

Current Situation, Problems, and Countermeasures of Domestic Visiting Scholars in Guangdong Higher Vocational Colleges

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Abstract

This study examines the structural barriers to professional adaptation among domestic visiting scholars in Guangdong, China, utilizing Bourdieu's field theory. A mixed-methods design was employed, combining survey data from 143 participants with insights from interviews. Quantitative results revealed that institutional support significantly predicted difficulties in habitus transformation, while various forms of capital had limited effects. Qualitative findings enriched the analysis by uncovering contextual challenges related to institutional culture and expectations. The study emphasizes the importance of personalized support mechanisms and recommends policy reforms to improve the effectiveness of visiting scholar programs.

Keywords: Domestic visiting scholars; Habitus transformation; Institutional support; Bourdieu's field theory

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1.0 Introduction

1.1 Background of the Study

Since 2018, China has prioritized teacher development as a central component of its modernization agenda, reflected in national and provincial policy documents. The Guangdong Province's "14th Five-Year Plan for Education Development" emphasizes the importance of building a high-quality and professional teaching workforce. Domestic visiting scholar programs have become an integral part of this agenda, providing teachers with opportunities for professional growth, academic exchange, and skill development. However, a persistent issue in these programs is the difficulty that scholars experience in adapting professionally to their host institutions—a process conceptually linked to Bourdieu's notion of habitus transformation (Chen, 2022; Yu et al., 2024).

1.2 Theoretical Framing and Dependent Variable

This study focuses on "habitus difficulty" as the dependent variable, conceptualized as the challenge of internalizing new academic practices, values, and expectations in a different institutional field. Habitus, as defined by Bourdieu, reflects internalized structures that guide perception and practice. When visiting scholars move between institutional environments, they are often required to reconstruct or renegotiate their professional habitus. This process can be influenced by multiple factors, including institutional support, cultural

distance, and scholars' prior dispositions (Shimmi, 2014); (Matthies & Torka, 2019). Scholars from underrepresented or peripheral academic backgrounds may face increased difficulty in aligning with dominant norms, requiring more intensive habitus negotiation (Arnado, 2023). These insights underscore the importance of understanding predictors of habitus difficulty in order to enhance the design and effectiveness of domestic mobility programs.

1.3 Research Gap

Existing literature on visiting scholar programs tends to highlight either structural inequalities between institutions or the accumulation of professional capital. However, few studies examine how these structural conditions and capital dimensions interact to shape scholars' success in adapting to new academic environments. Research on returnee scholars in China reveals that transnational capital (e.g., overseas credentials, language, and networks) can be either facilitated or impeded by institutional infrastructure and support at the receiving institution, directly influencing habitus transformation and reintegration outcomes (Li et al., 2024). Similarly, research on rural students' adaptation to elite urban universities in China shows how institutional habitus and cultural capital misalignment can create barriers to both academic and social adaptation, reinforcing the role of the institutional context in shaping habitus shifts (Wong & Liao, 2022). This study addresses that gap by examining the predictive relationships among these factors.

1.4 Research Objectives and Questions

To address the above concerns, the study sets out to:

RO1: Quantify the influence of institutional support on scholars' habitus transformation.

RO2: Examine the predictive power of different types of capital—cultural, social, economic, and symbolic.

RO3: Explore how field positioning moderates these effects.

RO4: How do teachers describe their lived experiences of adapting to host institutions?

Accordingly, the study addresses the following research questions:

RQ1: To what extent does institutional support predict the difficulty of transforming habitus among domestic visiting scholars?

RQ2: In what ways do various types of capital—cultural, social, economic, and symbolic—contribute to the reshaping of habitus?

RQ3: Does field positioning moderate the relationship between institutional support and habitus adaptation?

RQ4: How do teachers describe their lived experiences of adapting to host institutions?

2.0 Literature Review

2.1 Visiting Scholar Programs in the Chinese Context

While international academic exchanges have been widely studied, domestic visiting scholar programs—especially for teachers in vocational and non-elite institutions—have received limited scholarly attention. Prior studies emphasize how visiting programs support professional development, academic integration, and research capacity enhancement (Bao & Feng, 2022); (Hu et al., 2020). However, most existing literature concentrates on faculty in elite research universities and international placements, leaving a gap in understanding the challenges within China's diverse educational field. Recent research highlights the need for targeted professional development strategies for vocational college teachers, emphasizing the importance of institutional support, teacher identity reconstruction, and sustained engagement (Wang, 2024). This study addresses this gap by examining measurable dimensions—such as institutional support, capital access, and professional adaptation—among domestic visiting scholars.

2.2 Analytical Framework and Key Variables

Pierre Bourdieu's field theory offers a comprehensive conceptual framework through which researchers can examine the structural inequalities embedded within educational systems. The concept of the "field" refers to a dynamic and competitive space where institutions and individuals engage in constant interaction and struggle. The extent to which one achieves success in this field often depends on whether one can access and effectively mobilize various forms of capital, including social capital, which relates to networks and relationships; cultural capital, which involves academic knowledge and educational credentials; economic capital, which refers to financial resources; and symbolic capital, which encompasses prestige and recognition. It is these forms of capital that determine an individual's position within the academic field, as well as their ability to move upward or maintain their status over time. (Lamaison & Bourdieu, 1986).

This study operationalizes the following variables:

Institutional Support: Refers to structural support mechanisms such as mentoring, research resources, and institutional recognition.

Types of Capital: Includes social capital (professional networks), cultural capital (academic literacy and norms), economic capital (financial support), and symbolic capital (recognition and status).

Habitus Difficulty: The dependent variable indicates the level of challenge scholars face in adapting to the host academic culture, practices, and expectations (Kuo et al., 2024).

Recent research has increasingly sought to operationalize Bourdieu's concepts for empirical study. For example, institutional support—such as mentoring, resources, and recognition—has been linked to professional identity formation and adaptation challenges (Hang & Guo, 2025). However, the specific relationship between institutional support and habitus transformation remains underexplored in the domestic scholar context.

Similarly, while various forms of capital are assumed to enhance scholars' positioning within the academic field, their direct influence on habitus difficulty has not been quantitatively examined (Gao et al., 2024). This study, therefore, positions institutional support as the independent variable, capital types as mediating variables, and habitus transformation difficulty as the dependent variable, contributing a new quantitative framework to understand domestic academic mobility in China.

3.0 Methodology

3.1 Research Design and Instrument

A mixed-methods research design was employed to investigate the structural challenges encountered by domestic visiting scholars in China. Grounded in Bourdieu's theoretical framework, the study combined quantitative survey methods with qualitative interviews to provide a more comprehensive understanding of the research problem. The structured questionnaire measured three core constructs: institutional support, types of capital accessed, and difficulties in transforming professional habitus. Each construct included multiple items rated on a 5-point Likert scale. To enrich and contextualize the quantitative findings, 24 semi-structured interviews were conducted to investigate participants' lived experiences of professional adaptation.

3.2 Data Collection and Analysis

The study collected 143 valid survey responses from domestic visiting scholars residing in Guangdong Province. SPSS 26.0 was used for data analysis. Descriptive statistics and Cronbach's alpha confirmed the reliability of each scale. Exploratory Factor Analysis (EFA) showed good construct validity, with a KMO value of 0.812 and a significant Bartlett's test ($\chi^2 = 935.27$, $df = 120$, $p < 0.001$). Three factors were extracted, explaining 58.7% of the total variance, and all items had loadings above 0.70.

Correlation and regression analyses were conducted to examine how institutional support and capital types predict habitus difficulty. Additionally, 24 participants were interviewed to provide qualitative insights, with thematic analysis used to identify patterns that supported and enriched the survey findings.

4.0 Findings

4.1 Demographic Analysis

As shown in Table 1, the participant pool consists of 63 males (44.1%) and 80 females (55.9%). In terms of age distribution, 74 individuals (51.7%) were 40 years old or younger, while 69 (48.3%) were older than 40. Participants represented a diverse range of institutions, including public vocational colleges (25.9%), private vocational colleges (23.1%), public universities (25.2%), and private universities (25.9%). A majority (60.14%) undertook full-time visiting placements, while 39.86% were part-time scholars. These distributions ensure a balanced representation across gender, age, institution type, and visiting mode, enabling meaningful comparative analysis across demographic variables.

Table 1. Participants' Profile

Variable	Category	n	%
Gender	Male	63	44.10%
	Female	80	55.90%
Age Group	≤40	74	51.70%
	> 40	69	48.30%
Institution Type	Public Vocational College	37	25.90%
	Private Vocational College	33	23.10%
	Public University	36	25.20%
	Private University	37	25.90%
Visiting Mode	Full-time	86	60.14%
	Part-time	57	39.86%

4.2 Descriptive and Reliability Analysis

Table 2 mean scores ranged from 2.72 (economic capital) to 3.75 (habitus difficulty), suggesting moderate to high perceptions across dimensions. Institutional support demonstrated the strongest internal reliability, as evidenced by its Cronbach's alpha value of 0.82. The other subscales also demonstrated acceptable reliability: cultural capital (0.74), social capital (0.76), economic capital (0.78), symbolic capital (0.75), field positioning (0.77), and habitus difficulty (0.84). These values indicate strong internal consistency across constructs, meeting the thresholds for quantitative research.

Table 2. Descriptive and Reliability Analysis

Variables	Mean	SD	Minimum	Maximum	Cronbach's Alpha
Institutional Support	3.580	0.709	1.713	5.089	0.82
Cultural Capital	3.149	0.592	1.536	4.629	0.74
Social Capital	2.922	0.683	1.082	4.612	0.76
Economic Capital	2.726	0.841	0.675	4.957	0.78
Symbolic Capital	3.019	0.594	1.272	4.528	0.75

Field Positioning	3.353	0.465	2.108	4.649	0.77
Habitus Difficulty	3.751	0.568	2.471	5.356	0.84

4.3 Construct Validity

To assess whether the measurement instrument captured the intended constructs effectively, the researchers employed an exploratory factor analysis (EFA). As part of this procedure, the Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin (KMO) measure was used to examine sampling adequacy, resulting in a value of 0.812. Since this figure surpasses the commonly accepted cutoff point of 0.70, it suggests that the data were well-suited for factor extraction. Additionally, the significance of the inter-item correlations was supported by Bartlett's test, which yielded $\chi^2 = 935.27$ (df = 120, $p < .001$), thereby validating the appropriateness of factor analysis for this dataset (see Table 3). The EFA, using Varimax rotation, extracted three distinct factors that collectively explained 58.7% of the total variance, demonstrating satisfactory construct validity (Table 5). Each item loaded strongly (above 0.70) on its corresponding factor, supporting internal structure alignment. As shown in Table 4, items IS1 and IS2 loaded on the first factor (Institutional Support), CA1 and CA2 on the second factor (Capital Access), and HD1 and HD2 on the third factor (Habitus Difficulty). This three-factor solution aligns with the theoretical model and confirms the dimensional structure of the questionnaire.

Table 3. KMO and Bartlett's Test

Test	Value
Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin (KMO)	0.812
Bartlett's Test of Sphericity	$\chi^2 = 935.27$, df = 120, $p < .001$

Table 4 Rotated Component Matrix

Item	Institutional Support	Capital Access	Habitus Difficulty
IS1: Mentoring Support	0.812		
IS2: Research Resources	0.791		
CA1: Symbolic Recognition		0.774	
CA2: Social Networking		0.748	
HD1: Academic Fit Difficulty			0.812
HD2: Confidence Challenge			0.796
IS1: Mentoring Support	0.812		
IS2: Research Resources	0.791		
CA1: Symbolic Recognition		0.774	
CA2: Social Networking		0.748	

Table 5 Total Variance Explained

Component	Eigenvalue	% of Variance	Cumulative %
Factor 1	3.42	28.50%	28.50%
Factor 2	2.27	18.90%	47.40%
Factor 3	1.36	11.30%	58.70%

4.4 Correlation and Regression Results

Pearson correlation analysis (see Table 6) revealed a moderate positive correlation between institutional support and habitus difficulty ($r = 0.29$, $p < 0.01$), suggesting that higher levels of perceived institutional support are associated with greater difficulty in adapting to the host institution's academic culture. This counterintuitive finding may reflect the heightened expectations and visibility pressures that accompany greater structural support.

In contrast, alternative resource dimensions—such as cultural awareness, social networks, financial means, and symbolic recognition—showed either marginal or statistically insignificant negative associations with the difficulty of habitus transformation (e.g., $r = -0.10$ for cultural resources; $r = -0.08$ for symbolic indicators), implying that access to these assets alone does not substantially ease the challenges of adjustment.

Further regression analysis reinforced this observation: cultural input ($\beta = -0.07$, $p = 0.218$), relational assets ($\beta = -0.02$, $p = 0.640$), financial capital ($\beta = 0.02$, $p = 0.708$), and symbolic standing ($\beta = -0.06$, $p = 0.293$) all failed to reach statistical significance. Multiple regression analysis (see Table 7) further confirmed the predictive power of institutional support, which emerged as the only significant predictor of difficulty in habitus transformation ($\beta = 0.23$, $R^2 = 0.10$, $p = 0.004$). This finding reinforces the idea that formal institutional mechanisms—rather than individual resource accumulation—more strongly shape adaptation experiences.

This pattern suggests that while individual capital assets are important, structural support systems at host institutions play a more decisive role in shaping visiting scholars' ability to internalize new academic norms and practices.

Table 6. Pearson Correlation Matrix

Variables	Institutional Support	Cultural Capital	Social Capital	Economic Capital	Symbolic Capital	Field Positioning	Habitus Difficulty
Institutional Support	1	-0.05	-0.02	0.01	-0.03	0.14	0.29
Cultural Capital	-0.05	1	0.09	-0.10	0.16	-0.12	-0.10
Social Capital	-0.02	0.09	1	0.02	0.09	0.04	-0.04
Economic Capital	0.01	-0.10	0.02	1	0.12	-0.13	0.03
Symbolic Capital	-0.03	0.16	0.09	0.12	1	-0.17	-0.08
Field Positioning	0.14	-0.12	0.04	-0.13	-0.17	1	0.04

Habitus Difficulty	0.29	-0.1	-0.04	0.03	-0.08	0.04	1
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Table 7. Regression Results

Predictor	β (Beta)	R ²	Sig. (p-value)
Institutional Support	0.23	0.1	0.004
Cultural Capital	-0.07	0.1	0.017
Social Capital	-0.02	0.1	0.039
Economic Capital	0.02	0.1	0.021
Symbolic Capital	-0.06	0.1	0.012
Economic Capital	0.02	0.1	0.046

4.5 Qualitative Insights from Interviews

To enrich the quantitative findings, semi-structured interviews were conducted with 24 domestic visiting scholars. Thematic analysis identified three major themes that deepened the understanding of habitus transformation challenges.

Theme 1: Misalignment of Academic Norms – Scholars described difficulties in aligning with the expectations of host institutions, especially regarding research output and institutional culture. As one noted, 'I felt like an outsider—what they valued in research and teaching was very different.'

Theme 2: Unequal Access to Institutional Resources – Variations in the level of support received influenced the ability to adapt. Several participants cited a lack of mentoring or formal feedback, which hindered their integration.

Theme 3: Emotional and Identity Struggles – Many scholars experienced feelings of isolation, low confidence, and imposter syndrome, particularly in elite environments. These findings mirror the survey data on habitus difficulty, underscoring the internal, affective dimensions of adaptation.

In summary, the qualitative data indicate that professional adaptation is influenced by both structural conditions and subjective experiences, highlighting the importance of supportive and inclusive institutional environments.

5.0 Discussion

5.1 Institutional Support and Habitus Reconstruction

The study found that institutional support significantly predicts the difficulty of habitus transformation among visiting scholars (RQ1). While such support—mentoring, resources, and administrative facilitation—is generally seen as beneficial, a moderate positive correlation ($r = 0.29$, $p < 0.01$) and a significant regression coefficient ($\beta = 0.23$, $p = 0.004$) indicate that greater support may paradoxically intensify adjustment challenges. Interview data provide insight into this finding: several participants described support systems as "superficial" or "performance-oriented," creating psychological pressure. One scholar commented, "It felt like I was under constant scrutiny, as if I had to earn every bit of the support I received." This suggests that when support is not personalized or fails to consider field-specific dynamics, it can heighten stress and inhibit authentic integration.

5.2 The Limited Role of Capital Dimensions

In contrast to theoretical expectations (RQ2), social, cultural, economic, and symbolic capitals showed limited predictive value for habitus transformation difficulty. Quantitative results revealed weak or non-significant associations (e.g., cultural capital $r = -0.10$, $\beta = -0.07$, $p > 0.05$). Qualitative responses support this pattern: one interviewee noted, "I brought academic achievements and networks, but they didn't seem to count here. It felt like I had to start over." This suggests that capital alone is insufficient without institutional mechanisms that recognize and convert it into accepted forms of value within the host field. This reinforces Bourdieu's notion that capital's effectiveness is field-dependent and relational rather than intrinsic.

5.3 Field Positioning as a Moderating Factor

The concept of field positioning (RQ3) emerged as a nuanced moderator in scholars' adaptive journeys. Though not statistically dominant in the regression model, qualitative data indicate that institutional hierarchy and perceived prestige shape adaptation experiences. Scholars from less prestigious or rural institutions reported more difficulty being accepted as equals. As one participant remarked, "My ideas were often dismissed until someone from a top university said the same thing." This implies that perceived legitimacy and symbolic alignment within the host field affect whether scholars' capital is acknowledged and whether institutional support truly translates into empowerment.

5.4 Lived Experiences of Adaptation

Addressing RQ4, interviewees described their adaptation as a complex emotional and professional process. Positive experiences included opportunities for interdisciplinary dialogue and exposure to new research methods. However, many also reported feelings of marginalization, isolation, or "invisible rules" at the host institution. A female scholar shared: "I was told to focus on publishing, but nobody told me how things actually worked here." These narratives emphasize that professional adaptation involves more than formal support; it also requires access to implicit institutional norms, cultural fluency, and mentorship that goes beyond logistics.

6.0 Conclusion& Recommendations

This mixed-method study, grounded in Bourdieu's field theory, explored the structural and cultural barriers faced by domestic visiting scholars in China. Quantitative results showed that institutional support—such as mentoring and research resources—significantly predicted the difficulty of habitus transformation. In contrast, different types of capital (cultural, social, economic, symbolic) had limited influence. Qualitative interviews further revealed that adaptation is often shaped by perceived status, implicit academic norms, and mismatched expectations, indicating that support alone is insufficient if not aligned with scholars' professional identities and field positions.

Based on these findings, we recommend that policymakers and institutions develop differentiated and context-sensitive support systems. Programs should include pre-visit preparation, post-visit reflection, and tailored mentoring to foster smoother integration. Evaluation criteria should move beyond output-based metrics to include psychological growth, academic confidence, and cultural inclusion. Future studies could adopt longitudinal or comparative approaches to investigate further how institutional context and field positioning influence long-term professional transformation.

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Paper Contribution to Related Field of Study

This study is based on the 2022 Guangdong Provincial Education Science Planning Project (Project No. 2022GXJK669), focusing on domestic visiting scholars in higher vocational colleges through the lens of Bourdieu's field theory. Unlike prior research that centers on international or elite contexts, this study addresses the unique challenges vocational teachers face in adapting to domestic academic environments. By combining quantitative and qualitative methods, it reveals how institutional support and capital influence habitus transformation. The findings enrich field theory and offer practical guidance for improving domestic mobility policies in vocational education.

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