



Minerva Access is the Institutional Repository of The University of Melbourne

Author/s:

Martin, F

Title:

Changing Place, Changing Time: Lifestyle - Oriented Student Switching and the Quest for Temporal Flexibilization

Date:

2026-07

Citation:

Martin, F. (2026). Changing Place, Changing Time: Lifestyle - Oriented Student Switching and the Quest for Temporal Flexibilization. *Population, Space and Place*, 32 (5), <https://doi.org/10.1002/psp.70309>.

Persistent Link:

<https://hdl.handle.net/11343/369760>

RESEARCH ARTICLE OPEN ACCESS

Changing Place, Changing Time: Lifestyle-Oriented Student Switching and the Quest for Temporal Flexibilization

Fran Martin 

School of Culture & Communication, The University of Melbourne, Parkville, Victoria, Australia

Correspondence: Fran Martin (f.martin@unimelb.edu.au)**Received:** 5 February 2026 | **Revised:** 12 May 2026 | **Accepted:** 2 June 2026**Funding:** Australian Research Council, Grant/Award Number: DP230100442

ABSTRACT

Focussing on a group of middle-class women from China who studied in Australia and migrated there post-study, this paper contributes to the nascent amalgamation of educational mobility with lifestyle mobility conceptual frameworks. It analyses Chinese student-switching as a form of lifestyle-motivated middling migration facilitated by Australia's skill-based immigration regime, and driven by the graduates' desires to escape the temporal regime of overwork in recessionary China and obtain greater control over their own time. The analysis shows how the student-switchers use their class-based spatial mobility capacity to offset their gender disadvantage through temporal flexibilisation at everyday and biographical scales. The paper offers empirical extensions to lifestyle migration and educational mobility studies, and its conceptualization of temporal flexibilisation offers theoretical contributions on the interaction of spatial, temporal, and gender dimensions in middle-class migrations.

1 | Introduction

Lifestyle migrations and education-related mobilities have generally been understood as discrete phenomena, with separate scholarly subfields attending to their analysis within social geography and broader migration and mobility studies. However, recent work in population geography (Huang and Cohen 2023) has highlighted that student switching—international students transitioning to permanent skilled migrant visas in their host country (Robertson 2010)—should in some cases be recognized as a form of lifestyle-oriented migration. With a focus on the experiences of a group of middle-class women from China who studied at tertiary level in Australia and are currently living and working there several years post-study, this paper seeks to contribute to the nascent amalgamation of educational mobility with lifestyle mobility conceptual frameworks. Recognizing the Chinese student switchers as middling migrants (Conradson and Latham 2005) whose moves facilitate class reproduction rather than upward social mobility—a widely documented feature of transnational educational mobilities (Waters 2008; Findlay

et al. 2012; Waters and Brooks 2010)—the paper contributes to this special issue a perspective on “sideways” socio-spatial mobility; that is, international migration supporting middle-to-middle social reproduction.

The paper aims to make five main contributions to the scholarship, two largely empirical and three theoretical. First, in revealing Chinese student-switching in Australia as a type of lifestyle-motivated middle-class migration with characteristics specific to the Asia-Pacific regional context, it offers an empirical extension to the field of lifestyle migration studies. This is inspired by Benson and O'Reilly's (2016) call to recognize the role of “lifestyle *in* migration” by seeking lifestyle-related elements across diverse migrant types. Second, the paper provides an empirical extension to the field of international student mobility (ISM) studies by focussing on international students' post-study migrations from a whole-of-life perspective with a human-experiential emphasis, responding to repeated calls for such approaches from scholars in population geography and

This is an open access article under the terms of the [Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-NoDerivs](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/4.0/) License, which permits use and distribution in any medium, provided the original work is properly cited, the use is non-commercial and no modifications or adaptations are made.

© 2026 The Author(s). *Population, Space and Place* published by John Wiley & Sons Ltd.

beyond (Robertson 2010; Findlay et al. 2012; King and Raghuram 2013; Tan and Hugo 2016; Collins et al. 2016). Third, the paper aims to make a theoretical contribution to conceptualizing the entanglement of spatial with temporal dimensions in middle-class migrations by theorizing temporal flexibilisation through migration in relation to classed and gendered power relations. In particular, building on Xu's (2025) insight that international students' capacity to conceptualize and seek "time freedom" through mobility relies on sedimented histories of socio-economic advantage, the paper shows how the student switchers' pursuit of increased discretionary time through post-study migration expresses and reproduces their middle-class privilege. Fourth, the findings further highlight the interaction of spatial and temporal dimensions by illustrating how the student-switchers' migration intentions were redefined iteratively over time, as they compared their accumulating experiences of temporality, work, and gender across Chinese and Australian contexts in their transnational trajectories during and after study. This contributes to complicating extant conceptualizations of post-study migration intentions and the education-migration nexus in Australia, demonstrating the utility of a transnational perspective on these middle-class migrations (Robertson 2013; Tan and Hugo 2016; Tran et al. 2025). Finally, gender-based analysis is a recognized gap in lifestyle migration studies (Croucher 2013; Dixon 2020), and this article contributes a gender-focussed analysis of lifestyle-related migration. Specifically, it provides an analysis of how the Chinese student-switchers' class privilege and attendant spatial mobility capacity are used to offset their gender disadvantage as women, through their pursuit and realization of temporal flexibilization at both everyday and biographical scales through post-study migration.

2 | Migration Studies: Lifestyle, Education, and Time

Benson and O'Reilly (2009, 2) classically defined lifestyle migration as "the spatial mobility of relatively affluent individuals [...] moving [...] to places that are meaningful because [...] they offer the potential of a better quality of life." Such migrants, exemplified in many studies by privileged global north subjects moving either within the global north or to global south destinations, are motivated by a search for meaning and "the good life" based on self-realization, authenticity, and deceleration (Benson and O'Reilly 2009; Osbaldiston et al. 2020).

In recent years, lifestyle migration research has diversified significantly. With regard to motivations, for example, based on a study of German and Dutch migrants to rural Scandinavia, Persson (2019) argues that although these migrants might be classified as lifestyle migrants, the factors motivating their journeys are based more on desires to *escape from* various urban risks (stress, degraded social relations, and pollution) than O'Reilly and Benson's original framework is able to recognize. Relatedly, Zaban and Unger (2025), analyzing a lifestyle migration vector from Israel to Thailand, highlight Israelis' motivation to escape socio-political instability and economic uncertainty.

Lifestyle migration research has also diversified vis-à-vis the geography and directionality of exemplars. Recent work

examines lifestyle migrations from global south to global north (Robins 2019); and a growing body of research focuses on lifestyle-oriented migrations and mobilities from and within Asia, including among retirees (Chen and Wang 2020); youth (Huang 2022; Martin 2023); and professionals (Pieke 2006; Thunø and Li 2020). Particularly relevant for this paper is Beck, Gaspar, and Nyíri's cluster of works on migrations by middle-class Chinese families migrating to peripheral Europe in search of improved quality of life for themselves and their children (e.g., Beck 2024; Beck and Gaspar 2023; Beck et al. 2024). In particular, resonating with the work discussed above on "escape" motivations, Beck and Gaspar (2023) develop the concept of lifestyle exile based on their research with Chinese families using golden visa investment schemes to settle in Portugal and Hungary. They underline that these migrations are in part a negatively framed escape from social ills in China, including educational stress, hypercompetition, and loss of autonomy (see also Chau 2024).

Finally and most sharply relevant for this paper, a recent study by Huang and Cohen (2023) examines the lifestyle-related motivations of Chinese student-switchers in Britain. Challenging assumptions that such migrants are motivated mainly by capital accumulation strategies, the authors underline instead their desire to escape high-pressured work culture in China, and their entanglement of emotional and rational motivations. Inspired by that paper's call for an amalgamation of education-related migration and lifestyle mobility concepts, this article aims to supplement Huang and Cohen's insights with an additional perspective on the operations of time, and more extensive consideration of the entanglements of class and gender in lifestyle-oriented Chinese student-switching in Western destinations.

Other work on education-related mobilities from a population geography perspective has analyzed how domestic and international student (im)mobilities reproduce class relations in a range of contexts (Donnelly and Gamsu 2019; Cervantes-Macias 2025); while multiple articles have begun to examine, and called for further research into, the post-study lives of international graduates, including their migratory practices (Robertson 2010; King and Raghuram 2013; Collins et al. 2016; Tan and Hugo 2016). In the wider field, there is an emerging recognition of the complexity of ISM motivations and experiences beyond upward social mobility and strategic capitals accumulation. Prazeres et al. (2017), for example, recognize that lifestyle motivations inform how international students in the UK, Austria, and Latvia select their study locations, underlining the experiential appeal of specific places, which may also inform longer-term mobility aspirations. However, their analysis remains tied to the strategic framework of distinction-seeking. Waters (2024) suggests a different approach, calling for a move beyond capital accumulation frameworks toward existential models in the study of middle-class Asian education-related migration, underlining the importance of recognizing education migration "part of an attempt to seek meaning in life" (2). This is a central inspiration for the approach taken in this paper.

Recent decades have witnessed a temporal turn in the transdisciplinary field of migration studies (Cwerner 2001; Baas and Yeoh 2019; Ho 2021). A particularly rich vein of work explores lifecourse perspectives; that is, how migration intentions and

experiences and lifecourse transitions and trajectories mutually shape each other (Wingens et al. 2011). Researchers have investigated transnational migrants' temporal strategies in orchestrating care provision across life stages from childhood through parenthood and midlife to later life (Coe 2015; Carling 2017; Lulle 2024; Ho and Chiu 2020); elaborated the lifecourse contexts that inform the decisions and pathways of skilled migrants and their family members, or "linked movers" (Kōu and Bailey 2014; Lam et al. 2026); and explored the intersection of race- and age-based inequalities in migration policy and elderly migrants' experiences (Hepburn 2020; Katz and Grenier 2023). Particularly relevant for this paper, Robertson et al. (2018) mobile transitions framework combines youth studies and migration studies perspectives to address the implications of the fact that spatial mobility has become an important maker of lifecourse transitions for youth today across many contexts globally (see also Robertson 2021; Marchetti et al. 2024).

Studies on the relationship between transnational youth mobility and normative lifecourse in China, specifically, point to the potential for the former to either support or redirect the latter. Wang and Hu (2024), for example, observe that China's "study-abroad fever" is fueled by parental beliefs that overseas study will support children's adherence to normative biographies. But, as in Hansen (2015), they also note that international educational mobility may alternatively afford some students resources with which to negotiate with normative lifecourse demands (Wang and Hu 2024, 13). Relatedly, Liu (2025) finds that disenchantment with normative sexual and gendered life trajectories significantly motivated the travels of Chinese working holiday makers in Australia, and migration let them re-route their biographies in alternative directions (see also Martin 2022).

One of the present study's key findings is that temporal flexibility is a particularly prominent example of the existential values that the Chinese student-switchers pursue in migrating to Australia. In addition to its gendered ramifications, there is a deeply classed element to this pursuit of temporal flexibility. Xu's (2025) theorization of time as an inherited asset in Chinese higher education mobilities shows how the capacity to conceptualize and pursue temporal autonomy relies on students' family histories of social and economic advantage. Based on her fieldwork with both less privileged rural-to-urban and more privileged internationally mobile Chinese university students, Xu argues that the latter group's socio-economic advantage may be seen as "banked time" (2025, 3). This supports their capacity to pursue yet greater temporal autonomy through educational mobility (2025, 59). This conceptualization of time as inheritance and convertible resource—as a form of capital—is seen also in other studies of time, education, and class (Cheng 2014), and is central to my approach in this paper. Education researchers Wladis et al. (2024) crucially note that privilege—higher levels of economic, social, or cultural capital—"can be used to generate more or higher-quality discretionary time" (5). Turning back to migration studies, this speaks to what Beck (2024, 130) has aptly termed temporal geoarbitrage, whereby middle-class migrants "use their capital to opt out from the normative implications [of] the grinding temporal structures of contemporary urban China and choose Hungary as an 'oasis of

deceleration' [...] in order to repossess [...] temporal autonomy." Precisely this logic is expressed in the Chinese student-switchers' transformation of their own time into ever more flexible forms through spatial mobility projects, including international study itself, career gaps on post-study work visas, and permanent migration.

3 | Contexts: China's Time-Squeezed Middle Classes and Australia's Education-Migration Nexus

The social strata understood to constitute China's middle classes emerged after the initiation of market reforms following the death of Mao in 1976. These classes are generally recognized as a group of professionals, managers, and entrepreneurs that is largely urban and enjoys higher-than-average income, occupational prestige, education, and leisure consumption (Chen and Goodman 2013). However, from 2019, sharp economic downturn heralded the onset of a middle-class crisis (Wang and Ge 2020). During the pandemic, China's zero-Covid policy led to major economic disruption; this together with a national property crisis from 2021 intensified economic slowdown, leading to a job market squeeze and sky-high youth unemployment (Ezrati 2024). In this context, mounting popular critiques have arisen regarding the unlivability of contemporary life. A culture of compulsory overwork and increased precarity has engulfed ever-wider segments of the economy; the popular colloquialism "996"—referring to working from 9 a.m. to 9 p.m., 6 days a week—implies a clear critique of China's brutal temporal regime. A more general term for the rat-race grind is *neijuan* (内卷): involution. This was originally an anthropological term describing situations where increased input into a production system fails to increase output. Today, it refers to the inescapable pressure to do more and more without hope that this extra labor will result in any material improvement in one's situation (Wang and Ge 2020). As these popular critiques suggest, economic crisis has produced a recalibration of values: from a premium on striving and success, seen in earlier phases of the post-reforms period, to a renewed emphasis on wellbeing and self-cultivation (Hizi 2021).

A number of practical responses have emerged to these crises. While some espouse "lying flat" (躺平 *tang ping*: passive resistance) and others seek security in government jobs (Mei 2023), a third response open to the economically privileged is to leave China altogether, emigrating to seek better lives overseas. The concept of *runxue* (润学: "run-ology") arose post-Covid, fueled by despair at the devastating social impacts of the lockdowns and fear of looming economic recession. A gendered aspect was also observed, with women particularly keen to emigrate based on their experience of patriarchal constraints in China (Zhang 2022). Run-ology is a collective response to China's middle-class crisis: a form of escape-oriented emigration driven by flight from the unlivability of life under current economic, social, and environmental conditions.

Since the turn of this century, post-study migration to Australia has opened up as a major pathway for middle-class international graduates from China (Martin 2022), and for many, the desirability of this pathway has increased following the social and economic developments outlined above. Robertson (2013)

has analyzed in detail what she terms Australia's education-migration nexus: its government's intentional integration, since 1998, of international education with skilled migration pathways, serving both to increase the attractiveness of Australian degrees and to create a stream of "desirable" (young, skilled, locally educated, English-speaking, and middle-class) migrants (see also Baas 2019; Tran et al. 2025). International graduates with Australian degrees are thus—as the policy explicitly intends—well positioned to benefit from its classic "regime of skill," defined by Shan and Fejes (2015, 227) as a "mode of control and modulation that defines the desirability of individuals in the labor market, shapes the subjectivities, sensibility, and emotionality of migrants and workers, and [...] affords opportunities to some while closing doors to others." Here, "skill" may be understood as socially constructed through a process that engages potential migrants in skills acquisition as a means of selecting desirable "talent" and excluding unwanted migrants (Liu-Farrer 2025).

From the point of view of Chinese students and graduates and their families, the social imaginary (O'Reilly 2014) of Australia as a destination for study and migration—that is, its shared, collective meaning mediated through representations—has shifted over the duration of the research project discussed in this paper. In the project's initial stages (2012–2020), Australia was seen as a sort of lovable backwater: less competitive and dangerous than the USA, with a picturesque, clean-and-green environment on the one hand, but on the other hand technologically backward and economically less dynamic than China itself (Martin 2022, 64–65). The latest phase of the study, however (2023–present), reveals that after many participants returned to China and entered the job market, their evaluations shifted. Especially for those with personal experience of the punishing temporal regime of professional work in China, the possibility of migrating to Australia and enjoying its slower life tempo took on added allure. The confluence of all these contextual factors produces new conditions supporting migration by Chinese student-switchers, motivated by desires to escape involution and to pursue existential values, especially temporal flexibilisation, with its complex gendered and classed implications.

4 | Methods

This article draws on interviews with 35 Chinese international women graduates of Australian universities. I selected participants from a larger group of 56 who participated in an earlier phase of this longitudinal study, which involved intensive ethnographic fieldwork during their student years in Australia between 2015 and 2020 (Martin 2022). I conducted two fresh rounds of in-depth, semi-structured interviews in 2023–2026 in Melbourne and Shanghai, mainly in-person but in a few cases via videocall. Recorded interviews were on average 90 minutes long, but usually took place in the context of longer periods of non-recorded socializing. Interviews were mainly conducted in Mandarin, with one or two in English or a mix of both languages, based on participants' preference. Since the previous study phase allowed me to get to know all of the participants well and to share a reservoir of contextual knowledge about their experiences, interviews were tailored somewhat to each individual's personal situation. Topics were kept intentionally

broad and open. Relevant topics for this paper included their experiences of working in Australia and China, their experiences of pursuing Australian permanent residency (PR), and their feelings about time, including normative gendered life-course demands, their everyday life rhythms, and their hopes and desires for the future. At the time of writing, participants' average age is 31, with the youngest aged 28 and the eldest 39. 15 are living in China, 18 in Australia, one in New Zealand, and one in the UK. This article draws mainly on interviews with those living in Australia, who hold Australian permanent skilled visas (14), other visas with work rights (two post-study work visas and one spouse visa), or Australian citizenship (1). Of these, five are married and three have a young child who lives with them. All participants are referred to with pseudonyms.¹

Primary data analyzed include basic demographic data on participants and their parents, gathered in earlier phases of the study; interview transcripts; and fieldnotes written after each encounter with participants. To move from qualitative data to theorized analysis, I first coded data inductively, seeking recurring themes that linked meaningfully to the research aims. I then tested emerging patterns through focused coding before making interpretations with reference to the key concepts (existential migration motivations and the temporal, classed, and gendered character of the experiences they described). Quotes were selected based on their capacity to crystallize somewhat representatively recurrent themes across the interviews.

The qualitative and longitudinal nature of this study inevitably introduces certain limitations. Working closely with the same group over a period spanning more than a decade means I have developed a level of personal rapport with them, and their statements in interviews may sometimes reflect their sense of what I would be most interested in hearing. Quotations, then, should not be taken as scientifically objective measures of the totality or ultimate truth of participants' beliefs and orientations (which in any case, as the analysis shows, evolve over time and across socio-spatial contexts). I nonetheless hope this limitation is offset by the more holistic, contextualized view that the longitudinal design affords of participants' dispositions, situations, and experiences, and by the depth of reflection supported by heightened trust between participants and researcher.

5 | Lifestyle-Oriented Student Switching

Before discussing participants' interview responses, I provide here a brief overview of the key characteristics of their migrations that mingle those typical of educational and lifestyle mobilities. First, vis-à-vis their social and spatial mobility, the Chinese student-switchers are middling migrants: urban-dwelling, well-educated, and relatively privileged in China, they moved into similarly middling situations Australia, and their migration was imagined through indicatively middle-class identities and aspirations (Conradson and Latham 2005; Robertson and Roberts 2022, 3). Based on occupational outcomes, their post-study migrations support not upward social mobility but class reproduction: a comparison of their employment outcomes in Australia reveals broad similarity with the employment status of their parents in China. Parents worked in a range of upper and lower professional, management, and entrepreneurial roles (engineer, bank manager,

factory owner, public servant, journalist, police, and military officers); daughters with skilled migrant visas in Australia found jobs in broadly status-comparable professions (nurse, teacher, financial analyst, public servant, accountant, social worker, and medical scientist).² While a downward social mobility trend has been observed in some groups of Chinese migrants in Australia due to deskilling (Stevens 2022) compounded by a gender penalty among married women (Ho 2006), this was not observed for skilled visa holders in this study. This is because student-switchers are selected by the Australian skilled migration regime based partly on their labor market situation. Those who remain permanently are mainly those who secured white-collar jobs: this group bucks the migration-as-deskilling trend (of course, not every international graduate can join this select group: see below). Australia's skill regime thus works as a filtering mechanism supporting sideways or upward but generally not downward social mobility for international graduates.³ This situation broadly echoes the large body of work in human geography that recognizes international educational mobility as middle-class or elite social reproduction (Waters 2008; Findlay et al. 2012; Waters and Brooks 2010; Donnelly and Gamsu 2019; Cervantes-Macias 2025).

Second, as the discussion below illustrates, vis-à-vis motivations, the student-switchers' purpose in migrating is largely to pursue an improved quality of life; especially to escape from the temporal regime of middle-class time-squeeze in recessionary China and to obtain greater temporal autonomy in Australia. In contrast to the arguments of many analyses of ISM, these motivations are not based on a strategic logic of capital accumulation, but are postmaterial—focussing on quality of life (Inglehart 1977; Beck and Gaspar 2023)—and existential: connected with the pursuit of self-actualization and life values, including independence, freedom, and choice (Madison 2006; Waters 2024). The increased discretionary time the student switchers pursue through their migrations is valued not (only) as accumulation but more especially in its cashed-out form: as time to be spent, for its own sake, during one's own lifetime and as one chooses, rather than only “banked” and passed on to the next generation (Beck 2024; Xu 2025). It is these postmaterial and existential motivations that most notably echo key characteristics of lifestyle migrations (Benson and O'Reilly 2009).

6 | Chinese Graduate Women Working in Australia

6.1 | Escaping Involution

Many participants spontaneously cited escaping China's involuted temporal regime as a key motivator for their migration decisions. When I interviewed Yanyu in Shanghai in 2023, as she awaited her Australian skilled visa while working for a residential real estate company amid China's property crisis, she painted a vivid picture of the well-being tolls of her high-pressured work situation. She had been especially anxious during 2021, when “work squeezed too much of my time. [...] I was working overtime all the time, and I felt like I just woke up to work, slept, then woke up to work again.” She elaborated:

When I was an intern in Australia, my boss would at least say sorry⁴ if I had to work overtime. [Laughs] [...]

Here, it's “Why didn't you answer my call?” [...] The bosses even hold meetings until 11 or 12 o'clock at night. [...] For three consecutive days! [...] It's very crazy, very crazy now. [...] My colleagues studied at Chinese universities and were educated into this [work culture]. [...] [But] I can't [accept it]: I just want to escape! [Laughs]

With her prior experiences of studying and working in Australia, Yanyu felt she had greater capacity than her China-trained colleagues to resist the grind of their high-pressure workplace. And indeed, the granting of an Australian skilled visa soon after this interview enabled her to actualize her “runology” dream of escape to a different temporal regime through emigration.

Others who had already migrated made related comments. Zhenni offered a wellbeing-based calculus in which earning capacity was traded away in favor of health:

I think if I returned to China, I might suffer from health problems like anxiety or work-related illnesses. I don't want that. [...] Although [...] if I worked in China [...], I might earn more. In fields like banking and finance, they actually earn more [there]. [...] But for me, health is more important. [...] To spend your earnings, you have to be alive! Or are you going to spend all your earnings on hospital stays?!

Pingping, meanwhile, observed:

I'm not the type who is particularly competitive or hardworking. [...] I'm more used to [life] here, [...] including the fact that your work and your life are very separate. In China, your work is your life and your life is your work, with no boundary. Your boss will ask you to do things after you finish work, and you have to do it. [Laughs] [...] I just couldn't handle that kind of life.

Such humorously self-deprecating claims that they simply weren't fit to compete for professional survival in China were echoed by others. Coming from such privileged women— young, urban, middle-class, holding international Master's degrees—such statements cloak the emblematically middle-class privilege of being able to voluntarily opt out of the competition to seek a lower-pressure lifestyle with increased temporal autonomy abroad.

6.2 | Seeking Enjoyment, Self-Realization, and Flexible Time

As well as *running from* involution in China, the student switchers also saw themselves as *running to* enhanced lifestyles in Australia. Several pointed to pleasure projects, including woodworking, travel, ukulele playing, veganism, drawing, and swimming as a channel for self-realization. Like the South Korean women studied by Song (2014), these Chinese post-study migrants framed personal pleasure projects as an antidote to the

ills of high-pressure, high-speed East Asian capitalisms, and saw their own, non-achievement-oriented enjoyment and “right to be lazy” as indicative that they had their “own life” and were becoming “liberated as [...] individual[s]” (Song 2014, 77, 72).

Core to participants' appreciation of the temporal regime of Australian employment culture was the improved work-life balance they felt it allows, which often has a gendered aspect. In some cases, Australia's more time-flexible work culture supported the more equitable sharing of family carework within couples. Fenfang, a professionally ambitious senior financial planning analyst who had recently married and given birth to her first child, discussed how her return to full-time work after several months' parental leave was supported by sharing housework with her husband, Calvin, and sharing childcare with the couple's parents visiting from China (an intergenerational carework transfer common in Australia's Chinese communities: Ho and Chiu 2020). Fenfang and Calvin were also contemplating shifting at least one of their jobs to a part-time basis:

With the intensity of my job, there are full-timers, but they're rare. [...] Often, one [parent] is full-time and the other part-time, so it's more relaxed. [...] Monday to Friday, my work is pretty intense. As for Calvin, [...] I think he often really only has two or three hours of effective work time each day; I mean real, effective working time. The rest of the time, he might be out buying groceries or whatever. He's pretty free, I guess.

In other cases, the relatively flexible temporal organization of Australian work culture led the graduates to positively re-assess the value of their own carework with respect to future children. For example, Qi, a single primary school teacher who was eager to marry and have a child, reflected positively on the story of a colleague who had given up her full-time teaching position for casual part-time work after marrying and having children. Qi related:

When I was studying, I felt that a job was something I would simply have to have: I couldn't not go to work. Now that I'm a bit older, I think sometimes there are other things that could give you a sense of security, and once you have that, then you can make the choice about whether to work.

Shihong, a medical scientist working at a large Melbourne hospital while completing a Master's degree in genomics, similarly shared:

When I was young, I thought I'd definitely have my own career, definitely be independent. But I don't know if it's because my mother brainwashed me or what, but she keeps saying [...] if my boyfriend's very busy [...] then] one of us will have to contribute a bit more to the family, [laughs] and she said—it's the traditional idea—that person has to be me, right? [...] My thoughts on this have changed a bit. I [now] think I needn't [hire a nanny]. Maybe it's because life's more comfortable here. It's not as

stressful as in China. Most people here have a life. [...] So I think I needn't devote myself completely to work.

Accounts like these reflect a broader shift in valuation of “life” versus “work” that is notable throughout participants' discussions: both the conceptual and practical separation of the two, and the higher valuation of “life” in their emerging ethical schema. When family carework is associated with the authenticity of “life,” it automatically attains greater value—even when this runs against the more individualized, post-traditional self-views and life plans that highly educated women like Qi and Shihong previously held. The gendered value of childcare labor shifts from burden to freedom based on the women's class-marked temporal autonomy, expressed through skilled migration and bolstered by the more flexible regulation of labor time in Australia compared with China.

This points toward the overarching theme of temporal flexibilisation. This emerges two main levels: the micro-scale of everyday work rhythms and the macro-scale of gendered biographical time. Reflections on the former ranged from appreciation of the availability of part-time work arrangements (above) and relatively generous annual leave to improved daily work hours and tempo. Yuan had studied finance in Australia, worked professionally for two years in China, then worked informally for a time in Melbourne as a pet-sitter. In 2025—still on a Temporary Graduate Visa—she was employed on a permanent-casual basis in a retail position in a discount pharmacy chain in a Melbourne suburb near her home. When I asked how she saw her situation as a Master's graduate working a low-skilled job, she highlighted in striking terms the favorable temporal experience of her current job compared with her previous “respectable” office-based employment in China. She called the latter “livestock life” (牛马: a colloquialism referencing the everyday grind of office-based work in China): “that feeling that when you go to work, you don't see the morning sun because you're in the subway, then after work you go home on the subway again, and it's dark.” She contrasted this with her current job:

I'm much happier at [the pharmacy] than [I was] in China, considering the time cost, including the time you have to get up and time on the road. Because my commute time is short [...], the time cost I invest is less than in China. Plus we get about forty minutes of break time every day, whereas break time in China was an hour and a half, meaning my overall time at work was longer. [...] In China, [people] pay more attention to [...] whether you look prestigious in the eyes of others. Here, I pay more attention to [...] whether the time I spend on work and my leisure time are relatively consistent or equal.

Yuan's detailed time calculus underlines that increased everyday discretionary time in Australia represents a significant value for her—one that (for the present, at least) outweighs the status-value of more prestigious white-collar employment. Poetically, Yuan symbolizes this with reference to her desire to see the sun and feel connected to the natural diurnal cycle that was obscured in her experience of “livestock” life in China.

Thus, as in the case of the Italian migrants discussed by Marchetti et al. (2024, 1420), Yuan's low-status work should not be seen simply as downward social mobility, but rather as a "detour that pays worthwhile economic and experiential dividends"; "part of a journey of self-development" (Robertson and Roberts 2022, 7).

The second level of temporal flexibilization that participants valued was at the macro-scale of biographical time. This has a deeply gendered aspect insofar as the normative life-course for women in China today is markedly more compressed than for men. For women, a state-endorsed neo-traditionalist lifecourse mandates marriage-and-children before age 30, which among the privileged women able to study abroad often conflicts with hopes for independent life and career. Exacerbating this, time spent living independently away from family and social surveillance in China tends to intensify their critique of the standard gendered lifecourse; and women educated abroad are popularly understood as more likely to delay marriage beyond the "appropriate" age—or even avoid it altogether (Martin 2022).

When I spoke with her in 2023, Niuniu, who had migrated on a spouse visa, was employed as an accountant in a department store in Melbourne and enjoying working her way up the career ladder, while aware that a career-change at a later stage would be possible if she desired. She reflected: "For me, 'hazy future' is not a negative term. [...] The future is hazy because you have lots of choices. [...] In Australia, you don't feel you have a set life trajectory, you don't feel you have to do certain things at certain ages, you have lots of choices. But in China, [...] there's only one way." Although Niuniu had married, she described this as based on her husband's preference rather than her own (and as a way to stop her parents from nagging), and remained determined not to have children. She continued to see her future as open in terms of gendered biography, as well as professional direction: her reference to pressure to do certain things at certain ages is a clear reference to Chinese social expectations around women's marriage and childbearing.

The de-standardization of Chinese women's time-pressured lifecourse as a benefit of migration has been a central theme across all phases of this study, reflected in frequent contrasts participants draw between their own "late" or non-marriages and hometown peers' obedience to the normative schedule (Martin 2022). Jiaying, who had spent over a decade studying, living and working in Melbourne, had re-sequenced the normative gendered lifecourse in a particularly radical way, first becoming pregnant and marrying in Australia without informing her family; and later divorcing and recommencing dating. She shared that her peers back in China thought she should have stayed with her ex-husband despite her unhappiness, prioritizing her son's wellbeing over her own; whereas "in Australia, nobody *cares*. There are so many different *relationships*. It feels like [my situation] is a very *common topic*; everyone has that *mindset*." Jiaying compared her hometown peers to fish in a pond without the worldly experience to know any different: "they just think it's right because everyone does it that way, everyone thinks that way. You have to get married by thirty, you just have to. [...] Nobody ever asks why. [...] But once you truly step outside that framework, you start asking yourself, why is it impossible [to do otherwise]?"

Like others, Jiaying attributed migration's de-standardization of the gendered lifecourse to a combination of distance from and relativization of Chinese norms, and absorption of alternative gender-temporal values in Australia.

6.3 | Lingering Temporariness: Difficult and Unrealized Switches

However, the emphasis thus far on apparently smooth and positive outcomes vis-à-vis class reproduction, lifestyle and gendered temporal gains for those participants who successfully switched to permanent visas post-study may risk downplaying the significant frictions and frustrations of the switching process.⁵ In the larger sample of 56 who participated in the earlier phase of this study, just 20 ultimately obtained and took up permanent residency in Australia, though most stayed on for a few years on Temporary Graduate Work visas and considered attempting to obtain PR, before deciding to leave.⁶ Their years on temporary work visas were marked by legal and personal precarisation (Gilmartin et al. 2021) as they did all they could to amass points toward permanent visa applications amid deep uncertainty over whether they would be successful, given Australia's ever-shifting immigration policy (Martin 2022, 248–252).

Changying's experience represents this well. Originally a student of finance who re-routed to nursing to obtain the points attaching to a designated skills-shortage area qualification, in 2025 she was working as a clinic nurse to secure further PR points, despite realizing she was unsuited to a nursing career. She shared:

I still haven't got PR. [...] I've got 80 [points], now. [...] It should come soon—but I say that every time, you know? The points just keep going up. [...] It's a lot of drama. [...] It's been incredibly frustrating. I've cried to her [girlfriend] so many times. [...] Many people apply for a certain [skills-shortage designated] major, then the immigration department suddenly doesn't want that major anymore.

Despite her anxiety that the requirements might change yet again, though, Changying was at least somewhat reassured by the fact that the points for nursing are capped at 80.

In contrast, Yuan (introduced above) remained on a Temporary Graduate Work visa with seemingly little prospect of obtaining PR, despite her strong desire to do so based on her preference for the decelerated lifestyle she was enjoying in Melbourne. Distinct from the skilled visa holders discussed above, Yuan inhabited a "gap" temporality between Master's graduation and either transitioning to a skilled visa or being forced to leave Australia. To be eligible for PR she needed to seek professional employment in the field of her Australian studies (finance), but remained underconfident about doing so. Twelve months before her visa was due to expire, knowing how eager she was to stay, I asked if she'd begun seeking professional work. Evidently anxious and slightly embarrassed, she replied: "To tell you the truth, I haven't. Whenever I look at the [skilled] visa requirements, I get overwhelmed, it's all so difficult and complicated, so I'm kind of avoiding it." Thus, although Yuan's

move into low-status work in Australia was valuable to her for its reconfiguration of everyday temporality and as a form of experiential self-development, the institutionally determined temporariness of this “gap” period also cast a deep shadow of uncertainty and anxiety over her experience.

7 | Conclusion

This paper has analyzed young Chinese women’s student switching in Australia as a form of lifestyle-oriented existential migration structured by their desires to escape the temporal regime of time-squeezed professional life in recessionary China, and to obtain increased discretionary time and flexibility in Australia’s distinct temporal regime. I have argued that this form of migration expresses and reproduces middle-class privilege, while enabling the women to realize gendered benefits through greater control over their own time at everyday and biographical levels. Throughout the analysis, I have been developing the concept of temporal flexibilization. This refers to one of the core benefits that participants sought in migrating: increased temporal autonomy and scope for greater flexibility in allocating their own time resources. Temporal flexibilization is enabled by spatial mobility, and the concept underscores the interaction of spatial and temporal dimensions: in making their geographic moves, the women also “ran” from what they experienced as Chinese (relatively standardized and “involuting”) to what they experienced as Australian (relatively open and “work-life balanced”) temporal regimes. By changing place, they changed their experiences of time.

In the premium they place on temporal flexibilization, the Chinese women’s post-study migrations reveal the emergence of a cluster of middle-class migrant values characterized by a shift from “upward” to “sideways” life orientations. Participants consistently paralleled their “run” from Chinese to Australian urban work and time cultures with a value shift from striving and achievement to wellbeing and enjoyment; from status-seeking and self-advancement to self-care and self-fulfillment; and from time-squeeze and overwork to work-life balance and increased discretionary time. They also felt their moves marked a shift from restrictive gendered lifecourses to relatively autonomous gendered biographies. I have tried to show how the temporal and gender-related shifts that migration enables are linked. On one hand, some women saw temporal flexibilization at the biographical level as valuable because it loosened the constraints of the normative feminine lifecourse in China and afforded them increased autonomy. Hazy futures in Australia equated to increased scope for personal choice in crafting biographies less constrained by neotraditional gendered conventions. On the other hand, for others, seemingly traditional gender roles were revalued as personal choice, as when maternal carework transformed into a lifestyle value newly accessible thanks to Australia’s more flexible work cultures. Alternatively, this same time-flexibility could facilitate more egalitarian care-sharing within couples. In all cases, student-switching supported the flexibilization of gendered time scripts, while class privilege enabled the switchers’ pursuit of gendered time freedom through migration. This illustrates a complex interaction between class privilege and gender disadvantage, where the former is exercised to mitigate the effects of the latter.

This paper’s findings also illustrate the evolution of participants’ migration aspirations over time and across borders. We have seen how the women’s thinking on where they wanted to live and work shifted as their experiences accumulated over the course of their transnational peregrinations. For many, this followed the multidirectional pattern of earlier years lived in China, followed by several years’ study in Australia, then a few years working in China, then Australian migration. All the while, participants were embedded in transnational communication networks, so that even while living in Australia, they remained aware of ongoing social, economic, and zeitgeist developments in China. These transnational experiences fed iteratively into their evolving migration plans, revealing how these were remade over time as they experienced life and work in both locations and reflexively weighed up the opportunities and limitations of each place, while their own gendered, temporal, and existential values also shifted along with their mobility (Williams et al. 2014; Martin 2022). This adds nuance to the scholarship on international education as migration instrument, where migration intentions are understood to be formed before students arrive in study destinations (Tan and Hugo 2016). While this was indeed the case for some participants, their migration aspirations were also dynamically reshaped—and sometimes emerged for the first time or receded altogether—as a result of their transnational movements over time.

Throughout this paper, a tension has been evident between strategic and existential frameworks for understanding the student-switchers’ quests for temporal flexibilisation. Undoubtedly, both characterizations make sense: the same migratory practice can mark *both* adherence to a strategic logic of competition and status differentiation, *and* migrants’ earnest existential desire to depart from that logic (Waters and Brooks 2010). Those graduates who successfully switched to permanent visas gained more leisure time than they would have working in China, without experiencing significant downward social mobility: a tangible material benefit. However, it does not follow that student-switching must therefore be understood as a purely rational-strategic move. Qualitative attention to participants’ affective experiences reveals behaviors far in excess of rational calculation: recall Yuan’s decision—somewhat perplexing even to herself—to stick with low-status, precarious employment despite her intense desire to stay in Australia and clear understanding that in order to do so, she should seek professional work, as several of her peers had successfully done. Such examples remind us to remain alive to middling migrants’ existential, as well as strategic motivations, and the experiential benefits they gain through migration beyond directly economic or status-related ones.

In closing, it is worth noting that the Chinese women’s escape-oriented lifestyle migrations reflect a wider regional context: that of compressed, high-pressure East Asian capitalisms (Song 2014; Chang 2014). As Beck et al. have observed (2024, 4), these produce right across the region’s new middle classes “a strikingly similar orientation in lifestyle, initially characterized by the rise of the consuming individual in pursuit of leisure and material comfort [...], and then by questioning these material pursuits in the name of a more authentic and moral personhood.” With women’s high levels of education alongside their overburdening with carework expectations as social risk is

redistributed to families (Chang 2014), East Asia's compressed modernities also have related gendered side-effects across the region, producing temporal regimes that leave adult women with relatively low temporal autonomy. It therefore seems possible that middle-class professional women from other parts of East Asia may also find lifestyle-oriented migration, including via student-switching, to slower-paced, less pressurized temporal regimes like Australia's increasingly attractive. This gendered and regional aspect of student-switching motivations among East Asian women more broadly, beyond the Chinese example, would be a worthwhile topic for future research.

Acknowledgements

This research was supported by Australian Research Council grant DP230100442. Deepest thanks to all of the research participants for sharing their stories so generously. Thanks also to the three special issue editorial reviewers and two anonymous external reviewers for their very helpful suggestions on earlier drafts. Open access publishing facilitated by The University of Melbourne, as part of the Wiley - The University of Melbourne agreement via the Council of Australasian University Librarians.

Conflicts of Interest

The author declares no conflicts of interest.

Data Availability Statement

The data that support the findings of this study are not publicly available due to human research ethics considerations.

Endnotes

¹This research was approved by the HASS 2 Ethics Committee at the University of Melbourne. Approval number 2023-26100-37754-3; approval date: 14/03/2023; extension approval number 2025-26100-74457-4; extension approval date: 17/12/2025.

²Since the wider study also includes participants who returned long-term to China post-study, a general comparison of employment outcomes for returnees vs. non-returnees is also possible. This reveals a similar pattern with returnees showing minimal status variance from parental occupations.

³Nursing is an interesting case: it is classified as a profession in Australia but as blue-collar work in China; this led to complex negotiations between daughters who re-trained as nurses to gain points toward permanent visa status and some parents, who sometimes saw this as a status-drop.

⁴Words in italics were spoken in English.

⁵See also n.3 above.

⁶Two others had obtained Australian PR but were living in China, one had applied for PR and was awaiting the outcome at the time of last interview; one is unknown.

References

Baas, M. 2019. "The Education-Migration Industry: International Students, Migration Policy and the Question of Skills." *International Migration* 57, no. 3: 222–234.

Baas, M., and B. S. Yeoh. 2019. "Introduction: Migration Studies and Critical Temporalities." *Current Sociology* 67, no. 2: 161–168.

Beck, F. 2024. "It's All for the Child': The Discontents of Middle-Class Chinese Parenting and Migration to Europe." PhD Diss, Central European University.

Beck, F., and S. Gaspar. 2023. "In Pursuit of a 'Good Enough Life': Chinese 'Educational Exiles' in Lisbon and Budapest." *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies* 50: 4070–4088. <https://doi.org/10.1080/1369183X.2023.2245156>

Beck, F., P. Nyíri, and S. Gaspar. 2024. "Childhood, Migration and the Pursuit of Happiness in Middle-Class East Asia." *Global Networks* 24: e12511. <https://doi.org/10.1111/glob.12511>.

Benson, M., and K. O'Reilly. 2016. "From Lifestyle Migration to Lifestyle in Migration: Categories, Concepts and Ways of Thinking." *Migration Studies* 4, no. 1: 20–37.

Benson, M. and O'Reilly, K., ed. 2009. *Lifestyle Migrations: Expectations, Aspirations and Experiences*. Ashgate.

Carling, J. 2017. "On Conjunctures in Transnational Lives: Linear Time, Relative Mobility and Individual Experience." In *Timespace and International Migration*, Edited by E. Mavroudi, A. Christou, and B. Page, 33–47. Edward Elgar.

Cervantes-Macias, M. E. 2025. "The Production of Credentialized Aspirations: Familial Strategies in Mexican Upper-Middle-Class International Mobility." *Population, Space and Place* 31: e70142. <https://doi.org/10.1002/psp.70142>.

Chang, K.-S. 2014. "Individualization Without Individualism: Compressed Modernity and Obfuscated Family Crisis in East Asia." In *Transformation of the Intimate and the Public in Asian Modernity*, Edited by O. Emiko and H. L. Aoi, 37–62. Brill.

Chau, G. W. F. 2024. "'Get Rich and Get Going': Understanding Chinese Lifestyle Migrants to Western Countries." *Diaspora: A Journal of Transnational Studies*. Pre-Print. <https://muse.jhu.edu/article/945804>.

Chen, J., and B. Wang. 2020. "Unattended' Retirement: Lifestyle Migration and Precarity of the Houniao." *Population, Space and Place* 26: e2369. <https://doi.org/10.1002/psp.2369>.

Chen, M., and D. S. G. Goodman. 2013. "Introduction: Middle Class China—Discourse, Structure and Practice." In *Middle Class China: Identity and Behaviour*, Edited by M. Chen and D. S. G. Goodman., 1–11. Edward Elgar.

Cheng, Y. 'E. 2014. "Time Protagonists: Student Migrants, Practices of Time and Cultural Construction of the Singapore-Educated Person." *Social & Cultural Geography* 15, no. 4: 385–405.

Coe, C. 2015. "The Temporality of Care: Gender, Migration, and the Entrainment of Life Courses." In *Anthropological Perspectives on Care: Work, Kinship and the Life-Course*, Edited by E. Alber and H. Drotbohm, 181–205. Palgrave Macmillan.

Collins, F. L., K. C. Ho, M. Ishikawa, and A.-H. S. Ma. 2016. "International Student Mobility and After-Study Lives: The Portability and Prospects of Overseas Education in Asia." *Population, Space and Place* 23: e2029. <https://doi.org/10.1002/psp.2029>.

Conradson, D., and A. Latham. 2005. "Transnational Urbanism: Attending to Everyday Practices and Mobilities." *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies* 31, no. 2: 227–233.

Croucher, S. 2013. "The Gendered Spatialities of Lifestyle Migration." In *Contested Spatialities, Lifestyle Migration and Residential Tourism*, Edited by M. Janoschka and H. Haas., 15–28. Routledge.

Cwerner, S. B. 2001. "The Times of Migration." *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies* 27, no. 1: 7–36.

Dixon, L. 2020. "Gender, Sexuality and Lifestyle Migration: Exploring the Impact of Cosmopolitan Place-Marketing Discourses on the Post-Migratory Experiences of British Women in Spain." *Current Sociology* 68, no. 3: 281–298.

Donnelly, M., and S. Gamsu. 2019. "Spatial Structures of Student Mobility: Social, Economic and Ethnic 'Geometries of Power'." *Population, Space and Place* 26: e2293. <https://doi.org/10.1002/psp.2293>.

- Ezrati, M. 2024. "China's Middle Class Is Disappearing." *Forbes*, June 7: <https://www.forbes.com/sites/miltonezrati/2024/06/07/chinas-middle-class-is-disappearing/>.
- Findlay, A. M., R. King, F. M. Smith, A. Geddes, and R. Skeldon. 2012. "World Class? An Investigation of Globalisation, Difference and International Student Mobility." *Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers* 37: 118–131.
- Gilmartin, M., P. R. Coppari, and D. Phelan. 2021. "Promising Precarity: The Lives of Dublin's International Students." *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies* 47, no. 20: 4723–4740.
- Hansen, A. S. 2015. "The Temporal Experience of Chinese Students Abroad and the Present Human Condition." *Journal of Current Chinese Affairs* 44, no. 3: 49–77.
- Hepburn, S. 2020. "Retirement Time and the Temporalities of the Migratory Life Course." *Ageing International* 45, no. 4: 434–452.
- Hizi, G. 2021. "Tragic Stability and Elusive Selfhood: On the Drive for Self-Development in Contemporary China." *Journal of Current Chinese Affairs* 50, no. 2: 161–179.
- Ho, C. 2006. "Migration as Feminisation? Chinese Women's Experiences of Work and Family in Australia." *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies* 32, no. 3: 497–514.
- Ho, E. L. E. 2021. "Social Geography I: Time and Temporality." *Progress in Human Geography* 45, no. 6: 1668–1677.
- Ho, E. L. E., and T. Y. Chiu. 2020. "Transnational Ageing and "Care Technologies": Chinese Grandparenting Migrants in Singapore and Sydney." *Population, Space and Place* 26: e2365. <https://doi.org/10.1002/psp.2365>.
- Huang, H., and S. Cohen. 2023. "It's Not All About Money: Understanding Chinese Student Switchers in Britain." *Population, Space and Place* 30: e2749. <https://doi.org/10.1002/psp.2749>.
- Huang, S. 2022. "Be True to Yourself: Transnational Mobility, Identity, and the Construction of a Mobile Self by Taiwanese Young Adults." *Mobilities* 17, no. 3: 333–348. <https://doi.org/10.1080/17450101.2021.1946920>.
- Inglehart, R. 1977. *The Silent Revolution: Changing Values and Political Styles Among Western Publics*. Princeton University Press.
- Katz, S., and A. Grenier. 2023. "The Life Course and Migration: The Social Position of Ageing." In *Handbook on Migration and Ageing*, Edited by S. Torres and A. Hunter, 14–24. Edward Elgar Publishing.
- King, R., and P. Raghuram. 2013. "International Student Migration: Mapping the Field and New Research Agendas." *Population, Space and Place* 19: 127–137.
- Kōu, A., and A. Bailey. 2014. "'Movement Is a Constant Feature in My Life': Contextualising Migration Processes of Highly Skilled Indians." *Geoforum* 52: 113–122.
- Lam, T., B. S. A. Yeoh, and Y. Tan. 2026. "Linked Life-Course: Mapping the Intertwined Trajectories of Skilled Australian Migrants in Singapore." *Population, Space and Place* 32: e70195. <https://doi.org/10.1002/psp.70195>.
- Liu, Q. T. 2025. "Disenchantment, Disembedding, and Reembedding: Chinese Working Holiday Makers and the Remaking of Individual Biography." *Mobilities* 20: 1306–1323. <https://doi.org/10.1080/17450101.2025.2532407>.
- Liu-Farrer, G. 2025. "The Social Construction of Skill in International Migration: Perspectives From Asia." *Annual Review of Sociology* 51: 423–440.
- Lulle, A. 2024. "Middle-Aged Migrants: Expanding an Understanding of Lifecourses and Linked Lives." *Global Networks* 24: e12483. <https://doi.org/10.1111/glob.12483>.
- Madison, G. 2006. "Existential Migration: Conceptualising Out of the Experiential Depths of Choosing to Leave 'Home'." *Existential Analysis: Journal of the Society for Existential Analysis* 17, no. 2: 238–260.
- Marchetti, G., L. Baldassar, A. Harris, and S. Robertson. 2024. "Side-ways Moves to Adult Life: The Transnational Mobility and Transitions of Young Italians to Australia." *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies* 50, no. 6: 1409–1427.
- Martin, F. 2022. *Dreams of Flight: The Lives of Chinese Women Students in the West*. Duke University Press.
- Martin, F. 2023. "Enterprising Self and Bohemian Nomad: Emerging Subjectivities in Chinese Education Mobilities." *Mobilities* 18, no. 2: 312–327.
- Mei, D. W. 2023. "New Changes and Challenges in the Youth Employment in China After Covid-19." *Asian Social Science* 19, no. 6: 84–98.
- O'Reilly, K. 2014. "The Role of the Social Imaginary in Lifestyle Migration: Employing the Ontology of Practice Theory." In *Understanding Lifestyle Migration: Theoretical Approaches to Migration and the Quest for a Better Way of Life*, Edited by M. Benson and N. Osbaldiston, 211–234. Palgrave Macmillan.
- O'Reilly, K., and M. Benson. 2009. "Lifestyle Migration: Escaping to the Good Life?" In Benson, and O'Reilly eds., pp 1–13.
- Osobaldiston, N., F. Picken, and L. Denny. 2020. "Exploring Emotional Reflexivity in British Lifestyle Migration to Australia." *Population, Space and Place* 26: e2328. <https://doi.org/10.1002/psp.2328>.
- Persson, L. 2019. "Lifestyle Migrants or 'Environmental Refugees'? Resisting Urban Risks." *Population, Space and Place* 25: e2254: 1–12.
- Pieke, F. N. 2006. "Editorial Introduction: Community and Identity in the New Chinese Migration Order." *Population, Space and Place* 13: 81–94.
- Prazeres, L., A. Findlay, D. McCollum, et al. 2017. "Distinctive and Comparative Places: Alternative Narratives of Distinction Within International Student Mobility." *Geoforum* 80: 114–122.
- Robertson, S. 2010. "Student Switchers and the Regulation of Residency: The Interface of the Individual and Australia's Immigration Regime." *Population, Space and Place* 17: 103–115.
- Robertson, S. 2013. *Transnational Student-Migrants and the State: The Education-Migration Nexus*. Palgrave Macmillan.
- Robertson, S. 2021. *Temporality in Mobile Lives: Contemporary Asia-Australia Migration and Everyday Time*. Bristol University Press.
- Robertson, S., A. Harris, and L. Baldassar. 2018. "Mobile Transitions: A Conceptual Framework for Researching a Generation on the Move." *Journal of Youth Studies* 21, no. 2: 203–217.
- Robertson, S., and R. Roberts., ed. 2022. "Migrants 'In-Between': Rethinking Privilege and Social Mobility in Middle-Class Migration." In *Rethinking Privilege and Social Mobility in Middle-Class Migration: Migrants 'In-Between'*, pp. 1–26. Routledge.
- Robins, D. 2019. "Lifestyle Migration From the Global South to the Global North: Individualism, Social Class, and Freedom in a Centre of 'Superdiversity'." *Population, Space and Place* 25: e2236. <https://doi.org/10.1002/psp.2236>.
- Shan, H., and A. Fejes. 2015. "Skill Regime in the Context of Globalization and Migration." *Studies in Continuing Education* 37, no. 3: 227–235.
- Song, J. 2014. *Living on Your Own: Single Women, Rental Housing, and Post-Revolutionary Affect in Contemporary*. SUNY Press.
- Stevens, C. 2022. "The Classed Frustrations of Middling Migrants From China in Australia: Suzhi Discourse Meets the Neoliberal Logics of Selective Migration Policies." In Robertson and Roberts eds., pp. 29–47.
- Tan, G., and G. Hugo. 2016. "The Transnational Migration Strategies of Chinese and Indian Students in Australia." *Population, Space and Place* 23: e2038. <https://doi.org/10.1002/psp.2038>.
- Thunø, M., and M. Li. 2020. "Introduction: New Dynamics of Chinese Migration to Europe." *International Migration* 58, no. 3: 5–21.

- Tran, L. T., G. Tan, H. Bui, and M. Rahimi. 2025. "Evolving Pathways: From the Education-Migration Nexus to the Education-Work-Migration Nexus in Australia." *Journal of Sociology* 61, no. 2: 273–290.
- Wang, Q., and S. Ge. 2020. "How One Obscure Word Captures Urban China's Unhappiness: Anthropologist Xiang Biao Explains Why the Academic Concept of "Involution" Became a Social Media Buzzword." *Sixth Tone*, November 4: <https://www.sixthtone.com/news/1006391/how-one-obscure-word-captures-urban-chinas-unhappiness>.
- Wang, Z., and X. Hu. 2024. "The Normative Biography: International Higher Education Fever Among China's Middle-Class Families." *China Quarterly* 261: 1–16. <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0305741024001474>
- Waters, J., and R. Brooks. 2010. "Accidental Achievers? International Higher Education, Class Reproduction and Privilege in the Experiences of UK Students Overseas." *British Journal of Sociology of Education* 31, no. 2: 217–228.
- Waters, J. L. 2008. *Education, Migration, and Cultural Capital in the Chinese Diaspora: Transnational Students Between Hong Kong and Canada*. Cambria.
- Waters, J. L. 2024. "A Life's Work? Unpacking the Existential Meaning of Educational Mobilities for Migrant Families." *Global Networks* 24: e12513. <https://doi.org/10.1111/glob.12513>.
- Williams, N. E., A. Thornton, and L. C. Young-DeMarco. 2014. "Migrant Values and Beliefs: How Are They Different and How Do They Change?" *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies* 40, no. 5: 796–813.
- Wingens, M., M. Windzio, H. de Valk, and C. Aybek. 2011. "The Sociological Life Course Approach and Research on Migration and Integration." In *A Life-Course Perspective on Migration and Integration*, Edited by W. Wingens, de Valk, and Aybek, 1–26. Springer.
- Xu, C. L. 2025. *The Time Inheritors: How Time Inequalities Shape Higher Education Mobility in China*. SUNY Press.
- Zaban, H., and O. Unger. 2025. "Crisis, Privilege, and Lifestyle Migration: Mobility in Times of Uncertainty." *Population, Space and Place* 31: e70136. <https://doi.org/10.1002/psp.70136>.
- Zhang, J. 2022. "'Rùn!': Why Is China's Urban Youth Searching for a Way Out?" MoLab Inventory of Mobilities and Socioeconomic Changes." *Max Planck Institute for Social Anthropology*: 1–7. <https://doi.org/10.48509/MoLab.3467>.