Leif A. Johnson
Curriculum Vitae

leif.johnson@xjtlu.edu.cn
+86 13 120 858 802

HS351 (Humanities & Social Science Building)
Xi'an Jiaotong-Liverpool University
Suzhou Dushu Lake Science and Education Innovation District
P.R. China
215 123

Academic position

2021-Current: Assistant Professor, Department of China Studies, Xi'an-Jiaotong Liverpool University

Education

2021 PhD, University of Kentucky Department of Geography
Dissertation: *Building quality? Migration, suzhi and subaltern masculinity in the Shanghai construction industry.*
Advisor: Patricia Ehrkamp

2015 MA, University of Kentucky Department of Geography
Thesis: *Regulating Urban Belonging: China's Hukou System as Intra-National Bordering Process*

2011 BA, Macalester College
Cum Laude
International Studies, Latin American Studies.
Honors Thesis in Latin American Studies: *We Have Something to Say: Ideas and Mobilization in the Migrant Solidarity Movement*

Publications

Peer-reviewed scholarship:

Johnson, Leif (Under review - Second round, major revisions, *The Annals of the American Association of Geographers*). "Noncitizenship and the affects of unbelonging: On the embodiments of citizenship exclusion.

Johnson, Leif, 2026. "Fractal borders: Locating the boundaries of urban China." *Geopolitics*. Online First.

Johnson, Leif, Jacobsen, Malene and Patricia Ehrkamp, 2024. "The work of fluid metaphors in migration research: Geographical imaginations and the politics of writing." *Progress in Human Geography* 48(6): 843-860.

Johnson, Leif, 2023. "Who builds Shanghai's fiber-optic network? Thinking urban infrastructure through migrant construction labor." *Environment & Planning A: Economy and Space* 55(4): 795-809.

Johnson, Leif, 2023. "Technologies of migration and citizenship: Life and work at the base of Shanghai's digital infrastructure stack." *Global Media & China* 8(3): 289-304.

Johnson, Leif, 2017. "Bordering Shanghai: China's *hukou* system and processes of urban bordering." *Geoforum* 80: 93-102.

Johnson, Leif, 2015. "Material Interventions on the U.S.-Mexico Border: Investigating a Sited Politics of Migrant Solidarity." *Antipode* 47(5): 1243-1260.

Peer-reviewed book chapter:

Johnson, Leif, 2026. "Affective Exclusion and Unbelonging in the Chinese Megacity." *Urban Atmospheres between East and West.* Routledge, 2026. 125-145.

Research grants and fellowships

External funding:

2022	ACLS-Luce Early-Career Fellowship in China Studies: $15,000
2019	Fulbright-Hays Doctoral Dissertation Research Abroad (DDRA): $36,500
2015	NSF Graduate Research Fellowship Program, Honorable Mention
2014	National Science Foundation East Asia and Pacific Summer Institute: (NSF-EAPSI) $10,000

Competitive internal funding:

2024-26	Xi'an Jiaotong-Liverpool University Research Development Fund: ¥100,000 ($15,000 equivalent)
2018-19	University of Kentucky Dean's Competitive Graduate Fellowship: $10,000
2016-17	University of Kentucky Presidential Fellowship, 2016-2017: $20,000
2015-16	University of Kentucky Graduate School Academic Fellowship, 2015-16: $15,000
2013-15	University of Kentucky Multi-Year Fellowship, 2013-15: $40,000

Awards

Confucius Institute Graduate Student Summer Travel Grant, 2017: $1,500
Confucius Institute Graduate Student Summer Travel Grant, 2016: $1,500
AAG International Geographical Union Conference Travel Grant, 2016: $2,000
University of Kentucky Royster Award of Special Distinction, 2015-17: $5,000/year
University of Kentucky Daniel R. Reedy Quality Achievement Award 2013-15: $6,000
National Merit Scholarship, 2007: $2,500

Invited Lectures

2024 *Intergenerational deferral and subaltern masculinity under construction: Scaffolding identities among migrant men in the Shanghai building trades.* Liverpool University Department of Sociology. Nov 4, 2024

2024 *Affects of unbelonging: On migration and noncitizenship in Shanghai.* Durham University Centre for Contemporary China Studies. Nov 1, 2024

2024 *Fractal urban borders: Locating the boundaries of urban China.* University of Leeds Department of Geography Centre of Social Justice, Cities, and Citizenship. Mar 6, 2024

2023 *Researching infrastructure from the ground up: On the ethnography of precarious infrastructural labor in urban China.* University of Leeds Department of Geography PGR Methods Seminar, Nov 10, 2023

2023 *Building infrastructure, building the urban: Migrant labor in a Shanghai fiber-optic reconstruction project.* Harvard/University of British Columbia/MIT Urban China series, Apr 22, 2023

2023 *'Until my body doesn't work anymore': Resignation and subaltern masculinity in the Chinese construction industry.* Xi'an Jiaotong-Liverpool University China Talk series, Suzhou, China, Mar 8, 2023

2023 *Shanghai's construction industry and the formation of Chinese masculinity.* China Crossroads forum, Shanghai, China, Feb 11, 2023

2022 *Technologies of migration and citizenship: Life and work at the base of Shanghai's digital infrastructure stack.* Cities, Migrants and Ethnic Groups International Conference, School of Ethnology & Sociology, Minzu University, Beijing, China, Nov 26, 2022

Academic conferences – Research presentations

2026 *The Line and the margins of Global China: Migration infrastructures of Chinese low-waged trans-Pacific mobility.* Paper presented in "International Migration and Mobility in an East Asian context" session, at American Association of Geographers conference, San Francisco, USA, March 20, 2026.

2025 *Beyond the urbanization of people: Reconsidering rural and urban identities in the Chinese megacity.* Paper presented in "Beyond rural/urban divides 1: Definitions, dichotomies, differentiations of subjectivity" session co-organized with Asa Roast, at American Association of Geographers conference, Detroit, USA, March 24, 2025.

2024 *Global China through marginal and temporary mobilities.* Paper presented in "Multilingual Research and Gendered Analysis in China Studies in the Age of Global Asias" session at Association for Asian Studies' AAS-in-Asia conference, Yogyakarta, July 9, 2024

2023 *Fractal urban borderlands: Tracing the boundaries rural and urban life in Shanghai.* Paper presented at the East Asian Regional Conference on Alternative Geographies, December 14, 2023

2022 *Technologies of Urban Migration and Citizenship: Grassroots Life and Work in Shanghai's Digital Infrastructure Construction*. Paper presented in "Migrants and Work in the Digital Age" session at the conference on Cities, Immigrants and Ethnic Groups, Minzu University of China, November 26, 2022

2022 *What is a flow? Unpacking fluid metaphors and the work they do in migration research.* Paper presented with Patricia Ehrkamp and Malene Jacobsen in "Disease, contamination, dehumanization, and immigration control" session at American Association of Geographers conference, online, March 2, 2022

2020 *"A high-quality urban life": Theorizing ascriptions of human and material "quality" in the everyday labor of a Shanghai infrastructure upgrading project.* Paper presented in "Critical Perspectives on Chinese Infrastructure," session co-organized with Goeun Lee, at Asian Studies Association in Asia conference, Kobe, Japan, August 31, 2020

2016 *Translation Across the Borders of Citizenship & Belonging*. Paper presented in "Borders in Translation: Language Practices Across Boundaries of State and Difference," at Thomas R. Watson conference on Rhetoric & Composition, University of Louisville, October 21, 2016

2016 *Regulating urban belonging: China's hukou system and processes of intra-national bordering.* Paper presented in "China's Urban Transformation: Multidisciplinary Research on Urban China," session at International Geographical Congress, Beijing, China, August 22, 2016.

2014 *Sites of Struggle: Enacting Pro-Migrant Solidarity on the U.S. - Mexico Border.* Paper presented in "Reimagining Nationalisms: Communities and Borders in Moments of Transition," session at Association of American Geographers Annual Meeting, April 8, 2014

2011 *Arizona to Minnesota: Detention and Solidarity.* Paper presented at Saint Cloud State University Global Goes Local Conference on Conditions of Immigrant Workers and Families, April 12th 2011

2011 *Conscientizacion: Framing Processes and Mobilization in the Migrant Solidarity Movement.* Paper presented at University of Texas–Austin ILASSA Conference on Latin America, February 3-5, 2011.

Academic workshops and panels

2025 Invited reviewer and speaker: "Social Research in China: Ethics, Reflexivity and Methodology" workshop organized by University of Sydney China Studies Centre, Suzhou, China, September 22-24, 2025.

2025 *Affective Noncitizenship and Unbelonging in the Chinese Megacity.* Talk delivered in "Affective City: Urban Space Between the East and West" research workshop, XJTLU Department of Architecture, Suzhou, China, June 5 2025

2024 Invited reviewer and speaker: "'Platform-City' PhD Seminar Series: Platformization, Urbanization, and Media in Everyday Life" Workshop on Media and Political Economy, Communication University of China, Beijing, China. November 11, 2024.

2024 Co-organizer (with Sam Berlin, Durham University): XJTLU HSS PGR

professionalization workshop on UK/EU postdoctoral funding schemes. Suzhou, China. August 19, 2024

2023 Co-organizer (with Asa Roast, University of Leeds): XJTLU Early-career researchers' workshop on qualitative research methods. Suzhou, China. Aug 11, 2023

2022 Participant, XJTLU Urban Project workshop on urban China. Suzhou, China. July 15, 2022

2021 *Building but not belonging: Affective citizenship in the Shanghai construction industry.* Talk given at Xi'an Jiaotong-Liverpool University Urban Project, Suzhou, China, Dec 29, 2021.

2018 Participant, Made in China Summer School workshop on Chinese labor studies "Chinese Labourscapes: Transregional Perspectives on Work and Rights." July 9-13, 2018

2016 Panel organizer: Solidarities across lines of (under)development and (un)belonging, panel at Conference on Critical Geography, University of Kentucky, October 15, 2016

2016 Participant, UCLA-Shanghai Jiaotong University Joint Text and Translation Workshop: New Materials and Inter-disciplinary Methods of Studying Twentieth-Century Chinese History: Issues of Governance in Contemporary China, July 4-11, 2016

2015 Panelist and organizer (with Araby Smyth): "People out of Place", panel at Conference on Critical Geography, University of Kentucky, October 25, 2015

2015 Panelist, "Radical Teaching" panel at Association of American Geographers Annual Meeting, April 25, 2015

2015 Panelist, "Immigration and Law, Migrant Activism, 'Citizenship after Orientalism'" panel at Association of American Geographers Annual Meeting, April 23, 2015

2014 Panelist, "STOP criminalizing the Migrant-other ... PROMOTE radical autonomy resisting borders and b/ordering mechanisms" panel at Association of American Geographers Annual Meeting, April 9, 2014

Teaching

XJTLU Humanities & Social Sciences Publication seminar (PhD level), Spring 2023, Fall 2024, Spring 2026

XJTLU China Studies 405 (MA level): Chinese Society – Module leader, Fall 2022-2026

XJTLU China Studies 203: Social Stratification and Change – Module leader, Spring 2023-2026

XJTLU China Studies 304: Understanding Gender – Module leader, Spring 2022-2026

University of Kentucky Geography 221: Immigrant America, 2020-2021

University of Kentucky Geography 172: Introduction to Human Geography, Winter 2017

University of Kentucky Geography 172: Introduction to Human Geography, Fall 2017

Service

Programme Director, MA China Studies, 2025-Current

XJTLU China Studies Disability Officer, 2023-2025

Programme Director, XJTLU Diploma in China Studies / Liverpool Year in China, 2023-2025

XJTLU China Studies International Liaison Officer, 2023-2025
XJTLU China Studies PGR Officer, 2021-2023
XJTLU China Studies departmental representative to School of Humanities & Social Sciences PGR-Staff Liaison Committee, 2021-2023
XJTLU China Studies hiring committee, 2022
Secretary, University of Kentucky Geography Graduate Student Union, 2017-2018
Graduate Student Representative, University of Kentucky Geography Department External Relations Committee, 2015-2017
University of Kentucky Organizing Collective, Conference on Critical Geography, 2016
Departmental Liaison, Geography Graduate Student Union, 2016-2017
University of Kentucky Organizing Collective, Conference on Critical Geography, 2015

Academic certificates

2017 Graduate Certificate in Gender and Women's Studies, University of Kentucky
2016 Advanced summer language training, Shanghai Jiaotong University

Editorial Board

Editorial board member, *Political Geography*, 2024-Current

Invited Manuscript Reviews (Alphabetized)

Annals of the American Association of Geographers (2024, 2023)
Antipode (2024, 2017, 2016)
cultural geographies (2026, 2017)
Chinese Political Science Review (2017)
Eurasian Geography and Economics (2023)
Focaal - Journal of Global and Historical Anthropology (2023)
Geoforum (2024)
Habitat International (2023, 2021, 2020)
Humanities & Social Sciences Communications (2026)
International Journal of Urban Science (2026)
Political Geography (2026, 2025, 2017)
Space & Polity (2025)
Urban Geography (2018)
World Development Sustainability (2021)

Languages

English (native), Mandarin (professional competency), Spanish (professional competency)