

# European Migrant Professionals in Chinese Global Cities: A Diversified Labour Market Integration

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## ABSTRACT

Since the early 2000s, Chinese metropolises have been emerging as hubs for the national and global economy. They attract increasing numbers of foreigners with diverse socio-economic and educational backgrounds who tend to immigrate independently of the Chinese initiatives focused on “foreign talents”. Our analysis contributes to the understanding of these migrants’ integration into the labour market. Through a Bourdieusian capital lens, this article unpacks the access to the labour market and occupational positions of Swiss and Swedish migrant professionals in mainland China. Differentiated by how they can capitalize upon their educational, occupational, social and cultural resources in this specific context, the article distinguishes between three categories: corporate expatriates, local hires and entrepreneurs and concludes with policy recommendations to stabilize their residence conditions.

## INTRODUCTION

Since the early 2000s, Chinese metropolises have been emerging as strategic hubs for the global economy. This development has been accompanied by manifold forms of human mobility and social stratification and a growing number of foreigners. During the early phase of China’s economic reorientation in the late 1980s and early 1990s, foreigners were primarily diplomatic personnel, corporate expatriates and students. Recently, self-initiated migrant professionals have been on the rise, rendering foreigners in China a growing and diversifying group (Leonard and Lehmann, 2019; Pieke, 2012). A total of 900,000 foreigners were working in China in 2016 (Huang and Yan, 2018) and further increases are expected (Zhuang, 2018).

While China participates in the global “race for talent” (Shachar, 2006) and develops proactive policies to attract “talents”, the vast majority of foreigners move to China and take up work outside of such initiatives. The purpose of this article is to explore the immigration and labour market integration of a group of Europeans among these foreigners. There are few overviews about current immigration into China (Haugen, 2015; Leonard and Lehmann, 2019; Pieke, 2012). Empirical studies concerned with skilled migration from Europe to mainland China have exclusively dealt with Britons (Knowles, 2015), extended the scope to Western migrants (Lehmann, 2014; Farrer, 2008), or highlighted specific economic sectors (Farrer, 2014; Stanley, 2013). Our focus on Swiss and Swedish “migrant professionals”<sup>1</sup> (Meier, 2015) is novel – not only with regard to China,<sup>2</sup> but in

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contemporary migration literature in general.<sup>3</sup> The article investigates their labour market integration in Chinese metropolises, with regard to access and occupational positions through a “capital” lens (Bourdieu, 1986). The Bourdieusian capital lens provides a transnational and processual perspective. This allows us to analyse the status quo – as most other scholarship does, but also to consider the educational and professionals trajectories before and during migration and how the recognition of their capital evolves in the Chinese context.

By doing so, we present a joint analysis based on qualitative research on the migration of Europeans to Chinese cities. Our findings draw on narrative interviews with almost 90 European (51 Swiss and 35 Swedish) migrant professionals, or their accompanying spouses, conducted between 2014 and 2018. The age of the economically active persons was between 23 and 62 years, one-third was female and the duration of their stay in China varied between 1 to 23 years.<sup>4</sup> Additional insights were gained from participant observations and theoretically informed casual conversations with foreign and Chinese residents during our fieldwork.

The following section introduces recent developments in economic and migration policy in China, and provides insights into Sweden and Switzerland and their relations with China. This is followed by a short description of our Bourdieusian capital approach. Through the exploration of the data, the article presents three ways to access the labour market: through an intra-corporate assignment, local employment or self-employment. Despite their unifying characteristics, the subjects in all three categories share a considerable degree of heterogeneity, complicating the category of “foreign talents”<sup>5</sup> (as defined by Chinese immigration programmes) and the stereotype of the “Western careerist highflyer” (Leonard and Lehmann, 2019). The conclusion highlights the role of specific capital skill sets in relation to the labour market access of the three – common-sense *and* analytical – categories (Dahinden, 2016), before discussing the findings from a policy perspective. China’s immigration regulations result in these migrants’ residence conditions being unstable and, to some extent, marginalized. This article prompts policy adjustments which would allow for long-term and inclusive residential perspectives.

## ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT AND SWEDISH AND SWISS IMMIGRATION TO MAINLAND CHINA

After the isolationist phase under Mao Zedong (1949–76), China initiated reforms in 1978 to increase economic performance (Schmidt-Glintzer, 2014). In 2001, China became a member of the World Trade Organization (WTO) and exports grew at 20–25 per cent per year. This triggered fast-paced urbanization and created booming regions, mostly along the coast. In the post-Mao era, many foreign firms have first moved parts of their production to these metropolitan areas and later established research department hubs and country or regional headquarters.

These developments have made China an emerging destination for international migration (Haugen, 2015; Pieke, 2012; Zhuang, 2018). China’s immigration policy has responded to this trend with a number of measures. Major milestones were the new immigration law in 2012 and regulations based on it (see Bork-Hüffer and Yuan-Ihle, 2014 for an overview). Such adjustments to China’s immigration regime can be understood as a continuation of a long-standing policy imposing stricter controls and monitoring of foreigners while benefitting only a small group of “foreign talents” (Hüffer and Yuan-Ihle, 2014). However, migration policy has been implemented with variations in different administrative regions and cities (Leonard and Lehmann, 2019) which led to the establishment of a Central Immigration Bureau in 2018 with the aim to ensure more coherence (Huang and Yan, 2018).

Governmental measures to attract foreign talent include the national “1,000 talents programme” introduced in 2008 and similar regional initiatives. Between 2008 and 2017, more than 7,000

foreigners were recruited through the 1,000 talents initiative and 53,900 through similar programmes in Beijing and Shanghai (Zhuang, 2018). In practice, they are mostly returning highly qualified ethnic Chinese of foreign nationality (so called Overseas Chinese) and Europeans are rare. In 2013, about ten per cent of the national awards programme was extended to people originating from the European Union (EU27), including ethnic Chinese, mostly from Germany and France (Rijksdienst voor Ondernemend Nederland, 2017). With various perks like high salaries, long-term immigration perspectives and housing (Recruitment Programme of Global Talent, 2018) such talent immigration to China is a unique phenomenon, not comparable to other migrant categories, and small in numbers.

As China's economy has expanded to include foreign multinational corporations of varying size, the profile of Western immigrants has diversified, in terms of educational background and the sectors in which they work (Pieke, 2012). Self-initiated migrant professionals form part of what Leonard and Lehmann (2019) call the "new wave" of immigrants to China. They are gradually replacing corporate expatriates as the largest group of foreigners in China (Pieke, 2012). However, while there is increased interest from Europeans and other nationals about working in China, the government has been slow to allow avenues for general long-term settlement (Cheuk, *in press*; Leonard and Lehmann, 2019). Indeed, a permanent residence ("green card") for foreigners has been granted only to a small (yet rising) number of people, mainly overseas Chinese, since its introduction in 2004 (Bork-Hüffer and Yuan-Ihle, 2014). In 2016, 1,576 green cards were issued (Huang and Yan, 2018).

This article treats Swiss and Swedish professionals in Chinese cities as one group of migrants with regard to the similar socio-economic structural conditions in which they accumulated their resources and in which their preconditions for migration were formed. They largely represent middle-class, white, educated north-western Europeans. Sweden and Switzerland are self-declared "knowledge economies" and according to the OECD (2018) almost 90 per cent of 25–64 year-olds in both countries hold at least upper secondary education and over 40 per cent have attained a tertiary education. English is not an official language in either country but many Swiss and Swedish nationals master it. A considerable number of Swiss and Swedish citizens live abroad (7–11%). While their main destinations still lie in European or North American countries, in 2016 nearly 4,000 Swiss and a similar number of Swedish citizens were registered as residents in China (inc. Hong Kong) (Swiss Federal Department of Foreign Affairs, 2017; Svenskar i Världen, 2015). Both export-oriented countries see China as an important trading partner. There are currently over 600 Swiss companies operating there and Swedish companies employ over 150,000 individuals in China. The Swiss and Swedish presence in China is supported by a substantial number of public, semipublic and private organizations (Embassy of Switzerland in the People's Republic of China, 2017; Business Sweden, 2016).

## LABOUR MARKET INTEGRATION IN CHINESE METROPOLISES THROUGH A CAPITAL LENS

Bourdieu (1986) made us aware of the role of economic, cultural and social capital in the (re-) production of social positions. In order to explain how our interviewees accomplish economic integration in China and which labour market positions they occupy, we have extended and refined Bourdieu's notions of capital according to contemporary scholarship and adapted it to the study of transnational migration, mobility and labour market integration.

Labour markets are seen here as embedded in local, national and/or transnational contexts. These "fields", as Bourdieu (1986) would have called them, value knowledge and skills differently and create specific, context-related demands (Nohl et al., 2014; Erel, 2010). In other words: an individual may be able to capitalize upon their resources in one labour market, but not in another. Major

cities have become strategic nodes to organize and service the global movement of capital (Sassen, 2012), and consequently, they offer a labour market that is transnationally oriented, which has consequences for how cultural capital plays out (see Nohl et al., 2014). Applying a capital lens allows for highlighting processuality and, thus, to see individual migrants' access to the Chinese labour market from a historical and transnational perspective.

One of the relevant characteristics of capital is its convertibility and the interplay of different sorts of capital. In migration, social capital is often a prerequisite for creating cultural and economic capital, while cultural capital may play a vital role in forging social ties, especially with individuals perceived to be different (e.g. Ryan et al., 2008; Suter, 2012; Suter and Magnusson, 2015).

### **Human Capital**

Based on Bourdieu's (1986) conceptualization of institutionalized forms of cultural capital, we define human capital as formally acknowledged qualifications and work experience. In studies on integration and migration, the prominence of human capital is widely recognized, especially in the economic field. Analysis helps us to understand if and how it is acknowledged and valued and thus enables or constrains a person in accessing the labour market in a new country. It is widely understood (and empirically confirmed) that the process of migration may often be detrimental to the convertibility of human capital, which is often lost or devaluated in the process due to the embeddedness of skills and qualifications into specific contexts (Nohl et al., 2014; Erel, 2010). Human capital is often transferred without much difficulty by migrants who are labelled "skilled" (Kofman and Raghuram, 2005). Educational credentials from American universities (Kim, 2016) and other Western countries (Nohl et al., 2014) are most easily convertible transnationally along with professional skills related to the natural and computing sciences, and the financial sector.

### **Cultural Capital**

Cultural capital as we conceptualize it, refers to what Bourdieu (1986) calls the "embodied" state of cultural capital comprising informal education, i.e. the skills, knowledge, social codes and social (class) frames of reference that are usually not formally measured.

Cultural capital has been further differentiated by many scholars. Weenink (2008) specifies "cosmopolitan capital" such as excellent English skills, an affinity for international social contacts and experience living abroad as a de-nationalized form valued in increasingly international employment markets.

Race and ethnicity may be additional forms of cultural capital if significations of skin colour and heritage can be capitalized upon. While ethnicizations and racializations imposed by majority groups on migrant "Others" often result in marginalization, hindering their use of other forms of capital, such stereotypes may also work to the advantage of those "Others" and can be used, or created, to serve as capital (Moran, 2016). A form of such racial and ethnic cultural capital is what Lundström (2014) calls "white capital" which works as a form of privilege in various migration contexts.

Other important aspects are local, in the context of this article China-related, skills, especially language, knowledge about business culture, internal market regulations, social codes and behaviour. In general, this local knowledge and resulting skill sets work as a stratifying force in (re-) producing social and economic hierarchies and can be conceptualized as "localized cultural capital" (Suter, 2012).

### **Social Capital**

The central thesis of social capital is that relationships matter. Bourdieu (1986: 51) sees it as an "aggregate of the actual or potential resources which are linked to (...) institutionalized

relationships of mutual acquaintance and recognition". Social capital is inherent in contacts with individuals or groups from whose resources the individual can benefit in advancing his or her own position.

These ties are part of social networks formed on the basis of kinship, friendship, or common religion, ethnicity or ideology. While more traditional work sees social networks as loci of norms, solidarity and reciprocity, recent research on migration also stresses the capitalizability of more superficial contacts based on a clear understanding of utility and temporality (Suter, 2012).

## LABOUR MARKET ACCESS AND OCCUPATIONAL POSITIONS OF EUROPEAN MIGRANT PROFESSIONALS IN CHINA

This section presents the differing access to the Chinese labour market and the occupational positions of our research participants and analyses them through a capital lens.

### Intra-corporate expatriates

Intra-corporate transfers is one group of migrant professionals which is active in the Chinese labour market (40 in our joint sample). The majority are between 30 and 60 and have stayed in China on average between three and five years; six are female. Typically, intra-corporate expatriates were with the same employer before their posting to China and they consequently moved within a corporate labour market which can be characterized as simultaneously internal and transnational. Embedded in a longer career path in the same company, an intra-corporate assignment in China is per definition temporary, typically starting out with a contract for one to three years. Often this gets prolonged by a few years and (rarely) even up to 12 or 23 years, as is the case for two of our participants.

Consider Albin,<sup>6</sup> a 33-year old Swedish man who, after earning his degree in engineering, started working for a Swedish engineering solutions company. From being a "simple constructor" he became a mid-level manager, a career step that was sped up through his move to China, which was unplanned, above all career-oriented, but also a welcome new experience:

I guess, I wanted to get further in my career, and I wanted to show that I am willing to work hard to climb somewhere. (...) After a year, I received a concrete proposal to move to China and work there. I thought: 'I will say that I am interested and then we have to see how it goes' (laughs) (...). I thought that my wife would not want this (...) and I thought "this is never going to be working". (...) But then after a lot of talking we thought that maybe this could be fun after all.

Or Angela, a Swiss woman in her early forties, who, after graduating in International Management in Switzerland, took up work as financial controller of overseas operations in a fast-growing, internationalizing Swiss company. As part of this job, she often traveled to the US and to Asian countries. Later, she initiated her relocation to China where she assumed positions which signified steps up in her career:

I built up the team in China, I was responsible for 30–40 people (...). Then, I was offered the opportunity to implement production in China. (...) And I said I would like to do it and then I established the whole production.

Like Albin and Angela, most intra-corporate expatriates we interviewed work for multinational companies, often Swedish or Swiss ones, ranging in size from very large (up to 150,000 employees) to small and medium-sized ones (around 250 employees). These mostly belong to the

industrial sector including the steel, automotive, marine, solar, textile and sanitary industries, but some companies also specialize in interior design, pharmaceuticals or communications. A smaller number of respondents are employed in the (semi-) public sector and thus indirectly by the Swiss or Swedish state.

Personnel targeted for intra-company relocations are mostly subject specialists or executives, and their positions include leadership responsibilities on the mid- to top-level of the organization's hierarchy. International assignments most often come with a so-called "expat package". Although there are considerable differences, apart from a rather high and internationally competitive salary, most packages consist of a relocation and housing allowance, international health insurance, tuition fees for children, flights home for all family members, sometimes also a driver and a car, and a generous vacation policy.

Most of the intra-corporate expatriates received their educational credentials in Sweden or Switzerland. Those contracted in the private sector have a tertiary degree in engineering, economics, or law. A few have non-academic training in business administration, a technical profession or the hospitality sector, coupled with long in-company and/or overseas experience.

### **Career trajectories and the role of capital**

Our participants' career trajectories reveal that, for the international assignment in China, they are able to substantially capitalize upon their human capital like educational credentials, their Swiss/Swedish national background and their in-depth corporate knowledge. About half of them also had previous work experience abroad, some in Asia or China.

Social capital related to the Chinese location is usually not required. However, human capital and certain kinds of cultural capital are crucial assets. While international working experience and thus cosmopolitan capital occasionally played an additional role for being sent abroad (again), those interviewees with previous work or study experience in China stressed that their localized knowledge mattered for being promoted to their current position.

Our respondents alluded to the importance of being familiar with and passing on the (often Swiss or Swedish) corporate culture within the company (see also Farrer, 2014). Of similar relevance is the ability to represent the company's "Swedishness", "Swissness", or "Westernness" when dealing with clients and business partners. Against the backdrop of the rather favourable reputation of western people and products in China, their national/ethnic origin is understood to enhance the company's authenticity and trustworthiness. As Renato, a general manager of the China branch of a middle-sized Swiss mechanical engineering company in his mid-fifties, stated:

The Swiss headquarters wants the local manager here to be Swiss. For the corporate culture, the processes and, most importantly, for communication with the headquarters. (...) And it makes a good impression here. It's obvious that Swiss people are well-respected here.

The transfer period to China usually facilitates a career move within the company for intra-corporate expatriates. Their specific qualifications (mostly engineering and economics) and relevant work experience and hierarchical position are the most important resources they could draw on. The labour market they partake in and the types of capital required are related to both internal and transnational labour markets and are less embedded in local conditions in China.

### **Local employees**

With the growth and transformation of the Chinese economy, more Westerners have started to work on "local" contracts, or as "local hires" – the colloquial term our respondents used to describe their employment situation. Rather than taking up work in China as the result of an intra-company transfer, such employees are generally newly hired, either from abroad or from China. In our joint



sample, 33 respondents accessed the Chinese labour market in this way. The majority was between 20 and 40 years old. The duration of their stay in China varied between 1 year and over 20 years, with many having arrived in the past 5–10 years. Compared to the intra-corporate transfers, the ratio of females is significantly higher.

Consider Ben, a Swiss designer in his early forties, who first came to China in 2004 as a design exchange student. His stint at a Shanghai university was arranged with the help of the Chinese wife of a Swiss friend who lived in the city at that time. He quickly realized that his Swiss education provided him with skills not yet commonly taught in China and, consequently, that his professional opportunities there were more plentiful than back home. He returned to China in 2006 after graduation and started working on various design-related projects:

I had an offer here as furniture designer for an architectural practice that was half Swiss, half Chinese. I worked there for 4 months but then I quit. I already knew a couple of people by then and I started to work with a colleague. He had a management office that basically helps Swiss people to come to China.

Marcel and Stefan are Swiss men in their early thirties who met each other 10 years ago during an internship at a Swiss company in Beijing. They both went back to Switzerland with the desire to return to China. Marcel continued studying business administration and sinology and Stefan obtained a degree in international management. The former returned to China 5 years ago as the China director of a Swiss company, while Stefan found a management position in a German company in China 2 years later. Marcel pondered on his trajectory:

I was hired specifically for this job. I was attractive for this company because my of previous living experience in China, including management experience.

Many of the companies hiring locally are in the industrial sector (automotive, electronic accessories, or trade in industrial goods), but respondents also work in marketing, hospitality, software development, think tanks, consultancies in the growing tertiary sector. Employers are mostly foreign but also Chinese or foreign-Chinese in small to middle-sized companies. The minority is locally employed by large multinational corporations. A smaller group works for Swiss or Swedish publicly funded business consultancies or diplomatic missions.

The group of local hires is more heterogeneous in terms of hierarchical positions, professional backgrounds, work experience and careers. This is reflected in salaries and working conditions which are, to a higher degree, adapted to the domestic market, unlike the case of corporate expatriates. While such local contracts generally do not include a full expat package, local hires' salaries are still often higher than that of Chinese peers, and may include some benefits, such as a flight home, some housing allowance, or longer holidays.

Almost all participants in this category hold a higher education degree and a minority attained vocational diplomas, mostly in commerce or human resources. Backgrounds range from business administration, economics, social sciences, law, linguistics, design, marketing, and robotics engineering to education. Most respondents acquired their education in Switzerland or Sweden (or in other OECD countries) and a minority obtained their degree, or a postgraduate or language certificate in China. Around half of the local hires we interviewed are fluent in Chinese and many use both English and/or their mother tongue as well as Chinese at work.

### **Career trajectories and the role of capital**

The career trajectories leading to employment in China are quite diverse. A substantial minority of locally hired participants came to China after graduation with little or no previous work experience

and developed their career locally. Around one-third initially migrated for a (postgraduate) degree or language studies and took up employment afterwards. First positions for these two groups in China often had an internship character, leading to more demanding and better paid local jobs later on. The other half had worked in Sweden, Switzerland or another western country, or in Asia.

Educational human capital is certainly crucial for all local employees in our sample for their access to and trajectory in the Chinese labour market. Yet, as some of the quotes above illustrate, many need considerably more than that to appeal to their employers. Apart from cosmopolitan capital in the form of a command of English and international working or studying experience, similar China-related experience is the decisive part of their resumé and worked as localized cultural capital. As an employee of a Swedish business promotion platform elaborated:

If you as a Swede want to work for a Swedish company in China you will always have an advantage, especially if you also have work experience from China and know how it works here. It is always an advantage: you think in a different way, you think in a more similar way which makes it easier.

Another crucial asset of these employees is their western background as they can capitalize on the positive image of their ethnicity and race. And, background-related cultural skills such as their command of a certain language, sometimes presents an advantage due to the transnational character of labour markets in Chinese metropolises. As Marcel said: “I was looking for a job where I could use my German, in the sense that this would be a comparative advantage for me.”

For this type of professional migrant, social capital is much more important in the process of looking for employment in China. Some, like Ben above, or Anders, a Swedish online marketing specialist in his mid-thirties, found a job through their social networks, often rather coincidentally:

It is a coincidence that I came to China, I wouldn't have been in Beijing if my friend hadn't gotten a job here. (...) And I wouldn't be in Shanghai now, if my friend's ex-girlfriend didn't start a company and looked for employees.

Many others found their position through transnational social media platforms, such as alumni networks and LinkedIn, or through social or professional networks established during a previous stay in China. Another way of building up and converting social capital into employability are the networking platforms in various Chinese cities which gather “young professionals” and promote transnational links between the respective countries and China.

Swiss and Swedish local hires possess a combination of strong professional credentials and skills recognized in China, localized knowledge and diffused social networks coupled with a western ethnic and racial appearance they can capitalize upon. Their social, human and cultural capital is convertible into well-paid positions, especially in middle-sized Swiss and Swedish, or other foreign companies. Many participants perceive the market conditions in Chinese metropolises to be boosting their career faster than elsewhere. However, with the increasing importance of the domestic market for both foreign and Chinese companies, our participants experience a growing competition from overseas Chinese with similar capital (Farrer, 2014).

## Entrepreneurs

“Entrepreneur” is used here as an umbrella term for a variety of professionals that are neither intra-corporate expatriates nor locally employed. The common denominator is that entrepreneurs run their own business by themselves or with business partners, or are freelancers for third parties. Nineteen of our participants belong to this category. In terms of age range (25–65), they are the most heterogeneous of the three groups. One third of them are female, and on average they have



been in China between 5 and 10 years. Also, in terms of education, activities, income and overall trajectory their labour market access shows the most variations.

Consider Eddy, a Swiss man in his early sixties with a background in business administration who decided to spend his retirement in China running a business with his Chinese wife. He used to consider Southern European countries as potential retirement destinations but this changed when he met his wife many years ago, started coming to China often and liked it. Two years ago, his wife moved back to take care of her parents and to scout out a suitable location for their business. A year later, Eddy joined her.

Caroline is a 42-year old information technology specialist and had formerly held a well-paid position in Switzerland. During an extended stay in another Asian country, she realized that she preferred to live in Asia. Attracted by China's growing economy, she decided to try her luck as an entrepreneur there. Drawing on her parents' existing business in Europe, Caroline started to import and sell western products. After initial orders by Sino-Swiss institutions, she soon expanded to Chinese clients. Though she faced many obstacles, she now owns two Sino-Swiss companies with her Chinese business partner and employs an increasing number of Chinese employees.

In this group, we find owners of small and medium-sized transnational and local businesses in trade and/or retail, manufacturing for wholesale or end consumers, legal or business consultancies, investment companies, art galleries, hospitality, gyms or language schools. Those working on a freelance basis are active in the film/media industry, in information and communication technology and in language teaching. Quite a few are engaged in more than one professional activity at the same time and are also flexible in developing new projects according to opportunities.

Many entrepreneurs have studied business administration, while others are graduates in the fields of hospitality, architecture, law, information and communication technology, design, filmmaking, Chinese Studies, or the social sciences. Most have obtained their degree in Switzerland or Sweden while some studied in China. A small minority have a vocational training or no formal education at all. The majority of entrepreneurs we interviewed spoke Chinese fluently.

### **Career trajectories and the role of capital**

Before opening their current business in China, most had gained extensive and diverse educational or professional experience internationally and/or in China. A small number had initially come to China to study Chinese, to obtain a postgraduate degree or for an internship. Becoming an entrepreneur is a way to gain access to the Chinese labour market for many, often young, migrant professionals who sometimes lack the prerequisites for obtaining a work permit. Quite a few entrepreneurs had previously worked in China as local hires or intra-corporate expatriates and starting up their own business was a further step in an already established career. Some of them were able to become partners in or even take over the company. In general, entrepreneurs started their businesses with their own economic capital.

The human capital of this type is quite high in a general sense, with either a tertiary education and/or long and specific work experience. However, it also includes educational profiles that would not easily lead to a local contract or an intra-corporate transfer.

What stands out is the strength of the social capital of most entrepreneurs. These individuals are usually well-connected to large and diverse networks, with blurry boundaries between personal and business contacts (Lehmann, 2014). The social and cultural capital of this group is interconnected and transnationally anchored. Most respondents rely on their social networks of individuals located in their home countries, in third countries and in China. Chinese contacts were usually formed during an earlier study period, internship, or employment phase. A considerable number of businesses depend on a few strong social ties, usually with another Swiss/Swedish, or Chinese national.

Having a Chinese business partner – often the spouse, as in Eddy’s case – helps to bridge the cultural gaps in their transnational business (Farrer, 2008), and facilitates dealing with Chinese bureaucracy.

Business activities based on transnational social and cultural capital often comprise sourcing and selling of products for import/export, or various services between China and the country of origins. Remo, 34 years old and from the Italian speaking part of Switzerland, started out exporting Chinese products to Switzerland and Italy and gradually shifted his business scope:

I moved on to the fashion business. Because I know people here in China involved in fashion. (...) I speak Italian. (...) So that’s why it was easy for me to get involved, because it was easy for me to go to Milan, and find clothes. (...) And then from there I opened three shops.

In terms of cultural capital, most in this group have previous work experience in China and also substantial Chinese skills which they experience as most helpful. Others without these skills deem their cosmopolitan orientation as crucial, such as their ability to engage with the cities’ wider international circles (the expat community and English-speaking/internationally-oriented Chinese) and, their adaptability to unfamiliar environments in general. Hence, localized as well as cosmopolitan cultural capital help to navigate the business context in Chinese cities.

Often, ethnic origin and race are pivotal aspects providing cultural capital for our participants’ business activities. For example, a mediator for internships between Western youths and China-based companies said he benefits greatly from the trustworthy image his nationality conveys to foreign and local clients. This is echoed by marketing specialist Christophe (early forties):

We have the image of an international/Swiss company in China. That is very reassuring for (our potential customers) as they are going to trust the white guy more than (a Chinese). (...) When I speak with people in headquarters in Geneva or Paris or New York, I feel (...) how scary it is: they prefer to speak to the white dude who has been here for 5 years than speaking to a Chinese.

This applies even more to the substantial number of entrepreneurs whose business is directly linked to their ethnicity, for example as language tutors or heads of language schools, as importers of western, Swiss or Swedish products, or as an owner of an “ethnic” restaurant (see also Farrer, 2014). Being Swiss or Swedish warrants them authenticity to convey western, or nationally-connoted consumption patterns to both foreign and Chinese clients in China.

How respondents assessed the outcome of their entrepreneurial activities in China varies, as do their incomes, with some high earners and others in quite precarious financial circumstances. Still, they agreed that the current development in Chinese cities and the sheer size of the Chinese economy offers more business opportunities than Europe, especially for young entrepreneurs and/or those with little start-up capital. Other aspects that facilitated their access to the Chinese market are the fast turnaround time and the possibility to start businesses in informal ways. Many also emphasized that the highly dynamic and competitive business environment in Chinese cities requires flexibility and long working hours.

## CONCLUSION

In this article, we have analysed the labour market access of Swiss and Swedish migrant professionals in Chinese global cities through a Bourdieusian capital lens. As stated initially, these migrants arrived in China outside the government’s efforts to attract foreign talent. Their labour market access can be divided into three categories: intra-corporate transfers, local hires and entrepreneurs. By taking into account their educational and professional trajectories that preceded these

positions, we were able to show the role their human, social and cultural capital plays in the context of Chinese metropolises.

Intra-corporate expatriates are the most homogeneous group in terms of positions, education and professional trajectories. This category also shows an overrepresentation of male migrants. Rather than alluding to alleged Chinese preferences (Lehmann, 2014; Stanley, 2012), this gender imbalance seems to stem from the gendered profile of the labour market and the skewed educational preferences in the countries of origin (see Bundesamt für Statistik, 2011). The other two categories have a stronger representation of females, include more diverse educational profiles and commercial branches and show more diverse salaries, company positions and professional trajectories. Albeit in different ways, local hires and entrepreneurs interact more with and depend more on the local Chinese business contexts.

Human capital is important for the labour market access and easily transferable for all three categories. European professionals in China are clearly less affected by the devaluation of human capital through migration than many skilled non-Western migrants in Europe.

While social capital plays a subordinate role in the labour market access of European intra-corporate expatriates, it appears as an important aspect of professional success for local hires and entrepreneurs. Local hires rely more on larger, loose social networks among foreign and Chinese professionals, while entrepreneurs depend more on fewer but stronger social relationships. It is interesting to observe how Chinese business partners – often spouses – play an important role in facilitating business operations.

Cultural capital is highly relevant for the economic integration of all three categories. A certain cosmopolitan capital in the form of English skills but also international work or study experience, is conducive to advancing in professional careers. Localized cultural capital plays a pivotal role for local hires and, depending on entrepreneurial activity, for most entrepreneurs. Crucial for all three groups is ethnic and racial capital. Based on their ethnic origin, the ability to embody certain western, Swedish or Swiss values is assumed from all interviewed European professionals. Economic activities for western foreigners are at the same time restricted to some limited, albeit potentially lucrative, niches of the Chinese economy with increased competition by Chinese workers. Also, despite the favourable image of western people and products, the status as a foreigner creates obstacles to dealing with Chinese bureaucracy and to establishing trusting local business relations, especially for entrepreneurs.

Overall, our analysis has demonstrated how the growing majority of foreigners is drawn and incorporated into Chinese metropolises' economy in other ways than through government initiatives targeting "global talents". Many European migrant professionals have a long-standing interest in China and have acquired significant human, cultural and social capital throughout their trajectories. Especially for those with an enterprise and/or Chinese relatives, working in China signifies a professional and identificational long-term engagement rather than a transient stage in their careers. Many are not only economically, socially and culturally strongly embedded in the Chinese context, but often occupy bridging roles between their home countries and China.

While a few of our interviewees are living in China on permanent visas for foreigners married to Chinese citizens, none holds a Mainland Chinese "green card" that would give them an independent and long-term perspective of settlement and foster their economic and social inclusion. Instead, most hold 1-year working visas which grant them unequal participation in many areas of daily life in China and render their stay uncertain and explicitly transient. We thus find that for European migrant professionals, the contradictory reception experienced by many foreigners in China (Leonard and Lehmann, 2019) evolves mainly along two lines: the relatively accessible labour market and their long-term commitment stand in stark contrast to how little official Chinese immigration policy with its narrow focus on "global talents" accounts for them.

Based on our findings, we argue that policymakers and other relevant stakeholders, including international organizations, are well-advised to take note of and accommodate the social, economic and legal situation of migrant professionals in Chinese cities. Potential measures should include more stable and inclusive residential perspectives, especially in terms of visa categories. Moreover, initiatives that strengthen the localized social and cultural capital needed for professional endeavours in the changing Chinese economy could be another focus of future policy measures for (European) migrant professionals in China.

## NOTES

1. We delineate our interviewees as “migrant professionals” because their skills are recognized and they can draw on this recognition to gain status in the host country (Meier, 2015).
2. See Camenisch (in press) and Suter (in press).
3. Exceptions include Lundström’s (2014) work on Swedish women abroad, Sanders (2015) on Swiss in Peru as well as Camenisch and Müller (2017), and Müller and Camenisch (2019) on Swiss in Northern Europe and China.
4. While not statistically representative, our qualitative analysis explains relevant patterns and characteristics of the group under study.
5. The official ‘Standards for the Classification of Foreigners Coming to Work in China’ from 2018 distinguish between “Category A top foreign talents; Category B, professional personnel; and Category C, other foreigners (. . .).” The classification influences eligibility for different visa types. The long-term talent visa R is only issued to foreigners in Category A which is confined to “individuals with internationally highly outstanding achievements in academia, business, art, or sports” as well as “anyone who is selected by a national or local government talent program” (Zhang, 2018).
6. All names and personal details were anonymized by the authors.

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