, only a very small number of posts offer alternative viewpoints (see Table 1). The similarity between messages, with some up-voted comments copy-pasted by different users across different threads, and the speed with which they spread, suggested a level of coordination between influencers, which has been a characteristic of Chinese right-wing online communities (Zhang 2019, Yang and Fang 2021).

Table 6.1. Sentiment analysis of Weibo comment sample

Sentiment	**Number of posts**
Negative	714
Ambivalent/unclear	160
Positive	12

As the various hashtags attracted a wider audience, the announcement of the draft regulations triggered discussion of areas of discontent with immigration and its impact on Chinese society at large. Here, previously existing salient aspects of Chinese immigration debate were invoked. These include racist attitudes towards Black trader communities in southern China, the scale and social impact of which have long been exaggerated in 'clickbait' online coverage, and a long-standing public unease about preferential policies for foreign nationals. These policies, designed to increase China's international engagement and ranging from state scholarships for foreign students to tax privileges for foreign professionals, are increasingly considered discriminatory to locals, and would contribute to China attracting the 'wrong' kind of immigrants.

The draft regulations to many seemed to fit in a tradition of the state privileging foreign nationals, at a time when domestic employment and residential conditions for many Chinese citizens are considered far from adequate. Attracting larger numbers of immigrants to aid China's development, also sounds inappropriate to some, given China's recent history of government-enforced family planning. Some suggest revising the regulations to eliminate any loopholes for so-called 'low-quality' migrants, and to include guarantees that P.R. holders would not be privileged over local Chinese.

But these social concerns and suggestions for revised regulations were drowned out by commentary that took issue with encouraging any type of immigration at all (see also Table 2). These commentators present themselves as true patriots, and display a concern with a Chinese (Han) majority identity under threat from various directions, including the state. Some refer to "immigration disasters" in Europe and North America, juxtaposing it with a "stable" Chinese society. But most dominant is

the idea that immigration is a threat for a country in which national unity is premised on a specific version of Chinese identity that foreign nationals cannot share. Many define this identity in ethnic terms, describing the regulations as an attack on a Han ethnic identity. Drawing on nationalist state rhetoric to criticize the draft, commentators argue that the suggestion that immigrants are needed for China's development to succeed goes against the spirit of China's national rejuvenation project, which at its core is about overcoming humiliation by and dependence on foreigners.

Table 6.2. Thematic analysis of Weibo comment sample

Theme	**Number of posts**
Ethnic nationalism	65
China's history of humiliation	74
Criticism of state and state actors behind this policy	87
Criticism of state priorities	51
Criticism of current immigrants and immigrant policy	76
China's family planning policies	31
China's talent policy	21
Effects of immigration elsewhere	15
Suggestions for improving the draft	57
Simple expressions of dissent	267

Much of the most vehement criticism is directed at the state for producing these regulations. Many of the most-liked and upvoted comments posit an antagonistic relationship between the Chinese people and governing elites. They object to government claims that talent attraction policies will benefit China's development, and argue that the regulations would primarily benefit transnational Chinese elites ("fake foreigners"). Comments express a lack of confidence in the current regime more broadly, and personal attacks on the officials who drafted these regulations in particular. Passing the regulations would be "treasonous" (卖国) – as many commentators put – and would make it "time for the country to change its ruling Party." Some call for offline protest against the regulations on May 4, to commemorate the social movement that started on that date in 1919, in which Chinese students demanded a stronger state response to foreign influences. Some comments combine many of these ideas:

> *I resolutely oppose the regulations! I cannot forget how my teacher was helpless dealing with low* suzhi[107] *foreign students! I cannot forget the immigration disasters in Europe and America! I cannot forget the insults our students suffer in other countries! I cannot forget the hardship our parents and relatives had to suffer due*

107 A Chinese concept often translated as 'quality', often used in contexts of status hierarchy. See also Kipnis (2006).

to birth control policies! I cannot forget how difficult it is for children in remote mountain areas to go to school! Opening up the gate of permanent residency like there is no one living within these borders! I am here! 1.4 billion compatriots are here! As a Chinese, if it is necessary, there will be action on May 4! (Weibo, February 29)

The online debate led to a wave of attention for immigration in Chinese media. Many of these articles provided context on the actual scale and purposes of China's permanent residency program and immigration more broadly. They featured quotes or were written by immigration experts, such as Liu Guofu, who explained in *The Beijing News* that China's immigration system lagged far behind international standards and needed urgent reform. This media commentary, across state and commercial outlets, largely provided pro-immigration arguments in response to public worries. Experts, some of whom were asked to write articles by immigration officials they knew (N-R15, 9/2020), noted the benefits a controlled increase in immigration could provide during China's demographic transition, in addition to domestic population growth, and the importance of talent attraction for economic innovation. Director of think tank Center for China and Globalisation Wang Huiyao, for instance, emphasized China's brain drain and the evidence that migrants create jobs. A state media journalist who writes they were present at a meeting with immigration policymakers on the public controversy, assured readers that China's green card will remain 'the hardest to obtain on this planet'.[108]

However, the P.R. debate also attracted new elite voices from outside immigration policy circles. These intellectuals tended to be more sympathetic to the anti-immigration sentiment expressed online. In a widely shared popular talk show fragment, Fudan University historian Zheng Ruolin discusses being treated differently by a publisher after they realized he was a PRC-national rather than a foreign passport holder, arguing that China still puts foreigners' rights before those of its local residents. Criminal law professor Gao Desheng argued the P.R. regulations went beyond talent attraction and constituted a 'population policy' that should be scrapped altogether. Well-known commentator Hu Xijin, who at the time edited the nationalist newspaper Global Times, also largely endorsed the worries expressed by online critics, writing an op-ed stating that immigration management in China had gotten too relaxed and that the population "lacking confidence that these regulations will decrease related problems."[109]

---

108 "独家: 关于外国人永居条例，我们参加了座谈会" [Exclusive: We attended the meeting on the foreigner permanent residency regulations], Who知道 , March 7, 2020 https://mp.weixin.qq.com/s/En2oHik4MgllshCBOTSAmQ.

109 Hu Xijin 胡锡进 , "外国人永居条例，需细化到不留可钻的空子"[Revise, eliminate loopholes in the foreigner permanent regulations], Global Times, March 1, 2020, https://mp.weixin.qq.com/s/Jv18UaGIOP3pDnSowcKy_g.

The impromptu "public education campaign," as one expert called it,[110] had attracted unprecedented attention to China's 'green card' program. A mix of grassroots and elite influencers, however, had turned it into a public referendum on the state of immigration in China.

c. The aftermath of the P.R. debate: 'Immigration is now sensitive'

In the aftermath of the online controversy, immigration experts reflected on the rapid "failure" (N-R15, 9/2020) of the policy proposal, despite the draft having been seven years in the making. As one participant in the drafting process put it, the "misunderstanding" between public and state on the implications of the P.R. regulations was especially unfortunate given the level of caution policymakers had in fact taken on the issue of immigrant settlement.[111] This outcome illustrated just how opaque the immigration policymaking process had been. Immigration researchers themselves, even those who frequently cooperated with authorities, found that the lack of access to immigration data hindered their research (e.g. N-R9, 5/2019, S-R1, 8/2020).[112]

The NIA had responded to these complaints by saying that they would increase transparency, and broaden their consultative base (N-O2, 5/2019). In the years prior to the P.R. debate, it had started to increase its social media output and publish quarterly border crossings figures on its website. However, the P.R. debate showed that after decades of decision making "behind closed doors," it would require more effort to improve public communication.[113] As a researcher who had worked closely with the NIA on its planning put it: "We didn't prepare enough. Now immigration is sensitive, which means the majority view will have to be considered" (N-R5, 9/2020).

But the events also impacted the position of immigration experts in the policymaking process directly. First, there were a growing number of expert voices who started to speak out on the issue, including people without much background in immigration policy – a development that one long-standing immigration policy expert described as "very scary" (S-R4, 8/2020). Second, the public controversy reflected negatively on those within policymaking circles who had been "loudly preaching the immigration dividend," as a proponent of more cautious reforms put it (Zhang B. 2020). Experts

---

110 Yang Jingwen 杨靖昊, "从移民治理角度思考《中华人民共和国外国人永久居留管理条例（征求意见稿）》"[Considering the PRC foreigner permanent regulations (draft for public comment) from the perspective of immigration governance], CCG, February 29, 2020, https://mp.weixin.qq.com/s?__biz=Mzg5NjcxNzAzOQ .

111 Ma Yong马勇, "《外国人永久居留管理条例》的制定是新时代移民管理服务善治的重要里程碑" [The 'Foreigner permanent residence regulations' are an important milestone for new era immigration management and services], 边海境界, February 29, 2020, https://mp.weixin.qq.com/s/bg_eWtOCvxBgMasXNHdFIQ.

112 See also Liu 2015, Zou and Zou 2018.

113 E.g. Li Qing 李庆, "如何理解中国国际人才引进的法制化需求" [How to understand China's need for global talent attraction legal reform), CCG, February 29, 2020, https://mp.weixin.qq.com/s?__biz=Mzg5NjcxNzAzOQ.

who fit that description, such as CCG's Wang Huiyao, had been among the most vocal and well-connected among China's immigration experts. In the first years of its operation, the NIA had commissioned CCG on large-scale planning projects, in the first such public-private cooperation in immigration policy. Now, however, this cooperation was halted as a direct result of the P.R. debate, while planned medium and longer-term planning documents were to be revised (N-R5, 9/2020). In 2021, the NIA announced the establishment of its first consultative expert committee. While committee members' names were not included, the announcement emphasized that the 29 members came from a notably broad range of academic institutions and disciplines – including political science, public administration and ethnicity studies.[114]

Experts diverged on the significance of the P.R. debate for future immigration policy making. Some emphasized the timing of the debate, which came at the end of a period of Covid-19 lockdown, arguing that the public might have been especially anxious.[115] Others argued that extreme online voices should not be taken as representative of the entire population. More experts, however, took the debate as a reminder to policymakers of China's 'national sentiment,' which presented a policy reality that extended to intellectual elites and had roots in "policies, history, and asymmetrical information."[116] It provided further proof that immigration policymakers were highly constrained in their policy options following the issue's politicization, after previous controversy around foreigner management had already put relevant authorities in an increasingly "passive" position.[117] A researcher at the Central Party School, who had started to publish on international immigration more frequently in the preceding years, argued that policymakers should expect immigration to be a highly sensitive issue, as it had been globally, noting that currently both China's immigration management expertise and social understanding of immigration issues were at a low level.[118]

While elite actors took perceptions of public opinion as expressed in the P.R. debate as highly significant, evidence drawn from a wider cross-section of the Chinese population show a more moderate picture of public attitudes. In our July 2020 national

---

114 "国家移民管理局组建首届政策法律专家咨询委员会" [NIA establishes first advisory expert committee], NIA, March 31, 2021, https://www.nia.gov.cn/n897453/c1399338/content.html.

115 Liang Yucheng 梁玉成, "对《中华人民共和国外国人永久居留管理条例（征求意见稿）》的评价" [Comments on the 'Foreigners permanent residency management regulations' (draft for public comment)], March 1, 2020, https://mp.weixin.qq.com/s/knA2bxT57mmJM6b6V3Y_og.

116 E.g. Huang Zicheng 黄子诚 and Liu Hongwu 刘宏斌 , "引智引才视域下我国永久居留制度研究" [Our national permanent residency system from the perspective of attracting knowledge and talent], 广西警察学院34(4), 2021. Zhang Baoping 张保平, "《外国人永久居留管理条例》（征求意见稿）疏议" [Thoughts on the 'Foreigners permanent residency management regulations' (draft for public comment)] , 边海境界, March 13, 2020, https://mp.weixin.qq.com/s/GRQtY0mrlPpdzBoUTPqUQA .

117 Li Qing 李庆.

118 Chen Jimin 陈积敏, "十议外国人永居条例 , 怎样才算为中国经济作出突出贡献" [Ten points on the foreigner permanent residency regulations], 新京报, March 5, 2020, https://mp.weixin.qq.com/s/HLJVuGm0bijMWrbJUcmbxw.

survey, only 14% of respondents expressed opposition to 'qualified foreigners obtaining permanent residency,' vs. 49% neutral and 37% in favor. Asked to provide the number of years respondents think immigrants should have resided in China before they can qualify for P.R., the most common replies were '5 years' or '10 years.' Qualitative data further demonstrate the limits of taking the online debate as a reflection of wider public sentiment. In my sample of public interviews completed in the summer of 2020, slightly less than half of respondents were aware of the P.R. debate earlier that year, with 26 out of 46 interviewees saying they had not come across it. Reflecting the low public awareness around immigration policy, many asked the interviewer what permanent residency entailed, and what its benefits would be for immigrants. For the large minority who had been aware of the controversy, the P.R. debate had served as an opportunity to learn more about the issue, which most considered non-controversial in principle, as long as certain requirements were in place. Some expressed surprise at the discrepancy between the online discourse and their personal experiences. As one student put it: "It made me wonder if people I pass on the street actually hate foreigners" (J-P30).

Looking ahead at the future of the regulations, experts pointed out that the public response to the P.R. debate had made delays of the policy "unavoidable" (N-R14, 7/2020, S-R4, 8/2020). But given the centrality of the permanent residency program to the NIA's reform agenda, many experts considered it equally unavoidable that the revised regulations would eventually be passed (S-R4, 8/2020).[119] Some legal specialists have argued that, as a policy touching on issues of national sovereignty, future versions of the regulations should be passed as national law by the National People's Congress, rather than as departmental regulations. This would diversify the input process and increase public oversight. The state should respond to immigration concerns, while also recognizing the public anger related to domestic developmental issues that the debate revealed. Whatever the route, all emphasized that the public should now be considered a key player in immigration policy debate, and future proposals should be accompanied by extensive public messaging.

5. Discussion

The permanent residency debate demonstrates the growing importance of public opinion as a policy factor in Chinese immigration reform. Policymakers encountered surprisingly strong resistance to the proposed PR regulations, with online 'ultranationalists' mobilizing a large-scale public response that resulted in the regulations being shelved. The intensity of the public response, that initially *surprised* policy elites, was later largely reinterpreted as *inevitable*: the result of China's long-term conservative national

119 See also Ma Yong, The 'Foreigner permanent residence regulations' are an important milestone.

character, the result of excess emotion around the Covid-19 pandemic, or simply the Chinese manifestation of a "global change" in immigration attitudes, in which public opinion has gotten more extreme while expert voices are sidelined (e.g. Zhang B. 2020). However, rather than taking these domestic and transnational immigration-related factors as final explanations, they can be used to interpret the Chinese policymaking dynamics that led to this exceptional outcry to this public consultation procedure – and the state's rapid response. In this section, I discuss how the P.R. debate sheds light on the bottom-up politicization of policy issues in China's nationalist public sphere, and the effects such politicization in turn has on state information gathering.

The P.R. debate shows how grassroots groups can quickly come to dominate public debate on a marginal policy issue, in the absence of a variety of (state) perspectives and public knowledge. Although Chinese state actors intend to guide public opinion in all policy areas, immigration policy is an example of a policy area in which they have failed to keep the public up to date on China's policy realities and goals. With government statements on immigration extremely limited, the main source of state messaging on immigration policy can be found in state media. In these propaganda publications, foreigners are invariably presented as beneficiaries of Chinese policies, living a charmed life. While some of this content has aimed to show a more diverse view of China's immigrant society, much is premised on the strict foreign-Chinese division in society of the high socialist era, and there remain clear editorial limits to the depiction of foreigners' integration (Gan 2022). The lack of up to date, sanctioned guidelines on how to discuss immigration has led to situations in which state actors have been reluctant to intervene in public debate during moments of social tension related to immigrants, such as during the 2009 demonstrations by African migrants in Guangzhou, or the discrimination against African migrants, especially, during the Covid-19 pandemic, leaving the state position ambivalent.

By contrast, Chinese 'ultranationalist' groups have been very vocal on issues of immigration. Inspired by Western 'alt right' groups' concerns with a majority identity under threat, international immigration trends and refugee flows have been among their key interests, often with an Islamophobic focus (Yang and Fang 2021). In terms of domestic immigration, their sensationalist and racist coverage of African immigrant communities in Guangzhou has been influential in shaping public perceptions of the scale of African and irregular migration to China. At times, local state actors have provided official statistics to debunk rumors, such as in April 2020 when the Guangzhou government announced there were the 13652 African migrants registered in Guangzhou at the end of 2019. However, these figures are much less known than the '300,000' or

'500,000' irregular African migrants that feature in the headlines of 'ultranationalist' online media – and not always trusted.[120]

During the P.R. debate, this discrepancy proved fertile soil for misunderstanding. In pushing their criticism of the draft in explicit anti-state messages, online nationalists rapidly turned the proposal into a highly visible 'politically sensitive' issue. This politicization process has been common on historically sensitive foreign policy issues, such as in the China-Japan dispute about the Senkaku islands. What stands out in the case of the P.R. debate is the fact that it concerns a relatively marginal 'talent attraction policy' with low public salience – that was appropriated as a symbol to criticize the state for 'selling out' to transnational elites and foreign interests. It fits a definition of politicization as a process in which societal groups can play a bottom-up role that can be 'suddenly and expectedly' amplified by a 'triggering event' (Van der Brug 2015: 12). In the absence of electoral politics, politicization here refers in the first place to anti-state claims that render the state vulnerable to public criticism. Given the central position of assertive nationalism to current state legitimacy, state actors are sensitive to accusations that they fail to uphold it. These policy critiques are framed through a 'foreign influence' lens, accusing the state of compromising on Chinese autonomy and succumbing to Westernization

As online nationalists take on a role of self-declared 'political opposition', relatively uninhibited by censorship, they have demonstrated an ability to become a policy factor extend beyond foreign policy to other issues on which the ultranationalist constituency forms a strong opinion. This dynamic has started to affect a range of domestic policy issues, from environmental awareness campaigns to women's rights.[121] However, to what extent a policy proposal would be as directly impacted as in the case of the P.R. regulations depends on case-by-case factors such as its proximity to core regime interests, the complexity of the existing elite landscape, and authorities' evaluation of the impact of an audience cost at that particular moment (e.g. Fewsmith and Rosen 2001, Chen Weiss 2014). In the case of the P.R. policy debate, the marginal nature of the policy area, characterized by decades of neglect that resulted in a gap between a small, technocratic policy elite and a relatively uninformed public, provided nationalists with an opportunity to rapidly dominate public debate, which due to the lack of previous controversy surprised policymakers. This type of unexpected audience

120 In our survey, 55% of respondents selected 'Africa' as a 'top region of origin' for immigrants in China, more than for North America (49%) or Europe (33%), despite these regions making up a much larger share of the Chinese immigrant population.

121 E.g. "China's Rising Ultra-Nationalism Complicates Xi's Climate Ambitions", *Bloomberg*, November 29, 2021, https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2021-11-29/china-s-rising-ultra-nationalism-complicates-xi-s-climate-ambitions; "How a Women's Rights Law Became a Front in China's Gender Wars", Sixth Tone, January 22, 2022, https://www.sixthtone.com/news/1009507/how-a-womens-rights-law-became-a-front-in-chinas-gender-wars. See also Huang (2022).

cost policymakers had to consider resulted in a highly visible hyperresponsiveness despite considerable elite consensus: shelving the law, censoring the debate, increasing other types of messaging. In this sense, the P.R. policy debate can be considered a critical case for examining this policy dynamic, which could become more important as the centralization of power makes Chinese leadership more directly accountable to public opinion.

Politicization affects the policy area in ways that can extend beyond the outcomes of a particular policy to the wider policy field. When in European immigrant-receiving countries immigration policy became a more politically contested issue in the 1980s and 1990s, the role of immigration experts in the policymaking process shifted. Policymakers became less interested in expert advice, and social researchers advising the government on immigration policy, some of who had previously played key roles, now grew more contested (Scholten 2011). Other elites came to believe that the best way to manage immigration was to reassure the public with a more restrictionist stance. The agenda-setting and mediating role of the media became more important, and public opinion polls became important policy information.

In the P.R. debate, Chinese immigration policy elites can also be seen to accept public opinion as a 'norm' for elites that structures their discourse (Lahav and Guiraudon 2006). The controversy emboldened more cautious elite voices, while (apart from some initial media reporting) the best-known pro-liberalization advocates – whose opinions were farthest removed from those of the nationalist critics – have been relatively silent. New policy consultation mechanisms have further sidelined these voices, in an elite diversification process that was deemed necessary for China's immigration policy space to move forward (N-R15, 9/2020).

In the Chinese context, with its especially tight links between political and research agendas, any shift in the level of political sensitivity of a policy issue will also affect the space for research and publishing. Due to its historical sensitivity, only when China's global engagement became more pronounced after 2000, did it become more acceptable and possible to publish research on immigration (N-R5, 4/2019; N-R15, 9/2020). In the last five years, the emerging field had been boosted by the momentum of talent and diaspora policy making and the establishment of the NIA, which professed a need for China-relevant immigration expertise. This top-down state endorsement of immigration research led to an unprecedented wave of immigration studies centers and conferences, with national-level research calls for the first time explicitly including immigration topics. However, public controversy is a key consideration in triggering censorship mechanisms, both within formal publishing and funding structures and researchers' self-censorship.[122] The P.R. debate - while not the only factor – is widely

122 For a case study of the politics-research feedback loop in environmental studies see Goron (2018).

considered to have made conducting and publishing immigration research, including on immigration attitudes, more difficult again (e.g. S-R3, 6/2020; N-R15, 9/2020).

In this way, politicization also constrains future policy making, limiting quality information production at a time when it is especially needed, and impairing channels for policy consultation and accountability. It exacerbates the existing tension between the Chinese state's desire to simultaneously control and respond to public opinion. While China's leadership has continuously flagged the dangers of information asymmetry in government, experts in other policy areas too have warned that restrictions on knowledge production will affect experts' policy analysis "and the quality of their advice".[123]

6. Conclusion

After decades of proactively engaging the rest of the world to strengthen China's development, Chinese leadership now increasingly projects a more antagonistic relationship to the outside – especially the Western – world. An assertive nationalism rooted in historical narratives of a now strong China that has fully overcome foreign imperialism is becoming an (even) more important part of regime legitimacy, as policy drivers diversify beyond economic growth. However, these narratives sit uneasily with continuing efforts to build a well-connected, globally influential powerful country. Developing an immigration system that can attract top talent from around the world is an example of such an effort: it fits core domestic goals to build a world-class innovation economy, but also seems to contradict president Xi's more strident messages on foreign influence and national pride.

While the state has often ignored these tensions, avoiding position-taking on many aspects of globalization (Pieke and Barabantseva 2012), the proposed permanent residency regulations could be considered a small step in acknowledging the social diversity and immigrant settlement needs that come with attracting talent. As some commentators recognized, in this sense, the P.R. debate spoke to this larger tension, the question of "how our nation-state takes care of itself…within this chaotic world"[124] and the "identity crisis" (Tian 2021) of a rising power that struggles with its relationship to the outside world. The way this proposal was halted illustrates the challenges the state faces (and has largely created for itself) in the reform of underdeveloped policy areas with transnational components.

The dynamics that drive this policy dilemma have become more entrenched under president Xi Jinping, who has centralized power among domestic elites, while endorsing a more populist nationalist stance. In foreign policy, this has resulted in aggressive 'wolf warrior diplomacy' that has been popular among domestic nationalists. While

123 Vivian Wang, "How China Under Xi Jinping Is Turning Away From the World," *The New York Times*, February 23, 2022, https://www.nytimes.com/2022/02/23/world/asia/china-xi-jinping-world.html.
124 Who, 'Exclusive'.

this approach for several years triggered elite debate on whether radical domestic populism can work against China's long-term interests, state leadership seems not to see any reason for changing course with the assertive foreign policy course apparently 'firmly set for the foreseeable future'.[125]

The P.R. debate shows how this dynamic can also affect domestic policy making in a long-term strategic area. An increasingly 'stunted' public sphere, 'in which a Chinese commentator may more safely criticize government policy from a hawkish, nationalist direction than from a moderate, internationalist one,'[126] is a key reason for this development. Their agenda-setting force is so significant that they crowd out wider public attitudes and are often taken for the majority view, even if it demonstrably is not. As Yang and Fang write, in the Chinese context these online groups have made right-wing populism an emerging political force, that largely developed outside institutions. The P.R. debate offers an example of how this dynamic does indeed affect policy development in surprisingly unmediated ways. At the same time, this new manifestation of popular nationalism influences elite dynamics, empowering conservative voices.

While the impact of the P.R. debate on the wider public sphere displays regime-specific dynamics of politicization and censorship, the politicization trajectory itself is strikingly similar to that in other immigration-reception contexts. As this article shows, China seems to be entering a new phase of immigration policy making, in which – like elsewhere – an initial period of limited public interest in immigration policy is followed by one in which the public demand for immigration restrictions grows (at least among some parts of the population). Despite being one of the most politically closed authoritarian regimes worldwide, in China, too, a vocal minority gains outsized policy influence following decades of largely uncontroversial immigration policymaking, with elites following suit. As interviewees emphasized: "In the way that politicians aim to balance their own interests with public opinion, China seems not so different from other countries" (N-R14, 7/2020). In immigrant-receiving nations ranging from the United States to Russia, this dynamic has resulted in immigration policymaking as a balancing act between contradicting economic and social interests, in which control-focused rhetoric is combined with 'side-door' or 'backdoor' policy openings (Castles 2004, Schenk 2018). Indeed, following the P.R. debate, NIA social media output has become decidedly more populist and security-oriented, almost exclusively focusing on the state's efforts to control China's borders.

---

125 Yun Sun, "Statement before the U.S.-China Economic & Security Review Commission Hearing on "CCP Decision-Making and the 20th Party Congress" Panel," January 27, 2022, https://www.uscc.gov/sites/default/files/2022-01/Yun_Sun_Testimony.pdf

126 Thomas Christensen, "The advantages of an assertive China: responding to Beijing's abrasive diplomacy," *Foreign Affairs* 90(2), 2011, http://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/67477/thomas-j-christensen/the-advantages-of-an-assertive-china.

To a ‘populist authoritarian’, centralized leadership that has made itself responsible for all policymaking and output, looking responsive to nationalist segments of public opinion is increasingly urgent. Given this risk-averse policy context, under some circumstances Chinese immigration policymakers might be even more constrained than their counterparts in politically fragmented democratic settings in their ability or motivation to maneuver economically pragmatic immigration policy past the (perceived) majority. While the talent attraction agenda is unlikely to be abandoned, it remains to be seen when and in what form immigration authorities will attempt to push through the now controversial P.R. regulations. Ultimately, the attempted permanent residency reforms as well as their opponents illustrate China’s integration with both globalization and anti-globalization trends. However, unlike in other parts of the world, in China an anti-immigration backlash arrived before its immigrant settlement system got built in the first place.

CHAPTER 7

Conclusion

1. Core argument

In the course of writing this thesis, I had many conversations about the definition of an 'immigration country' and whether China could become one. Chinese officials would ask me how likely the migrants they were hoping to attract would want to settle in China, while migration researchers would debate whether it makes sense to describe the foreign nationals, whose lives in China are often transient and insecure, as 'immigrants'. As a term, 'immigration' has connotations of permanence and is often associated with a level of immigrant incorporation that does not easily fit the situation of most foreigners living in China today. Instead, a dominant discourse views foreigners living in China as, what cultural theorist Haiyan Lee calls, "invariably sojourners," no matter, she adds, what Chinese residence and naturalization laws might say (2014: 283). Researching China's immigrant reception, I found that such culture-centric views can no longer do justice to the complex social positions of foreigners in China. Instead, after four decades of increasing immigration to the country in the context of its 'reform and opening up', the role of immigration policy needs to be part of this conversation.

This thesis has examined China's politics of immigration in the 21st century. In this period, China became a middle-income country and a global power. In the face of developmental bottlenecks and slowing economic growth, the Chinese Communist Party has focused on strengthening the state, as well as expanding the sources of regime legitimacy and stability in addition to economic development. National Chairman Xi Jinping, in power since 2012, has promoted a narrative of nationalist rejuvenation "excluding difference" (Callahan 2015: 225) while also advancing the ambition to move China "closer and closer to the world's center-stage" (Xi 2017). Situating China's immigration reform against this backdrop, I asked what the case of immigration policymaking can tell us about China's wider global-power state transformation in this period.

While a growing literature has documented the emergence of China as an immigrant destination, the factors shaping Chinese policymaking around immigration – an outcome of China's internationalization that sits at the nexus of domestic and global state concerns – have remained under-explored. This thesis has examined key political dynamics underpinning immigration reform within the central Chinese state, local-level policy innovation and its obstacles, as well as the role of societal attitudes in immigration policymaking. The main argument it puts forward is that the treatment of China's diverse immigrant population provides insight into internal tensions within China's broader state strategy.

Specifically, I argue that China's shifting governance priorities, as shaped by the CCP's wider legitimation strategy, lead to institutional and ideological tensions in its approach to immigration. I find that China's domestic political dynamics, as an interplay between Chinese state-building priorities and national identity discourses, are key to analyzing the mix of liberalizing and control-oriented immigration reforms the Chinese state is pursuing today. With the developmentalism of the early reform era replaced by more comprehensive state control, Chinese immigration management has shifted from informal accommodation of economic migration, especially at the local level, to strengthened enforcement of its rigid legal migration framework combined with top-down policy reform. However, I find that this reform agenda faces implementation challenges and is experiencing increasing politicization. I argue that these policy challenges activate a conservative bias in China's immigration policymaking that also provides insight into wider issues related to the socio-cultural impact of the country's opening up.

More broadly, I argue that when studying China's global-power state transformation, it is important to contextualize its domestic politics within global trends of "repoliticization under late capitalism," or the return to a politics centering collective identities in the face of structural developmental challenges (Gonzalez-Vicente and Carroll 2017: 1010). Rather than seeing the internal tensions within the Chinese state's nationalist ambitions to build a globally competitive state as unique, I propose putting them into dialogue with political responses to the effects of unbalanced development and globalization around the world. When it comes to immigration policymaking, the case of China's immigration reforms not only defies research assumptions about the role of political regime and a country's development stage in migration policymaking, but also highlights the political nature of increasingly selective and security-oriented immigration policymaking worldwide.

In this conclusion, I first synthesize my main findings and then discuss their implications for the study of 1) China's migration patterns, 2) China's internationalization, 3) Chinese policymaking and 4) global migration politics. I end with a section that zooms out and considers the case of immigration policy's significance for a wider audience aiming to understand a rising 'global China'. In this final section, I also

discuss the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic on China's immigration management and revisit the question of whether foreign migrants in China must remain 'sojourners' – and what role immigration reform might play in that process.

2. Key findings: The political dynamics of China's immigration policymaking

My five case studies on central-level, local-level and societal immigration policy dynamics show how China's immigration policymaking is being reshaped by the CCP's wider state-building efforts in what it considers a period of economic and political uncertainty. Examining immigration reform following the establishment of China's first national immigration agency (Chapter 2), local-level policy innovation targeting skilled migrants in Shanghai (Chapter 3) and labor migrants in Guangxi (Chapter 4), as well as immigration policy attitudes (Chapter 5) and the controversial policy reform of China's permanent residency system (Chapter 6), I lay out the Chinese state's reform ambitions and some of the main constraining responses they have triggered.

On the one hand, central state ambitions to consolidate state power have made immigration policy more uniform and defined. The central state has started to acknowledge that China has become an immigrant destination country, and is dedicating more resources to developing what it now calls its 'immigration management' system. As my analysis of the establishment of the National Immigration Administration shows, long-term state aims to become a global innovation economy and an active participant in global governance have led to new goals on immigration, including increased accommodation of long-term immigration of immigrant groups deemed desirable (Chapter 2). In this vein, I find that systemwide top-down state reforms, aimed at building state capacity and increasing state control, are transforming the immigration policy area through "standardizing, specializing, and professionalizing" (MPS 2019) policy development and implementation.

As the 'foreigner management' system that had previously micro-managed foreign nationals' presence in China was largely dismantled in the 1990s and early 2000s, immigrants to China were governed by a 'exit-entry management' framework that was rigid on paper but often enforced in an 'ad hoc' or 'laissez-faire' manner (see also Brady 2003, Pieke 2011, Lan 2017, Zhang et al 2014). With economic development as their main target, local governments governed immigrants with considerable discretion, through considering local developmental needs as well as through corruption. In the 2000s, state concern with irregular foreign migrants increased. Regulatory campaigns gradually became part of immigration control enforcement, aimed at specific migrant groups, such as African traders in Guangzhou or unregistered transnational marriages in border regions, or in particular cities or regions (Barabantseva 2015, Habicht 2020, Li et al. 2012). Nationwide, however, state actors hardly framed immigration as a security threat (Chou et al. 2016). As vice-minister of public security Yang Huanning

put it in a rare speech on the state of immigration to China in April 2012, while "the growing diversity of [foreigners'] purposes and identities" were something to note, the "vast majority" of irregular migrants were simply "unaware of [China's] national laws and regulations" (Yang 2012). In fact, national-level state actors hardly discussed the rapid increase of immigration, treating it like a non-issue.

As I show in chapters 2-4, following the adoption of China's 2012 exit-entry law, there has been a sustained policy effort to rein in informal policy practices, and to increase the enforcement of the residency and employment regulations. In parallel, the state has developed an agenda to improve the attraction of educated and high-income (return) migrants, after its existing 'talent policy' was considered unsuccessful. Policy goals remained narrow: to increase the share of some desirable migrant groups, while strengthening control over irregular migration. But as my case studies on the NIA, skilled migrant reform in Shanghai and labor migration reform in Guangxi demonstrate, the reform momentum also led to formal policy reforms in areas that had lagged behind migration realities and migrant needs. These include the NIA's commitment to more transparency and the increase in public information available, opportunities for policy elite participation in policy development, as well as policy innovation on key issues such as expanding permanent residency rights and migrant social integration, and the regularization of low-income cross-border labor.

On the other hand, however, as this thesis has shown, this reform agenda has faced considerable implementation challenges, resulting in a mix of change and continuity in the immigration policy sphere. I find that these challenges are mainly located in China's domestic political sphere, and can be attributed to two types of tensions, 1) tensions within China's bureaucratic system under Xi Jinping, and 2) tensions related to Chinese national identity narratives and the role of public opinion in policymaking. Together, these lead to specific challenges facing policy reform in internationalization, that I argue have intensified as China became a global power.

First, in spite of a decade of centralization, the immigration system remains highly fragmented. As I show in Chapter 2, China's national immigration agency has been unable to take up its role as coordinator of immigration affairs at the national level, due to its relatively low-ranking bureaucratic status and bureaucratic conflict. Xi-era disciplinary governance reforms have also introduced new tensions into the central-local government relationship, which lead to a risk-averse implementation of experimental and other new policies. In Shanghai, I find that local officials choose to selectively implement new skilled migration policies, proactively implementing only those policies they deem in line with longstanding policy goals while hardly implementing those that could cause social controversy. However, all new policies are announced in ceremonies and state media coverage, leading to a gap between liberalized policy discourse and restrictive on-the-ground implementation (Chapter 3). In the Southwestern border

region of Guangxi, a policy trial regularizing cross-border labor migration has been subject to a series of securitizing adaptations that result in extreme uncertainty for migrants and their employers (Chapter 4). The tendency in this trial to prioritize security over development aims reflects a wider trend towards the strengthening of immigration control, including a build-up of border control infrastructure from a low base.

While state actors continue to pursue a variety of immigration-related goals, in the current risk-averse policy environment, my findings suggest that political incentives make it easier to implement securitizing reforms, while liberalizing aspects of the state's immigration agenda are stalled or face limited implementation. In addition, paradoxically, reforms that lead to policy liberalization on paper can be experienced as immigration restrictions on the ground due to the increase in standardized enforcement.

A second main driver of implementation challenges stems from the fact that Chinese state actors have remained ambiguous on the relationship between increasing immigration and China's national identity. In tandem with rhetoric on continuing internationalization, Xi-era leadership has also expanded the use of ideologically targeted anti-Western nationalist narratives. I find that the tension between policy discourses claiming it is in China's interest to partially liberalize immigration, and those that aim to limit foreign influence shows up throughout the immigration policy process (see especially Chapter 2 and 6). This tension reinforces a historical tendency among state actors to consider immigration a 'sensitive' policy issue. It activates conservative and secretive policy practices in an institutional context in which the difference between 'foreigners' and 'immigrants' has never been developed, and dominant conceptions of nationhood cannot easily accommodate diversity (Liu and Weng 2019, Cao 2019). With the new 'immigration' rhetoric remaining controversial within policy elites and creating "confusion and disagreement" among policy practitioners (Zhang and Yang 2022: 97), I find that the NIA adopted terms like 'immigration management' and 'social integration' without ever defining them. Despite commitments to increased transparency, the agency's long-term strategies have not been made public. In the absence of public education or open media debate on immigration, I therefore find that online nationalists have dominated social media debate on immigration, and were able to newly politicize a reform of the permanent residency system (Chapter 6). While I show that wider public views on immigration are in fact much more nuanced, policymakers consider critical public opinion a major policy factor. In the context of the Chinese political system's focus on social stability and avoiding public controversy, this increase in politicization in turn limits the space for public and elite policy debate, and strengthens the position of conservative policy voices.

Importantly, on these identity-related aspects of immigration I also identify on-going changes. Policy elites in and outside the state draw on different national identity narratives to advance an agenda of framing immigration as a long-term governance issue. These include accounts of national and local cosmopolitan history and modernization

narratives that present further internationalization as inevitable. Meanwhile, public attitudes on immigration policy I researched are indeed characterized by a diversity of views. Whether in favor or against a more liberalized immigration system, I find widespread recognition of immigration as a long-term issue facing a more developed, powerful China (Chapter 5). Highlighting the wider internationalization of Chinese society in recent decades, members of the public make sense of immigration by combining their interpretation of wider national identity narratives with personal experiences of mobility and international exposure. Previously unstudied, this thesis also finds some evidence of low-level politicization – both in the sense of an increase in salience and emerging polarization (Van der Brug et al 2015) - of immigration policy among the wider population, especially where it concerns preferential policies for foreign nationals that are deemed at odds with China's current development status. Likely reflecting the lack of state messaging on immigration per se, as well as the absence of reliable policy information, I identify a gap between state and societal narratives and low awareness of China's immigration policies among the general public.

Together, my findings provide insight into the slow and multi-directional formation of China's immigration system. While immigration to China has been normalized and mobilized for developmental aims, my five case studies foreground the political dynamics around and the (re)politicization of Chinese immigration policymaking. The reforms I have examined take place in a policy environment in which the stronger and centralizing state is more prepared and willing than in previous decades to build a more full-fledged "immigration system with Chinese characteristics" (NIA 2021). However, tensions within the current domestic political landscape, both institutional and ideological, affect how and to what extent this system can be built. Driven by a complex web of bureaucratic and other political interests, ideas about Chinese national identity, in which the position of immigrants remains ambiguous, shape the "tracks" along which China's immigration reforms move or fail to move forward (Brubaker 1992: 17). The politicization processes I describe are entangled with longstanding bureaucratic practices and threat narratives, rooted in a dichotomous view of China and 'the world.' Crucially, however, they are shaped by China's new identity as an immigrant destination that is also a global power – and share much with immigrant reception dynamics worldwide. This analysis exemplifies how immigration reform can indeed offer a privileged vantage point into wider social and political processes in China's on-going state transformation, especially those pertaining to its internationalization. The next sections elaborate on what these findings contribute to scholarship on migration and Chinese politics, and outlines the most pressing areas of future research.

3. Research implications

a. Contributions to the study of China's migration patterns

The study of immigration to China has been moving quickly since China's foreign populations started growing over 10% a year in the 2000s (Yang 2012). However, research on Chinese perspectives on this change has been relatively absent, especially at the national policy level. This thesis offers new insight into both state and societal perspectives on Chinese immigration policymaking. First, its empirical data on policy development and implementation, and on elite and public attitudes towards such policy adds to our understanding of the politics of Chinese immigration reception. Second, they also enable new comparisons with other types of Chinese migration.

In terms of state perspectives, my findings highlight a rise of immigration on the national policy agenda, as well as the limits of this reform agenda. At the local and regional level, immigration governance has traditionally varied in different areas and towards different immigrant groups (Lan 2017, Plummer 2022). For instance, some localities with higher concentrations of foreigners moved towards "partial recognition" of de facto permanent immigrants within the restrictive national policy framework (Cheuk 2019a). Previous studies have noted a decreasing space for such local autonomy (e.g. Cheuk 2019b, Lehmann and Leonard 2019). Building on this work, my thesis contextualizes this trend by analyzing the national-level reforms that lead to such policy standardization. It also offers further evidence of the growing pressure on local governments to focus on immigration control, while risk-averse implementation slows down liberalizing reforms. At the same time, my thesis documents the increased reform momentum at the national level, which includes new priorities on skilled migrant attraction and foreigners' social integration. My findings bring out the tensions of implementing a national reform agenda within a fragmented immigration system that inherits a history of public security authorities controlling the exit-entry management of Chinese and foreign nationals alike. Further research is needed on the NIA's ability to cross interdepartmental divides, on the content of local push-back, and on immigration policy attitudes among top national leadership.

The findings of this thesis on societal attitudes, too, have broader implications for the study of Chinese immigration. Building on previous studies of Chinese immigration attitudes, most notably Han (2017), I find that attitudes towards immigration selection and control policies are largely moderate. Previous studies on online attitudes have focused on documenting negative and often extreme anti-immigration sentiment. While these studies are crucial to our understanding of the emerging politicization of immigration issues, my findings among broader population samples suggest it is important not to extrapolate these findings to the general population. I find that bottom-up narratives on immigration are highly diverse and draw on a variety of national identity narratives, most notably that of China's reform and opening as a period of gradual internationalization. In the absence of public education on immigration, and

with the salience of immigration issues in public debate still relatively low, policy attitudes exist on a broad spectrum, with many also more liberal than current policy. Going forward, more qualitative and quantitative research of public attitudes towards immigration would be helpful, including of attitudes towards different migrant groups and of policy attitudes over time.

This research also suggests unexplored connections between the Chinese state's immigration reform and diaspora attraction agendas. My findings refute suggestions that the increase in return migration is the sole reason the Chinese state is starting to address long-term immigration (e.g. You 2020): the permanent residency reforms target a broader range of immigrants, foreign students are increasingly a policy target, and the emerging social integration policy is not aimed at return migrants. But as Ho (2018) has pointed out, immigrant and return migrant groups partially overlap in significant ways. I find that this partial overlap extends to the politics of governing these groups. Not only does diaspora attraction form an impetus for immigration reform, return migration contributes to the politicization of immigration policy. Notably, the public opinion backlash to the permanent residency reforms extended to former Chinese nationals (who were considered part of a transnational elite and, among other things, referred to as 'fake foreigners'). State discourse on Chinese emigration, which for decades had been largely "de-coupl[ed]" from politics (Xiang 2003: 22), is once again becoming more political, with Xi Jinping emphasizing the geopolitical purpose emigrants could serve rather than their developmental role (Liu 2022a, Liu 2022b). Future research might consider how security-oriented, populist domestic politics is affecting emigration and diaspora policy and their implementation. It would also be useful to gain further insight into the overlap between immigration and diaspora policy development, for instance with regard to policy consultation and lobbying. More broadly, as the development strategy that underpinned all China's fragmented exit-entry reforms changes, we need more research on how that affects different migration flows and their governance.

Finally, across state and society, I document an on-going shift in mindset that is making space for immigration as a long-term issue in Chinese society. This is itself an important finding, given the prevalent research emphasis on the temporariness of immigration to China (Niu 2018, Camenisch 2019, Cheuk 2019b, Lehmann and Leonard 2019). This shift is also palpable in the development of Chinese migration studies. While diaspora scholar Li Minghuan already wrote in 2005 that the state of international mobility in China "far exceeded the traditional focus of the field on overseas Chinese" (2005: 46), the last decade saw the emergence of a more complex immigration studies field made up of researchers working on diaspora studies, Chinese internal migration, public security and border studies across a range of social science disciplines. Many of these researchers are return migrant, emigrants and immigrants themselves. In mainland China, I find that the institutionalization of this new field is also affected by shifts in the politics around immigration. Considering its potential for

advancing theories of Chinese migration, both the transnational field's growth and its obstacles would benefit from further documentation and analysis.

b. Contributions to the study of China's internationalization

The politics of China's immigration policymaking, I argue, also speaks to a wider repoliticization of the 'international' in Chinese policymaking. Throughout the reform era, Chinese leadership maintained a conflicted stance towards the widespread global exposure its opening up strategy brought about, with leaders continuously monitoring its socio-political impact (e.g. Roberts 2018). However, within a developmentalist governance framework, international engagement that could contribute to that goal was relatively depoliticized. As governance priorities rebalance, how does this affect state attitudes towards internationalization? My findings in this thesis provide insight into two aspects of this question: 1) changes in state and societal perceptions of China's position in the world, and how they relate to policymaking, and 2) the decline in informal policy practices as a space for internationalization.

As my thesis shows, policymakers face a complex domestic political context as they develop and implement immigration reforms. I find that the Xi-era tension between establishing China as a global power while reinforcing an exclusionary nationalism leads to a more controlled and narrow internationalization agenda. In this environment, I even reforms that fit this agenda can be easily politicized and stalled. Like Gonzalez-Vicente (2011) in his study of state involvement in Chinese overseas business expansion, in the case of immigration policy, I find that, on the one hand, individual state actors are themselves "internationalizing" and "exposed to a greater range of cultural encounters" (410) as they discuss international immigration experience and policy scenarios with experts, thinktanks and deepen China's engagement in international migration organizations. At the same time, however, they face another set of incentives, shaped by the priorities of their leadership, that lead them to be risk-averse and avoid seeming too 'pro-foreign', for instance in debate on whether China needs an immigration law. More widely, restrictions on overseas travel or experience living or studying abroad within the bureaucracy have also become more common.[127] Future research might explore how different parts of the state cope with this unresolved tension as they pursue internationally oriented goals, for instance in higher education or climate cooperation, or how it affects cooperation with international organizations.

This thesis also contains new data on China's societal internationalization that complicate a straightforward 'repoliticization' narrative. While popular nationalism is important to policymakers' risk assessment (see also section 3.c), my findings also

127 Liu Guofu刘国福, "略论我国出入境管理法未来的重要转向" [Brief discussion of an important change of direction in the future of our exit-entry management law], presentation at 第3届国际移民学术论坛, 中国人民警察大学, December 24, 2022.

suggest that we need to go beyond nationalist discourse to more fully understand the impact of internationalization on Chinese society. Although the 'China-foreign' binary remains prevalent in popular discourse, this does not mean that Chinese perceptions of the foreign stayed stable or underwent only cosmetic shifts, as some accounts have suggested (e.g. Huang 2021). My findings on public immigration attitudes (Chapter 4), as a relatively non-politicized issue on which state positions are not well-known, reveal bottom-up changes in Chinese self-Other perceptions. They show how Chinese attitudes towards the world are shaped not only by nationalist narratives, but also by decades of positive internationalization narratives and experiences, including the study of foreign language and culture, international mobility and so on. The growing confidence respondents express about China's status in a (commonly referred-to) global power hierarchy, and the salience of perceived immigrant privilege as a symbol of previous inequalities, fit with other literature on 'Sino-centric' globalization and Chinese views of other parts of the world (Farrer 2019, Lan 2022, Kefala 2022). Rather than reducing these findings to the product of state propaganda and ethnic nationalism, I suggest that we need a more sophisticated understanding of the variety of Chinese discourses, critical and otherwise, on internationalization and its effects.

In addition, my study calls for renewed attention to both the formal and informal practices of internationally oriented policy reforms. To understand today's centralizing immigration policy environment and its bureaucratic tensions as described in my Shanghai and Guangxi case studies, it is important to contrast the current trend towards more rigid enforcement and securitization with the lower enforcement levels and informal policy practices that characterized much of the previous, more decentralized decades. In previous scholarship, the emphasis has often been on the temporary crackdowns on irregular migrants ('三非'), rather than on the wider context in which widespread "nonrecording" in immigration control (Lan 2017: 51), high levels of discretion and corruption in the visa industry (e.g. Zhang et al 2014, Zhang et al 2018), and local state tolerance of immigrant associations for which there was no legal basis (e.g. Ma 2019) were arguably the norm. While in this thesis I was unable to give an in-depth overview of immigration policy implementation since the 1980s, like the formal visa and permit systems enabling incoming mobility, these informal practices were crucial to the development of China as an immigrant destination and fit with existing work on the importance of informal practices in China's gradual and segmented opening up (Shirk 1993, Zweig 2002, Zhou 2022).

Since the late 2000s, the rebalancing towards societal control and national security in Chinese state strategy has limited state tolerance for such 'grey space' in its societal governance. This intersects with the growing capacity of the state to exercise control, through its strengthened bureaucracy at different levels of government. In the immigration policy field, this has been palpable through the more strictly enforced visa systems as well as in the recent adoption of nationwide digital databases, for instance

of foreigner residence registrations (see also Haugen 2019). To understand the on-the-ground impact of these shifts, it is crucial to go beyond formal policy change. For immigration policy, this has meant that even liberalizing reforms, such as allowing foreign students to start businesses, are not perceived as liberal by migrants who were used to a lack of enforcement. As a more state-controlled approach to internationalization is being codified in regulations that police the contact of Chinese individuals, officials, NGOs, media and universities with their international counterparts, social scientists might document these changes, and keep an eye on the potential persistence of local discretion and informal implementation practices on the ground. Finally, this more tightly controlled approach also raises a question about the limits of the state's ability to shape internationalization: while the increase in the Chinese state's capability to regulate has allowed it to increase its 'infrastructural power' as a facilitator of mobility and exchange (Xiang 2016), when does (over)regulation shut those processes down?

After four decades of China being a key player in globalization, it seems important to place current Chinese discourses on international exchanges and resistance to them in both a historical and a comparative perspective. More insight into the internationalization dynamics of the preceding decades of reform, in which China was not yet a global power and deepening global integration was the top priority, can contribute to a more comprehensive understanding of reform era internationalization. Meanwhile, comparative study of authoritarian-style controls on internationalization, including of societal attitudes towards it, can further contextualize these Chinese trends.

c. Contributions to the study of Chinese policymaking

Besides contributing to the study of China's internationalization, this thesis also brings new insight to the question of how Chinese policymaking at large is changing in the Xi Jinping era. How do the centralization drive, a rebalancing towards security, and intensified nationalist rhetoric affect policy development and implementation? In particular, the study of immigration policy in this thesis exemplifies the wider challenges of increased top-down steering for policy innovation, and the policy impact of China's increasingly restrictive information environment as an outcome of censorship and other political control measures.

The impact of an on-going centralization of power on China's famously localized policy development model has been an issue of interest the study of Xi-era policymaking. Existing scholarship has documented a decline in experimental policymaking in the 2010s (Chen and Göbel 2016, Heilmann 2018, Teets and Hasmath 2020). At the same time, a top-down formal commitment to policy innovation remains in place, with Heffer and Schubert (2023) finding that the increased central steering capacity at the top in fact results in higher pressure on local authorities to deliver new policies. However, so far less has been known about the on-the-ground implementation challenges policy innovation might face in this centralizing policy environment.

The two case studies of local-level policy experimentation in this thesis contribute new empirical material on this point. First, they highlight the variety of policy experimentation that continues to take place. While in the Chinese context, experimentation always takes place in the context of state hierarchy (Heilmann 2018), I find that the development of the Guangxi regularization trial fits in a tradition of bottom-up policy experimentation in which local governments propose a new policy that gets approved at a higher level. As the trial developed, the regularization of Vietnamese workers was securitized due to top-down pressure within the bureaucracy, arguably shifting from a 'proposal-approval' to an 'instruction-execution' model - to use the categorization of Shi and Frenkiel (2021). By comparison, the skilled migration reforms in Shanghai's national development zones represent a more top-down approach to policy development in which new policies are rolled out nationwide after a trial period in designated locations ("instruction-execution"). Second, for both cases I find that these new policies are implemented in a risk-averse manner. This finding strengthens a growing body of literature on the way local governments mitigate higher levels of surveillance through a selective mix of compliance and performativity (e.g. Tu and Gong 2022, Zhou 2022).

Overall, my findings suggest that policy experimentation is becoming more of a tool for the diffusion and enforcement of centrally approved policy than for bottom-up innovation, as also Ma and Pang (2017) find in the (since terminated) policy area of direct local elections. However, the case of immigration policy reform also shows that local governments continue to push back on top-down reforms, as exemplified by the local resistance within the exit-entry management apparatus against a vertical roll-out of an immigration management bureaucracy. Future research might look at these central-local negotiations in more detail, to gain more insight into the limits of centralization as president Xi maintains that a balance between "top-level design and practical exploration" remains a top priority (Xi 2023). Given the important role of Party-building in current centralization efforts, it would also be good to gain a more detailed of the Party-state dynamics shaping these implementation decisions at the local level (see also Snape and Wang 2020).

In addition to its contribution on Xi-era policy implementation, this thesis also provides insight into the role of the Chinese information environment in shaping current policymaking. In particular, the analysis of the swift state response to the permanent residency regulations (Chapter 5) showcases the continued importance of nationalist public opinion as a policy factor. While this has been studied in depth for foreign policy making, the study of immigration policymaking adds to findings that suggest a growing "tension between market-driven grassroots patriotism and state-led patriotic campaigns" (Zhang and Ma 2023: 1) across policy areas. It also adds evidence to the idea that a more centralized leadership might actually feel more exposed to public pressure and in response take a populist stance (Gries and Wang 2021, Chen Weiss 2019).

Furthermore, the case of immigration policy shows how the increasingly censored public sphere can result in new policy vulnerabilities for the state. In the absence of a publicly disseminated immigration strategy, state messaging on immigration remains propagandistic and detached from societal realities (Gan 2020, Huang 2021). Meanwhile, commercial and political incentives overlap to make aggressive nationalism "a defining component of online public discourse in China" (Schneider 2022: 16), while wider civil society voices on immigration remain very weak (Lu et al 2020). While my research into wider immigration attitudes suggests politicization for now remains limited, the dominance of nationalist anti-immigration rhetoric on the Chinese internet is clearly a shaping factor in public and policy debate on immigration. Similar "dissonance between the official rhetoric and social discourse" has been found on the issue of China's foreign aid (Wang and Cooper 2022: 15) and refugee policy (Song 2014), with online nationalist public opinion dominating public debate in both cases. Despite the state's strengthened control over the information environment, these dynamics suggest that the tensions characterizing governance of sensitive issues has affected the state's ability to both gauge and manipulate public attitudes on these issues. The ensuing cycle of politicization I describe feeds into what others have described as a growing risk of 'echo chamber' politics in the Xi Jinping era (e.g. Zhao 2022).

Adding to calls to research the role of digital technology in shaping Chinese policy (Schneider 2022), future studies might further explore the relationship between online and offline public attitude formation. How is aggressive online nationalism shaping nationalism on the ground? How does 'online public opinion' as a policy factor relate to other public opinion channels, such as street protests? The role of the wider Sinophone sphere in China's online information environment, or the transnational dimensions of the nationalism shaping Chinese domestic policy debate, also merits further research (Zhao and Fang 2022, Wan 2022). As Yang and Fang (2022) note, while the political influence of online ultranationalists might be growing, many of their alt-right discourses traveled "across borders and across the Great Firewall". Finally, while this thesis focuses on state perspectives, we also need more research looking into what Tu (2022) calls the "human cost" of opaque implementation and information environment for migrants and others affected.

d. Contributions to the study of global migration politics

In its aim to "read" the Chinese state through immigration (Xiang 2016: 671), this thesis has built on a literature on how migration policy and the nation-state co-constitute each other (Torpey 2000, Hollifield 2004, Xiang 2016, Natter and Thiollet 2022). While doing so, this thesis has also laid out some groundwork that can benefit further comparative study of the Chinese immigration state. So far, the Chinese case has been largely missing from comparative scholarship on migration politics, while China-focused studies are

rarely comparative (policy-oriented work forms an exception, see for instance Chou et al 2016, Lin and Shen 2022). The Chinese state has emphasized the unique nature of its governance challenges, and the need to develop an "immigration governance system with Chinese characteristics" (NIA 2021). This study, however, finds that the politics of Chinese immigration shares significantly with that of other places, perhaps more than would be expected based on existing scholarship emphasizing the importance of categories like developmental status or regime type (Nawyn 2016, Natter 2023). At the same time, the specifics of the Chinese case that this study uncovered can contribute to on-going discussions in the field on the role of regime type and development in immigration policy.

For part of its reform era, China could be perceived as somewhat of an outlier in its immigration policy, with policies "not designed in response to perceived threats, but in line with economic reform" (Chou et al 2016). My thesis shows how this has since shifted, with China's immigration policymaking and its challenges increasingly reflecting regional and global trends. In particular, its policy agenda has moved towards more migrant selectiveness and a growing concern with migration control, aided by instruments that aim to integrate 'desirable' migrants while keeping others temporary (de Haas et al 2016). Like in other East Asian countries, its policy agenda remains narrow and focused on economic (return) migration (Seol and Skrentny 2009). In addition, as for many other 'latecomers' to immigrant reception, most studied in the European context, I find that a period of relatively depoliticized, technocratic policymaking has been replaced by gradual politicization in which public opinion becomes a prominent policy factor (Scholten 2011). In China, too, authorities are taking a passive stand towards migrant integration, while competing economic and political interests have led to multiple and contradictory immigration goals (Castles 2004). Overall, then, China's immigration policymaking displays the "haphazard" and "reluctant" approach that has characterized immigration policymaking around the globe (Hollifield et al 2014).

At the same time, the Chinese immigration management system, as it develops in an authoritarian context in 21st century East Asia, does not easily fit existing research assumptions. First, it defies a prominent assumption that migration policy reform in authoritarian regimes would be fundamentally different from that in democracies, in which policymakers balance a range of political, economic, legal and diplomatic interests (Hollifield 2004). This study contributes to a growing literature exploring the complex drivers of migration policy in non-democratic settings, many of which are shared across regime type (Natter 2023, Thiollet 2016, Schenk 2018). The Chinese case especially highlights the role of domestic politics, in particular bureaucratic politics and public opinion, as factors constraining its authoritarian immigration policymaking. My findings on the role of the Chinese information environment fit, for instance, with research on Russian migration politics that similarly finds the state vulnerable to anti-immigration public opinion, and taking up "functions which are undertaken by

far-right parties under democratic rule" (Malakhhov 2014: 1074). At the same time, the Chinese system's selectivity and low immigration levels, especially of labor migration, distinguishes it from authoritarian countries like Russia, Singapore or the Gulf states. Future research might explore to what extent patterns among – but also beyond – these cases exist. For instance, comparative studies could explore the role of business interests and courts in immigration policy, or of immigration reforms that are part of broader authoritarian modernization projects (see also Natter and Thiollet 2022).

Second, regional comparison provides further evidence of the need for nuance in using regime type as a lens for understanding China's immigration policymaking. Like in its democratic neighbors Japan and South-Korea, China's emergence as an immigrant destination has been closely linked to its rapid economic development. China's demand for immigrants might be compared to that in Japan before the 1980s, when it had no need for labor migration and most of its economic migration consisted of 'white-collar' professionals (Chung 2014). In the following decades, Japan and Korea liberalized the immigration system less than might have been expected based on their liberal economies, implementing piece-meal reforms under civil society pressure rather than moving towards broadly accessible settlement rights. So far, China's immigration system has been even more selective, as even high-skilled foreigners in the country face limited options for long-term settlement. My findings suggest that the Chinese state aims to move to a model resembling that of its neighbors, but that even liberalizing its immigration system to that degree will be difficult, given the political sensitivity of permanent residency reforms I describe in this thesis, and the lack of political space for civil society activism.

I also find evidence of a similar institutional culture driving immigration reform across these neighboring countries. In particular, Seol and Skrentny's (2009) analysis of immigration policymakers in Japan and South Korea's developmental states – who stick to the economic priorities they know, while being less attentive to the socio-cultural changes that come with development – has explanatory power in China. While some point to general cultural claims on ethnocultural homogeneity (which as Chung mentions tend to be contingent and flexible) comparing East Asian immigration regimes, these specific and somewhat limited policy repertoires are more likely shaped by "interactions between recent immigration and existing institutions" (Chung 2014). Without sufficient internal or external pressure to reform, this developmental approach can lead to a 'reverse discursive gap', in which policy discourse is more liberal than implementation (Kim 2015, or see Freier and Acosto 2015 for a similar mechanism in Latin-America). In China, this is most prominent in state media discourse on the country's immigration policies, which makes these seem more generous than the actual policy environment. However, the examples of Japan and Korea also suggest that these policy cultures can adapt, for instance in Korea's relaxation of naturalization requirements and restrictions on dual citizenship.

Third, the Chinese case also contributes to the theorizing of immigrant policy in the so-called 'Global South'. In particular, my findings contribute to other studies aiming to correct the assumption that migration primarily driven by economic and informal processes signals a 'weak' state (Nawyn 2016, Thiollet 2019, Van Dongen 2021). As Chinese policymakers turned to international mobility as a developmental tool, they took on a regulatory role that, at least to some extent, intentionally included informal practices. With its current drive to increase control through formalizing and standardizing policy processes, the Chinese state is moving away from policy ambiguity as a strategic tool (Norman 2017, Natter 2022). I show how this embedding of migration reform in broader state-building trends has a big impact on the functioning of the migration state, even when policies do not change on paper.

Finally, the case of China's immigration policymaking can contribute to an on-going discussion on global migration regimes beyond Hollifield's liberal migration state (Adamson and Tsourapas 2019, Van Dongen 2022, Natter 2023). In addition to expanding previous categorizations, such an effort also points to unexpected similarities in how states deal with foreign nationals in the current nation-state system. While China's illiberal regime would in theory enable it to engage in top-down reforms as it wishes, state actors often end up constrained. Rather than a balance between the "logic of markets and the logic of rights" that characterizes policymaking in the liberal migration state (the 'liberal paradox') (Hollifield 2004: 886-7), for Chinese authorities, policy gaps often derive from the tension between the logic of development and the logic of political control and stability. Further theorization of the Chinese migration state, and the mix of "nationalizing, developmental and neoliberal" logics it applies to its management of emigration, diaspora and immigration, remains necessary (Adamson and Tsourapas 2019: 853). On the surface, China fits the global trend towards what Boucher and Gest (2018) call a politicized 'Market Model' of immigration management. However, these global trends 'land' in vastly different immigration systems, from the expansive 'settler-state' or European apparatuses to China's bare-bones framework. It raises the question of what building an immigration system can look like in the current (anti-globalization) moment.

4. Wider implications for public and policy debate

This thesis has focused on the Chinese state and its approaches to immigration policymaking. However, centering state perspectives also carries clear limitations. First, by analyzing state policy aims and processes on their own terms, researchers of migration policy risk appearing to think 'for the state' and to naturalize or even endorse the state's migration agenda by thinking within its policy categories (e.g. Schinkel 2018). In this thesis, while I have aimed to maintain an analytical distance from the policy agendas discussed, I have not always been able to include critical reflection on their terms and aims. Second, given the paper-based format of this thesis, I generally

did not have the space to put my insights on these state perspectives into dialogue with actors beyond the scholarly debate.

In this final section, then, I draw on my findings to critically discuss three sets of issues with wider relevance to foreign migrants in China, external media or policy observers, as well as Chinese migration policymakers. First, I discuss the role of immigration policy reform and activism in the debate about the possibilities for long-term integration of foreign migrants in China. Second, I look at China's strict pandemic border restrictions, and how they affected the dynamics described in this thesis. Finally, I outline some take-aways from the case of immigration reform for the wider debate on how to respond to China's global rise.

a. Does China have immigrants?

In the forty years since China reopened its borders to international mobility, a highly heterogeneous group of foreigners has arrived in the country. Analyzing cultural products from the 2000s, Lee (2014) offers insightful analysis on these migrants, who no longer could be captured by the previously polarized categories of invaders and sympathizers, friends or foes. Instead, these foreigners could even be framed as helpful participants in the articulation of a new cosmopolitan Chinese identity. And as 'sojourners', their "inevitable departure" (2014: 278) helped offset the anxiety these newcomers might produce.

To what extent does the 'sojourner' or '过客' trope remain a useful lens for understanding the incorporation – or lack thereof – of foreign nationals in China today? I would argue that it can certainly help illuminate the impermanent presence – chosen or imposed – of many foreigners in the country, and their often precarious life conditions. However, thinking of foreigners in China as inevitably transient also obscures the complexity of China's current foreign migrant population and its needs. Describing this population as 'immigrants', the globally dominant term for long-term incoming migrants, or 来华移民 in Chinese, can highlight this diverse group as a part of Chinese society with its own rights, duties, and policy demands.

In this thesis, I show how the Chinese state approaches foreign migrants as a developmental resource. Resembling what Chung (2017), discussing Japan, calls a situation of 'immigration without immigrants,' the Chinese state now recognizes the country as an immigrant destination but avoids calling foreign migrants 'immigrants'. This reflects a persistent state of exception, in which foreigners do not fit the Chinese Communist Party's static map of the Chinese nation (Pieke and Barabantseva 2012). From the fact that foreign nationals are discussed in an appendix of China's national population census to public services that are only accessible with a Chinese ID-card, the institutional incorporation of foreigners has not been a state priority. Interestingly, a prominent strand in the literature on migrant experience in China also focuses on utility, highlighting how economic migrants, often from Euro-American origin, use their time

in China for personal or professional development without the intention to settle (e.g. Camenisch 2019).

Within this shared frame, in which foreign migrants and the Chinese state extract mutual benefit for developmental purposes, the need for more immigrant-centered reforms might not be obvious. In addition to the restrictive visa policies, migrants themselves point to the limits of cultural integration ("a foreigner cannot become Chinese") to explain why they are transient (e.g. Carrier and Mathews 2020). Instead, the best immigrants can do is build up temporary belonging, which often manifests as membership of a locality (Farrer 2019). There is also evidence to suggest that migrants are deterred by political trends, such as the focus on reducing foreign ideological influence and tighter control over academic research, or events like the high-profile detention of two Canadian migrants, Michael Kovrig and Michael Spavor, who were imprisoned from 2018-2021 as part of a US-China trade war dispute (Pieke et al 2019, Jakes 2021).

However, migrant incorporation in today's China is in fact much more diverse and often does not fit an elite developmentalist framing. Similar to China's internal migrants, many of whom have settled in cities while state policy and popular discourse continued to see them as temporary (e.g. Zavoretti 2017), many foreign migrants have carved out long-term lives for themselves. Centering those migrants who start a family in China, whether from developing or developed countries, makes this the most clear. However, for the growing number of foreign spouses in China, permanent residency requirements are often very difficult to fulfil (Barabantseva and Grillot 2019). Among economic migrants, case studies show that many also "intend to stay," at least initially (Cudic et al 2023: 10, Huang 2019), or end up staying unplanned (Cheuk 2022). The staff at Shanghai's permanent residency center, too, told me that many enquiries come from long-term third-country migrants and former Chinese nationals who are interested in but do not qualify for permanent residency. Like elsewhere, migrants move to China without detailed knowledge of the immigration policy system, and its limitations can come as a surprise.

Despite often having been neglected, both in and outside academic discourse on immigration to China, immigration policy change is a crucial aspect of the discussion on immigrant belonging. It is impossible to know what the development of immigrant communities in China would have been like if policies so far had been more immigrant-centered, allowing a decoupling of employment and residency rights for long-term migrants, letting migrant spouses work, or supporting students to stay (see Pieke et al 2019 for more concrete policy suggestions). But rather than assuming that, no matter how open or closed China's immigration policies, its culture would remain largely resistant to immigration, I would argue that outcomes would be considerably different, given how immigration policy, migrant settlement choices, and wider immigrant reception culture mutually shape each other (e.g. Fitzgerald 1996).

This thesis has outlined some of the challenges facing a public conversation in China on the way in which "immigration reshapes the face of the nation, resulting in a different 'we'," (Fitzgerald 1996: 8) - from a central state evading debate on issues of internationalization and diversity to a censored public sphere. At the same time, that does not mean nothing is changing. New Chinese narratives on immigration have emerged that draw on historical and comparative repertoires. These include often-cited nationalist calls to kick out 'foreign trash,' but also the police academy administrator citing Tang dynasty immigration levels to emphasize the long history of immigration in Chinese society, or the diversity of public attitudes I found in this thesis (see also Tian 2021). While critical public opinion is indeed a policy factor, no simple assumptions should be made about the Chinese public's attitudes towards foreigner settlement. Like Sullivan et al (2022), who found broad support for naturalized non-ethnic Chinese athletes among Chinese football fans, my findings suggest broad support for wider access to permanent residency. With unitary or essentialist views of Chinese identity often not borne out by public opinion research, it is important to unpack evolving ideas about citizenship and ethnic/cultural/civic identity among the Chinese public: i.e. someone can be in favor of permanent residency or naturalization for immigrants, without considering them culturally 'Chinese' (see also Han 2022). Perhaps this means that, with more public education and transparency on the scale and nature of foreign migration to China, immigration authorities would be unlikely to face widespread resistance to the next draft of the permanent residency regulations.

The fact that immigrant and civil society voices have been kept marginal in Chinese policy debate is a major setback in this context. Without pathways to citizenship, and faced with the state's suspicion of foreign political interference, immigrants have been kept transient, suspended in a position that make advocacy very challenging (Xiang 2017). But some actors have long been pushing for more inclusive policy. This group – that includes long-term China-based immigration researchers, parts of the transnational diaspora, foreign business associations, international migrant organizations and immigrant community representatives – and their role in advancing policy change requires future study (e.g. Liu 2015, Liu and Van Dongen 2016, CCG 2018). As the NIA expands its mechanisms for legal reform and public consultation,[128] I hope that they will take up their long-standing suggestions, including, for a start, 1) the regular publication of national immigration statistics that clearly distinguish long-term residents from short-term visitors, and, more ambitiously, 2) expanded access to permanent residency, in tandem with dismantling the remaining *hukou* restrictions limiting residency rights for internal migrants (Chan 2021). My research in Shanghai suggests that state-led social organizations serving immigrant needs, while no replacement for independent

128 "移民管理法治研究基地在京成立" [An immigration management legal development base was established in Beijing]. NIA, February 27, 2023. https://mp.weixin.qq.com/s/bENLT2OxKn6Z8SIXES2uSw

civil society, would also be useful in improving state-migrant information flows if they were made more widely accessible.

Given the processes of repoliticization described in this thesis, such dialogue on immigrant incorporation is unlikely to become easier going forward. But, writing this in the Netherlands, a country in which official acknowledgment that it had become an 'immigration country' in the postwar era was "highly controversial" for decades (Hollifield 2014: 17), it seems important to note that reception (policy) cultures take time to change. In that sense, describing China's foreign resident population as immigrants can be considered aspirational for a system that acknowledges and accommodates their integration into Chinese society much more than the current one does.

b. Immigration and the Covid-19 pandemic

For the China's immigration trends described in this thesis, the Covid-19 pandemic was a major disruption. When the Covid-19 pandemic broke out in early 2020, China was the first country to be severely affected. In the following years, the country developed a 'zero-Covid' crisis management approach that included stringent border controls keeping out most foreign nationals Many of the restrictions, which decimated international border crossings, stayed in place until late 2022, much longer than in most other countries. During these years, in Western media, a narrative emerged that, the pandemic had provided a convenient excuse for the Chinese state to reduce immigration and to thereby further limit the internationalization of Chinese society. With international mobility again highly policed, was China 'closing off' once again like in the Mao-era? Experts spoke of a country "dangerously locked off" in which Xi's nationalist agenda could accelerate without resistance.[129]

This thesis shows how such an interpretation does not accurately reflect the Chinese state's priorities on immigration. Like in other countries around the world, the Chinese immigration framework pursues a range of sometimes conflicting development and security aims (Castles 2004). The border restrictions, part of a high-intensity crisis approach to keep Covid out, went against other key state goals that remained salient, such as the goal to attract and retain more high-skilled immigrants or to deepen ties with diasporic communities. Still, the question of how three years of radically reduced immigration affect the politics described in this thesis remains. Here, I reflect on how China's 'zero Covid' years sped up a trend towards securitizing migration but did not radically alter state priorities, while at the same time, the crisis measures have severely disrupted migration trends.

---

129 Scott Kennedy, "Xi-Biden Meeting May Help End China's Destructive Isolation," Foreign Policy, November 14, 2022, https://foreignpolicy.com/2022/11/14/xi-biden-meeting-china-isolation/; Lai-Ha Chan, and Pak K. Lee, "How Nationalism and Xenophobia Drive China's 'Zero Covid' Policy," *The Diplomat*, December 1, 2022, https://thediplomat.com/2022/12/how-nationalism-and-xenophobia-drive-chinas-zero-covid-policy/ .

Many of the dynamics in this thesis were put on display during the first years of the Covid-19 pandemic (Speelman 2021). Following the closure of China's borders to most foreign visa-holders on March 28, 2020, described by an NIA spokesperson as an "unfortunate, temporary restriction",[130] the agency's regular policy announcements raised its profile among the general public. Building up border security infrastructure and controlling irregular migrants became a priority in China's border regions, where the NIA also expanded a forced repatriation system. This trend was subsequently codified in a new Land Borders Law adopted in October 2021. Like in other parts of the world, the first months of the pandemic saw a rise in hostile attitudes towards and discrimination of immigrants, reinforcing images in global media of the Chinese public as predominantly xenophobic. The NIA's investment in communication resulted in some multilingual information services directed at immigrants. Overall, however, pandemic measures, from vaccination campaigns to pandemic management apps, regularly excluded foreign nationals. Finally, when growing numbers of Chinese nationals protested the persistent restrictive border measures in the fall of 2022, they were accused of being supported by 'foreign forces.'[131]

To many in and outside China, the country's strict border restrictions, outlasting those in other parts of the world, felt symbolic of the larger political closing that has characterized the Xi-era. The reappraisal of the Ming dynasty 'closed country' policy by one party historian was seen as a sign of the times.[132] However, when it comes to immigration, such a narrative of targeted and intensifying closure risks conflating several distinct developments. As this thesis has shown, the pre-pandemic immigration agenda was characterized by increased enforcement of selective immigration regulations, but also by a gradual expansion of rights for some migrant groups. These efforts – expanding permanent residency access in some cities, opening immigration service centers –continued after the border closures.[133] A widely cited pre-pandemic decline in the number of expatriates from Euro-American and East Asian countries in cities like Shanghai was accompanied by an increase in migration from other parts of the world (Pieke et al 2019). In addition, rather than seeing the instances in which migrants were excluded or unnecessarily singled out in Covid measures as evidence

130 "国务院联防联控机制新闻发布会: 介绍依法防控境外疫情输入最新情况 "[Press Conference of the State Council Joint Prevention and Control Mechanism: Introducing the Latest Measures for Preventing Virus Importation from Abroad]. March 30, 2020. www.gov.cn/xinwen/2020-03/30/content_5497281.htm.

131 Xiao Zibang, and Jing Li, "China Envoy Blames 'Foreign Forces' for Covid Protests." *Bloomberg News*, December 15, 2022, https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2022-12-15/chinese-envoy-says-covid-protests-smacked-of-color-revolution

132 Verna Yu, "History revisited: What the isolationist Qing dynasty tells us about Xi Jinping's China. *The Guardian*, January 16, 2023, https://www.theguardian.com/world/2023/jan/16/what-the-isolationist-qing-dynasty-tells-us-about-xi-jinpings-china.

133 See for instance Zhang Bin 张斌, Dong Yixin 董易鑫, and Wang Ji 王妃, "'是外国人但不是外人"浙江金华创新外国人服务举措" ['Foreigners not Outsiders': Jinhua, Zhejiang Innovates Foreign Service Measures], 中国侨网, October 5, 2021, www.chinaqw.com/jjkj/2021/10-05/309751.shtml.

of increasing xenophobia,[134] I find that they are best interpreted as typical blind spots in China's longstanding non-inclusive policy culture. While the treatment of foreign nationals during China's pandemic response illustrates how far the Chinese state has to go in terms of immigrant incorporation, it does not seem to depict a deterioration.

Instead, a more likely scenario is that the needs of foreign nationals (like those of many other domestic and diasporic groups) were considered collateral damage in a rigid and top-down but ultimately temporary crisis response. As China abandoned its zero-Covid policy in late 2022, its immigration agenda has emerged largely unchanged. Importantly, these years seem to have further tipped the balance towards control measures being implemented more rapidly than other reforms (see also Zhang 2022). The pandemic surveillance has also increased the state's use of big data in immigration governance (Zhao and Wang 2022). State framing of immigration has undergone some further securitization, with central policymakers now referencing national security and geopolitical competition as the rationale for a stronger central immigration apparatus (e.g. Lin and Shen 2022). These changes are important given the role crises play in state centralization (Jiang and Ong 2023). The announced policy agenda, however, continues to revolve around attracting more skilled (return) migrants and controlling irregular migration, with a focus on "system building" (Hu 2022). Indeed, given my findings on the state's narrowing but long-term internationalization strategy, these policy priorities are unlikely to be abandoned in the coming years.

However, the pandemic border restrictions have severely altered the migration context these policies aimed to shape. Reliable figures are limited, but it is clear that large numbers of long-term foreign residents left the country between 2020-2022. With the residency rights of most of these migrants linked to their employment, they will face a high threshold to return. Cross-border labor flows have been disrupted for years, while China's emerging reputation as an important student migration destination has been damaged by its refusal to let degree students (re-)enter the country during these years. Among the Chinese population, including many returnees, a popular discourse of emigration (润学) once again depicts China as a place to leave. While the issue of how Chinese attitudes towards immigration changed during this period requires further research, many reports suggest that foreigners once again became an unusual sight on the streets of major cities, with one American scholar noting that their reception during a rare trip in Fall 2022 reminded them of the 1980s.[135]

As a crisis event, the Covid-19 pandemic has deepened some on-going trends in China's immigration management but has also had a major disruptive impact on

---

134 E.g. Amanda Florian, "China's Zero-COVID Policies are Stirring Xenophobia," *Foreign Policy*, November 7, 2022, https://foreignpolicy.com/2022/11/07/china-zero-covid-xenophobia/.

135 Han Bochen, "Being there: American researchers extol benefits of returning to China." *South China Morning Post*, November 27, 2022, https://www.scmp.com/news/china/diplomacy/article/3201156/being-there-american-researchers-extol-benefits-returning-china.

foreign communities in the country that was the result of contingency. In fact, these years illustrate how both the Chinese state narrative of the 'inevitable increase' of foreigners living in China as the country becomes more powerful, and the 'inevitable downturn' narrative that has dominated Western reports are too simplistic. Rather, with immigration to China experiencing periods of growth and decline, what the next decades will bring is still highly uncertain.

c. Immigration reform and China's global rise

Finally, the case of China's immigration reform offers some take-aways for policymakers and observers of its global rise. These concern the need to critically assess how immigration to China is being framed in geopolitical narratives, especially in the context of US-China competition, to include detailed knowledge of Chinese domestic realities in political and media debate on China, and to cultivate a perspective that does justice to China's entanglement with the rest of the world.

Previously not a major dynamic, as the rivalry between China and the US becomes a long-term feature of global politics, both countries are viewing their immigration policies through a more geopolitical lens. For the United States, despite its outsized leadership role attracting Chinese and other skilled migrants, retaining Chinese talent is now considered a growing strategic priority.[136] In China, its long-term developmental 'talent attraction' strategy is now also being adjusted to fit a new geopolitical competition frame (e.g. Gao 2019). While the majority of Chinese students abroad return, efforts to attract (back) experts in STEM fields have been mixed (Zweig et al 2020, Zwetsloot 2021). Immigrants and diaspora groups are particularly vulnerable to such connections between migration and geopolitics. So far, the scrutiny of 'China-connections' in American research has led to discrimination and criminalization of participants in Chinese talent schemes, as well as an increase in anti-Asian racism (Lewis 2021). For instance, in response to the U.S. accusations, the Chinese state erased its flagship 'Thousand Talent Program' from government websites, leaving participants in a vulnerable position (Lu et al 2022). As this dynamic spreads,[137] an accurate understanding of these programs, as well as of China's skilled migration more broadly, is critical. As my case study of skilled migration reform in Shanghai demonstrates, the ability of China's immigration

136 E.g. Caroline Coudriet, "Congress mulls immigration's role in China competition strategy." *Roll Call*, May 16, 2022, https://rollcall.com/2022/05/16/congress-mulls-immigrations-role-in-china-competition-strategy/.

137 E.g. Frank N. Pieke, "China's influence and the Chinese community in the Netherlands," *Leiden Asia Centre*, March 2021, https://leidenasiacentre.nl/wp-content/uploads/2021/04/Chinas-influence-and-the-Chinese-community-in-the-Netherlands-F.N.-Pieke.-Machine-translation..pdf; Hannah Devlin, "1,100 scientists and students barred from UK amid China crackdown." *The Guardian*, March 15, 2023, https://www.theguardian.com/education/2023/mar/15/1100-scientists-and-students-barred-from-uk-amid-china-crackdown.

system to accommodate 'foreign talent' remains limited. Meanwhile, an unstable geopolitical environment negatively affects immigrants on all sides.

China's steep demographic transition is another topic on policy agendas around the world. In many countries, demographic pressures have formed an impetus for immigration reform. In China, where the transition has been sped up by decades of strict family planning policies, this is so far not the case. During my research, I have found that, when immigration policymakers discussed future demographic trends, they consider an explicit labor immigration policy politically unviable given uneven economic development in the country and China's recent past as a country defined by its large labor population. At the same time, there has been movement in related policy areas, such as reforming the foreign employment framework to accommodate some forms of 'low-skilled' foreign migration, increased local recognition of foreign marriage migration in rural areas with gender imbalance, or allowing regional solutions for labor shortages such as the Guangxi cross-border labor trial. The topic is also gaining traction in academic discourse, with more experts calling for immigration policy to be integrated in the country's transition strategy (e.g. Ye and Jing 2019, Liu 2022). While China is unlikely to embrace immigration as a major component of its demographic policy, in the future we could see more indirect 'side-door' immigration measures to relieve demographic pressures (see also Chung 2021).

More broadly, as countries around the world are developing new China policies, these should be based on a realistic assessment of China's political aims and abilities. In the case of immigration policy, we have seen how difficult it is for Chinese state actors to deliver on the immigration reform goals they set themselves, despite the authoritarian state being increasingly powerful. While foreign discourse on China tends to take Chinese policy rhetoric at face value, knowledge of its policy constraints is crucial to avoid policy that battles an idea of China that does not exist. For instance, as Liu (2022: 20) notes in the case of diaspora policy, while the Chinese state aspires to utilize the diaspora in its geopolitical ascendance, the "intensity and efficacy of these transborder connections" is far from clear. Like this work and that of others on the domestic political economy foundations of China's Belt and Road Initiative and wider foreign policy (Ye 2020), this study of immigration highlights some of the institutional and ideological limitations that affect much of China's 'external' policymaking.

In addition, this thesis cautions against generalizing about the Chinese population based on online attitudes. In the current environment of tense diplomatic relations with China, journalists and scholars make summary statements about xenophobia being at "a new high" or "on a scale not seen since the Cultural Revolution" that are impossible to verify (e.g. Shirk 2022, Ang and Martin 2023). Going beyond the internet, contrasting observations can often easily be found. For instance, as one of the only US journalists still reporting from mainland China in 2022 noted, while official barriers and online hate towards her work had increased in recent years, offline interactions throughout

the country remained unchanged and "really friendly" (Feng 2022). In this context, studying the range of offline attitudes, as this thesis has tried to do, is crucial to a more nuanced understanding of on-the-ground realities.

Ultimately, it is understandable that 'China exceptionalism' remains a common framing both in and outside the country due to the extraordinary scale and speed of its reform era development, including that of human mobility. However, the case of China's immigration policymaking is well-suited to debunking this idea. From the size of its immigration flows – significant but far from extraordinary – to its globally common policy tools, priorities and anti-immigration discourse, a critique of China's immigration policymaking invites zooming out. Doing so can illuminate the larger reality of what Franceschini and Louberere (2022: 58) call the "intensification of Chinese entanglements in the global system" and the need to understand linkages, parallels, ruptures, continuities and evolutions, as well as the broader forces shaping them. This thesis has attempted to do so for just one aspect of China's past decades of intensive and transformative international exchange – of people, information, ideas, institutional practices – that took place through a multitude of channels. Any movement towards undoing ('decoupling') or deepening these connections takes place in that entangled context.

ANNEXES

Annex 1. Timeline: Key events in Chinese immigration management (1978-2022)[138]

Year	Event
1978	Deng Xiaoping rehabilitates foreign exchange in his December 13 closing speech at the Third Plenum launching China's reforms, saying that China should "discover experts, train experts, heavily make use of experts" and "learn from foreign advanced management methods."
1978	Starting from 1978, large groups of refugees from Vietnam, Laos and Cambodia are resettled in southern China. This influx of about 250,000 migrants, mostly of Chinese descent, leads to the establishment of a UNHCR office in Beijing in 1980 and China's accession to international treaties on refugees. However, China has did not codify these treaties into Chinese law, and does not prioritize refugee protection, despite being an emerging (transit) destination.
1980	A new visa system is established (护照签证条例), requiring foreign nationals to apply for a visa to enter, transit, or exit China's borders. The exit visa was canceled in 1986. In this year, China also adopts a new nationality law (国籍法), in which dual nationality is banned.
1983	Exit-entry management bureaus are established under the Ministry of Public Security
1983	Adoption of the "Decision to attract foreign expertise to serve the four modernizations" (关于引进外国智力以利四化建设的决定), accompanied by a series of regulations on housing and other preferential policies for 'foreign experts'
1985	Adoption of the *Law of Administration of Entrance and Exit of Foreigners*, followed by accompanying regulations in 1986. A separate law governing the exit and entry of Chinese nationals was also adopted in 1985 (中华人民共和国公民出境入境管理法).
1985	Gradual opening up of Chinese territory to foreign nationals, from 244 areas in which foreigners could travel without requiring official permission in 1985 to 2650 areas in 2005 (making up 92% of national territory).
1996	Adoption of the "Regulations on the Management of Employment of Foreigners in China" (外国人在中国就业管理规定), ending a decade in which a lot of foreign employment did not have a legal basis.
1998	In nine major cities, professional police take over border inspection duties from military police. This reform is followed by the centralization of command over border control troops in 2001, and was implemented nationwide in 2018.

138 For sourcing and further detail, see: Gongan 2010, Liu 2011, Liu and Chen 2015, Liu and Ahl 2018, Song 2018, Zhang and Geiger 2020.

Year	Event
2001	A national exit-entry conference is held in November, ten days after China's accession to the World Trade Organization, announcing a foreigners' permanent residency program alongside reforms simplifying passport access for Chinese nationals
2003	Restrictions on foreigners' places of residency are lifted. Demand for 'international-style' housing among foreign professionals, whose numbers rapidly grow in this period, drives the emergence of a commodified housing market.
2004	China's foreigners permanent residency comes into force (外国人在中国永久居留审批管理办法). From 2004-2016, only 10,200 foreign nationals are awarded permanent residency, of which about 50% have been former Chinese nationals. Since 2016, the number of awardees has increased more rapidly, to a total of about 20,000.
2008	Regulations specifying the requirements to register foreigners' places of residency at police stations come into force (公安派出所外国人住宿登记管理办法（试行）). These requirements, which function as an immigration control instrument, were subsequently codified in the 2012 Exit-Entry law.
2008	Launch of a series of programs aimed at attracting return and foreign 'high-level talent', in an effort to combat brain drain and aid innovation (e.g. 中央人才工作协调小组关于实施海外高层次人才引进计划的意见). Generally referred to as the 'Thousand Talent Program', participants in this and a variety of other talent programs receive high levels of compensation and are individually managed by Party and state bureaus.
2009	The death of a Nigerian migrant in Guangzhou during a police check leads to a rare confrontation between foreigners and Chinese police authorities. The incident reflects growing controversy around especially African migrants in the city, leading to the 2011 adoption of provincial-level legislation specifying penalties for housing or otherwise assisting irregular migrants (广东省外国人管理服务暂行规定). These regulations also influence national-level policymaking.
2011	National-level regulations are published on tax-paying foreigners' rights to Chinese social insurance (在中国境内就业的外国人参加社会保险暂行办法). However, implementation of these rules has been limited by, among other things, a lack of bilateral treaties on immigrant social insurance.
2012	Adoption of the *Exit and Entry Management Law* (中华人民共和国出入境管理法), which discusses cross-border movement of both foreign and Chinese nationals, integrating the 1985 laws. Coming after a decade of rapid growth of migrant communities, the law focused on strengthening control over irregular migration.
2016	China joins the International Organization for Migration as a full member, after having been an observing member for 15 years. One of its main activities has been the implementation of the EU-China Dialogue on Migration and Mobility Support Project, focused on the exchange of expertise in migration control and other areas.

Year	Event
2016	The State Council publishes an influential guiding document on strengthening the implementation of foreigners' permanent residency (关于加强外国人永久居留服务管理的意见). Aimed at better coordination between the Ministry of Public Security and 33 other government entities, the guidelines emphasize the need for full "citizen treatment" previous regulations had also stipulated but which in practice had failed to materialize due to fragmented governance.
2017	China introduces a unified work permit system for foreign nationals, merging previously separate systems for 'foreign experts' working in designated professions and other professional migrants. It also divides employment-stream migrants into three categories: A (highly skilled talent), B (professional talent), and C (ordinary foreign worker).
2018	The National Immigration Administration (国家移民管理局) is established as a semi-independent, sub-ministerial agency on April 2, merging the Ministry of Public Security's departments of exit-entry administration and border control. While its name only refers to 'Immigration', the agency is responsible for exit-entry management of both foreign and Chinese nationals, and has a mandate to coordinate all migration affairs.
2020	On March 28, China closes its borders for most foreign nationals, with an exemption for permanent residency holders. In the following years, borders are heavily guarded to prevent virus transmission via border crossings, and international flights to and from mainland China greatly reduced. Despite some relaxations since September 2020, these strict pandemic border controls were largely in place until January 2023, with all visa categories restored from March 15, 2023.
2021	China adopts a land borders law (中华人民共和国陆地国界法), following a period of border infrastructure build-up and in the context of several border disputes. While specifying the role of immigration authorities, the law focuses on the responsibilities of China's military in border safeguarding.

Annex 2. Immigration statistics: Selected data sources and their limitations

Few reliable statistics on the scale and characteristics of immigration to China are available. Here I give an overview of the most commonly cited national-level data, and provide some context on each data source and its limitations.

a. Immigration population data from the 2010 and 2020 national census

Table A.2.1

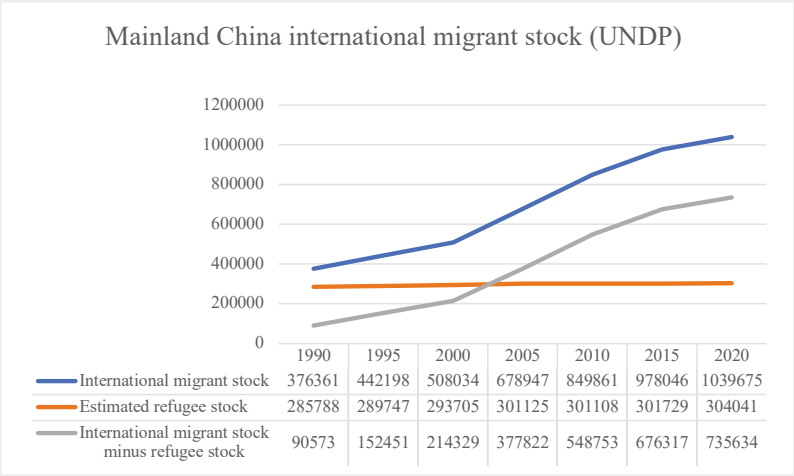
	2010 National Census	**2020 National Census**
Total third-country foreign population	593,832	845,697
Percentage of women	43.4	52.5
Percentage age 20-64	72.9	78.4
Length of stay (in %)		
• Less than a year	37.4	22.8
• 1-5 years	45.1	47.9
• Over 5 years	17.5	32.9
Education level (in %)		
• Primary and below	23.9	47.6
• Secondary and vocational	23	22.5
• University	53.1	27.9
Top 10 countries of origin	South Korea, United States, Japan, Myanmar, Vietnam, Canada, France, India, Germany, Australia	Myanmar, Vietnam, South Korea, United States, Japan, Canada, Australia, United Kingdom, Germany, Laos

Notes:

- Since the Chinese national census first included foreign nationals in the 2010 census, its results have become the key source for national immigration figures. The census aims to include foreign nationals residing in the country for 3 months or longer.
- The census figures are likely an undercount. Registered migrant populations by sending countries tend to be larger than those reported in the two censuses. For instance, South Korea's Foreign Ministry reported 369,349 South Korean nationals in mainland China in 2015, vs. 120,750 South Korean migrants counted in China's 2010 national census (and only 59,242 in the 2020 census – see the next point). Statistics from different state sources also show large discrepancies: Shanghai's public security bureau reports 338,700 foreign nationals in 2010, vs. 143,496 foreign nationals based in Shanghai counted in the 2010 census. It also excludes irregular migration.
- Due to its timing in November 2020, the 2020 census results should be considered a pandemic era snapshot and cannot accurately reflect pre-pandemic trends. At the time, most foreign nationals could not enter China, and a significant percentage of student and professional migrant populations had left the country in early 2020. The relative growth of border migrant populations in the 2020 results (with a significant shift towards less educated, female, and longer-term migrants) likely reflects this particular timing, in which migrants in urban areas left the country but migrants in more rural areas stayed. Strengthened control over border migration, compared to 2010, also plays a role in the higher numbers of border migrants captured in the 2020 census.

b. Immigration population data from the United Nations Population Division

Figure A.2.1



	1990	1995	2000	2005	2010	2015	2020
International migrant stock	376361	442198	508034	678947	849861	978046	1039675
Estimated refugee stock	285788	289747	293705	301125	301108	301729	304041
International migrant stock minus refugee stock	90573	152451	214329	377822	548753	676317	735634

Notes:

- Updated every five years, the UN Population Division International Migrant Stock data are also frequently cited by researchers of Chinese immigration as an alternative source of data. Its published figures for mainland have been higher than national census figures. However, population censuses form its main basis, with the UNPD also applying methods of extrapolation and projection.
- In the case of mainland China, the UNPD figures include the population of Vietnamese and Cambodian refugees who were resettled in Southern China in the early 1980s and remain registered as refugees. This fact is not usually noted, but can explain the discrepancy with the census figures on foreign nationals. More generally, this population, which has faced large challenges in gaining equal citizenship rights (see for instance Ho 2018) but has now (mostly) obtained Chinese nationality, is not usually included in the realm of Chinese immigration research.
- If you subtract the estimated refugee stock from the overall UNDP international migrant stock figure for mainland China, the resulting figures are more in line with the census figures on foreign nationals. However, going back to 1990, the UNPD data are valuable as a source on the rapid growth of China's foreign population prior to the 2010 census.

c. Exit-entry data from the National Immigration Administration

Figure A.2.2

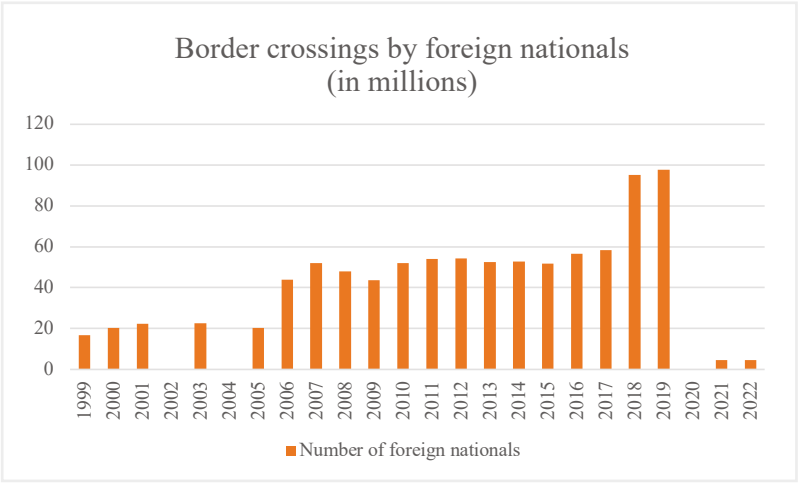
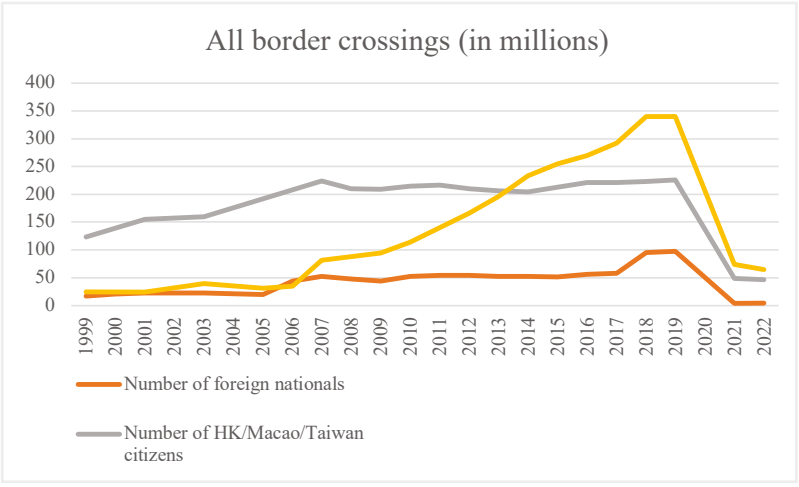


Figure A.2.3



Notes:

- Exit-entry figures have been the only figures on international mobility that are regularly released by China's immigration authorities. An annual statement has been put out in state media for most years since the early 2000s, while the NIA website has archived annual overviews for (2007-2013) and quarterly figures since 2014. Figures for 2020 were not published.[139]

139 See https://www.nia.gov.cn/n741440/n741567/index.html.

- The border crossings data show how international mobility took off in the early 2000s, when for several years, the cross-border flows of foreign nationals and Chinese citizens were comparable in size, before Chinese relaxations of passport controls led to a larger percentage of Chinese nationals traveling abroad. It also shows the high levels of HK/Macao/Taiwan border crossings throughout this period.
- Apart from showing the total number of border crossings, the data for foreign nationals likely provide some insight into migration trends as well, given the prevalence of long-term foreign residents working on short-term visas in this period.
- The large jump in registered border crossings by foreign nationals from 58,4 million in 2017 to 95,3 million in 2018 should primarily be attributed to an increase in central data collection of border crossings in land border areas, as reported by the NIA.

Annex 3: Interview and survey details

Table A.3.1. Details on survey "National attitudes towards incoming transnational migrants" (N=1888 completed questionnaires)

	% of respondents
Gender	
• Female	54.2
• Male	45.8
Location of household registration	
• Rural hukou	33.6
• County-level city	21.7
• Prefectural-level city	20.6
• Provincial capital/municipality	24.4
Education (highest level)	
• Primary or middle school	11.4
• High school	19.0
• College/vocational degree	59.6
• Graduate degree	10.0
Occupation	
• Full-time employment	39.8
• Other types of employment	8.9
• Agricultural work	4.1
• Retired	3.7
• In education	37.3
• Unemployed	5.2
Social class (self-identified)	
• Lower class	18.8
• Lower middle class	41.2
• Middle class	35.7
• Upper middle class	4.0
• Upper class	0.4
International experience	
• Has not traveled outside China	75.5
• Has traveled abroad	21.2
• Has worked abroad	3.6
• Has studied abroad	4.2

Table A.3.2. Geographical distribution of completed questionnaires (N=1888)

Location	% of respondents
Henan	14.3
Jiangsu	10.2
Zhejiang	9.6
Shanghai	8.3
Qinghai	8.3
Anhui	7.3
Liaoning	7.3
Hebei	6.0
Gansu	4.2
Hubei	4.2
Guangdong	3.5
Other	16.8

Table A.3.3. Details on semi-structured public interviews (46 interviews in total)

	# of interviews
Locations	
• Shanghai	28
• Pinghu	10
• Jinan	8
Gender	
• Female	24
• Male	22
Age	
• Under 30	14
• 31-45	18
• Over 45	14
Education	
• High school or less	13
• Vocational degree	4
• Bachelor degree	16
• Graduate degree	12
Monthly household income	
• Under 10,000RMB	18
• 10-25,000RMB	21
• Over 25,000RMB	7
Migration status	
• Local	20
• Internal migrant	26
Cross-cultural contact	
• Rare	12
• Occasional	20
• Frequent	14

Table A.3.4. Details on surveys used

Survey name	**Year conducted in mainland China**	**Sample size**
World Values Survey (Waves 2-7)	1990, 1995, 2001, 2007, 2013, 2017	N=1000, N=1500, N=1000, N=1991, N=2300, N=3036
China General Social Survey (Han 2017a)	2008	N=3008
Asian Barometer Survey, Wave 4	2014-2016	N=4068
Online survey "National attitudes towards incoming transnational migrants and their formation"	2020	N=1888

Annex 4: Selected survey data

a. Online survey "National attitudes towards incoming transnational migrants and their formation" (July 2020)

Figure A.4.1. Immigration control

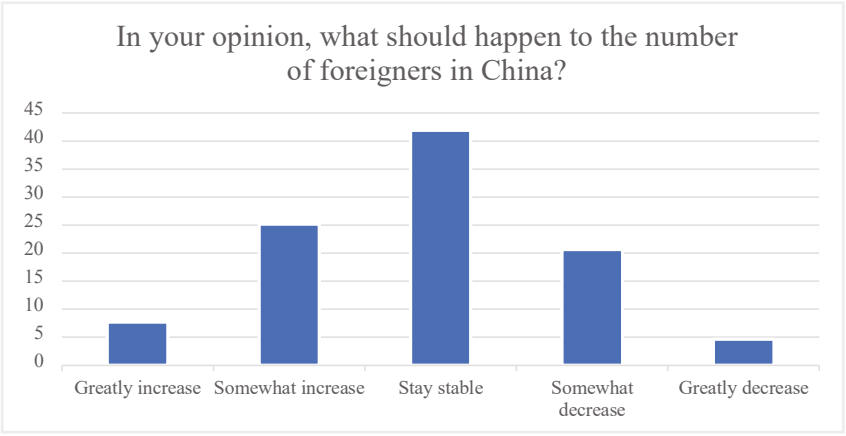


Figure A.4.2. Immigrant selection

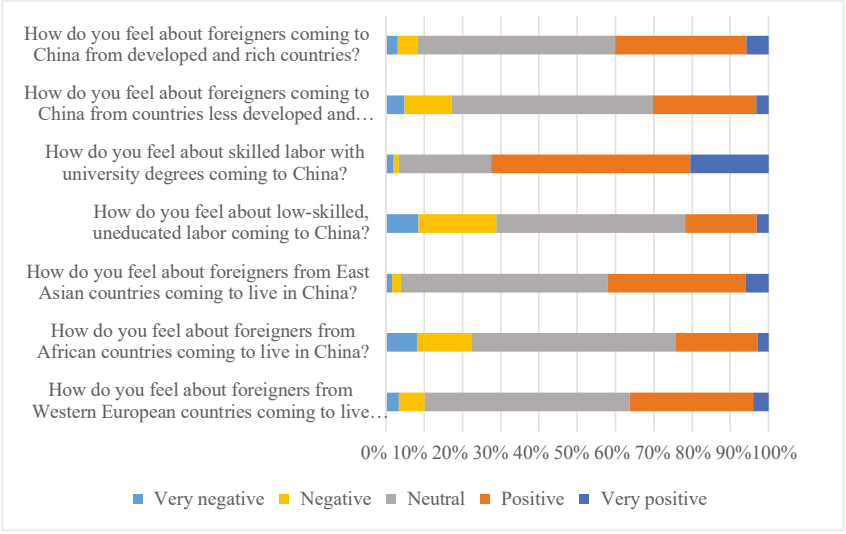


Figure A.4.3. Immigration effects

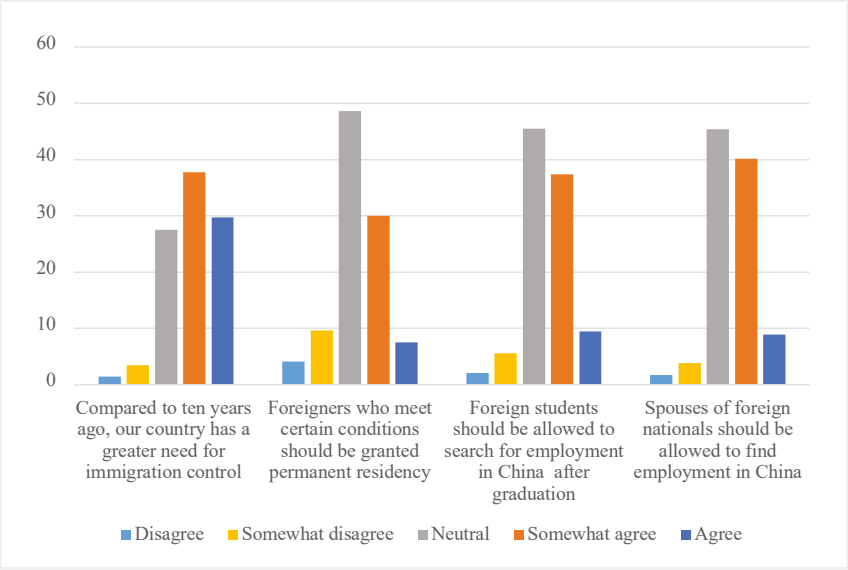


Figure A.4.4. Immigration policy

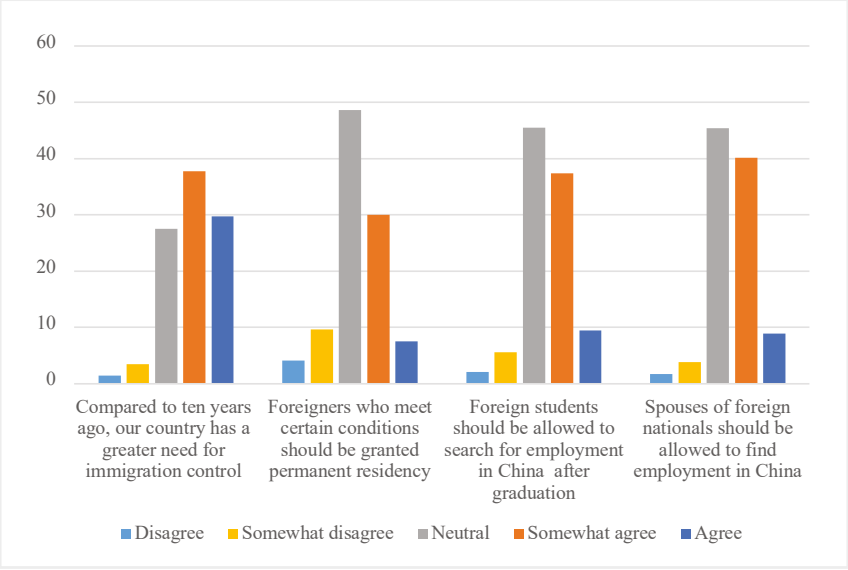
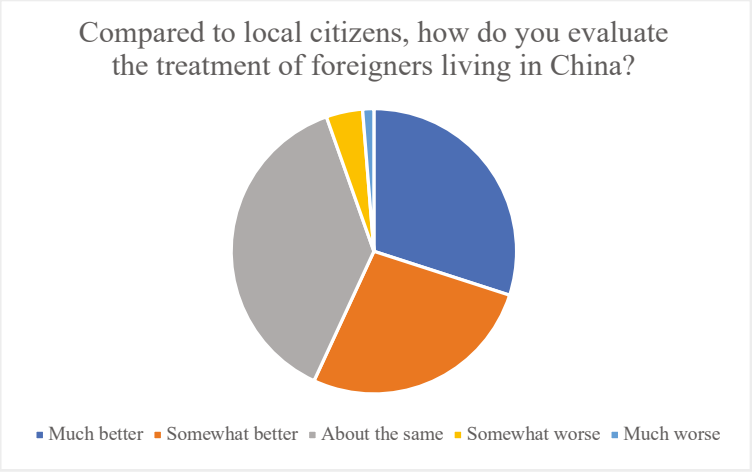
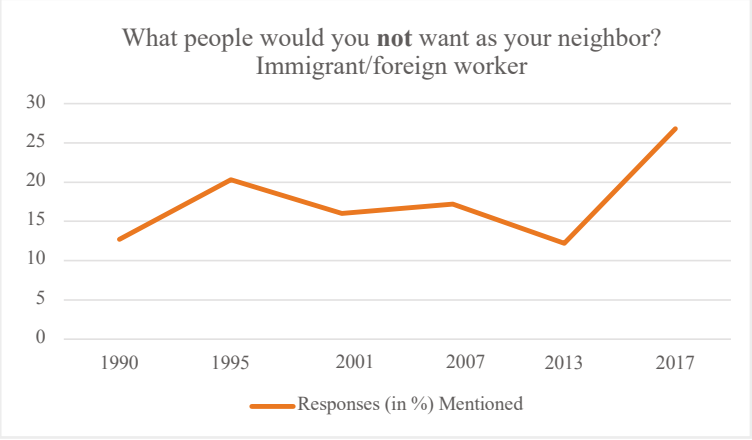


Figure A.4.5. Immigrant treatment



b. World Values Survey (Wave 2-7)[140]

Figure A.4.6. Immigrant neighbor question (Wave 2-7)



140 For more detailed data see the World Values Survey website: worldvaluessurvey.org

Figure A.4.7. Employment migration policy question (Wave 3-5)

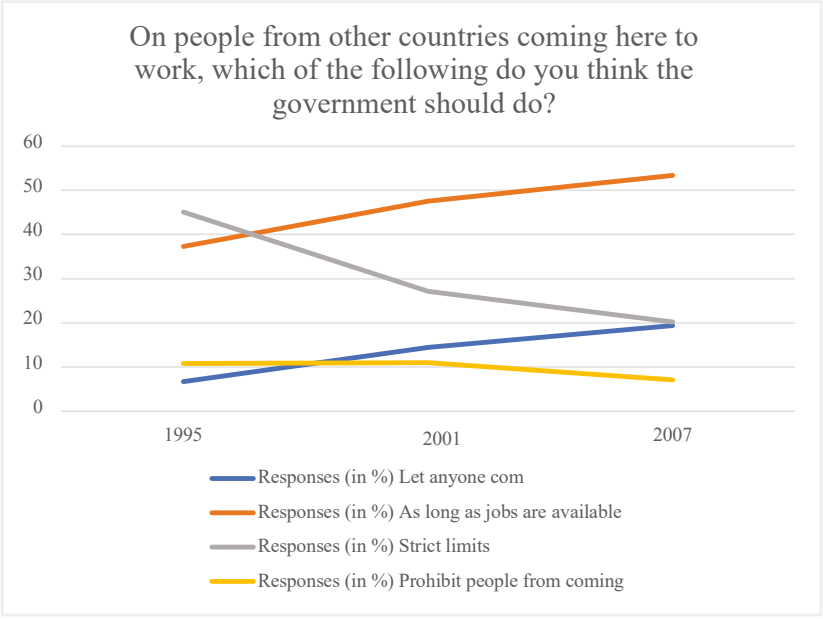
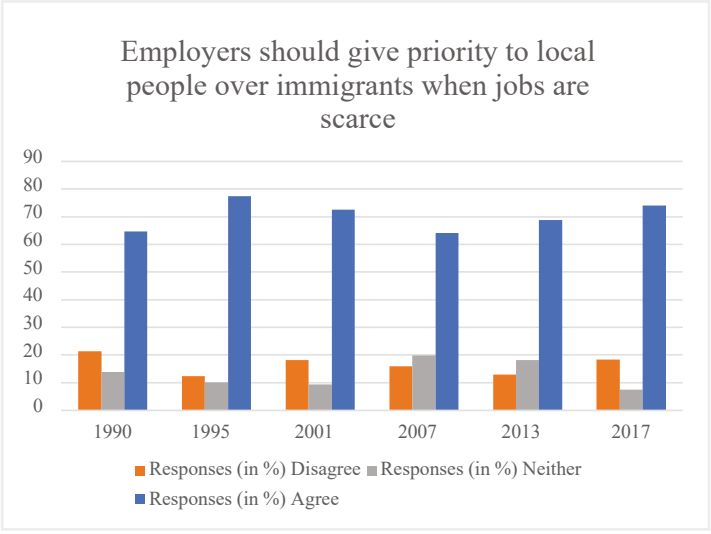
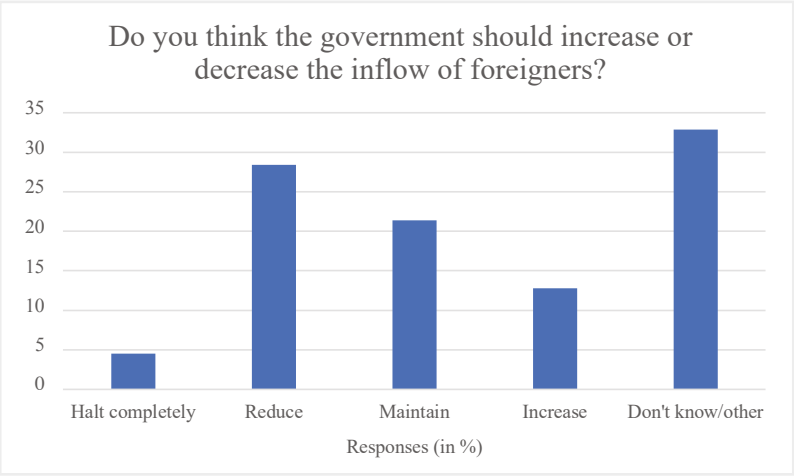


Figure A.4.8. Job scarcity question (Wave 2-7)



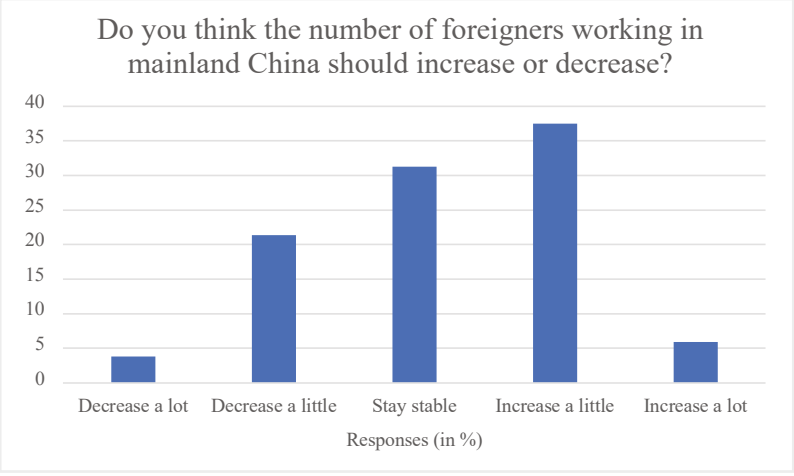
c. Asian Barometer Survey (Mainland China: December 2014- June 2016)[141]

Figure A.4.9. Immigration control



d. China General Social Survey 2008 (Han 2017a)

Figure A.4.10. Immigration control



141 To obtain the full dataset see the Asian Barometer website: globalbarometers.org.

References

Adamson, Fiona B., and Gerasimos Tsourapas. 2019. “The Migration State in the Global South: Nationalizing, Developmental, and Neoliberal Models of Migration Management.” *International Migration Review* 54(3): 853-882.

Adebayo, Kudus O. 2023. “Health challenges in everyday life of Nigerians in Guangzhou City, China.” *Journal of International Migration and Integration*.

Ahl, Björn. and Pilar-Paz Czoske. 2021. "The Reform of Chinese Migration Law and the Protection of Migrants’ Rights." In *Immigration Governance in East Asia: Norm Diffusion, Politics of Identity, Citizenship,* edited by G. Schubert, F. Plümmer and A. Bayo, 179-197. New York: Routledge.

Ahl, Björn, Pilar-Paz Czoske, and Cui Xu. 2020. “Labor rights protection of foreign employees in China.” *Asia Pacific Law Review* 28(1): 122-137.

Ahlers, Anna L. and Schubert, Gunter. 2015. “Effective policy implementation in China’s local state.” *Modern China* 41(4): 372–405.

Ahlers, Anna L. and Gunter Schubert. 2022. “Nothing New Under “Top-Level Design”? A Review of the Conceptual Literature on Local Policymaking in China.” *Issues & Studies* 58: 1-24.

Anderson, Bridget. 2013. *Us and Them? The Dangerous Politics of Immigration Control.* Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Ang, Yuen Yuen. 2018. “Autocracy with Chinese Characteristics: Beijing’s Behind-the-Scenes Reforms.” *Foreign Affairs* May/June.

Ang, Yuen Yuen. 2022. “How Resilient is the CCP?” *Journal of Democracy* 33(3): 77-91.

Arcarazo, Diego A., and Luisa F. Freier. 2015. “Turning the Immigration Policy Paradox Upside Down? Populist Liberalism and Discursive Gaps in South America.” *International Migration Review* 49(3): 659–696.

Bai, Yongfeng 白永峰. 2019. “论移民管理改革背景下的外国人入出境安全风险防控” [Foreigners’ exit-entry safety and risk control in the immigration management reforms]. 湖北警官学院学报3: 120-33.

Balla, Steven, and Zhoudan Xie. 2021. “Online Consultation and the Institutionalization of Transparency and Participation in Chinese Policymaking.” *The China Quarterly* 246: 473-496.

Barabantseva, Elena. 2015. “From ‘customary’ to ‘illegal’: Yao ethnic marriages on the Sino-Vietnamese border.” *Cross-Currents: East Asian History and Culture Review* 15: 57-81.

Barabantseva, Elena. 2019. “Marriage Immigration and Illegality in China’s Ethnic Borders.” In *Destination China: Immigration to China in the Post-Reform Era,* edited by Angela Lehmann and Pauline Leonard, 21-44. New York: Palgrave MacMillan US.

Barabantseva, Elena. 2021. “Losing self to discover national citizenship: contestations over parental rights among the post-Soviet foreign wives in China.” *Geopolitics* 26(2): 444-463.

Barabantseva, Elena, and Caroline Grillot. 2019. “Representations and Regulations of Marriage Migration from Russian and Vietnam in the People's Republic of China.” *Journal of Asian Studies* 78(2): 285-308.

Battistella, Graziano. 2014. *Global and Asian Perspectives on International Migration*. Cham: Springer International Publishing.

Bickers, Robert A. 2011. *The Scramble for China: Foreign Devils in the Qing Empire, 1832–1914.* London: Allen Lane.

Bodomo, Adams. 2010. “The African Trading Community in Guangzhou: An Emerging Bridge for Africa–China Relations.” *China Quarterly* 203: 693–707.

Boswell, Christina. 2003. *European Migration Policies in Flux: Changing Patterns of Inclusion and Exclusion.* Oxford: Blackwell.

Boswell, Christina. 2007. “Migration control in Europe after 9/11: Explaining the absence of securitization.” *Journal of Common Market Studies* 45(3): 589–610.

Boucher, Anna. 2020. “How ‘skill’ definition affects the diversity of skilled immigration policies.” *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies* 46(12): 2533-2550.

Boucher, Anna and Justin Gest. 2018. *Crossroads: Comparative Immigration Regimes in a World of Demographic Change.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Brady, Anne-Marie. 2003. *Making the Foreign Serve China: Managing Foreigners in the People's Republic.* Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers.

Bretell, Caroline. 2022. “Theorizing Migration in Anthropology.” In *Migration Theory: Talking across Disciplines (4th ed.),* edited by Caroline Bretell and James Hollifield, 193-222. Routledge.

Breunig, Christian, Xun Cao, and Adam Luedtke. 2012. “Global Migration and Political Regime Type: A Democratic Disadvantage.” *British Journal of Political Science* 42(4): 825–54.

Brubaker, Roger. 1992. *Citizenship and Nationhood in France and Germany.* Cambridge: Harvard University Press.

Byler, Darren. 2022. “The Social Life of Terror Capitalism Technologies in Northwest China.” *Public Culture* 34(2): 167–193.

Callahan, William A. 2006. “History, identity, and security: Producing and consuming nationalism in China.” *Critical Asian Studies* 38(2):179-208.

Callahan, William A. 2015. “Identity and Security in China: The Negative Soft Power of the China Dream.” *Politics* 35(3-4): 216-29.

Camenisch, Aldina. 2019. “China as a ‘new frontier’: Neo-liberal aspirations, imaginations and (dis) enchantments of Swiss migrant professionals in mainland China.” *Transitions: Journal of Transient Migration* 3(1): 31-44.

Camenisch, Aldina. 2022. “Middling whiteness: The shifting positionalities of Europeans in China. *Ethnicities* 22(1): 128-145.

Cassarino, Jean-Pierre. 2013. “The drive for securitized temporariness.” In *Circular Migration Between Europe and Its Neighbourhood: Choice or Necessity?* Edited by Anna Triandafyllidou, 22-31. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Castillo, Roberto. 2015. Landscapes of aspiration in Guangzhou's African music scene: beyond the trading narrative. *Journal of Current Chinese Affairs* 44(4).

Castillo, Roberto. 2016. “‘Homing’ Guangzhou: Emplacement, Belonging and Precarity among Africans in China.” *International Journal of Cultural Studies* 19 (3): 287–306.

Castillo, Roberto. 2020. “‘Race’ and ‘racism’ in contemporary Africa-China relations research: approaches, controversies and reflections.” *Inter-Asia Cultural Studies* 21(3): 310-336.

Castles, Stephen. 2004. “Why migration policies fail.” *Ethnic and Racial Studies* 27(2): 205-227

Castles, Stephen. 2006. “Guestworkers in Europe: A resurrection?” *International Migration Review* 40(4): 741–66.

Castles, Stephen and Ozkul, Derya. 2014. “Circular migration: Triple win or a new label for temporary migration?” In *Global and Asian Perspectives on International Migration,* edited by Graziano Battistella, 27-50. Cham: Springer.

Cerna, Lucie. 2013. “Understanding the diversity of EU migration policy in practice: the implementation of the Blue Card initiative.” *Policy Studies* 34(2): 180-200.

Cerna, Lucie. 2014. “Attracting High-Skilled Immigrants: Policies in Comparative Perspective.” *International Migration* 52: 69-84.

Cerna, Lucie, and Czaika, Mathias. 2021. “Rising stars in the global race for skill? A comparative analysis of Brazil, India, and Malaysia.” *Migration Studies* 9(1): 21–46

Chan, Kam Wing. 2019. "China’s hukou system at 60: continuity and reform". In *Handbook on Urban Development in China,* edited by Ray Yep, June Wang, and Thomas Johnson, 59-79. Cheltenham, UK: Edward Elgar Publishing.

Chan, Kam Wing. 2021. “Internal Migration in China: Integrating Migration with Urbanization Policies and Hukou Reform. Knomad Policy Note 16, November 2021.

Chen, Jidong, Jennifer Pan, and Yiqing Xu. 2016. “Sources of Authoritarian Responsiveness: A Field Experiment in China.” *American Journal of Political Science* 60: 383-400.

Chen Weiss, Jessica. 2014. *Powerful Patriots: Nationalist Protest in China's Foreign Relations.* Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Chen Weiss, Jessica. 2019. “How Hawkish Is the Chinese Public? Another Look at ‘Rising Nationalism’ and Chinese Foreign Policy.” *Journal of Contemporary China* 28(119): 679-695.

Chen, Xiaomei. 1995. *Occidentalism: A Theory of Counter-Discourse in Post-Mao China.* Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Chen, Xuelian and Christian Göbel. 2016. “Regulations against revolution: mapping policy innovations in China.” *Journal of Chinese Governance* 1(1): 78-98.

Cheng, Li. 2009. “China’s New Think Tanks: Where Officials, Entrepreneurs, and Scholars Interact”. *China Leadership Monitor* 29, August 14, https://www.brookings.edu/articles/chinas-new-think-tanks-where-officials-entrepreneurs-and-scholars-interact/

Cheng, Yinghong. 2011. “From Campus Racism to Cyber Racism: Discourse of Race and Chinese Nationalism.” *The China Quarterly* 207: 561-579.

Cheng, Yinghong. 2019. *Discourses of Race and Rising China.* Cham: Palgrave Macmillan.

Cheuk, Ka-Kin. 2016. “Everyday Diplomacy among Indian Traders in a Chinese Fabric Market.” *The Cambridge Journal of Anthropology* 34(2): 42-58.

Cheuk, Ka-Kin. 2019a. “Everyday Foreigner Management in a Chinese County.” Paper presentation at “Immigration and the Transformation of Chinese Society” conference, Manchester University, April 25.

Cheuk, Ka-Kin. 2019b. “Transient migrants at the crossroads of China’s global future.” *Transitions: Journal of Transient Migration* 3(1): 3-14.

Cheuk, Ka-Kin. 2022. “Diasporic convergence, sustained transience and indifferent survival: Indian traders in China.” *History and Anthropology* 33(2): 279-294.

ChinaFile. 2013. “Document 9: A ChinaFile Translation.” November 8, https://www.chinafile.com/document-9-chinafile-translation

Choe, Hyun. 2006. “National Identity and Citizenship in the People's Republic of China and the Republic of Korea.” *Journal of Historical Sociology* 19: 84-118.

Chou, Meng-Hsuan, Els van Dongen, and Harlan Koff. 2016. “Is Securitizing Migration a Mandatory Choice? Lessons from the EU and China.” In *Security Relations between China and the European Union: From Convergence to* Cooperation?, edited by Emil J. Kirchner, Thomas Christiansen, and Han Dorussen, 209-228. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press.

Chu, Yang 初阳, Chen, Lei 陈雷, and Qin, Yongfang 秦永芳. 2018. “中越跨境劳务合作的实践与探索 – 以广西防城港市,崇左市为例” [Practising and exploring cross-border labor cooperation between China and Vietnam – The cases of Fangchenggang City and Chongzuo City, Guangxi]. 桂海论丛 5: 127–31.

Chung, Erin Aeran. 2014. “Japan and South Korea: Immigration Control and Immigrant incorporation.” In *Controlling Immigration: A Global Perspective, Third Edition,* edited by James Hollifield, James, Philip L. Martin and Pia Orrenius, 399-421. Stanford: Stanford University Press.

Chung, Erin Aeran. 2019. “Japan’s Model of Immigration Without Immigrants.” *Current History* 118(809): 215–221.

Chung, Erin Aeran. 2022. “The side doors of immigration: multi-tier migration regimes in Japan and South Korea.” *Third World Quarterly* 43(7): 1570-1586.

Collins, Paul and Hon S. Chan. 2009. “State capacity building in China: An introduction.” *Public Administration Development* 29: 1-8.

Cook-Martín, David. 2019. “Temp nations? A research agenda on migration, temporariness, and membership.” *American Behavioral Scientist* 63(9): 1389–403.

Corrigan, Jack, James Dunham, and Remco Zwetsloot. 2022. “The Long-Term Stay Rates of International STEM PhD Graduates.” *Center for Security and Emerging Technology.* https://cset.georgetown.edu/publication/the-long-term-stay-rates-of-international-stem-phd-graduates/

CPC (Communist Party of China). 2016a. “中共中央印发《关于深化人才发展体制机制改革的意见》” [Central Party Committee publishes ‘Notice on deepening talent system development reforms’]. March 21. http://www.xinhuanet.com//politics/2016-03/21/c_1118398308.htm

CPC (Communist Party of China). 2016b. “中共中央办公厅 国务院办公厅印发《关于加强外国人永久居留服务管理的意见》” [Central Party Committee and State Council publish ‘Opinion on strengthening the administration of foreigners’ permanent residency services]. February 18. http://www.gov.cn/gongbao/content/2016/content_5051217.htm

CPC (Communist Party of China). 2022. “二十大报告全文” [Full-text report of the 20th Party Congress]. http://www.gov.cn/zhuanti/zggcddescqgdbdh/sybgqw.htm

Creemers, Rogier. 2017. “Cyber China: Upgrading Propaganda, Public Opinion Work and Social Management for the Twenty-First Century.” *Journal of Contemporary China* 26(103): 85-100.

Ćudić, Bojan, David Hazemali, Matjaž Klemenčič, and Jernej Zupančič. 2023. “From Bosnia and Herzegovina to China in the 21st Century: A Case Study of Personal Migration Histories.” *Journal of Balkan and Near Eastern Studies.*

Czaika, Mathias, and Haas, Hein de. 2013. “The effectiveness of immigration policies.” *Population and Development Review* 39(3): 487–508.

Czaika, Mathias, and Parsons, Christopher R. 2017. “The Gravity of High-Skilled Migration Policies.” *Demography* 54(2): 603–630.

Czaika, Mathias, ed. 2018. *High-Skilled Migration – Drivers and Policies.* Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press.

De Haas, Hein. 2010. “Migration and Development: A Theoretical Perspective.” *International Migration Review* 44(1): 227-64.

De Haas, Hein, Katharina Natter, and Simona Vezzoli. 2018. “Growing Restrictiveness or Changing Selection? The Nature and Evolution of Migration Policies.” *International Migration Review* 52(2): 314-367.

De Haas, Hein, Mathias Czaika, Marie - Laurence Flahaux, Edo Mahendra, Katharina Natter, Simona Vezzoli, and María Villares - Varela. 2019. “International Migration: Trends, Determinants, and Policy Effects.” *Population and Development Review* 45 (4): 885-922.

Denney, Steven, and Christopher Green. 2021. “Who should be admitted? Conjoint analysis of South Korean attitudes toward immigrants.” *Ethnicities* 21(1):120-45.

Dempster, Helen, Amy Leach and Karen Hargave. 2020. “Public attitudes towards immigration and immigrants – What people think, why, and how to influence them.” ODI Working paper 588.

Dikotter, Frank. 1997. *The Construction of Racial Identities in China and Japan.* Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press.

Ding, Feiping丁斐平, Lou Pengying楼鹏影, and Xu Li许丽 . 2019. “中外移民管理体制比较研究” [Comparative immigration management system research]. 上海公安高等专科学校学报 29(1): 5-11.

Dobrowolsky, Alexandra. 2007. “(In)Security and citizenship: Security, im/migration and shrinking citizenship regimes.” *Theoretical Inquiries in Law* 8(2): 629–61.

Duckett, Jane. 2018. “International Influences on Policymaking in China: Network Authoritarianism from Jiang Zemin to Hu Jintao.” *The China Quarterly* 237: 15-37.

Economy, Elizabeth. 2018. *The Third Revolution: XI Jinping and the new Chinese State.* Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Elrick, Jennifer. 2022. “Bureaucratic implementation practices and the making of Canada’s merit-based immigration policy.” *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies* 48(1): 110-128.

Fang, Kecheng 方可成. 2014. 中国人民的老朋友 [The Old Friends of China]. Beijing: The People’s Daily Press.

Farrer, James. 2010. “‘New Shanghailanders’ or ‘New Shanghainese’: Western Expatriates’ Narratives of Emplacement in Shanghai.” *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies* 36 (8): 1211–1228.

Farrer, James. 2014. “China Wants You: The Social Construction of Skilled Labor in Three Employment Sectors.” *Asian and Pacific Migration Journal* 23(4): 397-420.

Farrer, James. 2019. *International migrants in China's global city: The new Shanghailanders.* Routledge.

Favell, Adrian. 2022. "The State of Migration Theory: Challenges, Interdisciplinarity, and Critique." In *Migration Theory: Talking across Disciplines (4th ed.),* edited by Caroline Bretell and James Hollifield, 341-359. Routledge.

Fechter, Anne-Meike, and Katie Walsh. 2010. "Examining 'expatriate' continuities: postcolonial approaches to mobile professionals." *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies* 36(8): 1197–210.

Feng, Emily. 2022. "*Nuvoices* Podcast #80: A Conversation with Emily Feng, NPR's Beijing Correspondent. Nuvoices, September 7. https://nuvoices.com/2022/09/07/nuvoices-podcast-80-a-conversation-with-emily-feng-nprs-beijing-correspondent/

Fewsmith, Joseph, and Stanley Rosen. 2001. "The Domestic Context of Chinese Foreign Policy: Does Public Opinion Matter?" In *The Making of Chinese Foreign and Security Policy in the Era of Reform, 1978-2000,* edited by David Lampton, 151-87. Stanford: Stanford University Press.

FitzGerald, David. 2006. "Towards a Theoretical Ethnography of Migration." *Qualitative Sociology* 29: 1–24.

FitzGerald, David, and David Cook-Martin. 2014. *Culling the Masses: The Democratic Origins of Racist Immigration Policy in the Americas.* Cambridge: Harvard University Press.

Fitzgerald, Keith. 1996. *The Face of the Nation: Immigration, the State, and the National Identity.* Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press.

Foot, Rosemary. 2020. *China, the UN, and Human Protection: Beliefs, Power, Image.* Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Franceschini, Ivan and Nicholas Loubere. 2022. *Global China as Method*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Freeman, G. 1995. "Modes of Immigration Politics in Liberal Democratic States." *The International Migration Review* 29(4): 881–902.

Fung, Courtney J. 2019. *China and Intervention at the UN Security Council.* Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Gaillard Jacques, A.-M. Gaillard, and V.V. Krishna. 2015. "Return from Migration and Circulation of Highly Educated People: The Never-ending Brain Drain." *Science, Technology and Society* 20(3): 269-278.

Gan, Chun. 2020. "Discourse on Europe's Migrant Crisis in Chinese Social Media: Recontextualising Nationalism and Defending Perceived Homogeneity." *China Report* 56(1): 19-38.

Gan, Chun. 2022. "Immigrants on Chinese Television and Limitations of China's Globalist Discourse." *Television & New Media* 24(1): 54-70.

Gao, Ziping 高子平. 2013. "外籍人才引进中的国籍之争与" [The role of the nationality dispute in the attraction of foreign talent]. 华侨华人历史研究.

Gao Ziping 高子平. 2013. "外籍人才引进的风险管理研究" [Foreign talent attraction risk management research]. 人力资源 9: 77-81.

Gao, Ziping 高子平. 2019. "中美竞争新格局下的我国海外人才战略转型研究" [Shifting our overseas talent strategy under the new China-US competition]. 华东师范大学学报(哲学社会科学版) 3: 125-132+176.

Ge, Dandan 葛丹丹, Li Jia 鹿佳and Xu Weijie 徐维婕. 2019. "中国移民管理机关与国际移民组织: 合作与发展" [China's immigration management authorities and the IOM: cooperation and development]. 上海公安学院学报 29(3): 5-16.

Ghiselli, Andrea. 2021. *Protecting China's Interests Overseas: Securitization and Foreign Policy.* Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press

Gisselquist, Rachel M., and Finn Tarp. 2019. "Migration Governance and Policy in the Global South: Introduction and Overview." *International Migration* 57(4):247-53

Glick Schiller, Nina. 2003. "The Centrality of Ethnography in the Study of Transnational Migration: Seeing the Wetlands Instead of the Swamp." In *American Arrivals: Anthropology Engages the New Immigration,* edited by Nancy Foner, 99–128. Santa Fe, NM: School of American Research Press.

Göbel, Christian. 2013. "Information Technology and the Future of the Chinese State: How the Internet Shapes State-Society Relations in the Digital Age." *Comparativ* 26:2.

Gonzalez-Vicente, Ruben. 2011. “The internationalization of the Chinese state.” *Political Geography* 30(7): 402-411.

Gonzalez-Vicente, Ruben, and Toby Carroll. 2017. “Politics after National Development: Explaining the Populist Rise under Late Capitalism.” *Globalizations* 14(6): 991-1013.

Gore, Lance. 2022. “Behind Xi Jinping’s Resurrection of Ideological Orthodoxy.” In *CPC Futures: The New Era of Socialism with Chinese Characteristics,* edited by Frank N. Pieke and Bert Hofman, 47-54. Singapore: National University of Singapore Press.

Goron, Coraline. 2018. “Ecological Civilisation and the Political Limits of a Chinese Concept of Sustainability.” *China Perspectives* 4: 39-52.

Glasius, Marlies, Meta De Lange, Jos Bartman, Emanuela Dalmasso, Aofei Lv, Adele Del Sordi, Marcus Michaelsen, Kris Ruijgrok. 2018. *Research, ethics and risk in the authoritarian field.* Cham: Palgrave Macmillan.

Gongan. 2010. “外国人入出境管理改革发展六十年评析” [Commentary on 50 years of foreigner exit-entry management reforms]. 公安研究 (3):63-66.

Gries, Peter H. 2004. *China’s New Nationalism: Pride, Politics, and Diplomacy.* Berkeley: University of California Press.

Gries, Peter and Yi Wang. 2021. “Proscribing the “Spiritually Japanese”: Nationalist Indignation, Authoritarian Responsiveness and Regime Legitimation in China Today.” *The China Quarterly* 245: 122-141.

Gu, Edward, and Merle Goldman (eds.). 2004. *Chinese Intellectuals Between State and Market.* London: Routledge Curzon.

Guangxi. 2017. “广西壮族自治区人民政府关于同意广西中越跨境劳务合作试点工作方案的批复” [Guangxi autonomous region government decision on the approval of the Guangxi China–Vietnam cross-border labor cooperation trial]. June 27. http://www.gxdxsyq.gov.cn/kjlw/zczx/2017-6-27/3695.shtml [no longer available, PDF with author].

Habicht, Jasper. 2020. *The Role of Campaigns in Law Enforcement: The Example of Sanfei Campaigns in Chinese Immigration Law.* Baden-Baden: Nomos.

Habicht, Jasper, and Eva Lena Richter. 2022. “De Facto Dual Nationality in Chinese Law and Practice.” *China: An International Journal* 20(1): 24-45.

Haerpfer, Christian, Inglehart, R., Moreno, A., Welzel, C., Kizilova, K., Diez-Medrano J., M. Lagos, P. Norris, E. Ponarin & B. Puranen, eds. 2020. *World Values Survey: Round Two-Seven – Country-Pooled Datafile*. Madrid, Spain & Vienna, Austria: JD Systems Institute & WVSA Secretariat.

Hainmueller, Jens and Daniel J. Hopkins. 2014. “Public Attitudes Toward Immigration.” *Annual Review of Political Science* 17(1): 225-49

Hainmueller, Jens, and Daniel J. Hopkins. 2015. “The Hidden American Immigration Consensus: A Conjoint Analysis of Attitudes toward Immigrants.” *American Journal of Political Science* 59: 529-548.

Hammar, Tomas. 2011[1985]. *European Immigration Policy, A Comparative Study.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Han, Donglin. 2017a. “Is China Ready for Foreigners? Public Attitudes towards Immigration in China.” *China: An International Journal* 15(2): 120-43.

Han Donglin 韩冬临. 2017b. “中外人文交流与国家形象构建” [Chinese-foreign cultural exchange and the construction of the national image]. Beijing: 中国社会科学出版社.

Han, Donglin, and David Zweig. 2010. “Images of the World: Studying Abroad and Chinese Attitudes towards International Affairs.” *The China Quarterly* 202: 290–306.

Han, Peizi. 2022. “Can they represent the nation? Nationalism, national identity, and naturalized athletes in Chinese football.” *National Identities*.

Han, Shuangmiao. 2020. “Policy experimentation and power negotiation in China’s higher education reforms.” *Higher Education* 79: 243–257.

Hannerz, Ulf. 1996. *Transnational Connections – Culture, People, Places.* Routledge.

Hao, Jie, Wen Wen, and Anthony Welch. 2016. "When sojourners return: Employment opportunities and challenges facing high-skilled Chinese returnees." *Asian and Pacific Migration Journal* 25(1): 22-40.

Harlan, Tyler. 2019. "State of Sensitivity: Navigating Fieldwork in an Increasingly Authoritarian China." *Made in China Journal,* October 25. https://madeinchinajournal.com/2019/10/25/state-of-sensitivity-navigating-fieldwork-in-an-increasingly-authoritarian-china/

Haugen, Heidi Østbø. 2013. "African Pentecostal Migrants in China: Marginalization and the Alternative Geography of a Mission Theology." *African Studies Review* 56(1): 81–102.

Haugen, Heidi Østbø. 2019. "Residence Registration in China's Immigration Control: Africans in Guangzhou." In *Destination China: Immigration to China in the Post-Reform Era,* edited by Andrea Lehmann and Pauline Leonard, 45-64. Cham: Palgrave Macmillan.

Haugen, Heidi Østbø. 2022. "The Love Child and the State: Transnational Family Formation in Guangzhou." *NAN NÜ* 24(1): 134-160.

Hawthorne, Lesleyanne. 2018. "Attracting and Retaining International Students as Skilled Migrants." In *High-Skilled Migration – Drivers and Policies,* edited by Mathias Czaika, 195-221. Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press.

He, Huirong 何惠榕. 2019. "整体性治理视域下跨境劳务合作研究 – 以广西为例" [Research on cross-border labor cooperation through the lens of comprehensive governance – The case of Guangxi]. 山东行政学院学报 6: 99–104.

He, Xiaomin 何小民 . 2016. "中国入境外籍劳工现象研究 – 以广西为例" [Research on China's incoming foreign labor migrants – The case of Guangxi]. 学术论坛7: 124–9.

He, Yinan. 2018. "Domestic troubles, national identity discourse, and China's attitude towards the West, 2003-2012." *Nations and Nationalism* 24(3): 741-766.

Heffer, Abbey S., and Gunter Schubert. 2023. "Policy Experimentation under Pressure in Contemporary China." *The China Quarterly:* 1-22.

Heilmann, Sebastian. 2018. *Red Swan: How unorthodox policy-making facilitated China's rise.* Hong Kong: The Chinese University of Hong Kong Press.

Heilmann, Sebastian, and Elizabeth Perry. 2011. *Mao's Invisible Hand: The Political Foundations of Adaptive Governance in China.* Cambridge: Harvard University Press.

Heimer, Maria, and Stig Thogersen, eds. 2006. *Doing Fieldwork in China.* University of Hawaii Press.

Ho, Elaine Lynn-Ee. 2018. *Citizens in Motion – Emigration, Immigration, and Re-migration Across China's Borders.* Berkeley: Stanford University Press.

Ho, Elaine Lynn-Ee, and David Ley. 2014. "Middling" Chinese Returnees or Immigrants from Canada? The Ambiguity of Return Migration and Claims to Modernity." *Asian Studies Review* 38(1): 36-52.

Hollifield, James F. 2004. "The Emerging Migration State." *International Migration Review* 38: 885-912.

Hollifield, James, Philip L. Martin and Pia Orrenius. 2014. *Controlling Immigration: A Global Perspective, Third Edition.* Berkeley: Stanford University Press.

Hu, Chunxi 胡春喜. 2019. "中国国际移民现状及其管理工作的阶段性探析" [The state of China's international immigration and its management work]. 江西警察学院学1: 46-53.

Hu Xiaoming 胡小明. 2022. "制度建设在"十四五"移民管理事业发展中具有特殊重要性" [System-building is especially important to '14-5' immigration management]. 中国出入境观察5: 62-65.

Huang, Guangzhi. (2019). Policing Blacks in Guangzhou: How Public Security Constructs Africans as Sanfei. *Modern China* 45(2) 171–200.

Huang, Guangzhi. 2021. "Foreigner in China: Economic Transition and the Chinese State's Vision of Immigration and Race." *Made in China Journal,* 1 December. https://madeinchinajournal.com/2021/12/01/foreigner-in-china-economic-transition-and-the-chinese-states-vision-of-immigration-and-race/

Huang, Haisheng. 2021. "From 'the Moon Is Rounder Abroad' to 'Bravo, My Country': How China Misperceives the World." *Studies in Comparative International Development* 56: 112–30.

Huang, Jiasheng 黄家生. 2016. "广西跨境劳务合作大有作为" [Great potentials for cross-border labor cooperation in Guangxi]. 广西经济 10: 45–7.

Huang, Kejie 黄柯劼. 2019. “在华外国青年职业选择与居留模式——基于SFRC(2018)地区差异的分析” [Career choices and residential patterns among foreign youth in China: A regional analysis based on SFRC (2018)]. 青年探索 (5): 31-47.

Huang, Qiqi. 2022. “Anti-Feminism: four strategies for the demonisation and depoliticisation of feminism on Chinese social media.” *Feminist Media Studies.*

Ishitsuka, Aurélia M. 2020. “Visual Encounters in Global Shanghai. On the Desirability of Bodies in a Coworking Space.” *China Perspectives* 3: 39-46.

Jakes, Susan. 2021. “Will I Return to China: A ChinaFile Conversation.” *ChinaFile,* June 21. www.chinafile.com/conversation/will-i-return-china

Jiang, Guangming, and Lynette Ong. 2022. “Strengthening the State through Crisis Management: Battles against the SARS and COVID-19 Pandemic in China. *Issues & Studies* 58(3).

Jie, Dalei. 2016. “Public Opinion and Chinese Foreign Policy: New Media and Old Puzzles Chapter.” In *The Internet, Social Media, and a Changing China,* edited by Jacques deLisle, Avery Goldstein, Guobin Yang, 150-161. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press.

Jin, Hui 金卉 and Fan Xiaoguang 范晓光. 2019. “在华外国人的健康研究——基于SFRC(2018)杭州样本的分析” [Research on the health of foreigners in China: Analysis based on the SFRC (2018) Hangzhou sample]. 青年探索 5: 19-30.

Jordan, Lucy, Andrew Pau Hoang, Cheryl H. K. Chui, Wei Wang, and Valentina Mazzucato. 2020. “Multiple precarity and intimate family life among African-Chinese families in Guangzhou.” *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies* 47(12): 2796–2814.

Kalicki, Konrad. 2019. “Security fears and bureaucratic rivalry: Admitting foreign labor in Japan and Taiwan.” *Comparative Politics* 51(4): 603–23.

Kalm, Sarah. 2010. “Liberalizing Movements? The Political Rationality of Global Migration Management.” In *The Politics of International Migration Management,* edited by Marti Geiger and Antoine Pécoud, 21-44. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan.

Kefala, Christina. 2022. “Why Young Chinese Are Turning Their Backs on Western Brands.” *Sixth Tone,* January 20. https://www.sixthtone.com/news/1009491/why-young-chinese-are-turning-their-backs-on-western-brands

Kennedy, Scott. 2008. *The Business of Lobbying in China.* Cambridge: Harvard University Press.

Kim, Sookyung. 2015. “Soft talk, hard realities: Multiculturalism as the South Korean government’s decoupled response to international migration.” *Asian and Pacific Migration Journal* 24: 51– 78.

Kipnis, Andrew. 2006. “Suzhi: A Keyword Approach.” *The China Quarterly* 186: 295-313.

Kirk, Katherine, and Ellen Bal. 2021. “Stimulating Flexible Citizenship: The Impact of Dutch and Indian Migration Policies on the Lives of Highly Skilled Indian Migrants in the Netherlands.” *Journal of Citizenship and Globalisation Studies* 3(1):1-13.

Klotz, Audie. 2012. "South Africa as an Immigration State." *Politikon* 39(2):189-208.

Lagerkvist, Johan. 2005. “The Rise of Online Public Opinion in the People's Republic of China.” *China: An International Journal* 3(1): 128.

Lahav, Gallya, and Virginie Guiraudon. 2006. “Actors and venues in immigration control: Closing the gap between political demands and policy outcomes.” *West European Politics* 29(2): 201-223.

Lan, Shanshan. 2015. “State Regulation of Undocumented African Migrants in China: A Multi-scalar Analysis.” *Journal of Asian and African Studies* 50(3): 289-304.

Lan, Shanshan. 2016. “The Shifting Meanings of Race in China: A Case Study of the African Diaspora Communities in Guangzhou.” *City & Society* 28: 298-318.

Lan, Shanshan. 2017. “China gives and China takes: African traders and the nondocumenting states.” *Focaal* 77: 50-62.

Lan, Shanshan. 2017. *Mapping the New African Diaspora in China: Race and the Cultural Politics of Belonging.* Routledge.

Lan, Shanshan. 2022. “Between privileges and precariousness: Remaking whiteness in China's teaching English as a second language industry.” *American Anthropologist* 124: 118 -129.

Lan, Shanshan. 2022. “The foreign bully, the guest and the low-income knowledge worker: performing multiple versions of whiteness in China.” *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies* 48(15): 3544-3560.

Landry, Pierre. 2008. *Decentralized Authoritarianism in China*. New York: Cambridge University Press.

Lee, Ching Kwan. 2018. *The Specter of Global China: Politics, Labor, and Foreign Investment in Africa.* Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Lee, Haiyan. 2014. *The Stranger and the Chinese Moral Imagination.* Berkeley: Stanford University Press.

Lehmann, Angela. 2014. *Transnational Lives in China: Expatriates in a Globalizing City.* New York: Palgrave MacMillan.

Lehmann, Angela, and Pauline Leonard. 2019. *Destination China: Immigration to China in the Post-Reform Era.* New York: Palgrave MacMillan US.

Lei, Ya-Wen. 2016. *The Contentious Public Sphere: Law, Media, and Authoritarian Rule in China.* Princeton: Princeton University Press.

Lewis, Margaret K. 2020. “Criminalizing China.” *The Journal of Criminal Law and Criminology* 111(1): 145-225.

Lieberthal, Kenneth G. 1992. “Introduction: The ‘Fragmented Authoritarianism’ Model and Its Limitations.” Inn *Bureaucracy, Politics and Decision Making in Post-Mao China,* edited by Kenneth Lieberthal, and David Lampton, 1-22. Berkeley: University of California Press.

Li, Ling. 2019. “Politics of Anticorruption in China: Paradigm Change of the Party’s Disciplinary Regime 2012–2017.” *Journal of Contemporary China* 28(115): 47–63.

Li Minghuan 李明欢. 2005.国际移民学研究:范畴、框架及意义 [International migration studies: Scope, framing and significance]. 厦门大学学报 3: 44-50.

Li, Minghuan 李明欢. 2011. 国际移民政策研究 [International immigration policy research]. Xiamen: Xiamen University Press.

Li, Shao, Juan Du, Rongbin Han, and Dongshu Liu. 2023. Racial and gender stereotypes in immigration attitudes: evidence from China, *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies.*

Li, Wei, Richard Bedford, and Binod Khadria. 2019. “Rethinking International Migration in China and India.” *International Migration* 57: 310-316.

Li, Yuhua 李玉华, and Jiao Na 焦娜. 2020. “公安机关对在华外国人执法的规范化研究” (Standardizing enforcement in public security dealings with foreigners in China). 中国人民公安大学学报（社会科学版）5: 30-40.

Li, Zhang. 2008. “Ethnic congregation in a globalizing city: The case of Guangzhou, China.” *Cities* 25(6): 383-395.

Li, Zhidong, Laurence J.C. Ma, and Desheng Xue. 2009. “An African Enclave in China: The Making of a New Transnational Urban Space.” *Eurasian Geography and Economics* 50(6): 699-719.

Li, Zhidong, Michal Lyons, and Alison Brown. 2012. “China’s ‘Chocolate City’: An Ethnic Enclave in a Changing Landscape.” *African Diaspora* 5(1): 51-72.

Liang, Xiubo 梁秀波. 2019. “构建符合中国社会发展特点的移民政策体系——兼评《英国未来基于技能的移民体系》白皮书” [Building an immigration policy system that fits China’s social development – a review of “The UK’s future skills-based immigration system”]. 边海境界, August 6. https://mp.weixin.qq.com/s/1JbO6cTWTDheIbMUyAy4KQ

Liang, Yucheng 梁玉成, and Liu Heqing 刘河庆. 2016. “本地居民对外国移民的印象结构及其生产机制:一项针对广州本地居民与非洲裔移民的研究” [How local residents construct images of foreign migrants: A research project looking at Guangzhou locals and African migrants]. 江苏社会科学 2:116-126.

Liang Zai 梁在, and Wang Nan 王楠. 2021. 中国和21世纪的国际移民研究 [China and 21st century international migration studies]. 学术月刊 53(8):123-134.

Lim, Kean Fan. 2019. *On Shifting Foundations: State Rescaling, Policy Experimentation and Economic Restructuring in Post-1949 China.* Hoboken, NJ: John Wiley & Sons.

Lin, Yicong 林艺聪. 2019. “论移民输入管理中的地方角色” [Discussing the role of the local in the management of incoming migrants]. 山东警察学院学报 3: 142-8.

Lin Yicong 林艺聪, and Shen Yibo 沈一波. 2021. 移民管理体制之三维国际比较及启示 [Immigration management systems: International comparison and lessons on three dimensions]. 公安学刊(浙江警察学院学报) 5: 116-124.

Lipsky, Michael. 2010[1980]. *Street-Level Bureaucracy: Dilemmas of the Individual in Public Services.* New York: Russell Sage Foundation.

Litman, Raviv. 2022. “’Neutral’ vs. ‘pure’ accents: the racialization of Filipino and EuroAmerican teachers in China’s online education industry during the covid-19 pandemic.” *Asian Anthropology* 21(3): 224-237.

Liu, Guofu. 2007. *The Right to Leave and Return and Chinese Migration Law.* Leiden: Brill Nijhoff.

Liu, Guofu 刘国福. 2008. “移民法的最新发展 —兼论中国出入境管理法的改造和重塑” [The newest developments in immigration law and China’s exit-entry management law development]. 河南省政府管理干部学院学报5: 46-58.

Liu, Guofu 刘国福. 2010. “国际移民与现代化:以中国为例” [International migration and modernization: The case of China]. 理论与现代化 6: 21-26.

Liu, Guofu 刘国福. 2011. “试论移民融合制度:以移民融入中国的法律问题为视角” [Exploring an immigrant integration system: The legal issues of immigrants’ integration in China]. 太平洋学报 19(7): 63-75.

Liu Guofu 刘国福. 2012. “试论中国技术移民法立法” [Exploring Chinese skilled migration legislation]. 学习与实践 7: 58-66.

Liu, Guofu 刘国福. 2015. “中国国际移民的新形势、新挑战和新探索” [New trends, challenges and explorations in Chinese international immigration]. 山东大学学报(哲学社会科学版) 1:45-54.

Liu, Guofu 刘国福. 2018. “引进外国人才政策:严峻形势、重大挑战和未来发展” [Foreign talent attraction policies: Worrying trends, big challenges and future developments]. 国家行政学院学报 4: 21-26+147.

Liu, Guofu, and Björn Ahl. 2018. “Recent Reform of the Chinese Employment-Stream Migration Law Regime.” *China and WTO Review* 4: 215-243.

Liu, Guofu 刘国福, and Weng Li 翁里. 2019. “全球移民契约的重要理念、主要特点 及其对中国的启示” [Global Compact for Migration: Key Concepts, Main Features and Implications for China]. 华侨华人历史研究1: 1-8.

Liu, Jiaqi 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.

Liu, Jiaqi M. 2022a. “From “Sea Turtles” to “Grassroots Ambassadors”: The Chinese Politics of Outbound Student Migration.” *International Migration Review* 56(3): 702–726.

Liu, Jiaqi M. 2022b. “When Diaspora Politics Meet Global Ambitions: Diaspora Institutions Amid China’s Geopolitical Transformations.” *International Migration Review* 56(4): 1255-1279.

Liu, John Zhuang. 2021. “Public Support for the Death Penalty in China: Less from the Populace but More from Elites.” *The China Quarterly* 246: 527-544.

Liu, Hong, and Els van Dongen. 2016. “China’s Diaspora Policies as a New Mode of Transnational Governance.” *Journal of Contemporary China* 25(102): 805-821.

Liu, Yang, and Charles C. Self. 2019. “Laowai as a Discourse of Othering: Unnoticed Stereotyping of American Expatriates in Mainland China.” *Identities* March: 1–19.

Lucassen, Leo. 2018. “Peeling an onion: the ‘refugee crisis’ from a historical perspective.” *Ethnic and Racial Studies* 41(3): 383-410.

Lu, Hongyan 吕红艳, and Guo Dingping 郭定平. 2018. “全面构建外来移民治理体系——新时代中国国家治理的新课题” [Building a comprehensive governance system for incoming migrants – A new topic in ‘new era’ Chinese state governance]. 国家治理 8: 27-38.

Lu, Miao, Jinlian Zheng, Jason Allan Jean & Yixi Lu. 2022. “China’s International Talent Policy (ITP): The Changes and Driving Forces, 1978-2020.” *Journal of Contemporary China* 31(136): 644-661.

Lü Yunfang 吕云芳. 2011. 超越“朋友圈”:正在形成中的在华外籍团体 [Beyond ‘friend circles’: The foreign organizations emerging in China]. 开放时代5: 29-40.

Luo, Liuning 罗柳宁 and Lei, Jun 雷韵. 2018. “中越边民的特殊需求与边疆安全的生成研究” [Research on border residents’ special needs and the formation of border security between China and Vietnam]. 广西民族研究 5: 70–6.

Ma, Deyong, and M. Rosemary Pang. 2017. “The Rise and Fall of Electoral Democracy: A Social Evolutionary Approach to Direct Election Experiments in Local China.” *Journal of Chinese Political Science* 22: 601–624.

Ma, Ke. 2022. “Transnational white masculinity on Chinese social media: Western male vloggers’ self-representations during the covid-19 pandemic.” *Asian Anthropology* 21(3): 211-223.

Ma, Xiao. 2019. “Unpacking ‘Koreatown’ in Chinese Metropolis: urban governance, variations in ethnic incorporation and Consequences.” *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies* 47(17): 3967-3985.

Ma, Yingyi. 2020. *Ambitious and Anxious - How Chinese College Students Succeed and Struggle in American Higher Education.* New York: Columbia University Press.

Malakhhov, Vladimir S. 2014. “Russia as a New Immigration Country: Policy Response and Public Debate.” *Europe-Asia Studies* 66(7): 1062-1079.

Mao, Yanfeng. 2015. “Who is a Laowai? Chinese Interpretations of Laowai as a Referring Expression for Non-Chinese.” *International Journal of Communication* 9: 2119-2140.

Massey, Douglas S. 1999. “International Migration at the Dawn of the Twenty-First Century: The Role of the State.” *Population and Development Review* 25(2): 303–322.

Mathews, Gordon. 2015. “Africans in Guangzhou.” *Journal of Current Chinese Affairs* 44(4): 7–15.

Mazzocco, Ilaria, and Scott Kennedy. 2022. “Public Opinion in China: A liberal silent majority?” *Center for Strategic and International Studies,* February 9. https://www.csis.org/features/public-opinion-china-liberal-silent-majority

Mertha, Andrew. 2009. “Fragmented Authoritarianism 2.0: Political Pluralization in the Chinese Policy Process.” *The China Quarterly* 200(1): 995–1012.

Miller, Alice. 2011. “Dilemmas of globalization and governance.” In *The Politics of China: Sixty Years of The People's Republic of China,* edited by Roderick MacFarquhar, 528-600. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

MPS (Ministry of Public Security). 2012. “Exit and Entry Administration Law of the People's Republic of China,” June 30. https://en.nia.gov.cn/n162/n222/c426/content.html

MPS (Ministry of Public Security) 公安部. 2019. “全国移民管理工作会议赵克志出席并讲话” [Zhao Kezhi speeches at national immigration management work conference]. January 24. http://www.mps.gov.cn/n2255053/n5147059/c6375816/content.html

MoJ (Ministry of Justice). 2020. “司法部关于《中华人民共和国外国人永久居留管理（征求意见稿）》公开征求意见的通知” [Ministry of Justice notice for public comment on the “P.R.C. Regulations of the on the administration of permanent residence of foreigners (draft for public comment), February 27, http://www.moj.gov.cn/pub/sfbgw/lfyjzj/lflfyjzj/202002/t20200226_150745.html, https://www.thepaper.cn/newsDetail_forward_6230929 (bilingual version).

Monson, Jamie. 2015. “Historicizing Difference Construction of Race Identity in China-Africa Relations.” Social Science Research Council - China-Africa Knowledge Project, January. https://china-africa.ssrc.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/01/Monson-Final.pdf .

Naito, Hiroko. 2020. “The Puzzle: Reform and State Capacity Building in Contemporary China.” In *State Capacity Building in Contemporary China,* edited by H. Naito and V. Macikenaite, 1-9. Singapore: Springer Nature.

Nathan, Andrew J., and Boshu Zhang. 2022. “‘A Shared Future for Mankind’: Rhetoric and Reality in Chinese Foreign Policy under Xi Jinping.” *Journal of Contemporary China* 31(133): 57-71.

Natter, Katharina. 2018. "Rethinking Immigration Policy Theory Beyond ‘Western Liberal Democracies’."*Comparative Migration Studies* 6(4):1-21.

Natter, Katharina. 2021. "Ad-hocratic immigration governance: how states secure their power over immigration through intentional ambiguity." *Territory, Politics, Governance.*

Natter, Katharina. 2023. *The Politics of Immigration beyond Liberal States.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Natter, Katharina, and Hélène Thiollet. 2022. "Theorising migration politics: do political regimes matter?" *Third World Quarterly* 43(7): 1515-1530.

Nawyn, Stephanie. 2016. "New Directions for Research on Migration in the Global South." *International Journal of Sociology* 46(3): 163-168.

Naughton, Barry. 1995. *Growing out of the plan: China's Economic Reform 1978-1993.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

NIA. 2019a. "新中国成立70年来国家移民和出入境管理工作成就回眸" [A look-back at national immigration and exit-entry management achievements during 70 years PRC]. September 29. https://weibo.com/ttarticle/p/show?id=2309404421784916066323

NIA. 2019b. "一图读懂12条移民与出入境便利政策" [Understand the twelve immigration and exit-entry convenience measures in one glance]. July 18. http://www.gov.cn/fuwu/2019-07/18/content_5410793.htm

NIA. 2020. "全面履行法定职能开局之年 移民管理工作 '三升四降'" [In the year that all legal functions were commenced, immigration management work saw 'three ups, four downs'], February 16. https://www.nia.gov.cn/n897453/c1244625/content.html

NIA. 2021. "国家移民管理局印发《"十四五"移民管理事业发展规划》" [NIA publishes 'Immigration management development plan for the 14th Five Year Period']. December 28. https://mp.weixin.qq.com/s/cV9JdDnNMcFHQMde-Gs0jw

Niu, Dong. 2018. "Transient: A Descriptive Concept for Understanding Africans in Guangzhou." *African Studies Quarterly* 17(4): 85-100.

Norman, Kelsey P. 2020. *Reluctant Reception: Refugees, Migration and Governance in the Middle East and North Africa.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Nyíri, Pál. 2001. "Expatriating is patriotic? The discourse on 'new migrants' in the People's Republic of China and identity construction among recent migrants from the PRC." *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies* 27(4): 635-653.

Oishi, Nana. 2012. "The Limits of Immigration Policies: The Challenges of Highly Skilled Migration in Japan." *American Behavioral Scientist* 56(8):1080-1100.

Pang, Qin, Junhao Pan, and Lingzhen Lin. 2022. "China's Growing Power Makes Its Youth Hawkish? Evidence from the Chinese Youth's Attitudes toward the US and Japan." *Journal of Contemporary China* 31(137): 776-792.

Papademetriou, Demetrios G., Will Somerville, and Hiroyuki Tanaka. 2008. "Talent in the 21st-century Economy." *Migration Policy Institute*. https://www.migrationpolicy.org/sites/default/files/publications/Talent.pdf

Papagianneas, Straton. 2021. "Towards Smarter and Fairer Justice? A Review of the Chinese Scholarship on Building Smart Courts and Automating Justice." *Journal of Current Chinese Affairs* 51(2): 327–47.

Park, Stephen Kim. 2016. "Special economic zones and the perpetual pluralism of global trade and labor migration." *Georgetown Journal of International Law* 47(4): 1379–429.

Parks-Yancy, Rochelle, Shih, Johanna, DiTomaso, Nancy and Post, Corinne. 2009. "Talking about Immigration and Immigrants: A Qualitative Exploration of White Americans' Attitudes." *International Review of Modern Sociology* 35(2): 285-306.

Pecoud, Antoine. 2020. "The International Organization for Migration as the New 'UN Migration Agency'" In *The International Organization for Migration, The New 'UN Migration Agency' in Critical Perspective,* edited by Martin Geiger and Antoine Pécoud, 1-27. Cham: Palgrave MacMillan.

Penninx, Rinus, and Blanca Garcés-Mascareñas. 2016. "The concept of integration as an analytical tool and as a policy concept." In *Integration processes and policies in Europe: contexts, levels and actors,* edited by Blanca Garcés-Mascareñas and Rinus Penninx, 11-29. Cham: Springer Open.

Pieke, Frank N. 2009. *The good communist: elite training and state building in today's China.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Pieke, Frank N. 2011. "Immigrant China." *Modern China* 38(1): 40-77.

Pieke, Frank N. 2012. "The Communist Party and social management in China." *China Information* 26(2):149–165.

Pieke, Frank N. 2014. "Emerging markets and migration policy: China." *Institut Français de Relations Internationales*.

Pieke, Frank N. 2016. *Knowing China: A twenty-first century guide.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Pieke, Frank N. 2021. "China's influence and the Chinese community in the Netherlands. Leiden Asia Centre, March.

Pieke, Frank N., and Elena Barabantseva. 2012. "New and Old Diversities in Contemporary China." *Modern China* 38(1): 3-9.

Pieke, Frank N., Björn Ahl, Elena Barabantseva, Michaela Pelican, Tabitha Speelman, Wang Feng, Xiang Biao. 2019. "How immigration is shaping Chinese society." MERICS China Monitor.

Pingxiang. 2019. "凭祥市人民政府办公室关于印发进一步规范跨境劳务合作试点工作实施意见的通知" [Notice of the General Office of the People's Government of Pingxiang City on issuing the opinions on implementing the pilot work of further regulating cross-border labour cooperation]. January 22, 2019. http://www.pxszf.gov.cn/govinfo/gzbm/pxsrmzfbgs/zfxxgkml/zfwj/pzbg/t1923975.shtml

Plöger, Jörg, and Anna Becker. 2015. "Social Networks and Local Incorporation—Grounding High-skilled Migrants in Two German Cities." *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies* 41(10): 1517-1535.

Plümmer, Franziska. 2022. *Rethinking Authority in China's Border Regime: Regulating the Irregular.* Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press.

Plümmer, Franziska S. 2021. "'Three Evils' and 'Three Illegals': Discourses on 'Illegal' Immigration in China." In *Immigration Governance in East Asia: Norm Diffusion, Politics of Identity, Citizenship,* edited by G. Schubert, F. Plümmer, & A. Bayok, 91-114. Routledge.

Pulford, Ed. 2021. "Differences over Difference: Sino-Russian Friendship at Interstate and Interpersonal Scales." *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 63(3): 685-721.

Pulford, Ed. 2022. "Caught Between Spectacles: Migrant 'Clean-ups,' Gendered Performance, and the State in a China–Russia Border Town." *Anthropological Quarterly* 95(1): 35-63.

Qiu, Yu. 2021. "Cleavage: Guangzhou, Covid-19 and China–Africa Friendship Politics." *Journal of African Cultural Studies* 33(2): 184-193.

Ren, Yuan 任远. 2016. "中国人口格局的转变和新人口发展战略的构造" [China's population transformation and the making of a new population strategy]. 学海1: 76-81.

Repnikova, Maria, and Kecheng Fang. 2018. "Authoritarian Participatory Persuasion 2.0: Netizens as Thought Work Collaborators in China." *Journal of Contemporary China* 27(113): 763-779.

Rippa, Alessandro. 2020. *Borderland Infrastructures: Trade, Development, and Control in Western China.* Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press.

Roberts, Margaret E. 2018. *Censored: Distraction and Diversion Inside the Great Firewall.* Princeton: Princeton University Press.

Rowen, Ian. 2023. "Simulating territory: the rise and demise of Hong Kong, Macao, and Taiwan as an imaginary regional formation." *Eurasian Geography and Economics*

Rühlig, Tim. 2022. *China's Foreign Policy Contradictions.* Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Ruhs, Martin. 2006. "The potential of temporary migration programs in future international migration policy." *International Labor Review* 145(1–2): 7–36.

SAFEA (State Administration of Foreign Experts Affairs). 2017. "关于全面实施外国人来华工作许可制度的通知" [Notice on fully implementing the foreigners' work permit system]. April 6. http://www.safea.gov.cn/content.shtml?id=12749533

Saldana, Johnny. 2015. *The Coding Manual for Qualitative Researchers.* Sage Publications Ltd.

Sassen, Saskia. 1991. *The Global City.* Princeton: Princeton University Press.

Sassen, Saskia. 2006 [1994]. *Cities in a World Economy.* Newbury: Pine Forge Press.

Sautman, Barry. 1994. "Anti-Black Racism in Post-Mao China." *The China Quarterly* 138: 413-437.

Saxenian, AnnaLee. 2000. "Silicon Valley's new immigrant entrepreneurs". The Center for Comparative Immigration Studies Working paper.

Sayad, Abdelmalek. 1999. Immigration et 'pensee d'Etat' [Immigration and 'thinking the state']. *Actes de la recherche en sciences sociales* 129: 5-14.

Schenk, Caress. 2018. *Why Control Immigration?: Strategic Uses of Migration Management in Russia.* Toronto: University of Toronto Press.

Schenk, Caress. 2021, "Producing state capacity through corruption: the case of immigration control in Russia." *Post-Soviet Affairs* 37(4): 303-317.

Schendel, Willem van, and Maaker, Erik de. 2014. "Asian borderlands: Introducing their permeability, strategic uses and meanings." *Journal of Borderlands Studies* 29(1): 3–9.

Schinkel, Willem. 2018. "Against 'immigrant integration': for an end to neocolonial knowledge production." *Comparative Migration Studies* 6 (31).

Schneider, Florian. 2018. *China's Digital Nationalism*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Schneider, Florian. 2022. "Emergent nationalism in China's sociotechnical networks: How technological affordance and complexity amplify digital nationalism." *Nations And Nationalism* 28(1): 267-285.

Schoenhals, Michael. 1992. *Doing Things with Words in Chinese Politics: Five Studies.* Berkeley: Institute of East Asian Studies.

Scholten, Peter. 2011. *Framing Immigrant Integration: Dutch research-policy dialogues in comparative perspective.* Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press 2011.

Schubert, Gunter, Franziska Plümmer, and Anastasiya Bayok, eds. 2021. *Immigration Governance in East Asia: Norm Diffusion, Politics of Identity, Citizenship.* Routledge.

Seol, Dong-Hoon, and John D. Skrentny. 2009. "Why Is There So Little Migrant Settlement in East Asia?" *The International Migration Review* 43(3): 578–620.

Shen, Yongdong, Jianxing Yu, and Jun Zhou. "The Administration's Retreat and the Party's Advance in the New Era of Xi Jinping: The Politics of the Ruling Party, the Government, and Associations in China." *Journal of Chinese Political Science* 25(1): 71–18.

Si, Yutong. 2020. "Implementing targeted poverty alleviation: a policy implementation typology." *Journal of Chinese Governance* 5(4): 439-454.

Sier, Willy. 2022. "Breaking all Moulds? Racialized Romance Between White/Yang Women and Chinese Men." *Identities*.

Shi, Chunyu, and Emilie Frenkiel. 2021. "Policy entrepreneurship under hierarchy: how state actors change policies in China." *Journal of Chinese Governance* 6(3): 351-374.

Shih, Shu-Mei. 2001. *The Lure of the Modern: Writing modernism in semicolonial China (1917-1937).* Berkeley: University of California Press.

Shih, Victor. 2015. "Research in authoritarian regimes: Transparency tradeoffs and solutions." *Qualitative & Multi-Method Research* 13(1): 20-22.

Shirk, Susan.1993. *The political logic of economic reform in China.* Berkeley: University of California Press.

Shirk, Susan. 2007. *China: Fragile Superpower.* Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press.

Shirk, Susan. 2022. *Overreach: How China derailed its peaceful rise.* Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Snape, Holly. 2019. "Social Management or Social Governance: A Review of Party and Government Discourse and why it Matters in Understanding Chinese Politics." *Journal of Political Science* 24: 685–699.

Snape, Holly, and Weinan Wang. 2020. "Finding a place for the Party: debunking the "party-state" and rethinking the state-society relationship in China's one-party system." *Journal of Chinese Governance* 5(4): 477-502.

Song, Lili. 2014. "Who Shall We Help? The Refugee Definition in a Chinese Context." *Refugee Survey Quarterly* 33(1): 44-58.

Song, Lili. 2018. “China and the International Refugee Protection Regime: Past, Present, and Potentials.” *Refugee Survey Quarterly* 37(2): 139–61.

Speelman, Tabitha. 2019. “Immigrants wanted? State discourse on foreign professionals in Shanghai.” Working paper presented at ‘Immigration and the Transformation of Chinese Society’, 25 April, The University of Manchester.

Speelman, Tabitha. 2021. “Unfortunate or convenient? Contextualising China’s covid-19 border restrictions.” *Made in China Journal* 6(3): 31-40.

State Council. 2016. “国务院关于支持沿边重点地区开发开放若干政策措施的意见” [Opinions of the State Council on several policies supporting the development and opening up of key border areas]. January 7. http://www.gov.cn/zhengce/content/2016-01/07/content_10561.htm

Steinberg, David, Daniel McDowell, and Dimitar Gueorguiev. 2021. “Inside looking out: how international policy trends shape the politics of capital controls in China.” *The Pacific Review* 34(6): 995-1021.

Stepan, Matthias, Enze Han, and Tim Reeskens. 2016. “Building the New Socialist Countryside: Tracking Public Policy and Public Opinion Changes in China.” *The China Quarterly* 226: 456-476.

Stone, Deborah. 2012. *Policy Paradox: The Art of Political Decision Making.* New York: W. W. Norton.

Strauss, Claudia. 2012. *Making Sense of Public Opinion, American Discourses About Immigration and Social Programs.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Sullivan, Jonathan, Tobias Ross, and Chaojin Wu. 2022. “Representing the Nation: Exploring attitudes toward naturalized foreign football players in China.” *Soccer & Society*.

Surak, Kristin. 2013. “Guestworkers: A taxonomy.” *New Left Review* 84: 84–102.

Tan, Yeling. 2021. *Disaggregating China, Inc.: State Strategies in the Liberal Economic Order.* Ithaca: Cornell University Press.

Tang, Wenfang. 2016. *Populist Authoritarianism: Chinese Political Culture and Regime Sustainability.* Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Teets, Jessica. *Civil Society under Authoritarianism: The China Model.* Cambridge: Cambrige University Press.

Teets, Jessica C., Reza Hasmath, and Orion A. Lewis. 2017. “The Incentive to Innovate? The Behavior of Local Policymakers in China.” *Journal of Chinese Political Science* 22(4): 505-17.

Teets, Jessica and Reza Hasmath. 2020. “The evolution of policy experimentation in China.” *Journal of Asian Public Policy* 13(1): 49-59.

Thiollet, Helene, and Laure Assaf. 2021. “Cosmopolitanism in exclusionary contexts.” *Population, Space and Place:* 1-16.

Thiollet, Hélène. 2022. “Migrants and monarchs: regime survival, state transformation and migration politics in Saudi Arabia.” *Third World Quarterly* 43(7): 1645-1665.

Thunø, Mette. 2001. “Reaching Out and Incorporating Chinese Overseas: The Trans-territorial Scope of the PRC by the End of the 20th Century.” *The China Quarterly* 168: 910–929.

Tian, Fangmeng 田方萌. 2021. “开放转型背景下的中国移民政策与身份焦虑” [China’s immigration policy and identity anxiety against the backdrop of a reform transition]. 文化纵横 (2).

Tlostanova, Madina. 2012. “Postsocialist ≠ postcolonial? On post- Soviet imaginary and global coloniality.” *Journal of Postcolonial Writing* 48(2): 130-42.

Toma, Sorana, and Maria Villares-Varela. 2019. “The Role of Migration Policies in the Attraction and Retention of International Talent: The Case of Indian Researchers.” *Sociology* 53(1): 52-68.

Tradiafilopoulos, Triadafilos. 2012. *Becoming Multicultural: Immigration and the Politics of Membership in Canada and Germany.* Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press.

Tseng, Yen-Fen, and Jieh-Min Wu. 2011. “Reconfiguring citizenship and nationality: dual citizenship of Taiwanese migrants in China.” *Citizenship Studies* 15(2): 265-282.

Tu, Mengwei. 2022. “Institutional Gap and Mobility–Immobility Transition: International Students’ Study-to-Work Experience in China.” *Sociological Research Online* 27(4): 1094–1103.

Tu, Wenyan, and Ting Gong. 2022. “Bureaucratic Shirking in China: Is Sanction-based Accountability a Cure?” *The China Quarterly* 249: 259-274.

Van der Brug, Wouter, Gianni D’Amato, Joost Berkhout, and Didier Ruedin. 2015. “A framework for studying the politicisation of immigration.” In *The Politicisation of Migration,* Edited by Didier Ruedin, Wouter van der Brug, Gianni D’Amato, and Joost Berkhout, 1-18. London; New York: Routledge.

Van Dongen, Els. 2022. “Across the conceptual divide? Chinese migration policies seen through historical and comparative lenses.” *Third World Quarterly* 43(7): 1627-1644.

Wilczak, Jessica. 2018. “‘Clean, Safe and Orderly’: Migrants, Race and City Image in Global Guangzhou.” *Asian and Pacific Migration Journal* 27(1): 55–79.

Waldinger, Roger. 2018. “Immigration and the election of Donald Trump: why the sociology of migration left us unprepared … and why we should not have been surprised.” *Ethnic and Racial Studies* 41(8): 1411-26.

Wang, Cangbai. 2013. “Guiqiao as Political Subjects in the Making of the People’s Republic of China.” In *Return: Nationalizing Transnational Mobility in China,* edited by Xiang Biao, Brenda Yeoh and Mika Toyota, 63-82. Durham, NC: Duke University Press.

Wang, Howard. 2022. “‘Security Is a Prerequisite for Development’: Consensus-Building toward a New Top Priority in the Chinese Communist Party.” *Journal of Contemporary China*.

Wang, Hongying, and Andrew F. Cooper. 2022. “Public Opinion on Chinese Foreign Aid Policy: Calculated Opposition or General Discontent?” *Journal of Contemporary China*.

Wang, Jianchang 汪建昌. 2021. “中国国际移民政策变迁研究:内在逻辑与未来走向” [China’s international migration policy change: internal logic and future development]. 江海学刊 3:131-137+255.

Wang, Li 王莉. 2009. “我国现行出入境管理法刍议” [Disputes in China’s current exit-entry management law]. *Journal of Chinese People’s Public Security University (Science and Technology)* 2: 86-90.

Wang, Ping, and Chen, Haibin. 2019. “自贸区建设背景下优化出入境服务管理工作的若干思考” [Thoughts on optimizing exit-entry management work against the background of the free trade zone construction]. 上海公安高等专科学校学报 29(1): 39-47.

Wang, Shaoguang. 2008. “Changing Models of China’s Policy Agenda Setting.” *Modern China* 34(1): 56–87.

Wang Wenbin 王文彬, and Cao Yang 曹洋. 2019. “国际移民的差异性网络构建及融入效用发挥——基于SFRC (2018)长春样本的分析” [Differentiated network building and integration effects among international migrants—Analysis based on the SFRC (2018) Changchun sample]. 青年探索 (5): 5-18.

Wang, Yueping 王越平 and Yang, Tian 杨天. 2020. “差异性嵌入: 中国西南边境地区外籍务工人员的空间特征研究” [Differentiated embedding: Spatial characteristics of foreign labor migrants in the border regions of south-western China]. 广西民族大学学报 (哲学社会科学版) 3: 78–83.

Wei, Fu’an 韦福安. 2014. “越南砍蔗女工的跨国流动研究” [Transnational mobility of Vietnamese sugar cane-cutting female workers]. 广西民族大学学报 (哲学社会科学版) 2: 72–7.

Weinar, Agnieszka. 2020. *Highly-Skilled Migration: Between Settlement and Mobility.* Cham: Springer Nature.

Weng, Li 翁里. 1996. “论二十一世纪中国的出入境管理” [Discussing China’s exit-entry management for the 21st century]. 公安大学学报5.

Weng, Li 翁里. 2001. <国际移民法理论与实践> [Theory and practice of international immigration law]. Beijing: 法律出版社.

Weng, Li 翁里and Bi Wei 毕伟. 2006. “中国出入境管理体制的抉择” [A choice for China’s exit-entry management system]. 浙江大学学报36(4).

Weng, Li, and Xuan Li. 2017. “中国加入国际移民组织:选择、机遇与挑战” [China joins the International Migration Organization: Choices, opportunities and challenges]. 汕头大学学报 33(12): 67-75.

Wilczak, Jessica. 2018. "'Clean, safe and orderly": Migrants, race and city image in global Guangzhou.” *Asian and Pacific Migration Journal* 27(1): 55–79.

Willis, Paul, and Mats Trondman. 2000. “Manifesto for ethnography.” *Ethnography* 1: 5–16.

Wimmer, Andreas, and Nina Glick Schiller. 2003. “Methodological Nationalism, the Social Sciences, and the Study of Migration: An Essay in Historical Epistemology.” *The International Migration Review* 37(3): 576-610.

Wu, Angela Xiao. 2020. “The evolution of regime imaginaries on the Chinese Internet.” *Journal of Political Ideologies* 25(2): 139-161.

Wu, Cunyu 吴存玉 and Liang, Dong 梁栋. 2020. “劳工跨境迁移机制与治理策略 – 以广西P镇的越南劳工为例” [Cross-border labor migration mechanism and governance strategy – The case of Vietnamese workers in P town, Guangxi]. 公共行政评论4: 147–64 + 210.

Wu, Fulong, and Claire Webster. 2004. “The Rise of “Foreign Gated Communities” in Beijing: Between Economic Globalization and Local Institutions.” Cities 21(3): 203–213.

Xiang, Biao. 2003. “Emigration from China: A Sending Country Perspective.” *International Migration* 41: 21-48.

Xiang, Biao 项飚. 2009. “寻找一个新世界：中国近现代对 “世界”的理解及其变化” [Searching for a new world: Modern and contemporary Chinese understandings of the ‘world’and their changes]. 开放时代 9: 103-114.

Xiang, Biao. 2011. “A Ritual Economy of ‘Talent’: China and Overseas Chinese Professionals.” *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies* 37: 1469– 9451.

Xiang, Biao. 2016. “Beyond Methodological Nationalism and Epistemological Behaviouralism: Drawing Illustrations from Migrations within and from China.” *Population, Space, and Place* 22: 669– 680.

Xiang, Biao. 2017. “Hundreds of millions in suspension.” *Transitions: Journal of Transient Migration* 1(1): 3-5.

Xiang, Biao, Mika Toyota, and Brenda S. A. Yeoh. 2013. *Return: Nationalizing Transnational Mobility in Asia.* Durham: Duke University Press.

Xiang, Biao, and Qiang Ma. 2019. “Mobility Assemblage and the Return of Islam in Southeast China.” In *Asia Inside Out: Itinerant People,* edited by Eric Tagliacozzo, Helen F. Siu, and Peter C. Perdue, 52-74. Cambridge: Harvard University Press.

Xu Tao 许涛, and Wang Qingqing 王青青. 2017. “中国居民对外籍人士的社会评价、社会交往与社会距离——基于义乌市的实证研究” [Chinese locals’ attitudes towards, exchanges with and social distance from foreign nationals – An empirical study in Yiwu 浙江师范大学学报(社会科学版) 42(3):56-68.

Xu, Tao 许涛. 2018. “外籍人士管理的创新与实践——基于义乌的经验” [Innovation and practice in the management of foreign nationals: The Yiwu experience] 浙江师范大学学报(社会科学版) 43(4):33-40.

Yang, Hongxing, and Dingxin Zhao. 2015. “Performance Legitimacy, State Autonomy and China's Economic Miracle.” *Journal of Contemporary China* 24(91): 64-82.

Yang, Huning 杨焕宁. 2012. “国务院关于外国人入出境及居留、就业管理工作情况的报告” [State Council report on foreigner exit-entry, residence, and employment management work]. August 21. http://www.npc.gov.cn/zgrdw/huiyi/ztbg/wgrrcjglgzbg/2012-08/21/content_1872386.htm

Yang, Jingwen 杨靖昊, and Yang Xuedong 杨雪冬. 2021. “新时代中国跨边界人口流动与国际移民治理的逻辑与展望 [Transnational people flows in the new era and the logic and outlook of international migration governance]. 中共中央党校(国家行政学院)学报3: 74-83.

Yang, Tian and Kecheng Fang. 2021. “How dark corners collude: a study on an online Chinese alt-right community.” *Information, Communication & Society* 26(2): 441-458.

Yao Yelin 姚烨琳. 2019. “流动经历与社会融入:在沪外籍流动人口居留意愿的影响因素分析” [Mobility and social integration: a regression analysis of the residential preferences of Shanghai’s foreign floating population]. 福建论坛(人文社会科学版)(9): 95-104.

Ye, Min. 2009. “Policy learning or diffusion: How China opened to foreign direct investment. *Journal of East Asian Studies* 9(3): 399-432.

Ye, Min. 2020. The Belt Road and Beyond: *State-Mobilized Globalization in China: 1998-2018.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Ye, Qing 叶氢, and Song Hong 宋红. 2019. “中国国家移民管理机构设置与运行问题探讨” [Discussing the institutional set-up and operation of China’s immigration management authorities]. 北京警察学院学报 4: 26-30.

You Tianlong 游天龙. 2022. 全球化受到挑战的今天，我们需要怎样的移民研究 [As globalization is challenged, what kind of migration research do we need?]. *The Paper,* June 27. https://www.thepaper.cn/newsDetail_forward_8000872

Yūzō, Mizoguchi. 2016. "China as method." *Inter-Asia Cultural Studies* 17(4): 513-518.

Zavoretti, Roberta. 2017. *Rural Origins, City Lives: Class and Place in Contemporary China.* University of Washington Press.

Zeng, Jinghan. 2014. "The Debate on Regime Legitimacy in China: bridging the wide gulf between Western and Chinese scholarship." *Journal of Contemporary China* 23(88): 612-635.

Zhan, Shaohua, and Zhou Min. 2020. "Precarious talent: highly skilled Chinese and Indian immigrants in Singapore." *Ethnic and Racial Studies* 43(9): 1654–1672.

Zhang, Baoping 张保平. 2010. "出入境法律制度的整合:出入境法还是移民法" [Integrating the exit-entry legal system: exit-entry law or immigration law]. 中国社会科学报.

Zhang, Baoping 张保平. 2019. "中国的国际移民管理：体制变迁与面临的挑战" [China's international immigration management: institutional change and the challenges it faces]. 边海境, November 19. https://mp.weixin.qq.com/s/su6CNG407ObwCM1DUYK8Eg

Zhang Baoping 张保平. 2020. "一部行政法规公开征求意见何以引起汹涌舆情" [How did a public consultation procedure for an administrative law cause raging public debate?] 边海境界, March 2. https://mp.weixin.qq.com/s/h-6TFto_lKC0Y0fn1NMUtg

Zhang Baoping 张保平. 2022. "推进移民法治建设需要搞好"统筹"与"结合""[To advance immigration legal reform it's important to 'strategize' and 'connect']. 边海境界, April 19, https://mp.weixin.qq.com/s/8e-pJte2l6In-cwJeKnDGQ.

Zhang, Bo. 2019. "上海高端人才空间集聚的 SWOT 分析 及其路径选择 - 基 于 北 京 、深 圳 与 上 海 的 人 才 政 策 比 较 分 析" [A SWOT analysis of Shanghai high-level talent congregation – Comparing Beijing, Shanghai and Shenzhen talent policy]. 科学发展 123：22-31.

Zhang, Chenchen. 2019. "Right-wing populism with Chinese characteristics? Identity, otherness and global imaginaries in debating world politics online." *European Journal of International Relations* 26(1): 88-115.

Zhang, Chi, and Yiben Ma. 2023. "Invented Borders: The Tension Between Grassroots Patriotism and State-Led Patriotic Campaigns in China." *Journal of Contemporary China*.

Zhang, Huide 张惠德, Zhao Yu 赵宇, and Zhang Chen 张宸. 2014. "我国外国人入出境管理裁量权及其规范化控制" [Discretion and its standardization in our exit-entry management]. 中国人民公安大学学报(社会科学版) 3:143-150.

Zhang, Huide 张惠德, Wang Li王莉, and Lu Hua 刘华. 2018. "论反恐维稳背景下的出入境管控" [Discussing exit-entry control in the context of counterterrorism and stability maintenance]. 中国人民公安大学学报(社会科学版)1:145-156.

Zhang, Huide 张惠德, Wang Li 王莉, and Fang Yan 方岩. 2019. "论当前移民管理体制构建中的难题破解思路 [A discussion of how to resolve difficult issues in the construction of an immigration management system]. 北京警察学院学报2: 24-29.

Zhang, Huide 张惠德, and Yang Chunxia 杨春霞. 2022. "移民概念的辨析及在我国移民管理中的适用建议" [An analysis of the concept of 'yimin' and its use in our national immigration management]. 政法学刊 3:97-106.

Zhang, Jie 张洁. 2019. "非法移民对我国非传统安全的影响及治理对策 – 基于云南边境地区的考察" [Impact of illegal migration on China's non-traditional security and its governance – Investigating the border regions of Yunnan]. 云南警官学院学报 5: 124–8.

Zhang, Jue, and Jin Xu. 2021. "China–US Strategic Competition and the Descent of a Porous Curtain." *The Chinese Journal of International Politics* 14(3): 321-352.

Zhang, Yadi, and Martin Geiger. 2020. "The IOM in Building and Supporting Migration Management in China." In *The International Organization for Migration, The New 'UN Migration Agency' in Critical Perspective* edited by Martin Geiger, and Antoine Pécoud, 145-171. Cham: Palgrave Macmillan.

Zhang, Yinxian, Jiajun Liu, & Ji-Rong Wen. 2018. “Nationalism on Weibo: Towards a Multifaceted Understanding of Chinese Nationalism.” *The China Quarterly* 235: 758-783.

Zhao, Suisheng. 1998. “A state-led nationalism: The patriotic education campaign in post-Tiananmen China.” *Communist and Post-Communist Studies* 31(3): 287-302.

Zhao, Suisheng. 2013. “Foreign Policy Implications of Chinese Nationalism Revisited: the strident turn.” *Journal of Contemporary China* 22(82): 535-553.

Zhao, Suisheng. 2022. “Top-level Design and Enlarged Diplomacy: Foreign and Security Policymaking in Xi Jinping’s China.” *Journal of Contemporary China.*

Zhao, Mengyang and Kecheng Fang. 2023. “Extending the research on digital China: the transnational lens.” *Information, Communication & Society* 26(2): 270-285.

Zhao, Weiran 赵蔚然, and Wang Qiang 王强. 2022. “后疫情时代入境外国人风险防控” [Controlling the risk of foreigners’ entry in the post-pandemic era]. 中国人民警察大学学报 (38): 25-30.

Zhong, Shi. 2019. “中国移民管理语境下 “国际移民”的明晰与解读” [Clarifying and analyzing ‘international immigration’ in the context of China’s immigration management]. 北京警察学院学报 4: 31-7.

Zhou, Wen. 2021. “Deeper penetration – New migration patterns in the China–Myanmar borderlands.” Paper presented at 2021 Association for Borderlands Studies Annual Conference, 15–17 April.

Zhou Wenting 周雯婷, and Liu Yungang 刘云刚. 2019. “在华外国人社会融合的现状与问题——以在沪日本人为例” [Realities and issues around the social integration of foreigners in China – The case of Japanese nationals in Shanghai]. 世界地理研究 28(1):1-12

Zhou, Xueguang. 2022. *The Logic of Governance in China – An Organizational Approach.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Zhu, Guobin, and Rohan Price. 2013. “Chinese immigration law and policy: a case of ‘change your direction, or end up where you are heading’?” *Columbia Journal of Asian Law* 26: 1–28.

Zhu, Hong, and Junxi Qian. 2021. “New theoretical dialogues on migration in China: introduction to the special issue.” *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies* 47(12): 2685-2705.

Zhu, Xufeng. 2011. “Government Advisors or Public Advocates? Roles of Think Tanks in China from the Perspective of Regional Variations.” *The China Quarterly* 207: 668-86.

Zolberg, Aristede. 2018. *A Nation by Design: Immigration Policy in the Fashioning of America.* Cambridge: Harvard University Press.

Zou, Mimi. 2017. “Migrant Precarity under China’s New Immigration Law Regime.” Pp. 160-178 in *Politics of Precarity: Migrant Conditions, Struggles and Experiences,* edited by Carl-Ulrik Schierup and Martin Bak Jørgensen. Leiden, The Netherlands: Brill.

Zou, Xiangjiang 邹湘江, and Linjie Zou 邹林杰. 2018. “外籍常住人口社会融合指标体系研究” [Research into social integration indicators of the permanent foreign population]. *Shehui fuli* 3: 43-58.

Zweig, David. 2002. *Internationalizing China: domestic interests and global linkages.* Ithaca: Cornell University Press.

Zweig, David, Changgui Chen, and Stanley Rosen. 2004. “Globalization and Transnational Human Capital: Overseas and Returnee Scholars to China.” *The China Quarterly* 179: 735-757.

Zweig, David, Chung Siu Fung, and Donglin Han. 2008. “Redefining the Brain Drain: China’s ‘Diaspora Option’.” *Science Technology Society* 13: 1–33.

Zweig, David, and Feng Yang. 2014. “Overseas Students, Returnees, and the Diffusion of International Norms into Post-Mao China.” *International Studies Review* 16(2): 252–263.

Zweig, David, and Huiyao Wang. 2013. “Can China Bring Back the Best? The Communist Party Organizes China's Search for Talent.” *The China Quarterly* 215: 590–615.

Zweig, David, Siqin Kang, and Huiyao Wang. 2020. “‘The Best are yet to Come:’ State Programs, Domestic Resistance and Reverse Migration of High-level Talent to China.” *Journal of Contemporary China* 29(125): 776-791.

Zwetsloot, Remco. 2021. “Winning the Tech Talent Competition: Without STEM Immigration Reforms, the United States will not stay ahead of China.” *Center for Strategic & International Studies.*

Summary

This dissertation examines China's politics of immigration in the 21st century. In this period, the China's global reintegration as part of its reform and opening up since the 1980s intensified, leading to unprecedented levels of transnational exchange, including of human mobility from and to China. At the same time, China's Communist Party has remained wary of internationalization when deemed at odds with its aim of domestic control. This project interrogates this tension in China's reform-era state-building by focusing on immigration policy, which lies at the nexus of domestic and global state concerns. A growing literature has documented the emergence of China as an immigrant destination, showing its diversity in this period. This forms a contrast with the pre-reform period, when the number of immigrants in the country was much smaller, and foreign nationals tended to be politicized as 'friends' or 'enemies' of the regime. However, the factors shaping state attitudes to growing immigration and related policymaking have remained under-explored. This thesis therefore asks: What can Chinese immigration policymaking tell us about China's ongoing state transformation as a global power?

Drawing on methods from political science and sociology, the thesis is based on a body of 100 interviews collected in mainland China (2018-2020), coupled with survey, policy and media analysis. It is built around five strategically selected cases, which zoom in on central-level, local-level and state-society immigration reform dynamics. Following the introduction, first, a case study of national-level institutional reform, lays out key drivers and obstacles around the establishment of China's National Immigration Administration (NIA) in 2018 (Chapter 2). I show how the NIA reflects a growing state ambition to expand and strengthen China's immigration governance, while at the same time its reform agenda has faced considerable implementation challenges. Then, complementing case studies on local-level policy experimentation discuss two ends of the spectrum of economic migration, the core of China's immigration system: high-income professional migration reforms in metropolitan Shanghai (Chapter 3), and low-income labor migration reforms in the Southwestern region of Guangxi, bordering Vietnam (Chapter 4). Because of their dynamism, China's major cities and border regions have attracted the vast majority of immigrants to China and are particularly meaningful sites for examining policy reform conditions. However, in both Shanghai and Guangxi, I find that these reforms are selectively implemented, challenged by conflicting goals within the bureaucracy, in which security goals increasingly outweigh developmental priorities, and a growing concern about the Chinese public's response to immigration. Finally, I examine societal immigration attitudes (Chapter 5), and elite-public interactions surrounding a controversial immigration reform (Chapter 6). I show Chinese immigration attitudes are more moderate and diverse than usually found in studies focusing on online discourse, and argue that public opinion, especially that of

'ultranationalist' online commentators, are an increasingly relevant factor in Chinese immigration policy-making.

Together, these case studies provide new empirical material and insight into China's immigration policy landscape and the dynamics behind the emerging politicization of immigration. They expand the existing knowledge base on Chinese immigration politics and provide insight into China's broader state transformation, with a focus on three cross-cutting topics: 1) the factors driving change and continuity in China's immigration policy; 2) how state actors manage tensions between developmental pragmatism and the increasing policy focus on governance and security; and 3) the extent to which societal attitudes towards immigration are a policy factor. Throughout the case studies, the thesis also situates China's immigration policymaking comparatively, analyzing how China fits with regional and global patterns of immigration policy-making in an early-stage immigrant reception context. As an immigrant-receiving authoritarian state, the case of China is also essential to an emerging literature of immigration politics outside Western, democratic or high-income contexts.

The thesis shows that China's state response to the growing numbers of foreign migrants settling in the country is especially shaped by a mix of domestic political dynamics and national identity concerns. While state ambitions for a more comprehensive immigration strategy have increased, these constraining factors make implementing planned policy reforms more difficult. With the developmentalism of the early reform era replaced by more comprehensive state control, Chinese immigration management, too, has shifted from (informal) accommodation of economic migration, especially at the local level, to strengthened enforcement of its rigid legal migration framework combined with top-down policy reform. However, this reform agenda lands in China's fragmented bureaucracy, and is attracting controversy within an ideological environment favoring nationalism and national security. This implementation context makes policymakers once again consider immigration a politically 'sensitive' policy issue, and activates a conservative bias in China's immigration policymaking. Within China's institutional politics, this prioritizes security-oriented reforms and makes it more difficult to advance more liberalizing institutional priorities.

China's state treatment of its diverse immigrant population provides insight into internal tensions within China's broader state strategy. At the same time, however China's immigration politics should not be studied as a unique case, but contextualized within global political trends in which states and populations respond to the effects of unbalanced development and globalization around the world. Increasingly selective and security-oriented immigration policy has been an outcome of a repoliticization of collective identities in many countries and regions.

In its conclusion, the thesis discusses the implications of this research for the study of Chinese migration and internationalization, Chinese policymaking and global migration politics. Key points include the overlapping political factors governing

China's immigration and diaspora attraction; the ways in which societal responses to China's internationalization are more diverse than a dichotomy between nationalists and liberals suggests; the impact of a centralizing policy environment on policy innovation, and the ways in which China's immigration politics shares significantly with that of other places, perhaps more than would be expected based on existing scholarship emphasizing differences across developmental status or regime type. Finally, it considers how this research might speak to societal and policy debates on a rising 'global China', from the position of immigrants in the growing US-China rivalry, to the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic on China's immigration management, and the question of whether foreign migrants in China must remain 'sojourners' – and what role immigration reform might play in that process.

Samenvatting

Deze dissertatie gaat over China's immigratiepolitiek in de 21ste eeuw. In deze periode intensiveerde de herintegratie van China met de rest van de wereld die begonnen was als deel van de hervormingen in het land sinds de jaren '80. De hoeveelheid transnationale interacties en uitwisselingen, inclusief reizen en migratie van en naar China, bereikte recordhoogtes. Tegelijk is China's Communistische Partij altijd behoedzaam gebleven op het gebied van internationalisering, vanwege hun focus op het controleren van de Chinese maatschappij. Dit project onderzoekt deze spanning in China's hervormingen door te focussen op China's immigratiebeleid, een onderwerp met zowel binnenlandse als buitenlandse relevantie. Een groeiende literatuur heeft de opkomst van China als een bestemming voor buitenlandse migranten gedocumenteerd. Deze literatuur laat zien dat het gaat om een zeer diverse populatie, anders dan voor de hervormingen, toen er veel minder buitenlanders waren, die veelal werden gepolitiseerd als 'vrienden' of 'vijanden' van het regime. Maar de factoren die de houding van de Chinese staat rond immigratie en relevante beleidsvorming bepalen, begrijpen we nog onvoldoende. Deze dissertatie vraagt daarom: Wat kan China's immigratiebeleid ons vertellen over de transformatie van de Chinese staat als wereldmacht?

Dit onderzoek is gebaseerd op meer dan honderd interviews verzameld in China (2018-2020), aangevuld met opinieonderzoek, beleids- en media-analyse. Het bestudeert vijf strategisch geselecteerde casussen, die inzoomen op immigratiehervormingen op landelijk niveau, op lokaal niveau, en op de rol van de maatschappij in de formulering van Chinees immigratiebeleid. Het eerste hoofdstuk na de inleiding (hoofdstuk 2) kijkt naar de drijvende krachten en obstakels rond de oprichting van China's National Immigration Administration (NIA) in 2018 (Hoofdstuk 2), een belangrijke landelijke hervorming van China's jonge immigratiesysteem, waarin de mogelijkheden voor buitenlanders om een permanente verblijfsstatus te verkrijgen erg beperkt zijn. Ik laat zien hoe de oprichting van de NIA een groeiende ambitie van de Chinese staat op het gebied van migratiebeleid belichaamt, maar ook hoe de agenda van het nieuwe bureau moeilijk in de praktijk te brengen is. Daarna bespreek ik twee casussen van lokale beleidsexperimentatie op het gebied van economische migratie, het hart van China's immigratiesysteem: de hervormingen op het gebied van professionele migranten in de metropool Shanghai (Hoofdstuk 3), en die rond arbeidsmigratie in de zuidwestelijke regio Guangxi, aan de grens met Vietnam (Hoofdstuk 4). China's steden en grensregio's trekken de meerderheid van immigranten in China en zijn de belangrijkste locaties voor het experimenten met nieuw immigratiebeleid. Toch ontdekte ik dat zowel in Shanghai als in Guangxi het nieuwe beleid slechts selectief werd geïmplementeerd. Dit komt onder andere door tegenstrijdige ambities binnen de bureaucratie, waarbij veiligheidsoverwegingen het steeds vaker winnen van economische doelstellingen, en groeiende zorg over de publieke opinie rond immigratie. Tot slot breng ik de

maatschappelijke houdingen ten opzichte van migratie in kaart (Hoofdstuk 5), en bespreek ik de interacties tussen de beleidselite en het Chinese publiek tijdens een controverse rond de hervormingen van China's permanente verblijfsvergunning voor buitenlanders (Hoofdstuk 6). Ik laat zien dat de Chinese publieke opinie op het gebied van immigratie diverser en gematigder is dan meestal wordt aangenomen, en beargumenteer dat het publieke debat, en dan vooral de meningen van 'ultranationalistische' online commentatoren, een belangrijke rol speelt in China's immigratiebeleid.

Samen bieden deze casussen nieuw empirisch materiaal en nieuwe inzichten in hoe Chinees immigratiebeleid wordt gevormd, en in de dynamiek rond de opkomende (her) politisering ervan. Ze breiden onze kennis op het gebied van Chinese immigratiepolitiek, en geven tegelijk inzicht in bredere trends in de transformatie van de Chinese staat, met een focus op drie onderwerpen die door de dissertatie heenlopen: 1) de factoren die verandering en continuïteit in China's immigratiebeleid bepalen, 2) de manieren waarop overheidsactoren omgaan met de spanning tussen een pragmatische houding gericht op economische groei en de groeiende focus op bestuur en nationale veiligheid, en 3) de rol die publieke opinie al dan niet speelt in de beleidsvorming. Daarnaast plaatst elk hoofdstuk China's immigratiebeleid ook in vergelijkend perspectief, door te kijken hoe de situatie in China zich verhoudt tot regionale en wereldwijde trends op het gebied van immigratiebeleid in landen waar inkomende migratie een relatief recent fenomeen is. Als een voorbeeld van een autoritaire staat die een modern en competitief immigratiesysteem wil bouwen, is China ook een belangrijke casus voor de literatuur op het gebied van immigratiepolitiek buiten Westerse, democratie of hoge-inkomenslanden.

De dissertatie laat zien dat de manier waarop de Chinese staat reageert op de groeiende aantallen buitenlandse migranten in het land vooral wordt bepaald door een mix van binnenlandse bureaucratische politiek en van overwegingen op het gebied van nationale identiteit. Hoewel de staatsambitie op het gebied van immigratie groeit, maken deze beperkende factoren het implementeren van de geplande beleidshervormingen moeilijk. Nu de focus op economische groei en ontwikkeling van de vroege hervormingsperiode wordt vervangen door een bredere focus op bestuur en veiligheid, zie je ook binnen Chinees immigratiemanagement een verschuiving van het (informeel) accommoderen van economische migratie, zeker op lokaal niveau, naar een steeds strakkere implementatie van de migratiewetten, en top-down hervormingen. Deze hervormingen landen echter in het bestaande gefragmenteerde bestuurssysteem, en worden daarnaast steeds meer gepolitiseerd door een ideologische nadruk op nationalisme en nationale veiligheid. In deze context ervaren beleidsmakers immigratie opnieuw als een politiek 'gevoelig' onderwerp. Dit activeert een conservatieve inslag die hervormingen op het gebied van veiligheid de prioriteit geeft en het moeilijker maakt om de meer liberaliserende maatregelen in te voeren.

De beleidsvorming rond China's diverse buitenlandse populatie, een resultaat van decennia aan snelle internationalisering, biedt inzicht in bredere interne spanningen in

China's bestuursstrategie. Maar de Chinese immigratiepolitiek is tegelijk geen uniek geval: de prioriteiten en beperkingen van Chinese beleidsmakers hebben veel te maken met wereldwijde politieke trends op het gebied van migratie. Net als in andere delen van de wereld is immigratiebeleid een thema in een breder politiek debat over de effecten van ongebalanceerde ontwikkeling en globalisering.

In de conclusie bespreekt de dissertatie de implicaties van dit onderzoek voor het bestuderen van Chinese migratie en internationalisering, Chinese beleidsvorming, en wereldwijde migratiepolitiek. Zo is het belangrijk om China's immigratie- en diasporabeleid samen te bekijken, om de overlap in politieke overwegingen beter te begrijpen, en zou onderzoek naar China's internationalisering zich bewust moeten zijn van het brede spectrum aan maatschappelijke opinies die veel verder gaat dan een tweedeling tussen nationalisten en liberalen. Onderzoek naar Chinese politiek in het Xi Jinping-tijdperk kan zich verder richten op de rol van publieke opinie in beleidsvorming, en de impact van centralisering op beleidsinnovatie. Verder vragen de overeenkomsten tussen China's immigratiepolitiek en dat in andere delen van de wereld – meer dan je misschien zou verwachten op basis van bestaande kennis omtrent regime en ontwikkelingsstatus - om verder onderzoek. Tot slot kijken we naar de links tussen dit onderzoek en maatschappelijk en beleidsdebat rond een opkomend China, van de positie van buitenlanders in de groeiende VS-China rivaliteit, en de impact van de Covid-19 pandemie op China's immigratiemanagement, tot de vraag of buitenlandse migranten in China altijd tijdelijke 'reizigers' moeten blijven – en de rol van immigratiehervormingen in dat proces.

Curriculum Vitae

Tabitha Speelman was born on October 5, 1988 in Urk, the Netherlands. She completed her undergraduate studies at Calvin College, MI, obtaining bachelor degrees in Philosophy, English literature, and Chinese language (2006-2010). From 2010 to 2013, she pursued graduate studies in Chinese Studies, dividing her time between Nanjing University and Leiden University. Her MA thesis studied the social response to the rapid development of China's high-speed rail network in that period. o Following her studies, she was based in China as a reporter for several media outlets, working for Dutch daily newspaper *Trouw* from 2014-2017, and publishing freelance reporting on Chinese societal developments in other media like *Foreign Policy* and *The Initium*. In September 2017, she returned to Leiden as a PhD-candidate with the Institute for Area Studies (LIAS), as part of a research project studying the impact of growing immigration on Chinese society ('Immigrant China'). She spent 2018-2020 as a visiting PhD-student at Fudan University in Shanghai. Her interests include Chinese and global migration and media trends, and during her time as a PhD candidate, she taught several courses on these subjects. Her research has been published in *China Perspectives, China Information,* and *Journal of Contemporary China.*


7 6
Foreigners
外国人
Foreigners
外国人
5 4
3 2
8