Rich dad, poor dad: the impact of family background on educated young people’s migration from peripheral China

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ABSTRACT

Along with its rapid economic growth, economic inequality rises and intergenerational mobility declines in China. Meanwhile, significant growth in HEIs’ enrolment has contributed to major migration flows across the country. This research investigates the impact of family background on the migration location choice of educated young people from peripheral China, based on data from a life-course survey of recent graduates of tertiary education institutions originating from Chaohu, China. Logistic models are employed to analyse young people’s migration to receive higher education, whether inside or outside the home province, and the location trajectories afterwards. While the findings confirm the association between university and post-university location choice, substantial interaction effects are found between location choice and family background. Young people from different family backgrounds adopt different strategies of geographical mobility in their transition to adulthood. In particular, young people from privileged families are more likely to leave the home province for higher education and return after graduation, whereas those from underprivileged families are more likely to study within the home province and then move away.

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Student migration; graduate migration; location choice; family background; geographical mobility

Introduction

Youth migration has become a global phenomenon of increasing magnitude and scale. One of the major areas of scholarly interest is migration generated by and through higher education (Smith, Rérat, and Sage 2014). In the Chinese context, as a result of educational expansion, the enrolment rate among senior secondary school graduates increased from 46.1% in 1998 to 92.5% in 2015; the number of new entrants’ enrolment of regular HEIs increased from 1.08 million in 1998 to 7.38 million in 2015 (National Bureau of Statistics of China 2016). Significant growth in HEIs’ enrolment over the last twenty years or so has contributed to major migration flows across the country. Both university entrants’ and graduates’ migration are characterised by lopsided flows from the central and western regions to the eastern region, the degree of geographical unevenness for the latter is even more pronounced: the eastern region absorbs 65% of university-bound migrants and 84% of graduate migrants in 2000–2005 (Liu et al. 2016). For the central and western regions, most provinces suffer a net loss of both university entrants...
and graduates, or ‘brain drain’. It underscores the point that geographical mobility patterns differ between young people from peripheral areas and those who were brought up in core areas.\textsuperscript{2} To date, most studies have used data collected at destination places (e.g. Yue 2010; Ma and Pan 2014; Ye 2015). Research on the patterns and mechanisms of outmigration from the native-place perspective is conspicuous by its absence. This lack of recognition of the native-place perspective is inherent in the current framing of migration when attention is predominantly focused on destination places. In the urban-centric mapping of migration, the sending areas are devoid of localities and become abstract and homogenised. The destination-biased framework renders out-migration behaviour in China largely under-researched,\textsuperscript{3} a literature gap that the present work addresses.

Of particular interest in this paper is the role of family background in determining educated young people's geographical mobility. China’s economic reform has not only brought about rapid economic growth to the country but also given rise to increased economic inequality. The Gini coefficient has grown rapidly from around 0.3 in 1980 (the Gini coefficient in urban China was as low as 0.16) to a level above 0.5 around 2010 (Xie and Zhou 2014). Davis and Wang (2009) argue that the configurations of political and economic power have achieved high returns on political power and capital assets but lowered returns to manual labour and manufacturing. Fan (2015) observes that intergenerational mobility\textsuperscript{4} in income and education declines sharply with the increase in economic inequality during the reform era, which is more evident for residents from economically disadvantaged regions. Research on social stratification and social mobility in transitional China confirms that inequality persists across generations and that family plays an important role in the life chances of young people. Guanxi (social connections), as a mechanism to transmit status from the older to the younger generation in socialist China, also plays a crucial role in job allocation during early reform years (Bian 1994). The influence of family becomes more prominent in more recent years under market deepening. Since the late 1990s, the Chinese government has introduced a series of policy changes, like the commodification of education, the marketisation of employment, and the privatisation of housing, which have shifted the resourcing, responsibility and pressure from the state to individuals and their families. Such market-oriented reforms have heightened social inequalities and created boundaries across social classes (Kleinman et al. 2011), which have brought about a growing consciousness about family background: the gap between those who have access to power and money and those who do not. Pindie (‘stake it on daddy’) becomes a popular slang in China, referring to the practice among young people relying on their parents’ political status and economic wealth. Terms like guan’erda (the second generation of government officials), fu’erda (the second generation of the rich) and qiong’erda (the second generation of the poor) point to differences and gaps in the opportunities, experiences and life chances among the young generation.

Even for the group of highly educated young adults, recent research has also confirmed that their life chances are highly influenced by family background. For instance, based on data collected from 70,803 college and university graduates in 24 provinces between 2003 and 2009, Bao and Li (2012) report that more than a quarter of graduates go unemployed after graduation; female, rural origin and poor family background are significant negative predictors of employability. Another study of graduates in 16
provinces in 2005 shows that family social connections have positive impacts on graduates’ job placement and starting salary (Yan and Mao 2015). In his qualitative study on graduate employment, Liu (2016) argues that middle-class parents play a more active role in the job search of their children through directing social capital to children, transmitting to children cultural capital, and exercising supervision of children’s job search. With few exceptions (e.g. Yue 2010; Ye 2015) there has been a dearth of studies examining whether and how family background influences young adults’ geographical mobility. Based on a national survey of 21,753 graduates in 14 provinces in 2009, Yue (2010) finds that students from high-income families are more likely to study in a different province and then return to the home province for employment; on the other hand, students from rural families tend to either study in the home province and later move away upon graduation to another province for employment or study outside the home province and then move again to another different province for employment. The findings of the above studies suggest a possible intersection of geographical and intergenerational mobility in influencing the opportunities and experiences of educated young people in China, which remains to be elucidated.

This study investigates both the location choice of higher education and the location choice after graduation among a group of young people. There is a well-established literature on migration of university entrants (Kyung 1996; Belfield and Morris 1999) and migration of university graduates (Kodrzycki 2001; Corcoran, Faggian, and McCann 2010). Quite a number of authors have studied both the migration to and from higher education (McGregor, Thanki, and McKee 2002; Yue 2010; Panichella 2013; Liu et al. 2016). Whilst particular attention has also been paid to the link between the two (Faggian, McCann, and Sheppard 2007; Haapanen and Tervo 2012; Tano 2014; Rérat 2014), aside from few exceptions such as Groen (2004) and Ma and Pan (2014), little work has been attempted to tackle the possible selection bias or endogeneity bias. Migration to receive higher education and migration upon graduation may be endogenously determined, that is, decisions concerning the place of study and the place of employment are simultaneous. For instance, inter-provincial migration for higher education may increase the probability of staying outside the home province upon graduation; it could also be that individuals planning to work outside the home province are more likely to leave the home province to attend university. This study therefore sets out address the endogeneity problem.

Following the life-course approach and the native-place perspective, this paper presents a case study of educated young people’s migration to and from higher education and draws on data from a life-course survey conducted in a lagging interior region of China. Below, I first review the literature on migration to and from higher education and formulate hypotheses regarding the influence of education, family background, and previous migration. I then describe the study area, the data and methods employed in this study. It is followed by the presentation of the empirical results of binary and multinomial logit estimates and a recursive bivariate probit model. The concluding section discusses some potential mechanisms that may explain the impact of education, family background, and previous migration on location choice among educated young adults in China, with consideration of additional context-specific factors.
Literature review

Education

The educational selectivity in migration has been well recognised internationally: the academically more talented or the more educated are more likely to migrate; further, they tend to choose urban areas rather than return to declining regions. Suval and Horace Hamilton (1965) contend that educational selectivity in migration is most marked among young people. They also observe that the correlation between education (as measured by years of school completed) and migration increases with distance: interstate migrants include more of the better educated than intra-state migrants. This is consistent with an earlier study (Pihlblad and Gregory 1954) on migration among young adults in Missouri, United States. They use intelligence test scores at high school as a measure of ability and find a consistent tendency for mean test scores to rise with the size of community and with the migration distance. That is, migration of rural youth towards urban areas tends to be disproportionately selective of the more intelligent. A positive relationship between mobility and A-level scores is also observed among first-time undergraduate migrants in the United Kingdom (Belfield and Morris 1999). Similarly, in China, students entering higher education at regular universities are more likely to leave the birthplace than those enrolling vocational colleges (Liu et al. 2016); students entering key universities⁶ tend to leave the birthplace than those entering non-key universities (Yue and Zhou 2005).

The literature on graduate migration confirms educational selectivity among university graduates. Using grade point average (GPA) as the indicator of ability, Tano (2014) finds that university graduates with higher GPA tend to leave those university regions that are outside the big cities and stay in the more flourishing regions in Sweden. McGregor, Thanki, and McKee (2002) demonstrate that performing less well in A-level scores and the degree programme substantially increases the chance of returning to Northern Ireland after graduating from a university outside the region. In the cases of Scottish and Welsh students, the distance moved after graduation from higher education to employment increases with the rank in degree classification and degree level (Faggian, McCann, and Sheppard 2007). In Australia, postgraduates are more likely to prefer major cities upon graduation than undergraduates (Corcoran, Faggian, and McCann 2010). Rérat’s (2014), in his study on young graduates in Switzerland, confirms that graduates with a master degree are much less likely to return to the peripheral and rural region than graduates with just a bachelor degree. Studies on migration behaviour of university and college graduates in China point to similar results. Graduates with bachelor degrees from key universities or postgraduate degrees are more likely to leave their birthplaces than diploma-holders and those with bachelor degrees from non-key universities (Yue and Zhou 2005; Ma and Pan 2014). In addition, graduates with bachelor degrees tend to be attracted to high-wage regions in comparison to diploma-holders (Liu et al. 2016).

There are several reasons why migration is selective of the academically more competent, and moreover, why the urban hierarchy matches with the hierarchy of qualifications. First, persons with high level of qualification may not easily match their fields of specialisation with the local labour market. As Pihlblad and Gregory (1954) point out, individuals with superior intelligence and scholastic aptitude must necessarily search for
opportunities for their development, which is to be found largely in leading metropolises. Also, Suval and Horace Hamilton (1965, 547) argue, ‘the nature of educational specialisation may make migration mandatory for employment or advancement’. Second, the more educated are better equipped to recognise opportunities within a larger scope and take advantage of them through migration (Suval and Horace Hamilton 1965; DaVanzo 1983). Furthermore, Suval and Horace Hamilton (1965) suggest that the middle-class-value-oriented school system could be a factor in encouraging migration.

In brief, the educational selectivity in migration suggests that geographical mobility increases with the level of academic ability and qualification among young people. Consequently, I set up the two hypotheses:

Hypothesis 1: The academically more competent students are more likely to leave the peripheral home province for higher education.

Hypothesis 2: The higher the qualification of the graduates, the less likely they are to return to the peripheral home province.

Family background

Existing research on migration of university entrants suggests that the more privileged the family background, the higher the propensity to move away from the less developed to the more developed regions for higher education. For instance, in their study on Northern Ireland domiciled entrants to higher education, McGregor, Thanki, and McKee (2002) find that the professional classes are more likely to leave Northern Ireland. Panichella (2013), in his research on internal migration of southern Italian students, also finds the bourgeoisie and middle classes are more likely than the working class to move away to attend university in the more industrialised north. Belfield and Morris (1999) point to a link between fathers’ education and children’s mobility in the United Kingdom: students whose fathers are educated to the degree level are more likely to leave the home region to attend higher education.

The cost of college tuition and fees in China has risen by about 4.75 times from 1996 to 2008 (Li et al. 2013), exacerbating the inequality in access to higher education. Because of higher transport costs and living expenses, studying in a more prosperous region costs more than remaining in the peripheral home region. Families with high socio-economic status are more able to finance long-distance migration and living expenses in major cities, as interpreted in earlier studies (Belfield and Morris 1999; Panichella 2013). In addition to financial capital, parents’ social and cultural capital resources also shape the choice of higher education (Gao 2011). Privileged families could give supervision and advice based on their knowledge of educational opportunities, and mobilise their social resources to help the children get access to higher education. Besides, in order to reproduce the social status across generations, they are more willing to accumulate ‘institutionalised’ (academic qualification) and ‘embodied’ (attributes and characteristics of the person) forms of cultural capital and encourage geographical mobility (Waters 2006). It is thus possible to consider the following hypothesis:

Hypothesis 3: Privileged family background increases the probability of moving away from the home province for higher education.
When looking at the role of family background in graduate mobility, the findings are inconsistent. The earlier mentioned study on Northern Ireland (McGregor, Thanki, and McKee 2002) shows that the effects of privileged family background on the two groups of graduates manifest in different ways: if the fathers are professionals, graduates from universities inside Northern Ireland are much less likely to leave, while graduates from universities outside Northern Ireland are much less likely to return. It may suggest that for students coming from a professional background, the decisions concerning the location of university and job market are tied together. In general terms, the leavers are more likely to come from a privileged family background whereas the stayers are more likely to come from an underprivileged family background. Several studies report no strong link between family background and graduate mobility, however. For instance, Belfield and Morris (1999) find no evidence to suggest that graduates whose fathers are educated to the degree level are either more or less likely to move after graduation. Among graduates who stayed in the southern Italy for higher education, the higher social class does not have a significant effect on the probability of moving to the north after graduation (Panichella 2013). Unfortunately, the study separates the southern students into two categories: those attending a southern university and those attending a northern university. It does not examine the effect of social class on graduate mobility among those who graduated from universities in the northern Italy. Recent evidence from China shows a different story: graduates from high-income families are more likely to return to the home province for employment, while graduates from rural families tend to work outside the home province (Yue 2010). In the context of graduate migration in China, I propose the following:

Hypothesis 4: In China, graduates’ mobility is negatively selected on family background.

**Previous migration**

Many studies suggest a correlation between previous migration and subsequent migration (DaVanzo 1983; Newbold 1997). Research on migration behaviour of university graduates pays particular attention to the impact of the location of the university on migration after graduation. It has been demonstrated that the probability of moving after graduation increases if the graduates has previously moved (Belfield and Morris 1999; Tano 2014). Similarly, Kodrzycki (2001) finds that graduates who have moved to another state to attend college are more likely to be outside the home state five years after graduation than those studying in the home state. Other studies take into account the distance between the university and home place. Faggian, McCann, and Sheppard (2007) demonstrate that a distant initial move from the domicile to university tends to be followed by a further move from the university to employment. In their analysis of inter-regional migration of university graduates in Finland, Haapanen and Tervo (2012) report that, for those studying in large metropolitan regions, the probability of returning to their home region after graduation decreases with the distance from the home region to the university. To solve the problem of selection bias between attending college in a state and working in the state, Groen (2004) controls the variable of initial location preference and employs conditional logit model. It is found that the impact of attending college in a state on the probability of working in that state is significant but its magnitude is rather small.
In China, university graduates have a great tendency to work in their places of study (Ma, Yue, and Min 2009; Liu et al. 2016). Following Groen (2004), Ma and Pan (2014) take into account students’ preferred places of study to adjust the selection bias and find that graduates as a whole tend to work in either their birthplace or the place of study. Based on the above findings, I account for the endogeneity problem in this study and formulate the final hypothesis:

Hypothesis 5: Those attending in-province institutions are more likely to stay in the home province after graduation than are graduates who moved away for higher education.

There are two possibilities why initial migration, or more precisely, the location of initial move, is important for subsequent migration behaviour. First, according to the classic location-specific capital argument (DaVanzo 1983) and so-called ‘cumulative inertia’ or ‘negative duration dependence’ (Haapanen and Tervo 2012), a negative relationship exists between the duration in a state and the likelihood of leaving it. As Faggian, McCann, and Sheppard (2007) propose, the psychological and emotional costs of long-distance mobility could discourage those studying in the home province from searching out-of-province job opportunities. Besides, staying in the familiar environment helps maintain social networks and utilise the social capital in the home province.

For those who studied outside the home province, it may become difficult for them to gain better awareness of the social and economic changes and sustain their social network in the home province. Yet, the advantage of attending college in a different province is that people will have first-hand knowledge about the place of study and are better informed about the local economic conditions and job opportunities upon graduation. This view is consistent with that expressed by Faggian, McCann, and Sheppard (2007). Meanwhile, the first move for higher education is also a process of learning to migrate. Compared with those staying in the home province, the interprovincial migration experience lowers the psychological and emotional costs of subsequent moves, and makes them more adaptable to change. Haapanen and Tervo (2012) highlight the relevance of attachments (to home, friends, and area of residence) and point out that attachments grow over time with the development of social network and human capital in the host place. Additionally, Rérat (2014) reminds us that the further the distance between the birthplace and the place of study, the more difficult it is to make trips back home on a short-term basis because of the cost. This would not only impede the maintenance of social ties in the home place but also encourage the development of new social network in the destination place, and consequently influence the subsequent migration decision.

Second, considerations in the decision to choose the place of study, such as climate, economic conditions, distance from family and friends, are possible to be involved also in the choice of place of work after university (Groen 2004; Ma and Pan 2014). It is likely that decisions concerning the place of study and the place of employment are simultaneous, as noted by McGregor, Thanki, and McKee (2002). That is, individuals may perceive their first move as one of permanent settlement, and thus may have decided at the same time to remain within or outside the home province. I will test the potential endogeneity or simultaneity bias arising from unobservable factors that affect both the first move and the subsequent move.
Data and method

Research site

The research site of the present study is Chaohu. Chaohu was a prefecture-level city in Anhui Province, administering one district (Juchao) and four counties (Hexian, Hanshan, Wuwei, and Lujiang) (see Figure 1). In August 2011, due to adjustment in administrative division, Chaohu was partitioned and the three nearby cities of Hefei, Wuhu and Ma’anshan each absorbed a piece of its territory (see Figure 1). The county-level Chaohu City (previously Juchao District) and Lujiang County are now under the administration of Hefei City, Hanshan County and Hexian County under the administration of Ma’anshan City, and Wuwei County under the administration of Wuhu City.

In 2010, Chaohu covered an area of 9394 km² and had a population of 4,605,093 with an average population density of 490 people per km² (ASB 2011). As an agriculture-dominated area, Chaohu is characterised by a low urbanisation rate and a high out-migration rate. At the end of 2010, among the 4.61 million permanent household registration or hukou residents in Chaohu, agricultural population accounted for 83.6%. The hukou population living outside the residential areas of Chaohu, i.e. out-migrants, excluding those have obtained local hukou in the destination places, reached 1,962,961; among them about 1 million had out-migrated for more than half a year. Regarding the latter, intra-provincial migration only accounted for 13.1% and the major destination cities were Hefei (44.8%), Wuhu (14.8%), Ma’anshan (13.0%) and Tongling (7.4%), while 86.9% were inter-provincial migration and the major destination places were Shanghai, Beijing, Jiangsu and Zhejiang (ASB 2011). Clearly, the economic disparities offer a great pull towards the more economically developed areas both within Anhui Province and nationally.

Figure 1. The study area.
While the vast majority of emigrants are low-educated migrant workers from the rural areas of Chaohu, highly educated young adults also join this outflow in recent years. Along with the expansion of higher education since 1999, more and more young people have a chance to enter HEIs. The number of secondary school graduates from Chaohu who scored above the cut-off line on the national college entrance examination (gaokao) increased from 6100 in 2004–9005 in 2009; the total number reached 44,920 over the period 2004–2009. Note that the figures are close to, but not precisely the same as, university enrolment. In particular cases, those above the cut-off line may not be recruited or willingly accept the offer. Also, data on enrolment in undergraduate classes in branch campuses (autonomous institutions affiliated with public universities) and vocational colleges is unavailable. Based on the number of applicants in Chaohu and provincial enrolment rate at each year, it is estimated that the total university and college enrolment of students from Chaohu over the period 1999–2009 could be nearly 200,000.

**Data**

The present study draws upon data collected from a life-course questionnaire survey of recent college and university graduates, who were born and raised in Chaohu and received higher education outside Chaohu in or after the year 1999. Eligibility criteria required respondents to have graduated from at least one higher education programme with either a bachelor degree from a university or a diploma from a vocational college. Participants were recruited in the former prefecture-level Chaohu City. This selection allows us to incorporate more variations within the area. Another consideration is that the target group grew up and experienced their first migration during the period when Chaohu was a prefecture-level city.

The lack of sampling frame is a common sampling problem for research on out-migration. How to locate and access emigrants from the native area becomes the major challenge of the study. Snowball sampling method was thus used. The survey was carried out between January and April 2013. On-site interviews were conducted during the Chinese New Year when very many emigrants returned to Chaohu for family reunion. With the help of neighbourhood residents (in urban areas) and cadres (in rural areas), the author was able to identify potential respondents within urban neighbourhoods and villages. Most interviews were undertaken in-home face-to-face with respondents. Only a small number of respondents were found in public spaces like railway stations. In an attempt to include as wide a variety of emigrants as possible, the author sent out electronic questionnaires via a snowball approach, which involved asking the initial participants for referrals to members of their peer group.

The life-course data was collected retrospectively by asking respondents to record life events in spatio-temporal sequence, including information on their paths through education, migration, employment, etc. The period under study was their graduation from senior high school to the time of interview. Information on personal characteristics and family background was also collected. One methodological issue presents itself in this study: how to define migration in terms of length of stay? While studies on migration in China usually use six months as the minimum length of stay (Liang, Li, and Ma 2014), this study use a minimum of three months. The highly mobile nature of educated young adults, which will be demonstrated below, serves as a rationale for this demarcation.
**Method**

In the following empirical analyses, I will first use binary probit regression to estimate (1) the choice of whether to attend college in the home province or in another province, and (2) the choice of whether to locate within the home province or elsewhere after graduation. A recursive bivariate probit model (see Greene 1998 for details) will then be used to address the potential endogeneity of first move choice in subsequent migration decision. Later I will employ a multinomial logistic model to compare graduates’ three location choices: returning to the home city, locating in other cities of the home province, and locating outside the home province.

The predictors can be categorised in terms of education and family background. With regard to education, I differentiate three types of degrees, namely, diploma, bachelor degree, and master or doctoral degree. Considering the hierarchy of prestige and quality of universities in China, I further distinguish the bachelor degree into degree from key university (university in Project 211) and degree from non-key university (university not in Project 211). Two dummy variables (diploma, bachelor degree from non-key university) are deployed in the model of location choice for higher education; three dummy variables (diploma, bachelor degree from non-key university, bachelor degree from key university) in the models of location choice after graduation. The father’s occupation is used as a proxy of family background. Given the relatively small sample size for some sub-groups, I classify three groups of occupations. Two dummy variables (managers/cadres, farmers) are used to gauge their respective impacts on young people’s location choice; the reference category is the rest of occupations, such as unskilled and skilled workers, clerks, professionals, and the self-employed. Additionally, a dummy variable (inside Anhui Province) is included to test if the location choice for higher education helps explain the location choice after graduation.

**Empirical analyses**

**Sample profile**

Invalidated questionnaires are discarded, due to missing data or failure to meet inclusion criteria, leaving a sample of 269 respondents for analysis. The data has been restructured so that the units of analysis are ‘person-migration’ observations, each representing one type of migration behaviour. A total of 686 migration behaviours are observed in this sample. Out of these 63 cases (9.2%) have a duration between three months and six months. Excluding the 63 cases gives similar results. This study thus sticks to the length of three months as the cut-off point for defining migration. Before embarking on further analyses, I briefly compare the two location choices (within versus outside Anhui Province) with regard to the key variables of interest (see Table 1).

In respect of location choice for higher education, it can be seen that many students stay in the home province (68% within Anhui as compared to 32% outside Anhui). This is consistent with earlier findings that university entrants have a strong tendency to pursue tertiary education in the same province (Liu et al. 2016). Another study (Ma, Yue, and Min 2009) finds that vocational colleges and non-key universities absorb 80 to 90% of the local students, whereas key universities absorb a much lower percentage. Our sample exhibits a similar pattern: among students staying in Anhui Province, only 9.3%
study at key universities; the rest enrol in either vocational colleges or non-key universities. Regarding family background, a greater percentage of leavers are from families of cadres or managers, as compared with farmers’ families (31.4% versus 10.5%). A reverse pattern emerges among stayers: there are fewer students from families of cadres or managers than farmers’ families (11.5% versus 15.8%).

With regard to location choice after graduation, graduates are slightly more balanced between inside and outside Anhui Province (57% versus 43%). Among insiders, the majority choose the capital city of Hefei or the home city of Chaohu; among outsiders, a large proportion chooses Beijing, Shanghai, Jiangsu, Guangdong, and Zhejiang. This is in accord with recent studies showing that the main destinations of university graduates are the three destinations – Guangdong, Beijing, and Shanghai (Liu et al. 2016) and provincial capitals (Sun and Pan 2014). The data indicates that graduates with diplomas or bachelor degrees from non-key universities have a stronger preference to locate within Anhui Province whilst those with bachelor degrees from key universities or master degrees and above tend to locate outside the province. Regarding family background, farmers’ families account for a larger share of outsiders than insiders (18.7% versus 12.2%).

### Migration for higher education

The binary probit model (Table 2) provides estimates of the probability of acquiring higher education within Anhui Province relative to that of acquiring higher education outside

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>University location choice</th>
<th>Inside Anhui Province</th>
<th>Outside Anhui Province</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>44.8</td>
<td>40.7</td>
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<tr>
<th>Type of degree</th>
<th>Inside Anhui Province</th>
<th>Outside Anhui Province</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Diploma</td>
<td>41.0</td>
<td>24.4</td>
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<tr>
<td>Bachelor (non-key university)</td>
<td>49.7</td>
<td>44.2</td>
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<tr>
<td>Bachelor (key university)</td>
<td>9.3</td>
<td>31.4</td>
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<th>Family backgrounda</th>
<th>Inside Anhui Province</th>
<th>Outside Anhui Province</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Manager/cadre</td>
<td>11.5</td>
<td>31.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Farmer</td>
<td>15.8</td>
<td>10.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Others</td>
<td>72.7</td>
<td>58.1</td>
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<tr>
<td>N</td>
<td>183</td>
<td>86</td>
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<tr>
<th>Post-university location choice</th>
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<tr>
<td>Age (mean)</td>
<td>22.8</td>
<td>22.9</td>
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<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>43.5</td>
<td>43.5</td>
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<tr>
<th>Type of degree</th>
<th>Inside Anhui Province</th>
<th>Outside Anhui Province</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Diploma</td>
<td>36.7</td>
<td>23.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bachelor (non-key university)</td>
<td>44.6</td>
<td>34.0</td>
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<td>Bachelor (key university)</td>
<td>5.4</td>
<td>8.1</td>
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<tr>
<td>Master or above</td>
<td>13.3</td>
<td>34.4</td>
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<tr>
<th>Family backgrounda</th>
<th>Inside Anhui Province</th>
<th>Outside Anhui Province</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Manager/cadre</td>
<td>19.8</td>
<td>17.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Farmer</td>
<td>12.2</td>
<td>18.7</td>
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<td>Others</td>
<td>68.0</td>
<td>64.1</td>
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</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>University location</th>
<th>Inside Anhui Province</th>
<th>Outside Anhui Province</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Inside Anhui Province</td>
<td>79.1</td>
<td>56.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>N</td>
<td>278</td>
<td>209</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The father’s occupation is used to define family background, which is classified into three groups: manager or cadre, farmer, and others. The others’ group includes unskilled and skilled workers, clerks, professionals, and the self-employed.
Anhui. The model is statistically significant and the predication success overall is 72.9% (85.2% for intra-provincial migration and 46.5% for interprovincial migration).

Significant differences are found between different types of degree. Pursuing a diploma or a bachelor degree from a non-key university increases the probability of staying inside Anhui. This is largely in accord with Liu et al.’s (2016) finding that regular university entrants are more likely to move away from their original domiciles than college entrants. The type of degree could serve as a latent indicator of students’ academic ability. The results confirm that the higher the academic ability of the student, the more likely he or she is to leave the home province for higher education (Hypothesis 1).

It is important to note that the aggregation of micro-level migration behaviours is shaped by macro-level forces, which are linked to China’s university and college admission scheme and enrolment process as well as the geographical distribution of HEIs. First, as a result of centralised assignment of admission quotas (each province is assigned a fixed number), young people from different provinces have unequal access to universities and colleges. As many HEIs are funded by local governments, local students enjoy enrolment priority. While tertiary vocational education institutions and non-key universities extensively recruit students from the local province, key universities assume a greater responsibility to admit non-local students (Ma, Yue, and Min 2009). Second, the one-way enrolment process denies graduates’ freedom of multiple choices and assigns each graduate to no more than one university. Third, HEIs are over-concentrated in capital cities (Zhao et al. 2007). In contrast with cities like Beijing (26), Shanghai (10), Nanjing (8), Wuhan (7) and Xi’an (7), there are only three 211 Project universities in Anhui Province, in particular the capital city of Hefei, and two out of three are dominated by science and engineering fields.

A negative relationship is found between manager/cadre and inside Anhui Province, indicating that the father being a manager or cadre decreases the chance of children staying inside Anhui. The findings provide evidence to support the hypothesis that the privileged family background increases the probability of moving away from the home province for higher education (Hypothesis 3).

**Migration after graduation**

I now estimate a binary probit model predicting the probability of being within Anhui Province relative to that of being outside Anhui Province after graduation. The results are

<table>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>0.111</td>
<td>0.65</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Type of degree (ref: Bachelor (key university))</em></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Diploma</td>
<td>1.065***</td>
<td>4.28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bachelor (non-key university)</td>
<td>0.840***</td>
<td>3.59</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Family background (ref: Others)</em></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Manager/cadre</td>
<td>−0.768***</td>
<td>−3.54</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Farmer</td>
<td>0.156</td>
<td>0.63</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Constant</td>
<td>−0.207</td>
<td>−0.98</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total observations</td>
<td>269</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pseudo R²</td>
<td>0.108</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Log pseudo likelihood</td>
<td>−150.30</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

***p < 0.001.
Qualification is a key determinant of graduates’ location choice. Compared with those with a master or doctoral degree, the graduate with a diploma or a bachelor degree from a non-key university has a higher probability of returning to or remaining in Anhui Province. The result confirms the association between human capital and geographical mobility: the higher the qualification of the graduates, the less likely they are to return (Hypothesis 2). Reasons could be related to the earlier-mentioned the nature of labour market, individual characteristics, and socialisation process. Yet, it also reveals a hidden problem created by the hukou system in China. While people can leave their birthplace and work in other cities, they cannot easily obtain the local hukou and enjoy citizenship rights in the host city. Graduates of key universities or those with higher degrees, owing to their higher human capital, face relatively few barriers to acquire the local hukou in the place of employment (Ma and Pan 2014). By contrast, those with relatively lower human capital are discouraged from migrating because of the difficulty of obtaining the local hukou.

One interesting finding is that the effect of family background is still significant but completely opposite from the effect it has on migration location choice for higher education. Children of managers and cadres are more likely to choose the home province; graduates from farmers’ families are more likely to be outside Anhui. This finding offers support to the claim (Hypothesis 4) that graduates’ mobility is negatively selected on family background. This finding reveals how young adults’ geographical mobility is structured by social stratification, which is indicative of the relevance of intergenerational mobility. China is known for its segmented labour market, i.e. the public sector (tizhinei) and the private sector (tizhiwai). In the bureaucratic regime of job control, recruitment in the public sector, whether through civil service examination or not, leaves room for guanxi to play a role ranging from influencing screening to determining appointment. For employment in the private sector, where individual application is common, guanxi may also be used, but for obtaining job information more than substantive help. Our sample shows that slightly over half of graduates

### Table 3. Post-university location choice: home province or elsewhere.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Age</td>
<td>0.025</td>
<td>0.68</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>0.043</td>
<td>0.34</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Type of degree (ref: Master or above)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Diploma</td>
<td>0.907***</td>
<td>5.18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bachelor (non-key university)</td>
<td>0.784***</td>
<td>4.76</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bachelor (key university)</td>
<td>0.500</td>
<td>1.93</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Family background (ref: Others)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Manager/cadre</td>
<td>0.423*</td>
<td>2.47</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Farmer</td>
<td>−0.462*</td>
<td>−2.57</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>University location (ref: Outside Anhui Province)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Inside Anhui Province</td>
<td>0.717***</td>
<td>5.04</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Constant</td>
<td>−1.549</td>
<td>−1.77</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total observations</td>
<td>487</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pseudo $R^2$</td>
<td>0.107</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Log pseudo likelihood</td>
<td>−297.00</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*p < 0.05, ***p < 0.001.
inside Anhui are employed by the public sector for their first job whilst most graduates outside Anhui work in the private sector. In terms of channels of obtaining the first job, around 15% of graduates inside Anhui is through the introduction of parents or relatives, 13% through civil service examination, 58% through individual application; the figure for graduates outside Anhui is 6%, 4%, and 71% respectively.

When seeking employment after graduation, young adults from managers’ and cadres’ families can easier enter into the public sector in the home city or the home province under the influence of parental background. Interviews with those returnees working in the public sector suggest that such influence could be direct or indirect. On the one hand, parents in high-status occupations like cadres and managers have a good likelihood to create employment opportunities and to influence screening and recruitment in favour of their children. On the other hand, parents in high-status occupations are better able to supervise the children’s job search behaviours and to find and utilise *guanxi* in the children’s job search. This corroborates social resources theory that individuals with higher-level positions in the economic and social structure have a greater command of power and resources as well as gain advantage from their positions through the use of social ties and resources (Bian 1994). Compared with cadres and managers, farmers are less likely to have social ties with a higher status (being a cadre or having a high-status job in the public sector). Children from underprivileged families thus benefit less from parental support in their transition to labour market than those from privileged families do, especially in the access to public-sector employment. The peripheral areas are largely characterised by limited job opportunities (often restricted to particular industries and occupations), low wages, and unfair treatment. Young adults from underprivileged families thereby move out of the peripheral home place for more job opportunities, higher wages, and a relatively fairer competitive environment in large cities.

Table 3 also suggests that, controlling for other observable characteristics, studying within Anhui Province is associated with a higher rate of remaining within Anhui Province after graduation (Hypothesis 5). However, the relationship between first move and subsequent move might be spurious, as unobservable characteristics may have a direct influence on both decisions, that is, to study within the home province as well as to remain within the home province after graduation. A recursive bivariate probit model could capture such unobservable effects. Table 4 presents the results of the recursive bivariate probit model, estimating the location choice after graduation together with the location choice for higher education. The first equation estimates the probability of locating within Anhui Province after graduation and the second equation estimates the probability of studying within Anhui Province. The dependent variable of the second equation is an endogenous independent variable in the first equation. The null hypothesis is that the unobserved factors affecting the probability of studying within Anhui Province and the probability of locating within Anhui Province after graduation are uncorrelated: $\rho = 0$. The result of Wald test indicates that the correlation coefficient $\rho$ between the error terms is not significantly different from zero. We cannot reject the null hypothesis. As such, the error terms of the two equations are not correlated. This suggests that the endogeneity problem does not significantly affect the univariate probit estimates. The coefficient of the first move is still positive and statistically significant, reflecting the impact of university location on subsequent migration.
behaviours. As discussed earlier, this significant effect could result from location-specific capital as well as psychological and emotional costs of a long-distance move.

In this research, it is also observed that some educated young adults return to Chaohu after university. In the following, a multinomial logit model is employed to compare three migration choices: returning to the home city, locating in other cities of the home province, and locating outside the home province. Returning to the home city refers to return migration to either the one district or the four counties of Chaohu. Locating in other cities of the home province refers to intra-provincial migration within Anhui Province. Locating outside the home province includes migration to other provinces in China as well as overseas migration. This provides more detailed comparisons than the binary probit model. The results are presented in Table 5. First, lower education qualifications, including diplomas and bachelor degrees from non-key universities, increase the probability of graduates locating in Chaohu or other cities of Anhui Province. All else being equal, the probability of returning to Chaohu increases if the father is a manager or a cadre; moreover, the probability of returning to Anhui Province decreases if the father is a farmer. In other words, graduates from privileged family background are more likely to return to the home province, in particular the home city. Graduates from underprivileged family background are more likely to move away from the home province than return. Once again, the first move plays a crucial role in migration behaviours after graduation. Compared with those studying outside Anhui Province, graduates studying within Anhui are more likely to locate within the home province, choosing either Chaohu or other cities of Anhui Province.
Conclusion

This paper contributes to the growing body of literature on educated young people’s migration in several respects. First and foremost, the present study has extended previous research examining the effect of family background on young adults’ geographical mobility. While earlier studies suggest either a positive relation or no relation between family background and graduates’ mobility (Belfield and Morris 1999; McGregor, Thanki, and McKee 2002; Panichella 2013), this work on educated young adults in China shows a different pattern. There is a positive relation between privileged family background and the probability of moving away from the home province for higher education. Having graduated from university, the relationship between family background and geographical mobility turns upside-down: managers’ and cadres’ adult children tend to return to the birthplace, whereas farmers’ adult children are discouraged to stay in the home province. Young people from different family backgrounds thus adopt different strategies of geographical mobility in their transition to adulthood. When leaving home for university, youngsters from privileged family background have parental support to study outside the home province; after graduation they could further take advantage of parental resources to enter the labour market in the home province or in the home city. By contrast, individuals from the underprivileged family background are disadvantaged in terms of receiving family support to achieve geographical mobility for higher education. After graduation they become further disadvantaged in the process of transition into the labour market in the home place. Post-university migration becomes an important individual response for them to overcome the difficulties in entering the local labour market.

The finding is suggestive of the transmission of inequalities across generations. Guanxi, which constitutes a considerable proportion of job placement in all historical periods of China, becomes widely used in the early years of transition from socialism to a market economy (Bian 1994). Under market deepening, the rising income inequality accelerates the process of class reproduction and poses barriers to intergeneration mobility when those at the top of the class structure become increasingly privileged relative to those at the bottom (Davis and Wang 2009; Jackson and Evans 2017). This study indicates that the transmission of family advantages to children has come to prominence in
recent years. The situation is particularly evident for young people from peripheral areas. As demonstrated by Fan (2015), intergenerational mobility decreases significantly in economically disadvantaged areas. China is certainly not a special case of a decline in intergenerational mobility. In their study on central and eastern European countries, Jackson and Evans (2017) demonstrate that the move from socialism to the market is associated with declining levels of social mobility.

In addition to revealing the role of family background as discussed above, our findings contribute additional evidence in support of educational selectivity. Following its massive expansion, both quantitative and qualitative differentiation within higher education becomes greater. Even when young people from the same peripheral area achieve access to tertiary education, differences such as levels of degrees and ranks of HEIs matter in shaping individuals’ migration behaviors. The best and brightest tend to leave the home province; while graduates with lower qualifications are pulled towards their home province or home city. This finding confirms the idea that young people’s geographical mobility increases with human capital. From the perspective of market transition theory, the transition to market economy gives rise to higher returns to human capital and provides greater opportunities to those from disadvantaged backgrounds by offering channels of social mobility (Jackson and Evans 2017). Educated young people from disadvantaged families and disadvantaged areas do benefit from the rising returns to human capital in China’s transition to market economy via geographical mobility. Indeed, there is a systematic difference in income between educated young migrants and returnees (Du 2015). Yet, do migrants really achieve upward social mobility? The question is beyond the scope of this paper but certainly deserves dedicated study in the future.

Third, this study links migration to and from higher education and addresses the potential endogeneity problem between the two. For educated young adults, movement for higher education does not necessarily spell the end of migration. Following a life-course perspective, this study traces individuals’ migration history and investigates the location choice of young adults entering and leaving universities. Linking university location choice and post-university location choice has been proven to be fruitful. This study confirms that the location choice of university has an effect on the location choice of graduates in their subsequent migration. Also, results from a recursive bivariate probit model provide evidence against the presence of the endogeneity problem between migration to and from higher education.

The present study illustrates the potential of cases studies from the native-place perspective in migration research. The study of a single group of educated young migrants from the same place of origin allows us to observe differentiation within the group and to evaluate the importance of certain factors with regard to migration behaviours. The study is limited by the absence of sampling frame, which makes the findings less generalisable. More works need to be conducted in the future to ascertain whether the same conclusions hold for other peripheral areas in China. Nevertheless, the Chaohu findings clearly demonstrate that the interplay of geographical and intergenerational mobility deserves further investigation.

My final point concerns the issue of immobility and precarious mobility. The uneven geographical distribution of education resource and employment opportunity in China leads to displacement and migration of young people. Some may want to move but remain immobile; some have moved but lead a precarious life. As the author has shown
elsewhere, there are returnees who are ‘trapped’ in the home place where their life satisfaction is low; at the same time, some migrants feel ‘alienated’ in the host place (Du 2015). It is thus important for policy-makers to recognise and eliminate the mismatch between youth aspirations and available resources/opportunities. The government could increase investment and improve the quality of HEIs in the peripheral areas so that young people do not have to move out for quality higher education. Meanwhile, the government could promote activities that increase and diversify employment opportunities in peripheral areas to resolve unemployment and job mismatch among university graduates. Furthermore, hukou reform is needed to better integrate young migrants into the host city in core areas.

Notes

1. The regular HEIs include full-time universities, colleges, institutions of higher professional education, institutions of higher vocational education, and others (non-university tertiary, branch schools and undergraduate classes). Universities and branch schools usually offer four-year undergraduate education and grant academic degrees to graduates (some degrees like medicine and architecture require five years). Institutions of higher professional education and institutions of higher vocational education offer three-year professional or vocational education and grant diplomas to graduates, which can be used as credits towards completion of a bachelor degree.

2. The Chinese economic reform began in 1978 has provided preferential policies to the eastern coastal areas, or the ‘early-developed’ regions, which become engines of growth for the national economy. The inland areas, or the so-called ‘late-developed’ regions, become peripheral in state development.

3. Despite the vast literature on rural-to-urban migration in China, studies from the native-place perspective are also limited and they have only looked at urban-to-rural return migration of migrant workers.

4. Intergenerational mobility refers to social mobility that takes place between generations.

5. Under the dual economy and dual society in socialist China, a differential treatment was applied to two populations, urban residents economically and socially privileged than rural counterparts. Rural residents continue to be disadvantaged by urban-biased policies in the reform era.

6. Key universities refer to universities in Project 211. Project 211, initiated in 1995 by the Ministry of Education of PRC, is aimed at cultivating high-level elites. Among the more than 1700 standard HEIs in China, universities listed in Project 211 constitute only 6%. However, they take on the responsibility of training 4/5 of doctoral students, 2/3 of master students, 1/2 of students abroad and 1/3 of undergraduates. Also, they offer 85% of the State’s key subjects, hold 96% of the State’s key laboratories, and utilise 70% of scientific research funding. [http://english.people.com.cn/90001/6381319.html](http://english.people.com.cn/90001/6381319.html)

7. Family background is often measured by the father’s occupation, education, family income etc. ‘Privileged family background’ refers to the families where the father has a high-status occupation, or higher education level, or higher family income; ‘underprivileged family background’ refers to the families where the father has a low-status occupation, or lower education level, or lower family income.

8. As one of the most populous provinces with a large volume of surplus rural labour, Anhui is well-known for a historically high out-migration rate in China. Chaohu is one of few cities with very high mobility in Anhui Province, the others being Fuyang, Anqing, Lu’an and Bozhou. The local government also encourages and promotes labour export as a way to resolve the problem of surplus agricultural labour force and to increase its finance with migrant workers’ remittance (Anhuinews 2005).
9. There are only two colleges in Chaohu, Chaohu College and Chaohu Vocational and Technical College, granting diplomas to graduates. Chaohu College became Chaohu University in 2002 and begun to offer bachelor degree programmes.

10. The information is solicited from Chaohu Education Bureau.

11. Compared to education and income, father’s occupation status is believed to provide important information about the family’s economic, social and cultural capital. Furthermore, as respondents of the survey were adult children rather than their parents, questions about family income may not get satisfactorily answered. Information about the father’s occupation status rather than the mother’s is solicited, because in a peripheral area like Chaohu the father is usually the main person in the household responsible for the socioeconomic wellbeing of the family.

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Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the authors.

Reference


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