When the world is your oyster:

Factors shaping international students' post-graduation plans

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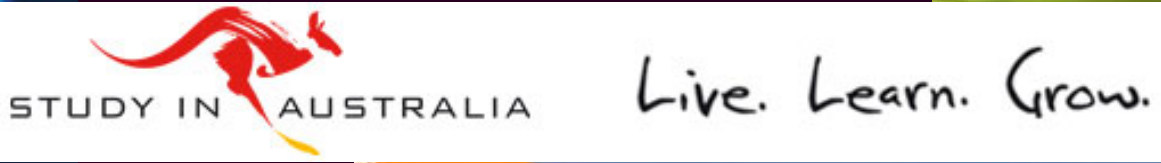Dept of Geography, University of Toronto

"Enrol here: Many countries regard universities as ideal talent-catching machines, not only because they select students on the basis of ability but also because those students bring all sorts of other benefits, from spending money to providing cheap research labour."

 - *The Economist*, 2006: 13

Translating the "race for talent" into programs and policy frameworks

- overseas educational marketing and branding

Imagine

STUDYING IN CANADA
ÉTUDIER AU CANADA

IMAGINE
Education au/in Canada

UK

NEW ZEALAND EDUCATED

STUDY IN AUSTRALIA

Live. Learn. Grow.

education malaysia

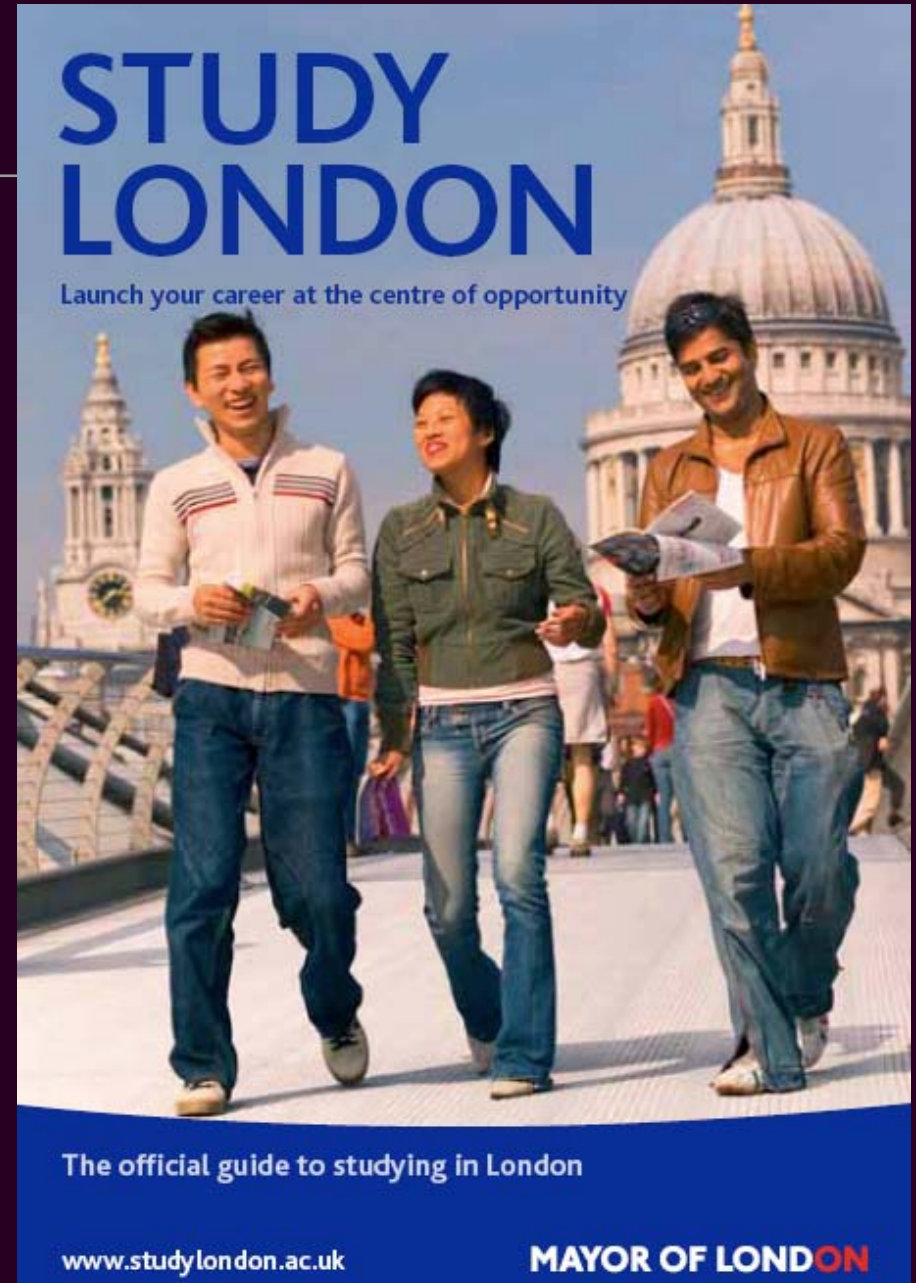study in holland
open to international minds

Translating the "race for talent" into programs and policy frameworks

- overseas educational marketing and branding

- scholarship programs for foreign graduate students

- (im)migration regulation
    - <u>before</u>: faster application process
    - <u>during</u>: off-campus employment
    - <u>after</u>: post-graduation work permits, routes to permanent residency

Regional/municipal interest

Study London campaign from London Higher and the Mayor of London

Provincial Nominee Program to fast-track students from study permit to PR status

STUDY LONDON

Launch your career at the centre of opportunity

The official guide to studying in London

www.studylondon.ac.uk   MAYOR OF LONDON

International graduate student mobility

Competitive issue with uneven geographic mobility patterns

> Efforts to determine stay rates and subsequent economic success (Regets 2001; Finn 2005; Hawthorne 2006; CBIE 2007)

Surprisingly little known about _why_ students make their decisions:

- International highly skilled labour migration (Ackers 2004; Saxenian 2006)

- Intra-national talent circulation (Florida 2002; Markusen and Schrock 2006; Vinodrai 2006; Storper and Scott 2009)

- Students as temporary migrants (King and Ruiz-Gelices 2003; Huang and Yeoh 2005; Waters 2006)

Research questions

- What are the factors and processes that shape the post-graduation settlement and employment decisions of international (post)graduate students upon completion of their studies?

- What is the likelihood that they will remain embedded in the city or region where they have been studying?

- What scope, if any, do regional institutions and governments have in influencing these decisions?
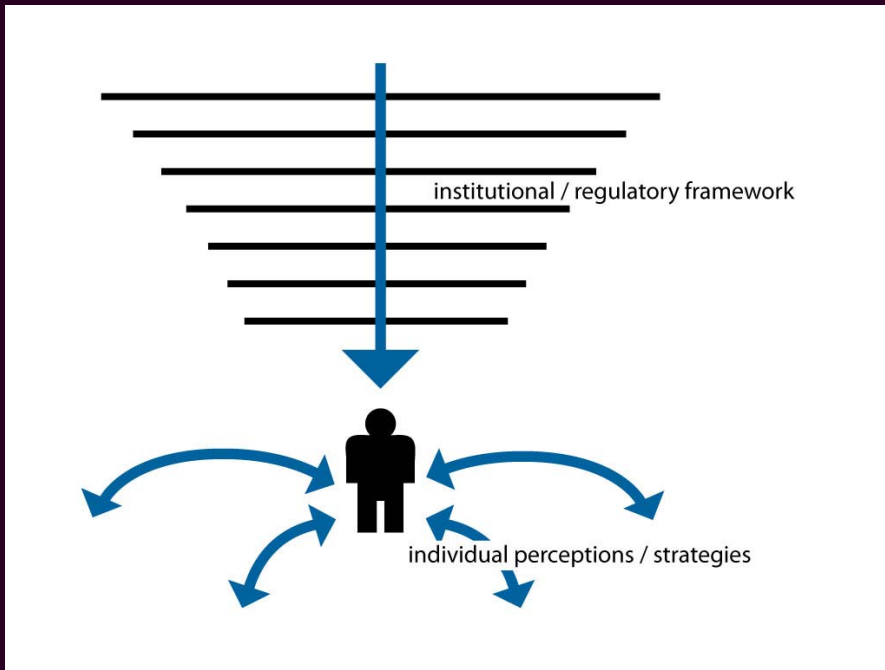
Conceptual framework

institutional / regulatory framework
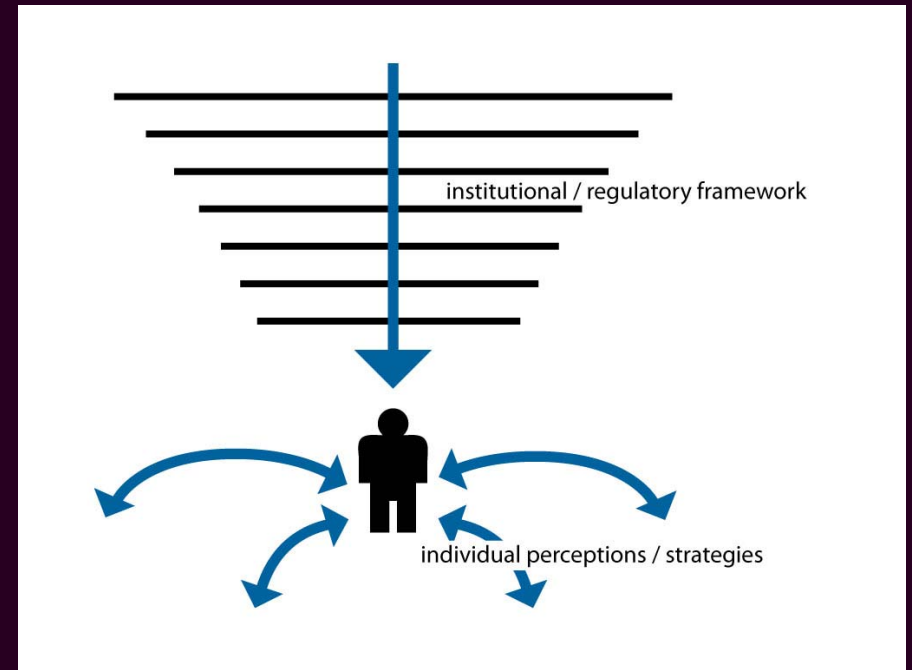
individual perceptions / strategies

Conceptual framework
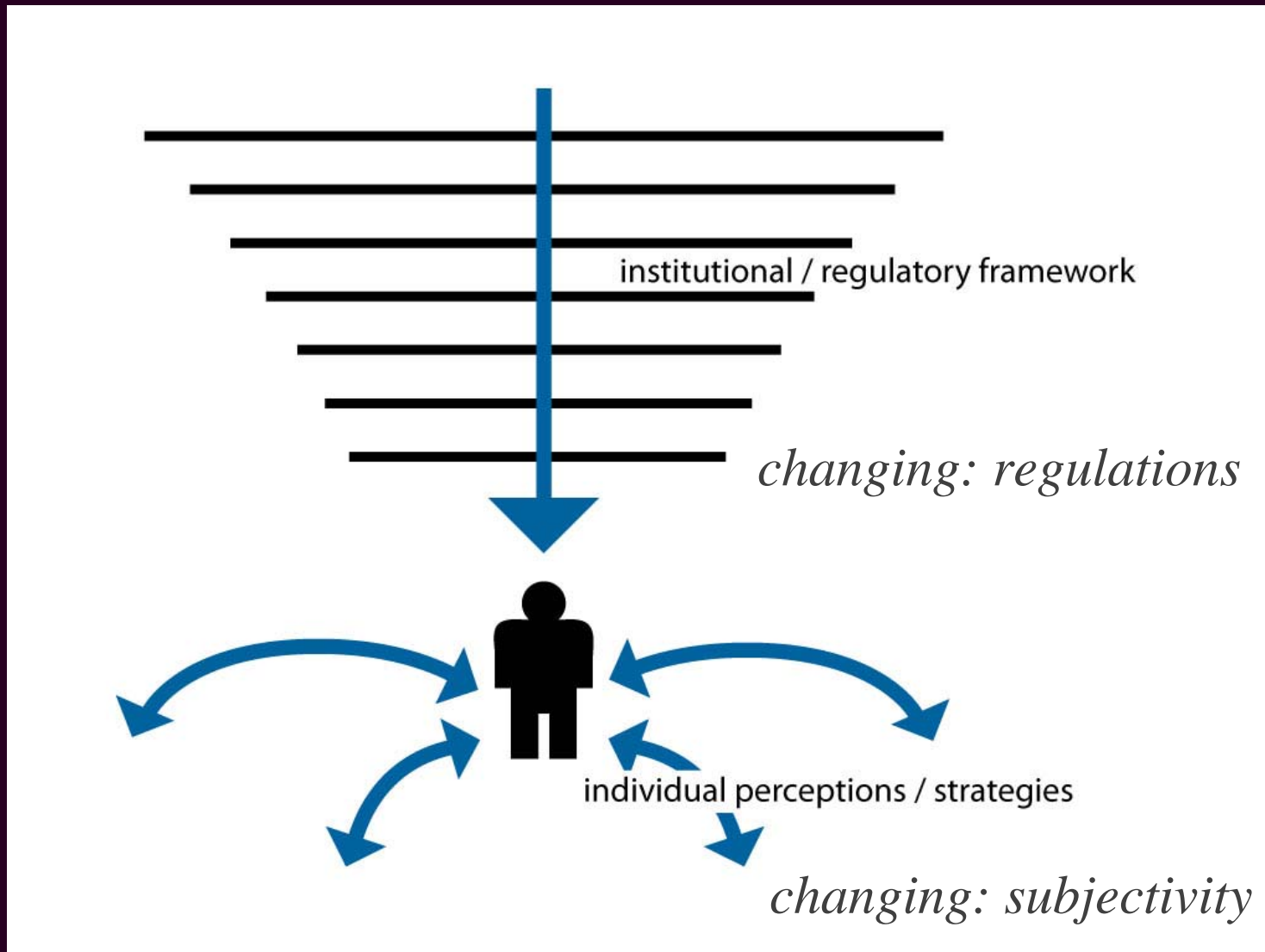
Conceptual framework

Toronto, Canada

London, UK

common personal concerns?   variation of regulatory/policy cultures?

Methods

- case studies: Toronto, Canada and London, UK

- 47 in-depth interviews with final year international (post)graduate students in science and engineering programs (32 PhD, 15 MSc/MASc)

- relative split between sites (27 at Imperial College London, 20 at University of Toronto) and gender (21 women, 26 men)

- diversity of national origins, departments, and status during studies (study permits, work permits, permanent residents)

Interview themes

- Professional/intellectual

- Personal/social

- Political/citizenship

Professional/intellectual

- distinction between committed academic and more open career interests

- strong sense of broadened career and geographic horizons

Professional/intellectual

"...One thing that you gain from the experience of being abroad is that you are actually exposed to the big world. (…) You just start thinking on a little bit bigger scale. You're here and so suddenly it's like there are almost no boundaries, it's like you can go anywhere in the world. Especially the fact that London is so multi-cultural and there are so many that are coming from so many countries and places. So you get a feeling that the world is like one big place that everyone just mixes around. It makes you think that maybe I don't have to go back home. It's like a ticket around the world. It definitely makes your options wider"

Taiwanese, PhD skin sciences, female (30), London

Professional/intellectual

- distinction between committed academic and more open career interests

- strong sense of broadened career and geographic horizons

- seeking to combine a <u>compelling work environment</u> with a <u>desirable quality of life</u>

Professional/intellectual

"…But in London if let's say this whole side [of the hospital] closed down, there still would be a lot of opportunity just because there's a critical mass here. It does influence because if the job market… (…) for example if I wanted to go into biotech (…) if you have a job, the next day the market crashes, your job is over. If I were in a little town somewhere I would actually have to physically move to get another job. But being in London I could probably find another job quite quickly. So I think in London you could take riskier jobs if you were inclined to do that… in mind that you could find something new relatively quickly without having to move.

American, PhD physiological genomics and medicine, female (32), London

Professional/intellectual

- distinction between committed academic and more open career interests

- strong sense of broadened career and geographic horizons

- seeking to combine a <u>compelling work environment</u> with a <u>desirable quality of life</u>

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- role of universities (faculty, career services, graduates schools) in shaping perception of non-research careers (London)

- socio-cultural norms and networks between universities and local firms (London)

Professional/intellectual

"I've sort of learned through Imperial, I can do anything! No honestly, because before, before I started the PhD, I was very, well, narrow-minded in the sense of a scientist. I thought I could just do scientific jobs, you know, either stay in academia or go in industry and just be a scientist, be in research and development, or whatever... or going into teaching, but always something to do with chemistry. But here, they show you, oh my god, you can do everything. You know, you can work in the City, in business and in banking because all of those qualities that you have, that you sort of gain as being a PhD student, they value those skills... like your analytical skills, or working under pressure, or working in a team, all of those sorts of things. I mean they really shape you."

German, PhD chemistry, female (28), London

Personal

- priority of personal relationships: partners and parents

- not always pulled "back home": pulled in different geographic directions

- challenges of balancing career opportunities for both partners, and of maintaining work-life balance

Personal

"...We don't know. That is something that we are trying to work out. Probably he won't be able to move right away. Maybe he can do a sabbatical. But I don't think we can both move and then come back. It's just because we are in different points in our careers. So that's actually a problem. And if we do decide to have kids it becomes really difficult, so it is a problem. We do talk a lot about it."

Greek, PhD laboratory medicine and pathobiology, female, married (31), Toronto

Personal

"As for being a parent I haven't really considered seriously having a kid... But now I'm 30 and sometimes I think maybe I will start to think of having a kid at 35. In that case, one thing is that Canada is really a great place for having a kid. You have great care for a year's maternity leave..."

Chinese, PhD molecular biology, female (30), unmarried, Toronto

Political

- offer of more flexible post-graduation work permits had strong influence on next steps → although viewed as temporary (both Toronto and London)

- extension to permanent resident status often used to avoid international tuition fees → ambivalent about long-term plans (Toronto)

- option of citizenship (Canada more so than UK): 'strategy' for long term career and family planning

Political

"But I think another reason that I'm leaning towards staying here is because of the new immigration. I feel it's a waste if I don't because you can get this right after you graduate if I stay here. If I go back now and want to come back later it will be a lot harder. So staying here is a smarter choice for now. If I get my PR then I can go anywhere. I can always go back and then come back, it doesn't matter. But if I just go back after graduation I lose this opportunity and it will be a lot harder to apply in China"

Chinese, MSc chemical engineering, female (25), Toronto

Political

KG: I'd be interested to hear why you applied to be a landed immigrant?

A: First of all I wanted to open as many doors as I could. Second, I thought that if in the future any of my children would like to come back to Canada and I was holding a Canadian passport, it would be good for them. Because I think it's a great country to have as a first or second country. It's a great country to have their passport. Also for funding opportunities. I realized very soon that the funding opportunities for international students are either low or not there. So I wanted to meet the competition. Maybe it's funny for you to hear that because I know you know that medical science takes all the funding ...

Iranian/Canadian PR, PhD molecular genetics, male (29), Toronto

Conclusions

- Diverse mix of issues and factors shape strategies and plans, common to scientific field and life-stage, and due to influence of regulatory cultures

- Commonly considered factors:
  - ease of post-graduation work permits + access to permanent resident/citizenship routes as increasingly influential
  - existence of (ethnic) community affiliation
  - openness of local employers to foreigners
  - sufficient S&E career opportunities

Conclusions

- Major differences between cases:
  - London: greater depth of opportunities to counteract risk; stronger pull of non-academic employment; short-term CV gain
  - Toronto: greater attraction for family and work-life balance interests; longer time commitment due to immigration regulation

- Relevant institutional factors largely determined at the national level → suggests limited scope for sub-national government strategies

- Raises further <u>questions</u>:
  - differences along disciplinary lines? contrast with changes in students' original intentions?
- Raises <u>concerns</u> about global justice and using offer of political membership to compete for skilled migrants

Questions?

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Citizenships

Canada/ born in Taiwan

Chile

China (9)

Cyprus

Dominica

Egypt

France

France/Peru

Germany (2)

Germany/New Zealand PR

Greece/Canadian PR

India (6)

Indonesia

Iran (2)

Iran/ America/ Canadian PR

Israel

Japan

Lebanon (2)

Malaysia (2)

Nigeria

Serbia

South Africa/China

Spain

Taiwan (2)

Thailand (2)

USA (2)

USA/China/UK

Academic programs: 32 PhD, 15 MASc/MSc

advanced computing
aeronautics, composites (2)
applied math
astronomy and astrophysics
biochemistry (2)
cell biology, medicine
chemical biology
chemical engineering (7)
chemistry (4)
chemistry/chemical engineering (2)
electrical and computer engineering (5)
genetics and development
haematology

laboratory medicine and pathobiology
material engineering
material engineering, biomedical
mechanical engineering (2)
molecular cardiology
molecular genetics (6)
optics and photonics
pharmacology
physiological genomics and medicine
skin sciences
software engineering
statistics

Political

"[It's] not always easy, especially for Iranians to go to US. I mean now. Unless you have some, maybe, Canadian citizenship as well. But because of this political problem it's not that much easy to go to US. But I know some guys, I mean some of my friends who graduate here, and they [go] to US to work. But I think all of them they got their, not immigration, their citizenship here and then go there."

Iran, PhD mechanical engineering, male (28), Toronto