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From Rural to Urban: Education Conditions of Migrant Children in China

Shuting Wang

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Professor Brian Komei Dempster
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Abstract

With Chinese economic reform, masses of people have moved from rural areas to cities to seek job opportunities, many bringing school-aged children along with them. This migration has promoted the development of urbanization, but also created many education problems for the inflow cities. This study uses government databases and interviews from migrant workers to compare education models of four cities: Beijing, Guangzhou, Shanghai and Jiangsu. In particular, this research analyzes the differences between public schools, private schools and migrant children educational experience in different cities. Moreover, the study attempts to find the optimal education model for this group and whether it is applicable to other cities. The findings reveal that even though the education model is unique for every city, the local government should eliminate household registration and increase education funding in order to ensure migrant children receive equal educational access.

Who Are Migrant Children?

In different countries, the education level of citizens is influenced by government policies as well as social and economic development. China has implemented a program of nine-year compulsory education since 1986, which includes six years of primary education, starting at age 6, and three years of junior secondary education for age between 12 to 15.¹ In 2006, the Chinese government promised every child a free nine-year free compulsory education. However, under China's current education system, there is a special group of children who "are not entitled to receive free compulsory education stipulated by law" in the places that they inhabit²: migrant children. Because migrant children are not able to benefit from equal access to education like local children, many of them have to go back to their hometowns and eventually become left-behind children.

According to the Ministry of Education of China, China had 14 million school-aged migrant children, and the number has increased 10.14% in the last five years as of 2017.³ Because the problem of receiving compulsory education for migrant children has become increasingly serious, the Chinese education ministration has gradually changed its migrant children education policies from strict control to active acceptance.⁴ Nowadays, the compulsory education of migrant children is mainly controlled by the local governments of inflow cities and different provinces, and cities normally implement different policies. However, it remains

¹ "9-year Compulsory Education." China.org.cn. <http://www.china.org.cn/english/education/184879.htm>.

² Yuanyuan Chen, and Shuaizhang Feng. "Quality of Migrant Schools in China: Evidence from a Longitudinal Study in Shanghai." *Journal of Population Economics* 30, no. 3 (July 2017): 007–34. doi:10.1007/s00148-016-0629-5.

³ National Bureau of Statistics of the People's Republic of China. Population Status of Children in China in 2015- Facts and Figures. <http://www.unicef.cn/cn/uploadfile/2017/1009/20171009112641471.pdf>

⁴ National Bureau of Statistics of the People's Republic of China. The Migrant Workers Monitoring Survey Report 2016. http://www.stats.gov.cn/tjsj/zxfb/201704/t20170428_1489334.html.

difficult for migrant children to receive compulsory education. This research compares educational systems and school attendance rates of four different cities: Beijing, Guangzhou, Shanghai, and Jiangsu, and outline pros and cons of each city's education model. The study will address these questions: How does the household registration system affect migrant children's school attendance rates? Which city has the best education model for migrant children? Can this model be applied to other cities? What should the government and society do to ensure every migrant child receives compulsory education? I will also examine if migrant schools (private schools) can replace public schools for migrant children and the differences between these two types of schools.

Historical Conditions and Obstacles

In order to understand current education conditions in China, it is important to examine the history of household registration. In the planned economy period (1949–1956), with the implementation of the Household Registration Ordinance, China formed an urban-rural binary education system, which is based on children's Hukou⁵ (Household Registration). Under this system, children were enrolled into the nearby schools automatically. Also, during that period of time, China had strict rules on population mobility. Instead of going to school, joining the army, or transferring careers, the urban population and the rural population were isolated from each other. It was extremely hard for the rural population to transfer their agricultural household registration to non-agricultural household registration status. In addition, in 1961, China's Ministry of Public Security issued the repatriation system, which aimed to repatriate "illegal

⁵ China's household registration system, aka Hukou, has designated Chinese citizens as having either rural or urban status.

peasants”⁶ from the cities to their registered permanent residence. After the Chinese economic reform, the segregated status of urban and rural areas was eliminated and the surplus of laborers in the rural areas moved to cities to seek job opportunities and some of them brought school-aged children along with them.⁷ In 2003, China abolished the repatriation system. Because of household registration, however, the differences in social welfare between urban and rural areas still exist and hundreds of millions of Chinese migrant children are facing significant obstacles to receiving compulsory education in inflow cities.

In every city, there are three types of schools—public school, private school and migrant children schools. Public schools are funded by the local government. In general, the number and scale of public schools far exceed private schools. In addition, the cost of tuition fees is relatively low and the quality of teaching and schools’ facilities is high (Picture 1). For example, in addition to Chinese, Math, English and other required classes, public schools also provide music, art and P.E. classes. According to the current household registration system, however, migrant workers and their children cannot transfer their household registrations from their hometown to their inflow city. Even though some cities have allowed migrant children to enter the public schools without local household registration, many migrant parents are unable to provide hefty sponsor fees⁸ and are required to have various documents and certificates.⁹

⁶ “Illegal peasants” indicated that rural population going to the cities without permits.

⁷ Ravi Kanbur, Xiaobo Zhang, *Fifty Years of Regional Inequality in China: A Journey through Central Planning, Reform and Openness*. (United States, North America: United Nations University Press, 2006).
<http://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&AuthType=sso&db=edsbas&AN=edsbas.F2E0EAE3&site=eds-live&scope=site&custid=s3818721>.

⁸ Sponsor fee refers to the extra cost that the students pay to attend school with non-registered permanent residence. Even though the ministry of education has emphasized numerous times that the schools are not allowed to charge the students’ sponsor fee, in some big cities, the high cost of the sponsor fees has become an unspoken rule.

⁹ Charlotte Coodburn. “Learning from Migrant Education: A Case Study of the Schooling of Rural Migrant Children in Beijing.” *International Journal of Educational Development* 29 (January 1, 2009): 495–504. doi:10.1016/j.ijedudev.2009.04.005.



Picture 1. Beijing public school, The Elementary School Affiliated to Renmin University¹⁰



Picture 2. Beijing private school, Dulwich College¹¹

Beside public schools, private schools, are approved but not administered by the local government. Moreover, private schools can be classified as “elite schools”¹² (Picture 2) and migrant children schools. So-called “elite schools” charge high tuition fees and their target students are limited to a very small number of rich people. There is no doubt that the private schools offer high teaching quality and advanced teaching facilities. But high tuition prevents migrant children from entering into these schools. Compared to public schools, students in

¹⁰ Sanhao.com. Digital image. Accessed April 30, 2019. <http://toutiao.sanhao.com/news-detail-19850.html>

¹¹ Dulwich College Beijing. Digital image. Accessed April 30, 2019. <https://beijing.dulwich.org/dulwich-difference/education-innovation>

¹² In this research, private schools refer to elite schools.

migrant children schools are not required to have local household registration. The classes, however, are normally held in a private house or abandoned factories (Picture 3&4). Attending migrant children school is always the easiest way for migrant children to receive an education. Yet is a migrant children school the best choice for migrant children?



Picture 3. Beijing Migrant children school, Lv Yuan Migrant Children School¹³



Picture 4. Migrant Children running through the trash after the demolition of migrant children school¹⁴

¹³ Tian shi zhi jiao zhu xue wang 天使支教助学网. Digital image. Accessed April 30, 2019. <http://www.angedu.org/2011/0814/892.html>.

¹⁴ Caixin.com 财新网. Digital Image. Accessed May 6, 2019. http://photos.caixin.com/2011-08-16/100291368_6.html

A study from “Quality of migrant school in China: evidence from a longitudinal study in Shanghai” shows that “Although students in migrant schools perform considerably worse than their counterparts in public schools, the test score” gap has narrowed to a large extent between 2010 and 2012.¹⁵ The authors gathered a large amount of quantitative data and proved that the migrant children’s education conditions are improving in migrant schools because “the test score difference in mathematics has almost been halved”.¹⁶

The authors, however, fail to discuss migrant children’s study conditions, education qualities and school schedules. Migrant schools usually only offer core classes, such as Chinese, Math and Physics, but not music and art classes.¹⁷ According to research, “students who don’t have access to art classes . . . might also face greater difficulty mastering core subjects, higher dropout rates and more disciplinary problems”.¹⁸ Therefore, the study is problematic as it simplifies the situation, inferring that migrant children’s education has improved as a whole simply because their math scores have little too no difference with the children in the public schools. This research seeks to further complicate the picture by discussing the difference between migrant schools, private schools and public schools in Beijing, Guangzhou, Shanghai and Jiangsu.

¹⁵ Yuanyuan Chen, and Shuaizhang Feng. “Quality of Migrant Schools in China: Evidence from a Longitudinal Study in Shanghai.” *Journal of Population Economics* 30, no. 3 (July 2017): 1007–34. doi:10.1007/s00148-016-0629-5.

¹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷ Yuankai Tang. “Rang ta men de ke zhuo wen xia lai 让他们的课桌稳下来” [Make their desks steady]. *Beijing Review* 北京周报. <http://www.bjreview.cn/Cn/06-CN/06-05/china-3.htm>.

¹⁸ Flynn. “Arts and Music in Public Schools Overview.” Salem Press Encyclopedia, 2018. <http://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&AuthType=sso&db=ers&AN=89158052&site=eds-live&scope=site&custid=s3818721>.

Where Are Migrant Children From?

In order to provide the most holistic, accurate assessment of these four places, we must take a closer look at the numbers. On the whole, how many migrant children does China have? The data from the Sixth National Population Census of China showed that in 2010, China had 35.81 million migrant children age between 0 years and 17 years, which increased by 41.37% from 2005 and the number of migrant children continues to grow.¹⁹ Of these migrant children, 80.35% of them hold agricultural household registration. Accordingly, China has 28.77 million rural migrant children.²⁰

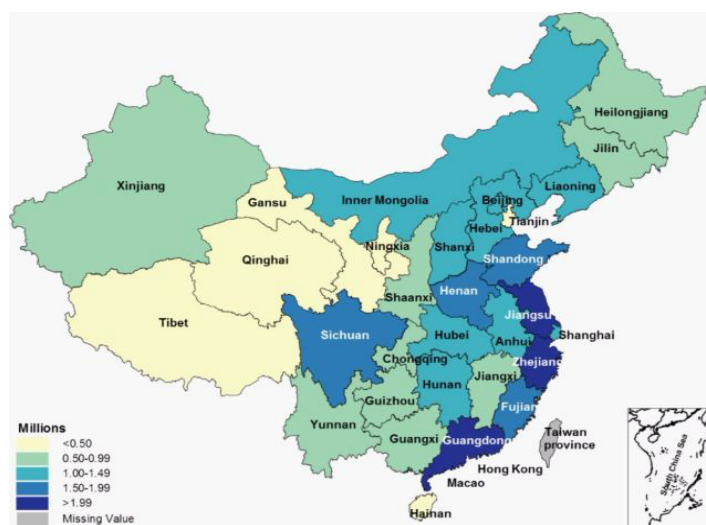


Figure 1. Number of Migrant Children by Province , 2010 ²¹

Figure 1 shows that every province has a certain amount of migrant children, but “there are seven provinces that had more than 1.5 million migrant children in each province and

¹⁹ National Bureau of Statistics of the People's Republic of China. *The Sixth National Population Census of the People's Republic of China*. <http://www.stats.gov.cn/tjsj/pcsj/rkpc/6rp/indexch.htm>

²⁰ Ibid.

²¹ Graph by Chengrong Duan et al.. Estimation based on the 2010 Population Census conducted by the National Bureau of Statistics. Number of Migrant Children by Province, 2010. The graph was published by United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund, 2012. <http://www.unicef.cn/en/atlas/migration/4034.html>.

accounted for 45.71% of the total of migrant children. Those provinces are namely Guangzhou, Zhejiang, Jiangsu, Sichuan, Shandong, Henan and Fujian.”²² Among those provinces, Guangzhou had the largest number of migrant children, which occupied 12.13% of the total. Moreover, in some cities, migrant children composed a high proportion of local children in the population. For example, in Beijing, three in ten children are migrant children and in Shanghai, the proportion is even higher, where four out of every ten children are migrant children.

When large numbers of migrant children move from rural areas to urban cities, they also create educational issues for the inflow cities. Some local governments think that enrolling non-local children in the local public schools will increase their financial expenditures. Moreover, sometimes low-income families do not pay taxes and social security to the inflow cities. Therefore, some of the megacities control the size of the urban population by increasing the school enrollment limit for migrant children. Indeed, some migrant families cannot meet the requirements, so they either send back their children to rural areas to receive education or those migrant children become the school dropouts and potentially the next generation of migrant workers. Professor Xiong Yihan, School of International Relations and Public Affairs of Fudan, indicates that the urbanization trend of migrant children is becoming a fact that the inflow cities cannot ignore. The new generation of migrant children are not only “the second generation”, but also “the new generation of the city”.²³ The statistics from “2016 Migrant Workers Monitoring Survey Report” shows that “the total number of migrant workers in China reached 280 million in

²² UNICEF. National Bureau of Statistics. Number of Migrant Children by Province, 2010. <http://www.unicef.cn/en/atlas/migration/4034.html>.

²³ China News 中国新闻网. “Da gong zhe er dai chu lu nan xun: nong cun bing fei tui lu, bei bo duo gan qiang lie 打工者二代出路难寻：农村并非退路，剥夺感强烈”. January 10, 2018. <http://www.chinanews.com/sh/2018/01-10/8420168.shtml>

2016”. The new generation of migrant workers who were born in 1980 and later are gradually becoming the mainstream of the migrant workers group, accounting for 49.7% of the total migrant workers in the country.²⁴

However, does increasing the number of migrant workers really hurt the interests of local people? It is not evidently true, and in fact their contributions may more than offset the cost of integrating them into each community. The migrant workers make a significant contribution to the construction of urban infrastructure; the city’s tax income; and the curbed cities’ labor price as well as reduced the cost of living in the city.²⁵ Local governments should realize that the majority of those migrant children will live, work and become citizens of the city. Therefore, their education level will also determine the quality of the city in the future. Whether migrant children can receive education in the cities and whether they can grow up with their parents are major factors that affect the long term development potential of China and all cities.

The Struggle is Real – Migrant Children in Beijing

One city that contends with the complex realities of migrant children is Beijing, the capital of China, which has attracted millions of migrants seeking jobs. According to the Beijing Municipal Bureau of Statistics, in the last decade, the number of migrant people in Beijing has grown rapidly. The migrant population increased from 4.03 million in 2006 to 7.04 million in 2010. After 2011, the growth rate of the migrant population began to slow down. From 2011 to

²⁴ National Bureau of Statistics of the People’s Republic of China. The Migrant Workers Monitoring Survey Report 2016. http://www.stats.gov.cn/tjsj/zxfb/201704/t20170428_1489334.html.

²⁵ Xiaojun Yang. “Nong min gong dui jin ji zeng zhang gong xian yu cheng guo fen xiang 农民工对经济增长贡献与成果分享”. Chinese Social Sciences Net 中国社会科学网. http://econ.cssn.cn/jjx/xk/jjx_yyjjx/jjx_slyjsjjx/201310/t20131024_517188.shtml.

2013, migrant population only increased by 327 thousand every year. In 2015, the proportion of migrant population has shown negative growth. By the end of 2015, the migrant population in Beijing was 8.22 million. In the migrant population, there was 687 thousand migrant children aged between 0 and 14 years old, which was 8.35% of the total migrant population.²⁶ Therefore, what are the educational conditions for this large number of migrant children? And how does the Beijing government cope with the migrant children education problem?

Statistics from the Beijing Municipal Education Commission show that 480 thousand migrant children have received compulsory education in Beijing's elementary and secondary schools (includes migrant children school) in 2015. In school-aged migrant children, there were 370 thousand students in the public schools, which represents 78.31% of the total population of migrant children in compulsory education. Moreover, 80,000 students were in the migrant children schools and 24,900 students were in private schools, which accounted for 16.54% and 5.15% of the total population of migrant children respectively. See Figure 2.

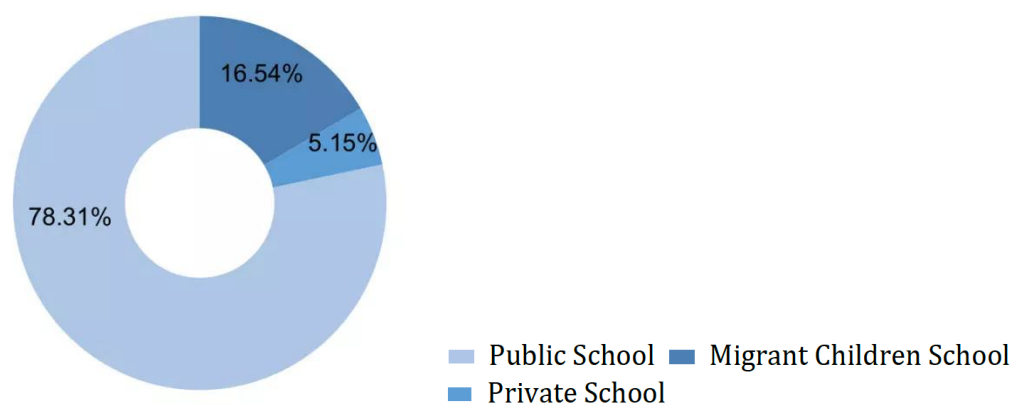


Figure 2. Distribution of the Percentage of Migrant Children in Compulsory Education

²⁶ Beijing Municipal Bureau of Statistics. Beijing Population and Employment Statistics Yearbook 2015. http://www.bjstats.gov.cn/tjsj/ndsj/ndsifpfb/2015n/index_1.html.

by School Type²⁷

What are the differences between these three types of schools in Beijing? Typically, public schools have a high quality of the teachers and facilities and cheaper tuition fees. They also have strict requirements for non-Beijing residents. The most difficult requirement for migrant workers is the sponsor fee. For example, the sponsor fee for Experimental Primary School of Beijing Normal University is 80,000 RMB²⁸ but the average annual wages for migrant workers in Beijing is 39,000 RMB, which means that migrant workers need to save the money all year without any expenses to pay for their children's sponsor fee—an almost impossible feat. Another prerequisite for elementary enrollment is the “Five cards,” which apparently include temporary residential permit, proof of residence, work permit, household registration, and proof of child custody. In fact, “Five cards” are far more than five. The non-Beijing residents actually need to prepare more than 28 cards to qualify for preliminary examination. The report from Beijing Academy of Social Sciences indicates that the “Five cards” are strict and unreasonable requirements for migrant workers, because most migrant children's parents are construction workers, cleaners, transport workers, farmers and housekeepers. Normally they do not belong to a certain company. Therefore, it is hard for them to get the work permits.²⁹

If migrant children do not qualify for public school, is it a good choice for them to go to private school? Even though private schools also have high quality of teachers and facilities and

²⁷ Beijing Municipal Education Commission. Distribution of the Percentage of Migrant Children in Compulsory Education by School Type. <http://www.bjedu.gov.cn/>

²⁸ 1 RMB=0.15 USD. For example, 80,000 RMB=11,911.14 USD

²⁹ Xinchun Yin, Zhenlong Yuan, Xiaoyan Ma and Su Zhang, Annual Report on Social Governance Development of Beijing. Beijing: Beijing Academy of Social Sciences, 2017. http://www.pishu.com.cn/skwx_ps/bookdetail?SiteID=14&ID=8577968.

most of them do not require sponsor fees, private schools are always the last choice for migrant workers. The reasons are not only because of the requirement of the “Five cards,” but also the problematic tuition. The average tuition fee for private school in Beijing is 50,000 RMB and accordingly most migrant workers cannot afford this cost. At the very most, migrant workers really are restricted to attending migrant schools. Education is one of the most cherished values in China, but one’s access to educational opportunities may limit and decide the way that value expresses itself in society. For migrants, escaping educational deprivation is difficult and may not even happen in two generations.

School Name	Public/ Private/ Migrant school	Tuition Fees (RMB/Semester)	Sponsor Fees (RMB)
Experimental Primary School of Beijing Normal University	Public	6,500	80,000
The Elementary School Affiliated to Renmin University of China	Public	6000	10,000
Beijing Zhongke Qiyuan Elementary School	Private	30,000	No
Beijing Jianhua Elementary School	Private	26,000	No
Dandelion School	Migrant	2,350	No
Yingjie Elementary School	Migrant	2,400	No

Figure 3. 2016 Beijing Primary Schools Tuition Fees and Sponsor fees

When we compare tuition fees between three types of schools, migrant children schools

seem like a good choice for migrant children. These schools were established for migrant workers who cannot afford the high cost of tuition fees and sponsor fees but also want their children to receive the compulsory education. Most migrant children schools are located in Beijing's suburban areas and mainly rely on students' tuition fees to maintain the schools' smooth operation. In order to lower the expenses, the schools usually use the most minimal supplies. For example, the desks and chairs were bought from flea markets, the blackboards were transformed from the plywood, and the bricks and tiles of the schools were picked up from abandoned factories.³⁰ Because of the funding shortage, the teaching qualities of migrant children school always cannot meet the national standards. In 2016, Beijing had nearly 300 migrant children schools, but only 63 of them had the school accredited.³¹ Students in non-accredited school do not have registration record cards and registration numbers, which means that those students cannot enjoy any welfare policies in Beijing, such as free health insurance and health examinations, discounted park tickets and train tickets. Lack of access to those social welfare benefits, however, is not the biggest challenge for migrant population. The real urgent challenge is that many migrant children can be relocated at any time.

These various challenges can be seen in the case of Ye Xingui and his wife Chen Xiang, who are originally from Anhui. They worked in Beijing as day workers for three years and last year, they brought their daughter Ye Zi from Anhui to Beijing. The father Ye Xingui said, "Even though we got all the permissions, the tuition fees and sponsor fees are too high. Hujialou Elementary School administration asked us to sponsored for 20,000RMB!" Indeed, it is

³⁰ Jialing Han, "Beijing liu dong er tong yi wu jiao yu zhuang kuang diao cha 北京流动儿童义务教育状况调查" [Investigation on compulsory education of migrant children in Beijing]. Renmin Wang 人民网. <http://www.people.com.cn/GB/guandian/1035/1929541.html>.

³¹ Shuiyun Liu, Fuxing Liu, and Yafeng Yu. "Educational Equality in China: Analysing Educational Policies for Migrant Children in Beijing." *Educational Studies* 43, no. 2 (January 1, 2017): 210-230. ERIC, EBSCOhost.

impossible for an entry level day worker to pay for the high sponsor fee for public schools. Migrant schools, on the contrary, have much lower tuition fees. Therefore, Ye Xingui sent her daughter to the migrant children school ten miles away from their home. Due to the expiration of the lease, Ye Zi's migrant children school is facing eviction, and a new site has not yet been found. This is the fourth time that this migrant children school has faced eviction which would cause it to relocate far from the city.³²

This particular issue with migrant children school is not an isolated one, and governmental oversight and priorities play a role in such evictions and other measures. According to the Chinese *Financial Times*, the Beijing government plans to keep the number of permanent population at 23 million by 2020 and relocate unnecessary companies and universities to neighboring provinces.³³ The report claims that Beijing has already started the clean-up campaign. The government shut down a number of small businesses, dismantled the slum districts and even recruited thousands of police to check the migrant worker's identity cards. During the campaign, there were seven migrant children schools in Tongzhou District facing dismantling. Quanzhi School, located in the shantytown of Tongzhou District, currently has 700 migrant children. Even though the school is accredited by Beijing government, it still needs to be dismantled because the entire community in which the school located is marked as an illegal settlement. The government also cut off the water and electric supply to the local residents in order to accelerate its dismantling. Cheng Hai, a lawyer, indicates "Those migrant children

³² Yuankai Tang, "Rang ta men de ke zhuo wen xia lai 让他们的课桌稳下来" [Make their study desks steady]. Beijing Review 北京周报. <http://www.bjreview.cn/Cn/06-CN/06-05/china-3.htm>.

³³ Shuhua Shi, "Beijing zui xin qing li zheng zhi xing dong, ying xiang fan wei you duo guang? 北京最新清理整治行动, 影响范围有多广" [The scope of Beijing cleanup campaign]. Financial Times Chinese. <http://www.ftchinese.com/story/001074307>.

schools are the disgrace to the Beijing government. The local government has enough revenue to support migrant children to go to the public schools and the ‘Five cards’ policies need to be simplified.”³⁴

These problematic policies have a devastating impact on families. Sun Zhili, originally from Hunan, has worked in Beijing for ten years. She is renting in Tongzhou District, Beijing suburban. She said, “I have been told that my daughter cannot enroll in elementary school in Tongzhou because I do not have the proof of social security payment of Tongzhou District, even though I worked in Xicheng District and paid my social security tax.” After careful deliberation, Sun decided to send her daughter to her hometown. “Most of my colleagues send their children to the boarding schools in Hebei³⁵ and meet their children once a month. Even though they suggested me to do the same, this is not the solution. I think parents should accompany their children as they grow up”, said Sun, “So I am going to go back to my hometown for my daughter even though I did not expect it to happen. I have served Beijing for ten years, but my child even cannot go to school there.”³⁶ Sun’s case is not unique. Hundreds of thousands of migrant workers are facing the same situation every day.

Does every non-Beijing resident need to have “Five cards” to enroll into the schools? The answer is no, because people who meet the following four requirements can transfer their household registration from their hometown to Beijing and enjoy equal rights with Beijing local

³⁴ Shuhua Shi, “Beijing zui xin qing li zheng zhi xing dong, ying xiang fan wei you duo guang? 北京最新清理整治行动, 影响范围有多广” [The scope of Beijing cleanup campaign]. Financial Times Chinese. <http://www.ftchinese.com/story/001074307>.

³⁵ Hebei is a province near Beijing. Geographically, Hebei includes Beijing.

³⁶ Shuhua Shi, “Beijing zui xin qing li zheng zhi xing dong, ying xiang fan wei you duo guang? 北京最新清理整治行动, 影响范围有多广” [The scope of Beijing cleanup campaign]. Financial Times Chinese. <http://www.ftchinese.com/story/001074307>.

residents: 1. Private business owners who have paid annual tax of 800,000 RMB three years in a row or the total amount of taxes exceeded 3 million within three years. 2. Foreign and domestic artists, sports stars and celebrities. 3. CEO, CFO and other senior executives of the large domestic enterprise and financial institutions. 4. Overseas students who obtained a bachelor's degree or above.³⁷

Objectively, those requirements are discriminatory and exclusive. Only a few elites with high incomes are eligible to transfer their household registration to Beijing with such strict rules, not to mention migrant workers. They may never meet those requirements. For migrant workers, no matter how long they have lived and worked in Beijing, they can only have temporary residential permits and never enjoy equal rights with Beijing local residents. In 2006, Beijing government implemented the Regulations on Guaranteeing Minimum Subsistence for City Residents, which formulated that non-Beijing residents do not have right to obtain basic livelihood material assistance from the local government. In 2007, Beijing government issued the Measures for the Guarantee of Low-rent Homes, which indicates that people without Beijing household registration are not eligible to buy affordable housing. According to the Decision of Management of Student Enrollment in Elementary and Secondary Schools, students without Beijing household registration cannot take the college entrance examination in Beijing. Those policies not only deprive migrant workers' the most basic rights to live in Beijing, but also limit their children from the chance to even receive compulsory education. And in 2017, Beijing government even marked those migrant populations as "low-end" populations and tried to remove them from Beijing.³⁸

³⁷ Beijing Municipal Public Security Bureau. Population management: household registration transformation. <https://gaj.beijing.gov.cn/website/IntelAskController/askInit.do>

³⁸ Chris Buckley. "Why Parts of Beijing Look Like a Devastated War Zone." The New York Times. November 30, 2017. <https://www.nytimes.com/2017/11/30/world/asia/china-beijing-migrants.html>.

Liu Kaiming, the head of Institute of Contemporary Observation, said, “it is so wrong that the Beijing government is trying to expel 8 million migrants from Beijing. Migrant populations are also Chinese citizens, they have the right to live and work in Beijing. The government creates so many troubles for migrant workers, especially for their children. The government is responsible for providing compulsory education for migrant children.”³⁹ Nine-year compulsory education stipulates that every child has a right to education. However, the reality is that the Beijing government not only neglects their responsibilities of providing compulsory education to migrant children, but also adds extra restrictions to the enrollment procedures and even wants to expel those migrant children from Beijing to solve the education issue.

The reason why Beijing government is so unwelcoming of the migrant population is not only because Beijing local residents are afraid that the migrant children will take away the limited education resources from their children, but also because the Beijing government considered itself an “elite city.”⁴⁰ This perspective is deeply rooted in the minds of many government officials, congressmen, and intellectuals. Some congressmen even think the city should increase the price on public transportation, so that people with lower income cannot stay in Beijing anymore. In fact, the Beijing Municipal Education Commission confirmed the elitism of the Beijing government because the government allows 8 types of “elites’ children” without Beijing household registration to attend the college entrance exam in Beijing, which includes

³⁹ Ping Lin, “Beijing zheng zai chai chu yi xie da gong zi di xue xiao, yi shu jie ren kou ya li 北京正在拆除一些打工子弟学校, 以疏解人口压力” [Beijing is dismantling the migrant children schools to reduce the population pressure]. Radio Free Asia. July 19, 2017.
<http://www.rfa.org/mandarin/yataibaodao/kejiaowen/yl-07192017112257.html>

⁴⁰ Kai Yu. *The implementation of inclusive education in Beijing : exorcizing the haunting specter of meritocracy*. (n.p.: Lanham, Maryland : Lexington Books, 2014), Ignacio: USF Libraries Catalog, EBSCO host.

foreigners, government officials and senior executives of enterprises.

However, the Beijing government and local residents need to realize that the migrant population have contributed their time, energy and labor towards the city's construction as well as social and economic development. Therefore, the Beijing government cannot use a financial shortage as an excuse to neglect the commitment to migrant children's education. The government should not only provide the equal education opportunities for both local and migrant children, but also offer more financial support for low-income migrant families.

Much Improved - Migrant Children in Guangzhou

In comparison to Beijing, Guangzhou is a better destination for migrant children. Guangzhou had 4.34 million migrant children in 2010, which comprised 12.13% of the area's total migrant children.⁴¹ Due to the Chinese economic reform, Guangzhou is the most popular destination for migrant children. At the beginning of China's reform period, Deng Xiaoping initially established four special economic zones, which include Shenzhen, Zhuhai, Shantou, and Xiamen. In 1984, Deng established Guangzhou, Shanghai and another 12 cities as Open Coastal cities. The reform and opening up of those places not only attracted many companies to build the factories in Guangzhou, but also created many job opportunities.

While China's economic reform has boosted economic growth, it did not really improve educational development. According to the Guangzhou government, Guangzhou had 1.7 million students in the compulsory education stage and migrant children comprised 30.5% of total students, with a figure of 520,000. In some districts, the number of migrant workers is even more

⁴¹ National Bureau of Statistics of the People's Republic of China. The Sixth National Population Census of the People's Republic of China. <http://www.stats.gov.cn/tjsj/pcsj/rkpc/6rp/indexch.htm>

than the local residents and the number of migrant children is same as the local children. Set Tianhe District is one example, which is the center of Guangzhou's new town. Tianhe District has 69 primary and secondary schools, but only 72% students are in the public schools.⁴² The reason is that the number of non-resident population is growing rapidly. There are nearly 2 million migrant workers living in Tianhe District. One of six non-resident students has a chance to study in Tianhe District public schools. Guangzhou has strict prerequisites for non-resident student to enroll in the public schools, and therefore the percentage of migrant children in public school is low. The government requires the parents of non-Guangzhou students to have an annual income of 50,000 RMB to qualify for the prerequisite of enrollment, even though the average income of Guangzhou citizen is 55,000 RMB.⁴³ Because migrant workers usually work in service, retail and construction industries, their income is often below the average income. Moreover, the public elementary schools in Guangzhou have alliances with other public kindergartens, which means that the public elementary schools only recruit the migrant children who are from their own kindergartens.⁴⁴ The remaining migrant children can only enroll in private and migrant children school.

According to the Guangzhou government, Guangzhou has more than 300 migrant children schools. Unlike the Beijing government, Guangzhou government has a more tolerant attitude towards the migrant children schools. Huangshi Elementary School is a migrant children

⁴² Chun Chen and Hong Zhu. "Spatial Cognition of Migrant Children in Urban Villages under the Background of Urbanization—A Case Study of Shipai Village, Tianhe District, Guangzhou". *Journal of South China Normal University* (Social Science Edition), No. 6, 2016.
<http://gb.oversea.cnki.net/KCMS/detail/detail.aspx?filename=HNSB201606020&dbcode=CJFD&dbname=CJFD2016>

⁴³ CEIC. China Disposable Income per Capita: Urban: Guangdong: Guangzhou.
<https://www.ceicdata.com/en/china/disposable-income-per-capita-prefecture-level-city-urban/disposable-income-per-capita-urban-guangdong-guangzhou>

⁴⁴ Fu Chen and Mengqin Liu. "Policy Improvement of Compulsory Education for the Children Living with Their Migrant Worker Parents in City: A Case of Guangdong Province." *Urban Light*, No.3 , 2012.
http://www.theorychina.org/xsqy_2477/201209/W020120920378080655417.pdf

school, which was established in 1996 by a non-governmental organization. The slogan at the school gate is very eye-catching: “No restrictions on household registration, no sponsor fee, school bus transportation is provided” and the school buildings and teaching facilities are even better than the public schools. Huang Shengwen, president of Huangshi Elementary school, states, “the Guangzhou government would not shut down the migrant children schools like Beijing government, because the public schools are not able to accommodate the large amount of migrant children. The compulsory education for migrant children highly relies on the migrant children schools.”⁴⁵

Lu Lin, Director of Education Bureau, indicates that the government should increase the number of public schools in Tianhe District and expand the enrollment scale in order to meet migrant children’s education needs. Doing so, however, may affect the teaching quality if the government steps up the enrollment in the short term.⁴⁶ Therefore, the Guangzhou government is supportive of migrant children schools in both financial and political ways. And the government also tries to push migrant children schools to standardize the management and diversify the school class. The standardized migrant children schools not only can reduce the pressures from the shortage of public schools, but also will help more migrant children to enjoy the compulsory education.

In conclusion, migrant children in Guangzhou do not face the same level of financial challenges, threats to mobility, and instability of schools that children in Beijing face. The more

⁴⁵ Xinlang News 新浪新闻中心. “Mei ti cheng guang zhou liu cheng nong ming gong zi nv jiu du fei gong ban xue xiao 媒体称广州6成农民工子女就读非公办学校” [The media claims that there are 60% of migrant children study in the private schools]. August 30,2011. <http://news.sina.com.cn/c/2011-08-30/150823075764.shtml>

⁴⁶ Sohu Jiaoyu 搜狐教育. “Guangzhou wai lai gong zi di xue xiao diao cha 广州外来工子弟学校调查” [Investigation on Guangzhou migrant children school]. May 1, 2014. <http://learning.sohu.com/2004/05/01/66/article220016645.shtml>

stable and high quality environment of the schools, along with local government support, provides a much better experience for these students in Guangzhou.

The Gold Standard? – Migrant children in Shanghai and Jiangsu

Compared to China's other cities' education models, Shanghai's education model is known as "gold standard" for migrant children. The data from National Bureau of Statistics shows that by the end of 2010, 0.47 million migrant children in Shanghai had received the compulsory education. The proportion of those receiving free compulsory education increased from 57.1% in 2007 to 100% in 2010.⁴⁷

The Shanghai government has invested a huge amount of education funds into reforming the education quality of migrant children schools and awarding migrant children for attending the schools. In 2010, the local government had not only transformed 162 migrant children schools to public schools, but also granted 50,000 RMB for every school to upgrade the teaching facilities. Moreover, the government also gives every migrant student 2500 RMB education grants per year.⁴⁸

Unlike Beijing and Guangzhou's education model, Shanghai's model does not have a fixed requirement for enrollment. In 2016, Shanghai implemented a points-based system. The points are determined by the length of residency, education level, skill level, real estate situation, recognition awards, social contributions and etc. Each indicator has a clear scoring standard. According to the points, migrant children can enroll in different public schools.

⁴⁷ National Bureau of Statistics of the People's Republic of China. The Sixth National Population Census of the People's Republic of China. <http://www.stats.gov.cn/tjsj/pcsj/rkpc/6rp/indexch.htm>

⁴⁸ Yuanyuan Chen, and Shuaizhang Feng, "Quality of Migrant Schools in China: Evidence from a Longitudinal Study in Shanghai." *Journal of Population Economics* 30, no. 3 (July 2017): 1007-1034. EconLit, EBSCO host.

Jiangsu is a coastal province located north of Shanghai. In recent years, with the rapid economic and society development, a large number of migrant workers has chosen come to Jiangsu for work. According to the statistics, Jiangsu has 0.5 million of school-aged migrant children in 2015.⁴⁹ Influenced by Shanghai's model, Jiangsu also adopted a points-based system. In 2015, the attendance rate of migrant children reached to 99% and 85% of students are enrolled in public schools. In 2014, Jiangsu government set up a 21.4 million RMB funds for upgrading the teaching facilities of migrant children schools in the whole province. In addition, the government guided 74 migrant children schools to raise funds of 204 million RMB, which has greatly improved the schools' education conditions. Even though there is still a certain gap between public schools and migrant children schools, Jiangsu government started to narrow the gap by establishing school alliance and implementing special supervision system for migrant children schools.

Compared to other models, the Shanghai and Jiangsu governments put numerous funds into migrant children's education. Therefore, we can conclude that in order to ensure the migrant children to receive the compulsory education without any restrictions, the central and local governments should increase the input in education and encourage more non-governmental organization and social capital to participate in the school development and management.

Conclusion

In order to compare the compulsory education conditions in Beijing, Guangzhou, Shanghai and Jiangsu, we can use these following two charts. For the qualitative data I have

⁴⁹ Suzhou Academy of Education Sciences 江苏省教育科学研究院. "Sui fu mu jin cheng wu gong zi nv jiu xue de xian zhuang yu dui ce 随父母进城务工子女就学的现状与对策研究". <http://www.jssghb.cn/ndlw/2005-11.htm>

drawn upon my work in this paper to provide keywords in understanding the educational contexts of these cities. See Figure 4 and 5.

City	The proportion of migrant children enrolling in public schools ⁵⁰	School requirements	Difficulty level on enrollment
Beijing	78.31%	Five cards	Relatively hard
Guangzhou	72%	Parents need to have stable jobs and income; live in Guangzhou for more than half year	Hard
Shanghai	78.3%	Points-based system	Relatively easy
Jiangsu	85%	Points- based system	Relatively easy

Figure 4. Comparison of migrant children in public schools, by different cities

City	The proportion of migrant children enrolling in private schools	Tuition fees	Migrant children school conditions	Difficulty level on enrollment
Beijing	21.69%	Average	Bad	Easy
Guangzhou	28%	High	Good	Easy
Shanghai	22.7%	High	Good	Easy
Jiangsu	15%	High	Good	Easy

Figure 5. Comparison of migrant children in private schools, by different cities

⁵⁰ The numeric figures are from the Beijing, Guangzhou, Shanghai and Jiangsu's case study.

In Beijing's model, even though the government solves most of the enrollment problems for migrant children, there is still a large amount of migrant children who experience unstable and unqualified compulsory education. In Guangzhou's model, the local government provides qualified compulsory education, but the migrant families face a lot of pressures to afford the high tuition fees. According to the research, Shanghai and Jiangsu's model have the best performance regarding providing migrant children access to education, because most migrant children can receive free and qualified compulsory education.

Even though Shanghai and Jiangsu have the "gold standard" models for migrant children, it is still debatable whether this system is applicable to other cities. Comparing the number of migrant children in the four cities, we see that Beijing and Guangzhou have almost eight times the number of migrant children population than Shanghai and Jiangsu. This situation indicates that the local governments may need more educational funds in order to cater towards migrant children's education needs. There is no doubt that the points-based system is more fair and practical.

Overall, there is no single city that treats the migrant children and local children equally. Even though Shanghai has the best performance for migrant children's education and the government puts the majority of the education funds into the public schools, without any exception, public schools have a lot of requirements for the migrant children but no requirements for local children. This policy definitely violates the values that define education equality. Therefore, no matter which model the local governments uses, it is important for them to allocate education resources for all schools equally and make sure every child has opportunity to enroll into the nearby school.

Moreover, not only should the local governments optimize the education resources, but

the central government should increase education funding. According to statistics, the proportion of national education funding exceeded 4% of total GDP for the first time in 2012 and before 2001, the percentage was less than 3%. On the contrary, in 2015, the average ratio of public education expenditure to GDP in Europe and North America was 5.1%, and the ratio was maintained at this level for a long time.⁵¹ Although compulsory education takes the highest proportion of total education expenditure, lacking of total education funds will still affect the compulsory education funds. With the development of social and economic as well as the growth of fiscal revenue, the Chinese central government should increase proportion of education expenditures to GDP in order to cater the growing education needs for migrant children.

Equally important is reformation of other policies. The best way to eliminate the educational inequality between migrant children and the local children is to terminate the household registration system. The household registration system is no longer suitable for the modern society, because it not only protects the privileges of the local residents in big cities, but also increases the barriers that prevent population mobility between the rural areas and urban areas. In 2019, National Development and Reform Commission issued guidelines on cultivating and developing modern metropolitan areas. The guidelines indicate that “the government will remove the limits on hukou registration in townships and small cities, relax restrictions in medium-sized cities and set qualifications for transferring registration in big cities.”⁵² Even

⁵¹ Li, Nan. "Shu ju jie xi: liu dong er tong yi wu jiao yu cai zheng zhi du de xian zhuang, wen ti yu dui ce 数据解析：流动儿童义务教育财政制度的现状、问题与对策 [Data Analysis: Current situations, problems and countermeasures of the financial system of migrant children's compulsory education]." Pengpai News 澎湃新闻. November 27, 2018. https://www.thepaper.cn/newsDetail_forward_2673802.

⁵² Wall Street 华尔街见闻. "Hua zhong dian: 2019 nian, zhe xie da cheng shi hu kou sui bian luo! Zhe xie cheng shi luo hu fang kuan 划重点：2019 年这些大城市户口随便落！这些城市落户放宽！ [Highlight: In 2019, those cities removed the limits on household registration! Those cities relax restrictions on household registration]. April 08, 2019. <https://wallstreetcn.com/articles/3507768>

though this policy did not really solve the educational problem in Beijing, Guangzhou, Shanghai and other megacities, it shows the Chinese government has begun to care about the population mobility and is trying to optimize the allocation of human resources.

In conclusion, it is each local government's responsibility to provide every migrant child compulsory education. Even in developed counties, the governments are responsible for providing the education. Even though China is in a social transformation period, it still has to take the initiative in providing more education opportunities for migrant children. The central government should not only increase its investment in migrant children education, but also eliminate the policy of household registration, which limits educational opportunities and choices. It is a good start that China has already removed restrictions from household registration transfers in cities of 3-5 million. We can only hope that China will recreate this same practice in other megacities as well.

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