

# Academic Migration, Employability, and Brain Circulation: Professional Integration of Cameroonian Graduates from Zhejiang Normal University in China (2021–2025)

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## ABSTRACT

This article examines the professional integration of Cameroonian graduates from Zhejiang Normal University in Jinhua upon completion of their studies in Zhejiang Province. While a growing number of African graduates seek employment in their host countries, few studies explore the professional integration of African graduates, and more specifically Cameroonian graduates, in China. This study adopts a qualitative approach, interviewing 62 Cameroonian graduates who obtained certificates (bachelor's degrees, master's degrees, or doctorate) in China. The results reveal that professional integration six months after graduation is generally satisfactory, but varies according to individual profiles. Most respondents work in trade (import-export), education, or teaching, and in Chinese private companies. The analysis highlights the key factors related to the professional integration of Cameroonians in China (in the Zhejiang region). Recommendations are being made to Cameroonian students currently in China to improve their career prospects after graduation.

**Keywords:** Education in China; Professional Integration in china; Academic Capital; Social Capital; Transnational Flows

## INTRODUCTION

In the past two decades, China has become a preferred destination for international students, especially Africans. This is because of the rising standard of Chinese education and the variety of courses offered. China aims to develop more world-class universities and invest heavily in higher education. Not only is Chinese education highly revered in fields such as Chinese language and calligraphy, martial arts, and other Chinese culture-related courses, but also Chinese degrees in fields such as engineering, science, medicine, economics and trade, MBA, finance, and others are highly valued. What about those who know no Chinese at all? Many Chinese universities offer courses in English. You can get your degree and learn the most popularly used language in the world. Thousands of foreign graduates pass through Peking University, Tsinghua University, or Fudan University every year to help China become a powerful player in the world's academic circles. Many studies have been done on this academic attractiveness.

However, the majority of studies have been limited to analyzing the student period, leaving aside the crucial transition phase to employment, which determines professional success and the optimization of capital accumulated during studies. For African students, and more specifically for Cameroonians, this transition is still poorly documented. Professional trajectories after obtaining a degree remain unclear, and the mechanisms by which these graduates integrate into the Chinese labor market are not systematically explored. Several questions emerge: What are the factors that favor the professional integration of Cameroonians in China? How does proficiency in Mandarin and the development of networks influence this integration? To what extent do these graduates participate in transnational flows, contributing to brain circulation rather than simply brain drain? This research aims to fill this gap by examining the strategies and resources mobilized by Cameroonian graduates to integrate into the Chinese labor market.

## Theoretical Positioning and Conceptual Analysis

The analysis of this study highlights two conceptual frameworks: Capital and Social Reproduction, and Skilled Migration and Brain Circulation.

### Capital and Social Reproduction

Inspired by the work of Pierre Bourdieu (1986), the study examines: Academic Capital (degree level), Linguistic Capital (Mandarin proficiency), and Social Capital (professional networks). The conversion of this capital in a non-Western migratory context is a central issue.

#### Academic Capital

As Bourdieu (1986), the degree is cultural capital, which is institutionalized. Nevertheless, the value depends on the recognition by the institution, the implicit hierarchy, and migration policies. In China, foreign academic capital is fully operational if it is compatible with the administrative categories of the work permit policy. The state, in this case, is an instance of consecration or devaluation (Pierre Bourdieu 1986). Chinese universities are recognized worldwide for their quality and demanding academic programs. In the scientific and business sectors, they have the advantage of having superior research, modern labs, and international collaborations. The students receive prestigious degrees, which are in demand in the world's most competitive job markets. In fact, many countries, like the United States, recognize Chinese degrees with international accreditations and mutual recognition agreements (CAST & IEA, 2025). In this way, African students have the opportunity to develop their careers or pursue higher education in the most advanced countries in the world. The recognition of Chinese degrees is a key element in accessing the world's most competitive job markets. The graduates have the opportunity to develop their careers in any skilled position in multinational corporations in any country in the world, even in China, which values international experience and the ability to understand Asian cultures.

#### Linguistic Capital

The concept of linguistic capital emphasizes language as an undeniable asset in better integrating into the professional world. Indeed, language is not only an instrument of communication but also an instrument of power (Bourdieu 1982). To be more precise, linguistic capital is an asset in a given field where linguistic competency is recognized and valued (Bourdieu 1991). Therefore, to speak a dominant language in a social space means to possess: Legitimacy, Credibility, Access to resources, and Capacity for influence. In China, mandarin is the dominant language in the professional linguistic market. Therefore, to speak mandarin is to possess incorporated cultural capital and an instrument for economic conversion. In addition, mandarin has its legitimate accent, register, and style. Linguistic capital can be studied based on several criteria. Formal competency according to HSK level. The HSK is the official international exam for mandarin language competency among non-native speakers. It is organized by Chinese Testing International under the authority of the Ministry of Education in China. The HSK exam includes 6 levels ranging from HSK 1 to HSK 6 (Center for Language Education and Cooperation, 2025).

**Table 1.** HSK Levels and Corresponding Profiles

HSK Level	Approximate Vocabulary Size	Profile
HSK 1	150 words	Beginner
HSK 2	300 words	Elementary
HSK 3	600 words	Intermediate
HSK 4	1,200 words	Upper Intermediate
HSK 5	2,500 words	Advanced
HSK 6	5,000+ words	Proficiency

In order to work in China, most employers demand at least: HSK 4 or HSK 5. Practical competence, i.e., ability to negotiate, to take part in meetings, etc. Interactional fluency: ease in informal settings. Symbolic capital associated with interactional fluency: positive perception by Chinese employers. Language is a key element in

differentiating access to employment, rate of integration, level of wages, and professional progress. Linguistic capital is as important as academic capital in integration.

## **Social Capital**

As defined by Bourdieu (1986) in "The Forms of Capital" (Handbook of Theory and Research for the Sociology of Education), Social capital refers to the sum of real or potential resources derived from a strong network of relationships, whether formal or informal. Social capital is crucial for cultivating strategically valuable relationships, enabling access to information, recommendations, and employment contracts, thereby accelerating professional integration. This is exemplified by networks such as academic communities, student and professional associations, African commercial networks, and Sino-African digital platforms like WeChat groups and specialized job search forums. Empirically as Portes (1998), social capital has been shown to influence the time it takes to obtain a first job, the sector of activity, the type of contract, and job stability. In a job market with little transparency, recruitment is generally done through recommendations rather than advertisements.

## **Skilled Migration and Brain Circulation: The Choice of China for Professional Integration**

As defined by Salt (1997), skilled migration describes the movement of people with high academic capital (bachelor, master, doctorate) and skills. Skilled migration, historically viewed as a South-North flow, is now characterized by emerging South-South movements, particularly towards China, which is reshaping traditional migration hierarchies. Student migration is evolving from a temporary stage to a phase of strategic capital accumulation, involving academic, linguistic, social, and symbolic capital. The transition from student to skilled worker is a structural process involving administrative requalification, conversion of academic capital to economic capital, and integration into the local professional field, progressively leading to labor market integration. China serves as a strategic training and working hub for African students, making student migration a preparatory stage for professional migration. Drawing on Bourdieu's theory, skilled migration can be seen as a strategy for capital maximization, where individuals seek locations that best convert academic capital, value linguistic capital, and activate social capital. The decision to stay in China post-studies is a strategic choice influenced by migration policies, economic prospects, and symbolic hierarchies, indicating that skilled migration is no longer a unidirectional movement. Rather, it may be considered as part of circulation logics, as suggested by the concept of brain circulation, as theorized by AnnaLee Saxenian (2005) in *The New Argonauts: Regional Advantage in a Global Economy*. According to Saxenian (2005), this concept of brain circulation goes beyond the opposition between brain drain/brain gain by considering the dynamic movement of skills. For foreign graduates in China, and more specifically for Cameroonians, this phenomenon may be characterized by four dimensions:

**The circulation of skills:** As Saxenian (2005) observed, graduates will be able to transfer their skills and know-how from the host country to the country of origin. This will be done by applying professional techniques learned in China to projects in Africa. The direct implication of this phenomenon is that academic capital, as well as linguistic capital, will be used outside the specific social field, thus valorizing skills on several territories.

**The creation of transnational networks:** Saxenian (2005) documented that skilled migrants will be able to create social networks that are connected to several countries. Indeed, several Sino-African networks can be created for the purposes of trade, as well as digital platforms such as WeChat, LinkedIn, WhatsApp, to maintain social networks. The direct implication of this phenomenon is that social capital becomes a lever of strategic conversion to facilitate integration.

**The creation of distance investment:** According to Saxenian (2005), graduates will be able to invest in projects or businesses in their home countries while staying in another country. This will help to create the circulation of accumulated resources without the need to go back to the home country.

**Economic collaborations:** As Saxenian (2005) argued, brain circulation will create transnational partnerships. In this case, skilled migration will be used to create bilateral economic development.

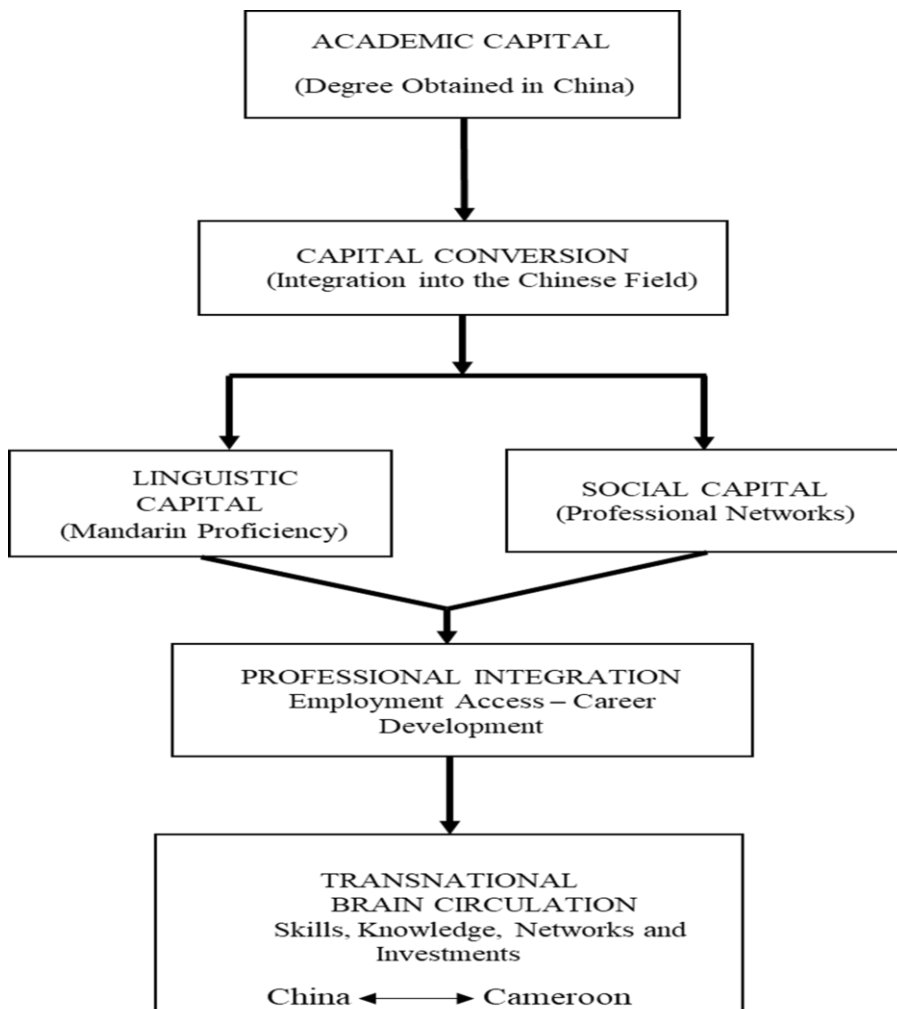
**Table 2.** Dimensions of Brain Circulation

Dimension	Main function	Concrete example
Circulation of skills	Dissemination of know-how	Training or technical transfer
Transnational networks	Access to opportunities	Professional WeChat groups
Remote investment	Mobilization of economic resources	China-Cameroon start-ups
Economic collaborations	Creation of bilateral flows	Import/export, joint projects

The circulation of the brain converts skill migration into a dynamic process that is multidirectional, connecting academic capital, linguistic capital, and social capital in a transnational space.

### Conceptual Model and Analysis

The integration of young graduates into the labor market can be explained by a three-component model: academic capital, which encompasses qualifications and theoretical knowledge; linguistic capital, meaning proficiency in the language of the host country, essential for effectively leveraging these skills; and social capital, which includes relationships and networks, facilitating access to job information and mentorship. The interaction of these three forms of capital drives the dynamic process of professional integration.



**Figure 1.** conceptual framework of professional integration

Academic capital, represented by a degree obtained in China, is essential for the official recognition of skills, but insufficient for accessing the Chinese job market. The latter requires complementary linguistic and social capital. Linguistic capital, and more specifically, fluency in Mandarin (HSK 4-6), is crucial for professional communication and legitimizes academic qualifications, often constituting the main determining factor for access to and advancement in careers.

Social capital, encompassing professional networks such as academic, African, and Sino-African networks, provides access to opportunities, reduces uncertainty, and multiplies other forms of capital, thus enabling the exploitation of academic and linguistic resources for concrete purposes.

The brain drain results from the strategic mobilization of these three forms of capital in a transnational space. It transcends the simple brain drain or acquisition by allowing graduates to facilitate the exchange of skills, networks, and investments between China and Cameroon, acting simultaneously as a product and amplifier of the mobilized capital.

### Main Hypotheses

Capital and Professional Integration: Academic capital, linguistic capital, and social capital have a positive impact on access to professional integration.

Linguistic and Social Capital as Mediators: The mastery of the Mandarin language and social capital act as mediators between academic capital and professional integration.

Brain Circulation as Result and Amplifier: The graduates who decide to stay in China are involved in the dynamics of brain circulation; local integration is converted into a transnational opportunity.

To facilitate comprehension, the equation of professional integration as a function of the various capitals is as follows:

$$IP_i = \beta_0 + \beta_1 CA_i + \beta_2 CL_i + \beta_3 CS_i + \epsilon_i$$

Where:

$IP_i$  = level of professional integration of individual

$CA_i$  = academic capital

$CL_i$  = linguistic capital

$CS_i$  = social capital

$\beta_0$  = constant

$\beta_1, \beta_2, \beta_3$  = impact coefficients

$\epsilon_i$  = error term

$\beta_1 > 0$ : The higher the academic capital, the better the integration.

$\beta_2 > 0$ : Mastery of Mandarin significantly improves access to employment.

$\beta_3 > 0$ : Professional networks increase the probability of integration.

In the case where integration is bivariate (employed = 1, not employed = 0), a logistic regression is used:

$$P(IP_i=1) = 1 / (1 + e^{-(\beta_0 + \beta_1 CA_i + \beta_2 CL_i + \beta_3 CS_i)})$$

This makes it possible to estimate the probability of being professionally integrated.

### Research Method

#### Study Population

This study examines the employability of Cameroonian graduates trained in China, specifically those from Zhejiang Province and Jinhua City, given China's growing importance as a destination for Cameroonian students. Thanks to its scientific and technological advancements, China is attracting global interest and surpassing the United States in key technological fields. The research focuses on 62 graduates of Chinese universities currently

working full-time in China. Participants were interviewed about their academic background, job search, reasons for choosing not to return to Cameroon, and their advice to future students. A structured interview guide facilitated the exploration of various topics. The selection criteria for participants were possession of a Chinese university degree and professional integration in China. To do this, we mainly used the proximity strategy and WhatsApp and WeChat, which are online audio and video calling applications, in order to get in touch and make appointments with the object of our study.

### Data Collection and Analysis Instruments

The study employs a qualitative approach with semi-structured interviews conducted via tape recorder or telephone to gather data, justified by the geographical distribution of respondents across China. A total of 62 participants (39 men, 23 women) were involved, comprising 14 with PhDs, 28 with Master's degrees, and 20 with Bachelor's degrees. Interviews were held from September 2023 to September 2025, averaging 30 minutes each. Consent was obtained, and confidentiality assured. Data transcription preceded thematic analysis. IBM SPSS was utilized for reliability tests, while SmartPLS performed PLS-SEM to analyze relationships affecting professional integration of Cameroon graduates in China, with Cronbach's Alpha applied to Likert scale responses.

### Results and Interpretation

This part is a statistical study on the experiences of 62 Cameroonians who studied in China and decided to work there at the end of their studies, between 2021 and 2025. In this section, the analysis is on the experiences in professional integration in China, and recommendations to Cameroonian students in China on what to do in order to better capitalize on their foreign studies, in general, and in China, in particular.

**Table 3.** Interview Structure

No	Question	Response Options
1	What is your gender?	Male / Female / Prefer not to say
3	What is your nationality?	Open response
4	What degree did you obtain in China?	Bachelor / Master / PhD
5	What is your field of study?	Business / Engineering / Medicine / Social Sciences / Others
6	Which university did you attend in China?	Open response
7	Are you currently employed?	Yes / No
8	In which sector are you currently working?	Public sector / Private sector / Self-employed / NGO
9	How long did it take you to obtain your first job after graduation?	Immediately / Less than 3 months / 3--6 months / More than 6 months
10	What is your current monthly salary range?	Less than 3000 RMB / 3000--6000 RMB / 6000--10000 RMB / Above 10000 RMB
11	What type of contract do you have?	Permanent / Temporary / Internship / Self-employed
12	Does your current job match your field of study?	Yes / No / Partially

Scale: 1 = Strongly Disagree, 2 = Disagree, 3 = Neutral, 4 = Agree, 5 = Strongly Agree\*

No	Statement
13	I decided to stay in China because of better career opportunities.
14	Language barriers affect my professional integration.
15	Visa policies create challenges for foreign graduates seeking employment.
16	My Chinese language proficiency (HSK level) helps my career development.
17	Cultural differences affect workplace integration.

18	Networking opportunities helped me find employment in China.
19	Employers in China value international graduates.
20	Administrative procedures make employment difficult for foreigners.
21	I plan to stay and build my career in China long term.
22	I intend to start my own business in China.
23	I am considering migrating to another country for better opportunities.
24	I believe China offers good long-term career prospects for foreign graduates.
25	I would recommend studying in China to other international students.

**Table 4.** Demographic and Professional Profile of Respondents

Variable	Category	Frequency (N)	Percentage (%)
Gender	Male	39	63
	Female	23	37
Highest Degree Obtained	Bachelor's	20	32
	Master's	28	45
	Doctorate	14	23
Field of Study	International Business / Commerce	24	38
	Engineering / Technology	6	9.7
	Languages / Translation	18	29
	Social Sciences	14	22.6
Employment Sector in China (2023–2025)	International Trade (Import–Export)	19	31
	Chinese Private Companies	17	27
	Teaching / Language Training	9	15
	Technology / IT	8	13
	NGOs / International Organizations	4	6
	Others	5	8
Time to First Job	Less than 3 months	26	42
	3–6 months	23	37
	More than 6 months	13	21
Main Motivation to Stay in China	Economic Opportunities	30	48
	Professional Networks	13	21
	More Competitive Salary	11	17
	International Experience	6	9
	Other Personal Reasons	3	5
Major Difficulties Encountered	Work visa acquisition	27	44
	Professional language barrier	24	39
	Hiring discrimination	16	26
	Degree recognition	11	18
	Contract instability	9	14
Average Monthly Income	Bachelor's	20	4,000 RMB
	Master's	28	8,000 RMB
	Doctorate	14	11,000 RMB
Future Professional Intentions (2026)	Stay in China (>5 years)	29	46
	Create a Sino–African business	18	29
	Return to Cameroon	9	15
	Migrate to another country	6	10

## Sociodemographic Profile

**Table 5.** Gender Distribution

Category	Frequency	Percentage
Men	39	63%
Women	23	37%

The information obtained reveals a dominance of males in the sample, as 63% of the respondents were males, compared to 37% who were females. This reveals that the migration of Cameroonian students to China is dominated by males. The ratio of males to females is 1.7 men per 1 woman.

**Table 6.** Degrees Obtained

Category	Frequency	Percentage
Bachelor's Degree	20	32%
Master's Degree	28	45
Doctorate	14	22

The data collected show that: 45% of respondents hold a Master's degree, 22% a Doctorate, and 32% a Bachelor's degree. This means that 67% of the total number of graduates have a second or third cycle degree (Master's + Doctorate). This is a very high qualification level for a global society.

**Table 7.** Field of Study

Category	Frequency	Percentage
International Business	24	38 %
Engineering/Technology	6	9.67%
Languages/Translation	18	29 %
Social Sciences	14	22.58%

The study indicates a high concentration of graduates in the fields of Commerce/International Business (38%) and Languages/Translation (29%). These two fields account for a total of 67% of the study. The Technical fields, i.e., Engineering/Technology, form a minority of the graduates, at 9.67%. This finding aligns with the economic dynamics between China and Africa, as well as the evolution of trade between them, which offers opportunities for economic intermediation. This indicates a strategy of migrant integration, which aims at rapid integration into commerce and international business. The graduates are potentially well-positioned for: Import/export, International logistics, Commercial representation, Sino-African entrepreneurship.

**Table 8.** Employment Sectors in China (2021-2025)

Category	Frequency	Percentage
International Trade (Import–Export) Chinese private companies	19	31%
	17	27 %
Education / language training	9	15 %
Technology / IT	8	13 %
NGOs / international organizations	4	6 %
Other	5	8 %

The data indicates that the leading sectors for graduates are International Trade (31%) and work in Private Chinese Companies (27%), totaling 58%. Education/Language Training represents 15% and Technology/IT accounts for 13%, making up 28% combined. Graduates predominantly enter sectors requiring linguistic or technical capital. NGOs/International Organizations (6%) and others (8%) together constitute 14%. International Trade focuses on goods/services exchange between China and Africa, whereas Private Companies emphasize local market integration. Education roles rely on linguistic skills, and Technology requires specialized knowledge, highlighting the importance of social and academic capital throughout these sectors.

**Table 9.** Time to Obtain First Job

Time	Frequency	Percentage
< 3 months	26	42 %
3-6 months	23	37 %
> 6 months	13	21%

42% of graduates secure jobs in under 3 months, while 37% find employment between 3 and 6 months. Overall, 79% achieve this within 6 months, indicating efficient professional integration. Quick integration is linked to leveraging academic and social capital, primarily in Commerce and International Business. Those taking longer encounter market competition and demand for stronger linguistic skills. Specializations in low demand contribute to longer job searches, highlighting the importance of complementary capital.

**Table 10.** Motivations to Stay and Work in China

Category	Frequency	Percentage
Economic opportunities	30	48 %
Established professional networks	13	21%
More competitive salary than in Cameroon	11	17 %
International experience	6	9 %
Other personal reasons	3	5 %

The main motivation for graduates is economic (48%), focusing on maximizing economic capital through sectors like international trade and private Chinese companies. Professional networks (21%) are valued for job information and recommendations, emphasizing the importance of social capital. Competitive salary (17%) reflects economic concerns related to the Cameroonian market, aligning with Bourdieu's theory of capital. International experience (9%) offers intercultural benefits, enhancing symbolic capital. Other personal reasons (5%) are less impactful on economic integration but highlight personal migration aspects.

**Table 11.** Difficulties Encountered

Category	Percentage
Professional language barrier	39%
Hiring discrimination	26%
Recognition of qualifications	18 %
Obtaining a work visa	44 %
Contractual instability	14 %

The primary constraints faced by individuals in China include difficulties in obtaining a work visa (44%), which limits legal residence and professional mobility despite adequate qualifications. The visa is more than an administrative requirement; it acts as the foundation of all rights for a migrant to be employed, have social stability, mobility, and even integration into the host country. Without the proper visa, graduates will neither find stable jobs nor will there be labor rights and professional development in the host country. Therefore, visa regulations are important in determining labor market inclusion and socio-economic stability. It results in a structural conflict within international education systems since universities entice foreign students using financial incentives and international collaboration initiatives but there is no guarantee of career opportunities for graduates.

### Psychological and Social Implications

The lack of certainty with regards to visas leads to great psychological tension among graduates. Concerns with regards to one's immigration status can result in the following psychological and social difficulties: career planning, financial stability, mental wellbeing, life choices and social inclusion. A graduate who does not enjoy any legal certainty will have to be constantly worried about deportation, unemployment, and visa renewal issues. As such, psychological security can never become a precondition for professional success in China.

There are many cases where African (Cameroonians) graduates graduate with great credentials, but then face difficulty trying to get employment due to restrictive visa requirements. Immigration policies of China about employing foreigners are highly stringent. There are instances where the employer will need to justify the need to hire a foreigner. This makes it difficult for companies to hire foreigners due to expensive processes.

Furthermore, this issue is associated with global competition involving the governance of migration and the protection of labor markets. As such, China seeks to protect its own labor market while regulating that of foreigners as dictated by economic and political factors. As such, immigration laws have become more than just laws; they are instruments of labor market governance and national sovereignty. The problem is even more pertinent for Cameroonian graduates who lack strong institutional backing to sponsor their employment applications. Unlike highly demanded expatriates hired directly by multinational firms, Cameroonian graduates do not enjoy any institutional backing when navigating immigration laws.

The professional language barrier (39%) hinders professional integration, even for those proficient in academic Mandarin.

Graduates who only have academic or intermediate level of Mandarin may find it difficult to communicate in professional settings, understand what is expected from them at work, attend meetings, and establish connections with employers or other colleagues. This lack of language skills may hinder graduates' chances of employment since the most important requirement that employers look for in job candidates is their ability to integrate in work communication systems. It should be noted that the significance of language is connected with processes of globalization. Indeed, Mandarin is used as a form of economic capital in the Chinese labor market. It means that those who have a good command of Mandarin are likely to have better integration due to the ability to contact with employers.

Hiring discrimination (26%) poses social barriers based on nationality or origin.

This shows how labor market access not only depends on qualification and competence but also involves social perception related to nationality, race, and foreign identity. The African graduates might face social discrimination such as stereotyping or exclusivism while being recruited. Forms of discrimination may include employers' resistance towards recruiting foreign candidates, preference for local employees, stereotypes about competence, racial discrimination and unequal treatment while interviewing.

These factors result in inequalities among graduates and local candidates, although they might have similar educational background. Social discrimination can take an indirect form involving structural factors and culture. Employers might use different reasons to exclude candidates such as language barriers, cultural fit, administrative inconveniences or clients' wishes. But sometimes the mentioned explanations may mask hidden racism or prejudice about nationality.

According to this study, there are some Cameroonian graduates who feel like social outsiders in China's labor market. It does not mean that there is animosity towards them, but there are some structural imbalances in international labor market systems with regard to foreign workers.

Non-recognition of degrees (18%) restricts job access, and contractual instability (14%) impacts economic stability, affecting job security.

A few Cameroonian graduates may experience challenges due to inadequate appreciation of the worth of their academic qualifications by potential employers or educational establishments. Such a challenge can be faced in the following circumstances, where employers are skeptical about foreign specialization in the area; professional qualifications have no equivalents in the local setting and foreign qualifications are generally not well-understood.

The above challenge is also based on the global hierarchy of higher education systems. There exist universities and other academic institutions that enjoy more international prestige compared to others. In such a case, graduates may lack professionalism even with good capabilities.

**Table 12.** Average Monthly Income (in RMB)

Category	Monthly Income (RMB)
Bachelor's Degree	4 000 RMB
Master's Degree	8000 RMB
Doctorate	11000 RMB

Average salaries increase with educational degrees: Bachelor's at 4,000 RMB, Master's at 8,000 RMB, and Doctorate at 11,000 RMB, highlighting a linear relationship between academic qualifications and income. Positions depend on degrees, with higher education facilitating access to better-paying roles and requiring various types of capital.

**Table 12. Professional Perspectives (2026)**

Category	Frequency	Percentage
Stay in China for more than 5 years	29	46 %
Start a Sino-African business	18	29%
Return to Cameroon	9	15%
Migrate to another country	6	9%

The results show that 46% of graduates aspire to stay long-term (> 5 years) in China. The majority of graduates intend to stay long-term in the Chinese market. This shows that they have successfully transferred their academic, linguistic, and social capital. It also shows that they have access to interesting economic opportunities and have acquired professional experience in a favorable environment for the mobility of skilled workers. This confirms that skilled migration to China is sustainable. 29% intend to create a Sino-African company. This shows that they have a transnational entrepreneurial strategy. These graduates have a transnational entrepreneurial logic. This shows that they are engaged in commercial brain circulation. A Sino-African company enables import-export as well as economic exchanges, professional and economic networks, as well as skill and know-how transfer between China and Africa. 15% intend to go back to Cameroon, and 10% intend to migrate to another country. These are graduates who are part of the minority that have a reverse or alternative mobility strategy. Main observation: 75% of graduates choose sustainable or entrepreneurial integration in China. This shows that they have a strong orientation towards South-South brain circulation.

**Measurement Model Assessment**

For the evaluation of the measurement model, the software SmartPLS has been employed, and the guidelines suggested by Joseph F. Hair Jr. on Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM) have been considered. The evaluation has been conducted on the basis of the following constructs: Language and Cultural Integration (LCI), Networking Capital (NC), Institutional Barriers (IB), Professional Integration (PI), Future Career Orientation (FCO). All the constructs have been measured by reflective indicators with the help of a Likert scale.

**Indicator Reliability**

The reliability of the indicators has been checked by testing the outer loadings of each of the indicators. As per Joseph F. Hair Jr., if the outer loading of each of the indicators is above 0.70, it shows reliability.

**Table 13. Indicator Loadings**

Construct	Indicator	Loading
Language & Cultural Integration	LCI1	0.82
	LCI2	0.79
	LCI3	0.84
Networking Capital	NC1	0.81
	NC2	0.77

	NC3	0.83
Institutional Barriers	IB1	0.74
	IB2	0.80
	IB3	0.76
	IB4	0.72
Professional Integration	PI1	0.85
	PI2	0.88
	PI3	0.83
Future Career Orientation	FCO1	0.84
	FCO2	0.80
	FCO3	0.82

All the loadings are above the recommended level of 0.70, showing good reliability.

### Internal Consistency Reliability

Internal consistency reliability has been checked by testing the value of Cronbach's Alpha and Composite Reliability (CR)

**Table 14. Reliability Metrics**

Construct	Cronbach Alpha	Composite Reliability
Language & Cultural Integration	0.82	0.88
Networking Capital	0.80	0.87
Institutional Barriers	0.84	0.89
Professional Integration	0.86	0.91
Future Career Orientation	0.83	0.88

All values exceed 0.70, confirming acceptable reliability.

### Convergent Validity

Average Variance Extracted (AVE) was used to measure convergent validity.

**Table 15. Average Variance Extracted (AVE)**

Construct	AVE
Language & Cultural Integration	0.65
Networking Capital	0.63
Institutional Barriers	0.60
Professional Integration	0.72
Future Career Orientation	0.66

All values are above 0.50, which confirms convergent validity.

### Discriminant Validity

Discriminant validity is measured by the following factors: Fornell-Larcker criterion and HTMT ratio

**Table 16. Fornell-Larcker Criterion**

Construct	LCI	NC	IB	PI	FCO
LCI	0.81				
NC	0.47	0.79			
IB	-0.35	-0.41	0.77		

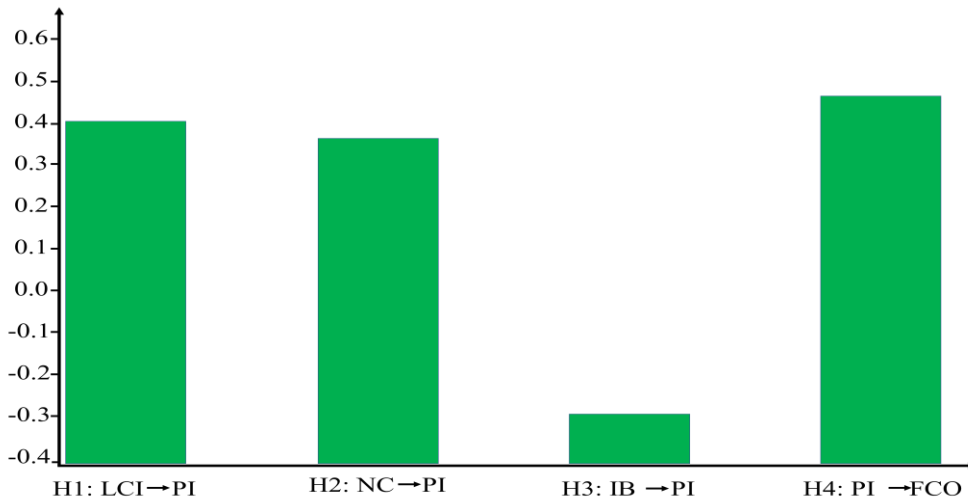
PI	0.52	0.56	-0.44	0.85	
FCO	0.48	0.50	-0.39	0.62	0.81

The square root of AVE (bold values) is greater than the correlations, confirming discriminant validity.

### Structural Model Assessment

After validating the measurement model, the structural relationships between constructs were analyzed using bootstrapping with 5000 resamples in SmartPLS.

### Path Analysis



**Figure 2.** Hypothesis Testing Results

The findings show that language proficiency and networking capital are the strongest predictors of professional integration, while institutional barriers have a negative impact on integration.

Linguistic and cultural integration is the second strongest predictor of professional integration. This implies that Chinese (Mandarin) language proficiency is a key advantage in the Chinese labor market. In addition, knowledge of cultural codes (guanxi, face, hierarchy) helps in getting hired. Moreover, those who are able to integrate culturally are 41% more likely to achieve integration. In addition, network capital is very important in China for several reasons. Firstly, because of the hidden job market (many jobs are not publicly advertised), secondly because of trust (Chinese employers value recommendations), and thirdly because of mentorship (networks provide access to professional mentors).

**Table 17: Coefficient of Determination (R<sup>2</sup>)**

Endogenous Variable	R <sup>2</sup>
Professional Integration	0.64
Future Career Orientation	0.55

An R<sup>2</sup> value of 0.64 indicates that the model explains a substantial portion of the variance in professional integration.

**Table 18: Effect Size (f<sup>2</sup>)**

Relationship	f <sup>2</sup>	Interpretation
LCI → PI	0.21	Medium
NC → PI	0.18	Medium
IB → PI	0.14	Small
PI → FCO	0.26	Medium

## DISCUSSION

The results demonstrate the importance of human capital and social capital as tools for the professional integration of Cameroonian graduate students in China. The integration of language and culture has a positive impact on employment opportunities, while network capital has a positive impact on access to labor market information. On the contrary, institutional factors have a negative impact on integration.

The professional integration of Cameroonian graduates in China relies on three key factors: linguistic and cultural capital ( $\beta = 0.41$ ), social networks ( $\beta = 0.36$ ), and overcoming institutional barriers ( $\beta = -0.29$ ). The research results present a highly significant and multi-dimensional view on the process of professional integration of Cameroonian graduates in China. They show that successful integration into the Chinese job market does not depend only on one particular factor – educational qualification, but comes as a result of the interaction between linguistic knowledge, social capital, institutional settings, professional network, and personal adjustment strategies. Professional integration in China turns out to be a sociologically and economically complex process, driven not only by personal resources, but also by the institutional setting.

One of the most important results obtained during the research is the economic advantage created by Chinese language proficiency. According to the research data, Chinese language proficiency brings about an economic profit already in the first year after the students' graduation, and leads to the salary difference of up to 48%. Thus, the language appears to be a highly valuable human capital for the participants of the job market in China. It is worth noting that language proficiency serves as an economic resource rather than just as a means of communication.

A 48% difference in the salaries earned by graduates with excellent and poor language ability demonstrates the significance of language skills in determining their marketability. It implies that graduates with good mastery of Mandarin will have the ability to obtain better paying jobs, actively participate in work-related interactions, and establish stronger professional connections with colleagues and employers. Most of the time, Mandarin-speaking foreign graduates appear to be more flexible, competent, and able to operate within the local professional environment. As such, language skills enhance the labor market advantage and professionalism of graduates.

Moreover, the results demonstrate the implications of sociological theories, especially the ideas advanced by Pierre Bourdieu, on linguistic competence. According to Bourdieu, language acts as economic and symbolic power that grants its holder opportunities for upward social mobility and prestige. Given this understanding, Mandarin can be perceived as the dominant lingua franca in China. This means that graduates who speak Mandarin are professionally superior compared to those who can speak only English or other foreign languages.

The other crucial finding from this research is the significance of networking, which constitutes about 60% of job access amongst the graduates. The findings demonstrate the essential nature of social capital in labor market entry. Employment chances in many labor markets, particularly in China, depend not only on formal job recruitment processes but also on individual social connections and networks. The term *guanxi*, which implies social networks, is particularly relevant to this discussion as it pertains to the Chinese society.

It is important to note that this finding further highlights the inequalities in opportunities for foreign graduates. Those who have more extensive networks, regardless of whether these include professors, other students, fellow alumni, employers, the local diasporic community, or even the Chinese community, certainly have a distinct advantage over socially isolated graduates. The use of social networks thus constitutes one way in which inequality is perpetuated among migrants.

Other issues raised by this study include key institutional factors that contribute to negative impacts on integration processes. As visa restrictions, complex administrative procedures, legal uncertainty, and red tape delay the process of integration into employment and diminish salary potential, this aspect emphasizes the structural component of migrants' integration. Even highly skilled graduates will find it difficult to integrate professionally under such conditions.

Such institutional constraints lead to economic instability for migrants, who need extra time to find legal work, navigate through visa renewals, or adjust their immigration status according to the changes within the system. The process of delayed integration leads to instability of salary sources and professional growth and creates stress for graduates. Thus, institutional barriers impact the work of graduates directly and influence their career development.

What makes this discovery of professional integration having great correlation with future expectations especially important is the idea that graduates integrating well into the world of work will have positive intentions about their future in China. Professional integration defines willingness to stay in China, entrepreneurship, international business ventures, sense of belonging and confidence in one's economy. This proves that employment is not just an economic practice but a tool used for shaping identity, movement, and intentions. Graduates with good job opportunities tend to see China as an environment for success and advancement. In contrast, people without jobs may feel discouraged or even intend to leave the country.

Last, but certainly not least, this paper proves quite convincingly that Human Capital Theory and Social Capital Theory play out their roles perfectly when applied to the topic of South-South migration. In this sense, Human Capital Theory provides an explanation of how knowledge of the local language and education affect the employment situation and economic efficiency, while Social Capital Theory demonstrates the role played by relations and networks.

In conclusion, it can be stated that Cameroonians who graduated from Chinese universities have a high potential to act as cultural, economic, and professional intermediaries connecting China and Africa through the use of their educational mobility. Nonetheless, it is necessary to stress that integration will depend largely on the ability of migrants to acquire appropriate linguistic and social capital.

### **Limits and Future Research**

This research has methodological limitations that warrant caution. With only 62 respondents, statistical power is limited despite using bootstrap methods for robustness. The cross-sectional design inhibits establishing causal links, suggesting high professional aspirations may result from better integration. Subjective data may introduce social desirability biases despite anonymity and neutral question formulation. The fourth-year research period restricts long-term trend analysis. Future research could include a ten-year longitudinal study to explore professional integration dynamics, comparative studies across nationalities and sectors, and a deeper understanding of graduates' experiences. Exploring variables like gender and migration is recommended to enrich South-South skilled migration literature.

### **CONCLUSION**

The study shows that "the professional integration of Cameroonian graduates in China results from the strategic combination of academic, linguistic, and social capital, as well as administrative and cultural constraints." The role of transnational sectors in the Chinese economy, i.e., trade and entrepreneurship, is emphasized as a driving force for the valorization of this capital. The mastery of Mandarin Chinese and professional networks are underlined as essential factors for rapid, stable, and profitable integration. The fact that "the professional integration of Cameroonian graduates in China occurs as a result of a deliberate use of academic, linguistic and social capital along with administrative and cultural limitations" offers a valuable sociological and economic interpretation of migrant integration in the case of South-to-South migration. As can be seen, professional integration is not just an effect of earning a university education; on the contrary, it is a complicated process characterized by dynamics and interactions among individual assets and the overall environment. According to the research, the graduates should mobilize all possible types of capitals and deal with various problems connected with institutions, culture, and employment.

Moreover, it can be argued that the study makes a valuable contribution to the wider debate around globalization and transnational mobility in that it shows that African students educated in China are not simply passive beneficiaries of the opportunities presented to them, but also actors who are helping to shape the formation of

new economic and social relationships between China and Africa through their educational credentials, Mandarin language skills, and networks.

### **Statements and Declarations**

In preparing this article, the authors used ChatGPT and Deepseek to obtain assistance with linguistic revision and proofreading. After using ChatGPT and Deepseek AI, the authors reviewed and revised the content as necessary and assumed full responsibility for the content of the publication.

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### **Conflict of Interest**

The author declares that there are no competing interests or conflicts of interest that could have influenced the work reported in this paper.

### **Ethical Approval**

All procedures performed in this study involving human participants were conducted in accordance with the ethical standards of academic research in the social sciences. The research respected the principles of confidentiality, anonymity, and voluntary participation.

### **Informed Consent**

Informed consent was obtained from all individual participants included in the study. Participants were informed about the purpose of the research, the use of the data collected, and their right to withdraw from the study at any stage without any negative consequences.

### **Data Availability**

The datasets generated and analyzed during the current study are not publicly available due to confidentiality considerations but are available from the author upon reasonable request.

### **Author Contributions**

The author was responsible for the conception and design of the study, data collection, data analysis and interpretation, as well as the drafting and revision of the manuscript. All authors contributed equally. All authors have read and agreed to the published version of the manuscript.”

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