

## DOCTORAL THESIS

### **Social capital, institutional constraints, and labor market outcomes: evidence from university graduates in China**

Du, Shengchen

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## **Abstract**

The effect of social capital on labor market outcomes is a key concern in sociological studies. Even though there are extensive studies on this topic, with the worldwide expansion of higher education, insufficient scholarly efforts have so far been devoted to understanding access to social capital in the educational setting and labor market impact of social capital for well-educated individuals. Moreover, studies on social capital and migration tend to focus on the role played by social capital on migration decisions and outcomes, contingency impact of social capital on migrants' labor market outcomes are not well understood. To fill the knowledge gap, this research is to examine undergraduates' social capital accumulation and mobilization on campus, and the associated outcomes for their job seeking, with the particular focus on 1) the impact of macro institutions on migrant students' social capital accumulation and mobilization; 2) contingency impact of social capital on labor market outcomes.

Combining primary data from in-depth interviews in Tianjin and secondary data collected in Nanjing, China, I examine the different processes of social capital accumulation and mobilization between local and migrant students on campus, and associated labor market outcomes between local and returned migrant students. Findings of this study suggest that university provides an important context for undergraduates to establish social ties and accumulate social capital. By attending higher education institutions, especially elite ones, students gain opportunities to build exclusive social connections on campus. However, opportunities to accumulate social capital on campus are highly structured between local and migrant students because of the household registration system. Moreover, data from in-depth interviews have demonstrated that migrant students suffer disadvantaged capacities to mobilize social

capital compared to their local counterparts. The household registration system deprives migrant populations of access to some local employment opportunities, such as government and government-affiliated organizations, migrant students suffer from weaker job information and influence when mobilizing their social capital. Further, by analyzing survey data from Nanjing, it has verified the institutional contingency impact of social capital upon the household registration system between local and returned migrant students. Both total and university-based social capital increases local students' chance to get a desirable job but does not do so for returned migrant students. The central argument of the study is that institutional constraints, such as the household registration system, could lead to different capacities for the accessibility and mobilization of social capital among local students, migrant students, and returned migrant students, finally leading to differential labor market outcomes in Chinese cities.

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