

Market or State? Post-Reform Distribution of Sociology Faculty at Chinese Universities

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Abstract

Neoliberal policies since 1978 have caused severe regional inequality in China. Cities in regions with high levels of marketisation attract top academic experts due to their proximity to economic incentives and prestigious universities. However, little is known about how economic reform has shaped the distribution of experts in the social science and humanities disciplines as they are less in demand on the market and often rely on support from the state. Using sociology as a unique case, this study investigates market and state influences on the regional distribution of sociology experts in Chinese universities based on city-level measurements. Sociology has a unique historical and paradigmatic connection with the state of China, which complicates any straightforward relationship between neoliberal policies and higher education inequality in sociology departments. Through a manual collection of 1,041 faculty profiles from 66 university websites, it was determined following the fractional logistic



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regression method that both the market and the state facilitate distribution. The city's marketisation increases the internationalisation of faculty members in sociology departments, while the city's position in the state's administrative hierarchy maintains the sociology departments, regardless of the city's marketisation. In general, the state still plays an important role in shaping academic expert distribution after 40 years of market reform in China.

Keywords: higher education; market reform; regional inequality; faculty mobility; Chinese universities

Introduction

The Chinese higher education system has experienced dramatic neoliberal change since the 1978 reform. As Chinese universities moved towards reform, academic resources gradually became focused in wealthy regions following market principles (Hamnett, Hua, and Bingjie 2019). With a decentralisation policy, wealthier cities flourishing as a result of marketisation can lure better scholars and provide more financial aid to students (Bickenbach and Liu 2013). In response, the state implemented policies to intervene in regional inequality in academic resources caused by the market. However, the strong market largely limits the effectiveness of these policies (Zhang 2017).

The state's influence might prevail in less marketable disciplines. Using sociology departments as a unique case, we investigate the distribution of higher education resources in Chinese universities in regard to faculty background, examining city differences tied to the state-market debate in post-reform China. Following the 1979 campaign, Chinese universities re-established sociology programmes (Cheng and So 1983). Market reforms brought Western sociological frameworks to support the rebirth of Chinese sociology. Despite Western intellectual influences, the state maintains a strong systematic influence in the sociology departments in China's higher education system (Bian and Zhang 2008). Sociology research funding and topics are dominated by state policy and governmental motivation. In addition, sociology represents a group of less market-favourable social science disciplines compared to revenue-generating programmes (e.g., science, technology, engineering and mathematics [STEM] or law) in post-reform China. Therefore, sociology's unique connection to the state might reinforce the effectiveness of state policies, making it unclear what role marketisation has played in the distribution of academic experts. Sociology departments might follow a more general market momentum in the higher education system while departments in cities with high market activity might cater to the academic employment market. Research funding and the selected locations of established departments of sociology are largely subject to state policy, which seeks to redistribute university professors towards disadvantaged areas of the country.

This study examines how marketisation and state factors influence the construction of sociology departments, focusing on the presence of foreign PhD faculty members and levels of academic "inbreeding". Faculty backgrounds by alma mater could represent

education resources as forms of social capital (Burris 2004). Following an institutional framework, we first examine how hiring preferences in sociology departments in Chinese universities came to be associated with local levels of marketisation and state power. Like most new institutional analyses, we are agnostic about actual improvements in performance resulting from this change, but we suggest that hiring foreign PhDs sends a signal in the Chinese higher education institutional environment given the current paradigm of globalisation in education (e.g., Scott 2000). Although the current research mainly adopts a quantitative analysis, qualitative discussions are also presented in the Discussion and Conclusion sections, which explain the future development of Chinese sociology and elaborate upon the role of market reform.

By manually combining 1,041 sociology professors' background information listed on 66 sociology department websites from universities across 32 cities in China with city-level socioeconomic metrics from official sources, we investigate how city variations in marketisation and state influences shape the distribution of faculty across sociology departments.

Literature

Neoliberalism: A Global Reform in China

With the collapse of the Soviet Union, neoliberalism gained even greater popularity at the end of the Cold War outside the Western hemisphere. Many former communist countries adopted such economic reform to reconnect with the world (Berger 2001). Both neoliberalism and classical liberalism promote individual property rights within a free market. However, neoliberalism goes one step further: It believes that the state should set up an institutional framework and social environment to support the free market and even create such a market if it does not already exist (Harvey 2005). At the same time, it insists that the state maintains minimum involvement in the free market that it facilitates (Harvey 2005).

Neoliberalism has become the dominant policy framework around the globe and its triumph allows capital to move more freely across national borders with less government control. As such, globalisation has emerged, with large, multinational companies squeezing out small and local businesses due to the diminished state role (Berger 2001). While these companies have presented themselves as the symbol of neoliberalism with capital and pathways for investment when facing the Global South, it has become excessively hard for them to develop their own industrial capacity without the long-term application of trade protection mechanisms (Radice 2005). While neoliberalism promised economic development, it also created huge wealth disparities within and across borders.

Individualism has also emerged with neoliberal reform in China. The declining role of the government opens social space for individual independence (Taylor-Gooby and Leruth 2018). In neoliberal reform promoted by Thatcher and Reagan since the 1980s,

policies such as deregulation, lower taxes, and free trade have allowed individuals to compete more freely on the labour market. With the reduced role of the state, individual choices are emphasised in order to produce better outcomes (Taylor-Gooby and Leruth 2018). Compared to Anglo-American neoliberal reform, China has approached reform much more cautiously in the form of “market socialism”. While individualism became the key feature of contemporary neoliberalism, Chinese “individualism” was largely embedded within the state governance structure and presented as a form of *guanxi* (Nonini 2008). *Guanxi* is a cultural notion that originates from traditional Chinese rural society. It refers to the establishment of relationships through strong family or individual connections, which “starts with people making friends, even though there may be no instrumental benefits in it” (Hongzhi 2017). As social capital is often circulated through *guanxi*, those who are part of such networks are often considered as “my people” and enjoy proximate access to information, resources, and knowledge (Hongzhi 2017). In other words, the individual cadres or administrators still need to obey the principles of state policy, which intend to produce “better outcomes” as neoliberal practices in other countries; however, their own interpretation of “better outcomes” can impact the final policy implementation, which is largely influenced by *guanxi* social networks (Tang and Hao 2017). As such, development plans and hiring preferences of Chinese universities are largely dependent on the administrator’s individual understanding of government instructions (Tang and Hao 2017). Thus, social connections (such as alumni status, acquaintance relations, and research collaborations) and individual preferences (research areas and candidates’ demographics, among others) of these administrators become key factors when accessing employment opportunities in these institutions (Bian 1994).

At the same time, government reform introduced a certain degree of free market practice through internal competition and promotions based on merit (Nonini 2008). The standards for such merit are often based on their own sectors and these are not always for profit; the gain often comes from top-down political distribution instead of market incentives (Huang and Kim 2020). For example, Chinese university administrators, acting as government officials, will try to increase the research productivity of the governed institution, not for the purpose of attracting investments from individual stakeholders, but for promotions within the higher education bureaucratic systems.

Quasi-Market Theory

Like many other post-reform countries, China has emphasised decentralisation and marketisation strategies for its higher education system (Ngok 2007). This specific strategy involves various approaches, including diversifying funding channels through markets, turning second-tier colleges into private or state/private co-owned institutions, and devolving university governance to the local level (Mok and Lo 2007). These strategies increased mass access to higher education in China.

Despite the decentralisation policy, the Chinese state still plays a significant supervisory role, so much so that previous literature has theorised Chinese higher education as a

“quasi-market” (Mok 2002). The term quasi-market refers to the presence of state regulations with attention to public welfare instead of simply maximising profit (Le Grand and Bartlett 1993).

Unlike the theoretical debate between human capital domination theory and the persistence of state power theory (Bian and Logan 1996), quasi-market theory argues for the integrated influence of state power and free markets in higher education in China. To establish this quasi-market, the central government started to promote greater autonomy within each individual institution after the Education Reform Plan (Minister of Education 1985). Specifically, Chinese universities adopted a dual governance system embracing a government role in supervision based on state power and a university operational role based on market principles (Han and Xu 2019).

Attracting Academic Experts: Market or State?

As the state devolves its power to the local level, both the state and the market influence Chinese universities through local characteristics at the local level. In post-reform China, higher education institutions rely more on local funding, resulting in great regional inequality in terms of educational resources (Ngok 2007). In the 1990s, policies such as the 985/211 project assigned top-tier status to universities in sub-provincial cities in poorer regions. At the same time, the decentralised quasi-market enabled localised financial and provincial support for universities. Over four decades of reform, marketisation channels (e.g., foreign investment, proximity to ports) favoured coastal areas, such as the Yangtze River Delta and the Pearl River Delta regions, enabling them to finance more visible universities and academic programmes, creating greater inequality between cities (Fu, Zhu, and Ren 2015). Regional inequalities based on cities translated into shifts in academic rankings, as some universities previously assigned to higher academic tiers by the state were outperformed in global university rankings by lower-tier universities (e.g., Shanghai University) in coastal areas.

The state also exerts power through local development in response to inequality caused by the market. Administratively, the central government deliberately assigned higher administrative status to several poorer cities with less market activity (e.g., Xi’an or Wuhan). Thus, they enjoy favourable treatment, especially in the distribution of higher education resources, to counterbalance competitive shortcomings caused by the market (Logan, Bian, and Bian 1999). Financially, the central government utilised a regional transfer payment policy to subsidise universities in poorer provinces. In 2013, the Ministry of Education (MoE) proposed the Central and Western Region Higher Education Revitalisation Plan, which allocated 10 billion RMB to more than 100 universities in those regions (MoE 2013). The funding was aimed at hiring faculty members with international backgrounds, supporting innovative research facilities, and providing more funding for disadvantaged university students.

Among all the institutional resources impacted by regional inequality caused by reform, the academic backgrounds of faculty members in Chinese universities are especially

vulnerable. Faculty members' academic backgrounds in terms of location and prestige of faculty terminal degrees represent both institutional capital (the focus of university competition) and individual choices based on economic and prestige incentives (Burriss 2004). As a result, universities in wealthy cities can attract scholars, especially those with Western degrees and strong publications, unlike institutions in poorly marketised areas, regardless of the city's administrative status or the university's academic tier designated by the government (Tang and Hao 2017). Consequently, students in universities from poorer cities or regions with limited market activity have significantly less access to prestigious faculty members (Hamnett, Hua, and Bingjie 2019).

A disparity was also generated by urbanisation even within the same geographical region. For decades now, urban regions have enjoyed a huge advantage in terms of academic resources with easier faculty recruitment than those in smaller cities (Hu 2014). Moreover, the Chinese household registration system, or *hukou*, was largely relaxed in the reform era to allow for more mobility across cities. As a result, megacities such as Beijing and Shanghai have been able to strengthen their dominance in terms of attracting professors based on the urban hierarchy (Hu 2014).

In response, the MoE has prevented universities from using excessive direct monetary salary incentives to lure faculty from disadvantaged regions to developed cities with higher market activity (Yi and Zhang 2019). In addition, institutions and governments from Central or Western China have offered more lucrative starting packages for newly graduated PhDs than those in richly marketised cities, even though market channels make it difficult to retain those faculty in the long term (Yong 2019). Universities in the Eastern regions can find loopholes to bypass those policies and attract faculty by providing other subsidies, such as research funding (Zhang 2017). In general, educational inequalities created by marketisation continually conflict with the state's socialist goal of educational egalitarianism in higher education.

Transforming Society and Diverse Faculty

Chinese reforms increased higher education resources, increased the diversity in the academic background of faculty members, and increased university autonomy. Prior to the 1979 reform, academic positions in universities were directly assigned by the state through the *fenpei* system, which existed until 1994 on the national level (Bian 1994). The lingering application of the *fenpei* system resulted in a scarcity of degree holders prior to the reform. In 1982, there were only 8,000 master's degree and 13 doctoral degree holders across all disciplines in China, and these were mainly graduates from top-tier universities (Shen, Xu, and Zhang 2015). With the *fenpei* system, academic inbreeding was a universal phenomenon as most degree holders worked in their alma mater institutions (Shen, Xu, and Zhang 2015). Gradually, the free academic labour market and expansion of higher education resources enabled top-tier universities to distribute their graduates to lower-tier universities, effectively improving academic diversity.

The transitional economy has been accompanied by the internationalisation of Chinese sociology departments. With the common goal of competing globally, Chinese universities started welcoming home foreign-trained PhD returnees after 1978. Universities have also been prioritising international metrics for academic output. The system favours foreign-trained PhDs on the academic market over domestically trained graduates (Lu 2013). Additionally, many city and provincial governments offer preferential treatment, including sizable monetary rewards and social welfare or tenure benefits, to attract overseas returnees as they symbolise the local desire for “global experts”¹ (Sun 2010).

The motivation for attracting overseas talents comes from both the university and local government. Universities receive funding from the central government and set up various institution-based programmes. For example, South China Normal University (SCNU) offers 1–3 million RMB research funding for three years and tenure for any candidates who are selected in the national Distinguished Overseas Young Talents programme.² From local government, each urban municipality has its own version of the talent programme. For example, the city of Shenzhen has proposed the Peacock Initiative since 2010 to attract talented young individuals to work and invest in this city. In order to attract overseas talents, such a plan offers 1.6–3 million Chinese RMB for any tenured professors from renowned Western universities who are willing to return full-time to Shenzhen.³

History of Chinese Sociology

In the first decade of the twentieth century, the Qing Dynasty of China experienced unrest with both domestic uprisings and international war failures. China’s educated elite recognised the urgency of studying Western knowledge. Although the Qing Dynasty was eventually overthrown by the nationalists in 1912, and China was quickly turned into a chaotic battleground of warlords, the social movement of studying Western knowledge persisted. Sociology as a discipline was introduced following a movement in the 1920s (Bian and Zhang 2008). The first sociology department in China was founded in Shanghai College by American missionary teachers in 1913 (Qi 2016). Their purpose centred around evangelical missions and expected students to distance themselves from core Confucian beliefs. Later, the first full Chinese-governed sociology department was established in Xiamen University in 1921, which mainly focused on social investigation and social reform (Qi 2016). Despite their differences, Chinese sociology experienced quick expansion from the 1930s to the 1940s. By 1947, 40% of Chinese universities had sociology departments, totalling more than 140 faculty

¹ Chinese sociology in its early days had a tradition of embracing Western sociology. Renowned sociologists, such as Xiaotong Fei and Wenzao Wu, graduated from Western universities in the 1930s and remained alive after the 1978 reform. The reform reconnected them with international sociology.

² China South Normal University Opportunities for Distinguished Overseas Young Talents: <https://english.scnu.edu.cn/a/20210304/514.html>.

³ Peacock Initiative: <https://daoinsights.com/opinions/shenzhen-vs-silicon-valley-from-female-empowerment-to-peacock-talents/>.

members (Qi 2016). Along with such expansion, Chinese scholars such as Xiaotong Fei made an effort to advocate the indigenisation of Chinese sociology.

In 1949, the Socialist Revolution ended the chaotic era. As the proclamation of the People's Republic of China finally brought unification and stability, sociology as an analytical framework continued to grow. To meet the goal of improving living standards and increasing productivity, governments instituted the ideas of sociological investigation in their five-year plans along with the Marxist school of thought. However, sociology as an academic discipline has followed a bumpy path. Due to the national higher education institutional adjustment in 1952, all 25 sociology-related departments in existence at that time in China were dissolved or consolidated into other departments, because sociology was perceived as impractical and dominated by Western theoretical frameworks (Zheng 2001). In 1957, sociologists tried to restore their departments by asserting that sociology could contribute to national development, but there was little institutional support from the central government (Arkush 1981). It was not until 1979 that officials started to re-evaluate the role of sociology as an academic discipline; this was followed by Deng Xiaoping's marketisation reform. Because "mass sociology" (Young 1974) could not address rapid social change, the central government quickly approved the re-establishment of sociology departments in universities across the nation (Qi 2016).

The institutional development of "new" sociology in China after 1979 bears strong marks of market reform. On the one hand, Marxist sociology with "Chinese characteristics" still held dominant status following market reforms (Bian and Zhang 2008). On the other hand, extensive efforts were being made to solve real-world social issues in the post-reform society. As a result, academic enquiries in Chinese sociology are mainly concentrated on market-reform topics, such as socioeconomic development, state-society relations, and economic sociology (Bian and Zhang 2008). Furthermore, the rapidly globalised market interactions of post-reform China required an engagement with a variety of perspectives beyond the domestic narrative. Consequently, Western sociological theory and methods were welcomed to a certain degree due to their deep investigation of the free-market economies and the marketisation of society (Bian; Zhang 2008). As a result of these cumulative changes, the number of sociology departments has grown from 15 in 1993 to 33 in 1999 and 74 in 2008 (Bian and Zhang 2008; Zheng 2001). This rapid increase indicates both the state and public recognition of sociology's potential for social development.

Sociology vs Other Disciplines in China

Sociology in the Chinese context may be influenced by the state more than other disciplines for various reasons. First, Chinese sociology has had a unique historical relationship with the state. Not only has state policy largely driven research topics and funding, but their very existence has also been dominated by the state (Zheng 2001). Second, sociology, as a non-STEM, business, or law discipline, has fewer connections with the market in reform-era China compared with other disciplines (Hu and Hibel

2015). Most importantly, the development of Chinese sociology has been marked by the intellectual competition between Western influences and locally grounded perspectives.

As such, although Western sociology provides a strong grounding for Chinese sociology methodologically and theoretically (Bian and Zhang 2008), its influence did not exist without local resistance. One of the most important operating principles for the central government is “self-determination”, which emphasises the national integrity and independence in social development (Lin and Palmer 2016). Inspired by this principle, many scholars have advocated for the localisation of Chinese sociology through various strategies to mediate Western influence. They have either tried to propose a Sinicized theoretical framework to capture the unique cultural complexity of China or required an appropriate application of local context when using foreign theories (Lin and Palmer 2016).

This institutional tension translates into two preferential hiring paths for sociology departments following the 1979 social reform. First, following the international path, universities welcome the overwhelming Westernisation of sociology faculty members for the international prestige it brings. Thus, universities have lured overseas tenured Chinese sociology professors back home to increase the internationalisation of Chinese sociology departments (e.g., Prof. D.X. Zhao from the University of Chicago to Zhejiang University). Second, following the indigenisation path at the same time, the state also emphasises the importance of localisation through the integration of international sociological theories and local contexts (Zheng 2001). For example, various universities have started to establish programmes or think-tanks focusing on China-specific topics in recent years, both intellectually (e.g., the Marxist with Chinese Characteristic Centre in Tsinghua University) and contextually (e.g., “ethnic” sociological programmes at Ningxia University). The goal is to construct networks of domestically trained academic experts who are familiar with the local context to better construct a Chinese-dominated narrative. Because of the quasi-market in higher education that pairs marketisation with state influence, sociology departments face both forms of institutional pressure.

In comparison, other disciplines, especially those with more connections to the market, such as STEM or business, have adopted a slightly different approach when facing indigenisation requirements. On the one hand, they have tried to seek international talents who are on the frontier of scientific research, which is measured purely based on academic criteria, such as Nobel laureates. On the other hand, they also focus on the international talents who can help China’s manufacturing to increase its value in the global industry chain (Shi, Liu, and Wang 2023). Specifically, the central government and universities provide more funding to attract overseas talents who work in the high technology sectors. These sectors either have a shortage of talent supply in China, such as semiconductors, or might lead to future development such as artificial intelligence and robotics (Sun, Guo, and Zhang 2017). Additionally, as these disciplines have more

channels for profit from the market, universities and government often offer much more lucrative financial packages for overseas talents compared with liberal arts disciplines such as sociology (Sun, Guo, and Zhang 2017).

The above literature has followed the logic map as shown below in Figure 1:

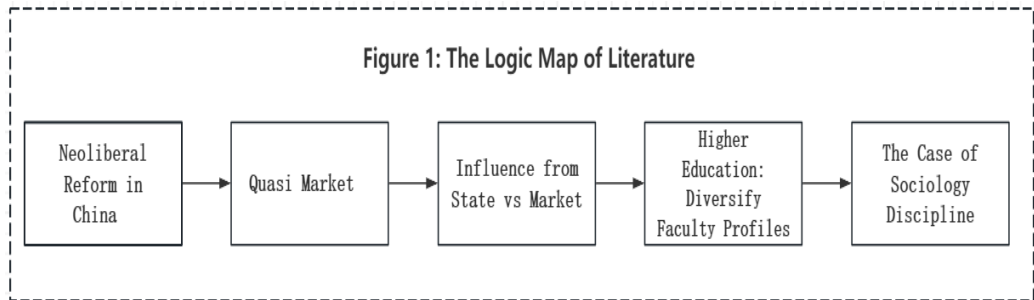


Figure 1: Logic map of the literature

Research Questions and Hypotheses

Our first research question asks how marketisation and state power influence the regional distribution of faculty with foreign PhDs in sociology departments. On the one hand, the spread of Western sociology is a byproduct of the market reforms (Bian and Zhang 2008); on the other hand, the “self-determination” principle seeks to limit market influences (Lin and Palmer 2016). The market influences are also limited by the lack of profitability among sociology departments themselves within Chinese universities. The state also favours domestically trained scholars for universities’ administrative positions (Lu 2013). These observations lead to the following hypotheses:

Hypothesis 1: There is no significant influence of marketisation on the representation of foreign-trained PhDs in Chinese sociology departments.

Hypothesis 2: Sociology departments in cities with high levels of state influence have fewer foreign-trained PhDs holders among their faculty members.

Our second research question asks how marketisation and state power influence faculty academic inbreeding in sociology departments. Cities with higher marketisation levels have an abundance of faculty members with diverse backgrounds and less inbreeding (Tang and Hao 2017). In comparison, state power contributes to academic inbreeding through organisational familiarity (Shen, Xu, and Zhang 2015). The state has constantly tried to establish sociology programmes with a Sinified narrative, greatly favouring domestically trained scholars who are already part of domestic *guanxi* networks. These observations lead to the following hypotheses:

Hypothesis 3: Sociology departments located in cities with more marketisation have less inbreeding among their faculty members.

Hypothesis 4: Sociology departments located in cities with higher levels of state power have more inbreeding among their faculty members.

Data and Methods

Data Sources

In this study, we have combined the backgrounds of faculty members from sociology departments on university websites and local measures of bureaucratic administration and marketisation influences from various governmental sources. To gather information on faculty members' backgrounds, the first step was to identify the sociology departments. The website of China Education Online (CEO) (中国教育在线), sponsored by the MoE, listed all the institutions that offered a Bachelor's degree in Sociology across China at the time when we started this project in December 2019. Then, we cross-referenced this list with each university's official website to check the existence of sociology departments. After data cleaning, the study finally included the academic profiles of 1,041 professors from 66 Chinese sociology departments.

Because the 66 sociology departments were located in 32 cities across China, we used the respective city-level measure to reflect local political position and marketisation. Among these cities, four were direct administrative cities and 28 were prefecture cities. Furthermore, "city" in our analysis refers to the whole administrative division, including both urban and rural areas administrated by that city. The independent and dependent variables relied mainly on three official publications: the China City Statistical Yearbook or "CCSY" (中国城市年鉴), individual city statistical yearbooks (各地城市年鉴), and the provincial yearbooks of statistics (各省城市年鉴). We relied mainly on the CCSY to provide socioeconomic data for all cities in China.

Dependent Variables

The study was interested in information at the department level, so all collected data for individual faculty members were organised on that level once collected. For the first research question, this study used two metrics to indicate the global capital in sociology departments for each university: (1) the percentage of faculty members holding PhD degrees from foreign institutions outside mainland China in each sociology department, and (2) the percentage of faculty members holding PhD degrees from the United States in each department. For the second research question, we measured the percentage of faculty members who were working in their alma mater in the department. We generated three dependent variables based on bachelor's, master's, and PhD records, respectively. Levels of inbreeding for each department can effectively reflect the market level of academic labour in the sociology discipline (Shen, Xu, and Zhang 2015). All the dependent variables were continuous and aggregated on the department level.

Because all the dependent variables are bounded proportions, we use a fractional logistic regression model with a quasi-maximum likelihood estimator (see Wooldridge 2010). The advantage of such a method is that it can produce consistent estimations with fewer

assumptions about linearity when dependent variables are in the format of fractions (Wooldridge 2010). Because of the bounded nature of the dependent variables, we adopted a generalised linear model for the estimation technique. Because the universities were nested in cities, we estimate clustered standard errors. This estimation technique counters the potential heteroscedasticity in estimation that occurs as the proportions reach the outer limits of their range (close to 0 or close to 1).

Independent Variables

We employed the city's administrative and socioeconomic variables to represent the influence generated by the state and the market. To directly measure influence from state power, we used the Chinese government's official hierarchical administrative tiers for each city. The 32 cities were categorised into four directly administered municipalities (DCMs), 11 sub-provincial prefecture cities, nine provincial capital prefecture cities, and eight regular prefecture cities. Each city's position in the Chinese political hierarchy directly represents the state power and is important for universities when it comes to attracting academic experts (Logan, Bian, and Bian 1999). We refer to this measure as "City Administrative Tier" in our analysis.

This study referred to seven previously identified city-level variables to measure the degree of marketisation and economic development (Fu, Zhu, and Ren 2015): (1) Gross domestic product (GDP) per capita and (2) GDP growth rate in 2018 indicate gross domestic product by population size and its overall growth rate, respectively, for the city from the previous year. We used three variables to measure the marketisation level of the labour market and employment environment from 2018: (3) the ratio of non-state to state workers, (4) the percentage of non-state workers among all workers, and (5) the percentage of market-related workers among all workers. "State workers" are those who work in a state-owned enterprise or collective firm (Fu, Zhu, and Ren 2015). "Market-related workers" refer to those who work in the financial sector and economy-related sectors in the real estate and leasing/business industries. We also used (6) the ratio of actually utilised foreign direct investment (FDI) to the city's total fixed assets investment in 2018 to measure the marketisation level in capital investment (Bian and Zhang 2002). Lastly, (7) value added tax per capita in 2018 based on the city's de facto population was used to measure the marketisation level in production–consumption cycles (Fu, Zhu, and Ren 2015).

Because of relatively high correlations between these socioeconomic measures, we subjected the seven measures of marketisation to principal components factor analysis (orthogonal rotation). Initially this produced a three-factor solution with the first factor most clearly representing marketisation (GDP per capita, proportion of FDI, ratio of market to non-market related jobs, and value added tax per capita). This first factor explained 74% of the variation among the marketisation measures, and we turned these four measures into a "marketisation" scale (Chronbach's alpha 0.89).

Covariates

We included covariates at the region, university, and department levels to control for the relative size of the sociology department and the overall academic ranking of the university in question. The Yangtze Region and Pearl Region were used as two dummy variables to denote a university location in the Yangtze or Pearl delta regions. Cities located in these two regions enjoy much more extensive economic and market opportunities, as they are a hub of international investment. “Professor Number” is a continuous variable measuring the size of a department, which refers to the number of faculty members in each sociology department. “University Academic Tier” is an ordinal variable indicating the university ranking in the most recent official academic projects of the Double First-Class programme.

In sum, dependent variables, independent variables and covariates are presented below:

Table 1: Dependent variables, independent variables, and covariates

Table 1: List of Variables	
Dependent Variables	Independent Variables
1 Percentage of Foreign PHD	1 Marketization
2 Percentage of US PHD	(Generate from 7 Local Market Variables)
3 Percentage of BA Inbreeding	2 City Administrative Tier
4 Percentage of MA Inbreeding	Covariates
5 Percentage of PhD Inbreeding	1 Yangtze Region
	2 Pearl Region
	3 Professor Number
	4 University Academic Tier

Table 2: Correlations between independent variables vs faculty profiles

	Log-Odds Overseas PhD%	Log-Odds US PhD%	Log-Odds PhD Inbreeding%	Log-Odds MA Inbreeding%	Log-Odds BA Inbreeding%
Pearl River Delta Region (=1)	0.036	-0.081	-0.144	-0.027	-0.008
Yangtze River Delta Region (=1)	.307*	0.056	0.012	-0.091	-0.16
City Admin Tier	.431**	.428**	0.232	0.151	-0.057
Marketisation	.445**	.454**	0.103	0.011	-0.133
University Academic Tier	.542**	.430**	.349**	.268*	0.207#
Professor Number	.384**	.398**	.301*	.323**	0.174
**p<.01; *p<.05; #p<.10 (two-tailed)					

Relations between Variables

The correlations between variables is presented above in Table 2. On average, just 3% of faculty in the studied sociology department have US PhDs and most departments (53) had no faculty with US PhDs. The average sociology department in our sample had relatively more faculty with foreign PhDs (16%), and 21 departments had no faculty with foreign PhDs. Inbreeding at each degree level varied within a small range, with the average of 10% of faculty holding PhDs from their own institution, 12% with Master of Arts (MAs) from their own institution, and 11% with Bachelor of Arts (BAs) from their own institution. In terms of inbreeding, 32 institutions reported no PhD-inbred faculty, 26 reported no MA-inbred faculty, and 27 reported no BA-inbred faculty. Overall, the descriptive results suggest that foreign-trained, US-trained, and inbred faculty are significant differentiators of sociology departments in China.

Table 2 suggests that both marketisation and administrative/political tier are positively associated with the number of faculty with US PhDs and foreign PhDs in sociology departments. Inbreeding is associated with university ranking (higher rankings lead to more inbreeding) and the number of professors in the department (a higher number of professors is associated with more inbreeding).

Methodology

Using fractional logistic regression, we examined the relationships between marketisation and administrative tier, controlling for region, university academic tier, and sociology department size. Our analytical strategy moves from macro to micro, so for each measure of sociology faculty origins, six equations are estimated, using linear model notation for ease of presentation:

- 1) $\hat{Y} = \alpha + F1(\text{Yangtze Region}) + F2(\text{Pearl Region}) + F3(\text{City Administrative Tier}) + \varepsilon$
- 2) $\hat{Y} = \alpha + F1(\text{Yangtze Region}) + F2(\text{Pearl Region}) + F3(\text{City Administrative Tier}) + F4(\text{Marketisation}) + \varepsilon$
- 3) $\hat{Y} = \alpha + F1(\text{Yangtze Region}) + F2(\text{Pearl Region}) + F3(\text{Marketisation}) + \varepsilon$
- 4) $\hat{Y} = \alpha + F1(\text{Yangtze Region}) + F2(\text{Pearl Region}) + F3(\text{City Administrative Tier}) + F4(\text{Marketisation}) + F5(\text{University Academic Tier}) + F6(\text{Professor Number}) + \varepsilon$
- 5) $\hat{Y} = \alpha + F1(\text{Yangtze Region}) + F2(\text{Pearl Region}) + F3(\text{City Administrative Tier}) + F4(\text{Marketisation}) + F5(\text{University Academic Tier}) + F6(\text{Professor Number}) + F7(\text{City Administrative Tier} * \text{Marketisation}) + \varepsilon$

Equations (1) and (3) examine the effects of political tier and marketisation with only the regional controls in the equations. Equation (2) then examines their net effects. If our hypotheses about the enduring effects of political allocation are supported, the effects of political tier in equation (2) should be negative and statistically significant in the prediction of US and foreign PhD recruitment and in the prediction of department inbreeding. Equation (5) examines the combined effects of political tier and marketisation on our measures of department faculty origins. A positive and significant interaction effect here would further support a quasi-market theory of stratification among Chinese sociology departments.

Results

Research Question 1: Foreign Trained PhDs

Table 3: Fractional logit analysis predicting the percentage of foreign PhDs ($N=66$)

	M1 (Equation 1)	M2 (Equation 2)	M3 (Equation 3)	M4 (Equation 4)	M5 (Equation 5)
	<i>b(SE)</i>	<i>b(SE)</i>	<i>b(SE)</i>	<i>b(SE)</i>	<i>b(SE)</i>
Pearl River Delta Region (=1)	.166 (.685)	.078 (.682)	.006 (.683)	.390 (.297)	.588# (.326)
Yangtze River Delta Region (=1)	.589 (.406)	.467 (.426)	.396 (.412)	.314 (.340)	.369 (.328)
City Admin Tier	.633** (.176)	.375# (.229)		.190 (.176)	.280 (.234)
Marketisation		.281 (.251)	.556** (.142)	.262# (.153)	.497* (.218)
University Academic Tier				.666** (.147)	.711** (.145)
Professor Number				.012(.012)	.013 (.012)
City Admin Tier*					.193 (.164)
Marketisation					
(Constant)	-.556 (.455)	-1.09* (.537)	-1.87** (.184)	-2.47** (.426)	-2.47** (.457)
Pseudo R-Sq.	0.061	0.065	0.060	0.113	0.116
F-Statistics	0.538	0.576	0.529	1.055	1.087

** $p < .01$; * $p < .05$; # $p < .10$ (two-tailed)

The results for foreign-trained PhDs are presented in Table 3. Hypotheses 1 and 2 suppose that the presence of foreign-trained PhDs will be negatively associated with city administrative tier and not associated with marketisation. While initially it looks like hypothesis 2 might be supported (see equation 2), marketisation reaches statistical significance once university academic tier and number of professors are added to our equations. Sociology departments located in cities with more active local markets have an advantage over others when luring those who graduated from foreign institutions. The interaction between marketisation and city administrative tier does not reach statistical significance and the additive marketisation effect remains statistically

significant. Overall, the ability to attract individuals with foreign PhDs to sociology departments in China is enhanced by the marketisation of the city where the university is located, contrary to our initial hypothesis.

Table 4: Fractional logit analysis predicting the percentage of US PhDs ($N=66$)

	M1 (Equation 1)	M2 (Equation 2)	M3 (Equation 3)	M4 (Equation 4)	M5 (Equation 5)
	<i>b</i> (<i>SE</i>)	<i>b</i> (<i>SE</i>)	<i>b</i> (<i>SE</i>)	<i>b</i> (<i>SE</i>)	<i>b</i> (<i>SE</i>)
Pearl River Delta Region (=1)	-1.12 (1.14)	-1.28 (1.12)	-1.50 (1.13)	-.917** (.331)	-.867** (.327)
Yangtze River Delta Region (=1)	-1.32 (.620)	-.305 (.588)	-.384 (.569)	-.572** (.192)	-.560** (.201)
City Admin Tier	1.39** (.429)	.857* (.426)		.977* (.420)	.973* (.414)
Marketisation		.469 (.430)	1.01** (.312)	.302 (.419)	.418 (.426)
University Academic Tier				1.14.** (.219)	1.16** (.211)
Professor Number City Admin Tier*				.040* (.017)	.041* (.017)
Marketisation					.095 (.262)
(Constant)	-.774 (.837)	-1.85* (1.00)	-3.55** (.394)	-4.07** (1.34)	-4.13** (1.33)
Pseudo R-Sq.	0.111	0.113	0.114	0.212	0.214
F-Statistics	1.034	1.055	1.066	2.229*	2.256*
** $p < .01$; * $p < .05$; # $p < .10$ (two-tailed)					

The results for US PhDs are presented in Table 4. The results for the presence of faculty with US PhDs support hypothesis 1 once we add university academic tier and number of professors, but the positive and significant effect of city administrative tier is contrary to hypothesis 2. While the effect of marketisation by itself positively affects the presence of US-trained sociologists (equation 3), this result only appears when the city administrative tier is removed in the models. Otherwise, the presence of faculty with US PhDs is not affected by marketisation, but it is affected by the city administrative

tier. Our results suggest that marketisation, political rankings, and jurisdictions have distinct effects on the ability to attract faculty members from foreign or US sources. The recruitment of individuals with US PhDs is influenced by the political designation of the city where the university is located. The recruitment of individuals with foreign PhDs (most of whom come from the European Union) is affected by marketisation, but not by political designation.

Research Question 2: Academic Inbreeding

Table 5: Fractional logit analysis predicting BA inbreeding percentage ($N=66$)

	M1 (Equation 1)	M2 (Equation 2)	M3 (Equation 3)	M4 (Equation 4)	M5 (Equation 5)
	<i>b(SE)</i>	<i>b(SE)</i>	<i>b(SE)</i>	<i>b(SE)</i>	<i>b(SE)</i>
Pearl River Delta Region (=1)	-0.136 (.703)	-.002 (.709)	-.050 (.705)	-.124 (.311)	.032 (.302)
Yangtze River Delta Region (=1)	-.945* (.433)	-.768# (.468)	-.829# (.456)	-1.16* (.522)	-1.11* (.478)
City Admin Tier	-.041 (.140)	.249 (.250)		-.519** (.194)	.117 (.275)
Marketisation		-.362 (.262)	-.154 (.160)	-.034 (.266)	-.332 (.240)
University Academic Tier				.370 (.274)	.421 (.289)
Professor Number City Admin Tier*				.062* (.024)	.061** (.024)
Marketisation					.148 (.161)
(Constant)	-1.99** (.285)	-1.41# (.558)	-1.94** (.171)	-3.46** (.812)	-3.31** (.776)
Pseudo R-Sq.	0.021	0.022	0.024	0.073	0.074
F-Statistics	0.177	0.186	0.204	0.652	0.662
** $p < .01$; * $p < .05$; # $p < .10$ (two-tailed)					

Hypothesised outcomes about the ratio of academic inbreeding vary based on degree levels. Table 5 presents the results for academic inbreeding based on faculty members' bachelor's degree location. Marketisation has no statistically significant effect at all on

bachelor’s degree inbreeding in sociology departments, but city administrative tier negatively affects the presence of BA-inbred faculty when a full set of covariates and controls are added to our models (equation 4), a result that contradicts hypothesis 4. Department size (number of professors) is positively associated with having BA-inbred faculty, and BA-inbred faculty are less likely to be found in the Yangtze River region. Overall, the results for city administrative tier are counter to our hypothesis that political designations would increase inbreeding among university faculty.

Table 6: Fractional logit analysis predicting MA inbreeding percentage ($N=66$)

	M1 (Equation 1)	M2 (Equation 2)	M3 (Equation 3)	M4 (Equation 4)	M5 (Equation 5)
	<i>b(SE)</i>	<i>b(SE)</i>	<i>b(SE)</i>	<i>b(SE)</i>	<i>b(SE)</i>
Pearl River Delta Region (=1)	-.221 (.702)	-.094 (.700)	-.215 (.697)	-.166 (.365)	-.025 (.411)
Yangtze River Delta Region (=1)	-.441# (.270)	-.270 (.280)	-.391 (.270)	-.425 (.287)	-.387 (.275)
City Admin Tier	.298* (.143)	.615* (.314)		.455 (.290)	.574# (.414)
Marketisation		-.386 (.268)	.108** (.118)	-.488* (.217)	.418 (.303)
University Academic Tier				.283 (.223)	-.348 (.300)
Professor Number City Admin Tier* Marketisation				.047* (.019)	.046* (.019)
(Constant)	-1.23** (.291)	-.587 (.678)	-1.87** (.158)	-2.01** (.759)	-1.90** (.740)
Pseudo R-Sq.	0.012	0.024	0.010	0.052	0.053
F-Statistics	0.101	0.204	0.083	0.454	0.463

** $p < .01$; * $p < .05$; # $p < .10$ (two-tailed)

The results for MA inbreeding are presented in Table 6. The results for MA inbreeding suggest a more complex relationship between city administrative tier, marketisation,

and the employment of one’s own graduates. Initially, in equations (1) and (2), city administrative tier is positively associated with MA inbreeding and marketisation is not, a finding that supports hypothesis 4. Marketisation has no statistically significant effect on MA inbreeding when city administrative tier is removed (equation 3), but the effect of marketisation becomes negative and statistically significant in equation (4) when university academic tier and department size are added, supporting hypothesis 3.

Table 7: Fractional logit analysis predicting PhD inbreeding percentage ($N=66$)

	M1 (Equation 1)	M2 (Equation 2)	M3 (Equation 3)	M4 (Equation 4)	M5 (Equation 5)
	<i>b</i> (<i>SE</i>)	<i>b</i> (<i>SE</i>)	<i>b</i> (<i>SE</i>)	<i>b</i> (<i>SE</i>)	<i>b</i> (<i>SE</i>)
Pearl River Delta Region (=1)	-1.12 (1.14)	-1.74 (1.10)	-.188# (1.10)	-.168** (.670)	-1.98** (.734)
Yangtze River Delta Region (=1)	-.132 (.620)	.054 (.249)	-.072 (.254)	-.164 (.274)	-.251 (.258)
City Admin Tier	1.39** (.429)	.673# (.373)		.463 (.335)	.275 (.334)
Marketisation		-.327 (.324)	.182 (.119)	-.388 (.250)	-.752** (.268)
University Academic Tier				.442** (.173)	-.374* (.176)
Professor Number				.037* (.018)	.038* (.018)
City Admin Tier*					-.301# (.165)
Marketisation					
(Constant)	-.774 (.837)	-.756 (.838)	-2.16** (.178)	-2.29** (.879)	-2.40** (.829)
Pseudo R-Sq.	0.111	0.031	0.014	0.070	0.075
F-Statistics	1.035	0.265	0.118	0.623	0.672

** $p < .01$; * $p < .05$; # $p < .10$ (two-tailed)

The results for PhD inbreeding are presented in Table 7. The results for PhD inbreeding suggest that the influence of the state (via city administrative tier) is mediated by the influence of university academic tier and department size. Initially, anyway, more state administrative influence increases PhD inbreeding. However, the effects of

marketisation are positive once controls are added for university academic tier and number of professors, and they remain so even with the addition of the interaction term in equation 5. The interaction term between city administrative tier and marketisation is negative and statistically significant, suggesting that the overall effects of marketisation are reduced through political influence. These results are contrary to hypotheses 3 and 4, but they do suggest that state political actors have ways to reduce the effects of marketisation on university hiring practices.

Discussion

Using professors' profiles from university websites across China, this research analysed market and state influences on the distribution of sociology professors in post-reform China. Like other disciplines (Ngok 2007), sociology departments have a significant advantage in recruiting foreign-trained PhDs if they are in cities with a high level of marketisation. The city administrative tier designated by the state power influences the presence of faculty with US PhDs. The results indicate that the state exercises a positive impact through direct monetary or tenure rewards, especially in the case of faculty with US PhD returnees (Sun 2010). However, the magnitude of the state's influence is limited to those with US PhDs because of the previously mentioned "self-determination" principle in the sociology discipline and less administrative mobility for sociology faculty members in particular (Lu 2013; Wang 2021).

Also, the state's preference for faculty with US PhDs might come from the hiring preference of university administrators. However, such a preference often comes from assessment pressures rather than an appreciation for academics. As the government appoints academic scholars according to university principles, scholars enjoy a similar official rank to that of a city mayor. Their main road plan for developing the university follows the government's initiative: The internationalisation of higher education is regarded as a cornerstone for the "Building World Class Universities" movement from a political point of view (Yang and Xie 2015). The ability to attract foreign scholars was introduced in their evaluation and assessment of these "university cadres" (Li 2006). From the perspective of university principles, the quantity and quality of overseas returned scholars are necessary components for promotion (Li 2006). However, university principles pay less attention to these overseas returned scholars once they have begun their careers in China. The political mission is already accomplished the moment these scholars sign their contracts, and thus there is a lack of motivation to provide them with long-term support (Li and Xue 2021). As a result, many professors who have returned from overseas have reported feeling "abandoned" because they do not receive any long-term support from university administration (Li and Xue 2021).

State power represented by the city administrative tier affected academic inbreeding in sociology departments, but not always in the ways we would expect. For instance, the city administrative tier is negatively associated with BA inbreeding; it is positively associated with MA inbreeding, and it renders the effects of marketisation still more negative with PhD inbreeding. The state influences academic inbreeding, not

necessarily by encouraging it but by reducing its influence (Shen, Xu, and Zhang 2015). The results for the bachelor's degree could emerge from the students' individual motivation. Students in graduate programmes are usually more dedicated to their predetermined professional goals than those in bachelor's programmes. Thus, graduate students generally wish to take advantage of their established *guanxi* when studying in their hosting universities. As discussed above, university administrators need to strictly follow the narrative of "better outcomes" from central government, but they can also exercise their "individualism" through these social connections in hiring practice. In cities with higher administrative tiers, the state network is embedded more extensively into the society. It produces more forms of *guanxi* networks beyond alumni status, which could minimise the inbreeding effect originating from academic background.

Compared to the state's role, the local city level of marketisation generally reduces inbreeding. Markets appear to diversify the background and institutional mobility of faculty members in sociology departments and, in the case of PhDs, the state further reduces the effects of marketisation on departmental inbreeding.

According to the quasi-market theory, the state's reform goal should emphasise social welfare rather than generating revenue (Le Grand and Bartlett 1993). Sociology departments have a strong connection with the state for historical reasons (Bian and Zhang 2008). Our results indicate that the academic expert distribution in sociology departments is indeed shaped by a duality of market and state influences. On the one hand, a city's degree of marketisation helps sociology departments achieve international legitimacy and prestige through foreign faculty recruitment. However, favourable administrative designation seems to enhance the recruitment of individuals with US PhDs, and state power (represented by the city's administrative tier) reduces departmental inbreeding in most cases. The state not only plays a supervisory role but also intends to secure the existence of sociology departments in the Chinese higher education system through administrative adjustment.

Because a city's administrative tier is often assigned by the government to ensure equal development across the nation, this tier system could effectively reduce the regional inequality quantitatively by maintaining sociology programmes in various regions regardless of economic or market development. However, market factors could still result in disparities in Chinese sociology departments between richer and poorer cities. Currently, the domestically trained scholars mainly publish in Chinese-indexed domestic journals, while foreign-trained PhD scholars tend to publish in internationally indexed English journals. It could take several years for Chinese universities to reach a standardised method to evaluate the quality of these publications among them. Also, the adjustment from the state administration tier could reinforce the "big city" effect and create an inequality axis based on political resources from the state (Hu 2014), leaving those small or lower-tier cities behind. Moreover, universities develop sociology departments in order to meet the central government's requirement of better understanding the society and making contributions towards public service (Bian and

Zhang 2008). However, how to achieve such a goal mainly depends on the research focus from each of the sociology department chairs or college deans. It would be interesting to investigate how their research interests could be reflected in the hiring process.

Conclusion

In 2018, a world-renowned Chinese-American scholar from Princeton, Yu Xie, published “Sociological Indigenisation in China Is a Pseudo-Proposition” in the top Chinese sociological journal *Sociological Study*. He argues that there is no uniqueness to the Chinese context of sociology as it follows the same research paradigm as Western sociology (Yu 2018). While some scholars agree with this statement, others believe that sociology as a discipline should serve to promote a better understanding of the uniqueness of China rather than the other way around (Wang 2021). The heat of debate was cooled down by a third party, which proposed that sociological indigenisation in China is an authentic problem as in other countries, and a universal methodological paradigm can also be applied in China to better communicate with the rest of the world (Wang 2021).

From a recruiting perspective, sociology departments in China might follow a preference duality in its hiring practices. They might hire both American-trained sociologists who possess strong expertise in Western methods as well as locally trained PhD graduates who are familiar with the Marxist research analysis. However, because the central government has pushed to establish independent “Marxist Colleges”, which have specialised in such tools of analysis since 2015 (Luo 2023), there is less urgency to apply it in sociology. As such, the competitiveness of locally trained PhD graduates might remain relatively low compared with Western-trained PhD graduates on average if they are looking for a position in a sociology department. Future research could research this preference to determine the actual hiring practice.

Moreover, the present research has provided a practical paradigm to analyse the relationship between urbanicity and faculty composition of sociology departments under the transforming society of China. To address the quality differences, future research could investigate the regional disparity in research productivity among sociology departments.

In addition, future studies could concentrate on how the size of a city could influence the development of sociology departments in China and reflect on the impact of urban development. This analytical framework can be extended to other more marketable disciplines such as STEM or business to test their marketability. Beyond the potential research in analysing the background of faculty members, the present study can also inspire future research to analyse other aspects of higher education administration. For example, the narrative of market versus state can also be applied to understand how universities from different cities with variation in local acceptance of market economy might operate differently in China.

In conclusion, the current analysis of sociology faculty members can illustrate the push and pull of the market within the Chinese higher education system, and future research can approach similar issues from both academic and urban development perspectives.

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