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*Mainland Chinese Students' Transition into Skilled Migrants in Hong Kong*

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Abstract

The proposed project will explore an understudied issue in migration studies: the transition that student migrants make when they become skilled migrant workers in the host countries. By collecting qualitative data from mainland Chinese students and skilled migrants in Hong Kong, this exploratory research will investigate how student migrants transition into skilled migrant workers and examine how the interplay of social structures and individual agency shapes this process.

Against the background of the global 'skills race' or 'talent war', recruiting international students or student migrants as skilled migrant workers upon graduation has become a strategy used by many developed countries/areas to facilitate their economic development, enhance their skill bases, and deal with the labor shortage caused by their low fertility rate and ageing population. The migrant students in the host countries/areas are believed to be more readily employed and more easily integrated into the local labor market and the host country than skilled migrants with foreign educational backgrounds who are directly recruited from overseas. The advantages enjoyed by student migrants include their local credentials and educational backgrounds, which are easily recognized and verified by their employers; their enhanced language skills after years of study in the host country; and their accumulated knowledge about, life experience with, and social connections in the host country obtained during their study process. With an increasing number of student migrants, and more developed countries adopting them as potential skilled migrants, such individuals' transition from student migrants to skilled migrants has become an increasingly important topic in migration. However, existing studies on student migrants have mainly concentrated on either their migration motives/channels or their post-migration adaptations to the host countries/societies. Some nascent research examining the transition of international students into skilled migrants has primarily discussed the immigration policies in the host countries and how they determine international students' eligibility to become skilled migrants or even obtain citizenship in the host countries. Very little research has been conducted to explore how the intersection of structural factors and individual agency influences student migrants' transition into skilled migrants from a processual perspective. The proposed project aims to fill the gap by addressing the following questions: 1) how the structural factors in the host society (the assemblages of political, economic, social, and cultural factors) influence mainland Chinese students' transition into skilled workers in Hong Kong and 2) how the individual agency of mainland Chinese students/graduates and their everyday practices shape this transition process. The proposed research will enrich both the theoretical and empirical discussions of the transition between one type of mobility and another. It will also update and deepen the academic understanding of student and skilled migrants in general, and mainland Chinese students in Hong Kong in particular.