

**HURDLES AND HOPES:
AN ECOLOGICAL ANALYSIS OF MIGRANT CHILDREN IN CHINA**

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NATIONAL UNIVERSITY OF SINGAPORE

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AN ECOLOGICAL ANALYSIS OF MIGRANT CHILDREN IN CHINA**

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(B.A., M.A.)**

**A THESIS SUBMITTED
FOR THE DEGREE OF DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY
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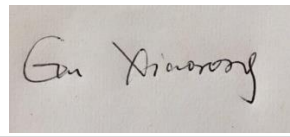
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DECLARATION

I hereby declare that the thesis is my original work and it has been written by me in its entirety. I have duly acknowledged all the sources of information which have been used in the thesis. This thesis has also not been submitted for any degree in any university previously.

A rectangular box containing a handwritten signature in black ink. The signature appears to be 'Gu Xiaorong' written in a cursive style.

GU Xiaorong
August 31st, 2016

Acknowledgment

11 years ago, still a *literary youth* (*wenxue qingnian*) in college, I got myself published in a literary magazine in China by reminiscently saying that “hometown is such as place that you yearn to escape from; yet when you have escaped, you cling it to your heart since you know that you will never return. And you cling to it so dearly that it floods your dreams and burdens your mind, in between the mountains and your watery eyes” (Gu, 2005). By shamelessly self-referencing a non-academic work, I aim not to show off my youthful indulgent sentimentality. Rather, when a few months ago an old friend freshened me up with a web-link to this article, it triggered my serious self-reflection. I have realized a consistent theme in my personal experience as well as scholarly inquiries: migration and rural life. My experience as an educational migrant drove me away from a small village in central China, to the provincial capital city, and then to economic booming towns in south China, and all the way to Singapore. When I quit an *iron-bowl* job in a prestigious institution and became determined to be a sociologist four years ago, my primary research interest was to investigate the life of millions of rural children influenced by the massive internal migration waves in post-reform era. Sometimes, I feel a responsibility to tell their story, a much more nuanced story than the sensationalized newspaper headlines could allow for. Other times, I question whether this self-imposed responsibility is merely a Sisyphean effort, as it is too complex a story for a PhD career to exhaust. As such, this dissertation bears the fruit of a circular process of self-motivating, self-doubting and self-empowering during these four years.

I owe enormous debts to great mentors who are exemplar scholars and teachers in diverse ways: my dissertation supervisor Professor Jean Yeung, for offering her unyielding encouragement, chances to hone my craftsmanship through

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I am also grateful to the families, schoolteachers and administrators in Hunan and Shenzhen, who show up in this dissertation under pseudonyms, for the trust and the patience bestowed to a curious and inexperienced researcher in her first field study. My gratitude and respect extend to “gatekeepers” in these sites, Dr. MaryAnn O'Donnell, Ms. Qu Hong, Ms. Xu Qian and Mr. Chen Songya, to name a few who are in some way

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The Central Library and its staff have provided superb infrastructure and services that support learning and researching. In particular, Ms. Hayati Abdul offers very professional advice on searching information pertaining to sociology, with her beaming and welcoming smile. The Education Resource Center in University Town is a wonderful working environment where I spent the last 8 months on intensive writing.

My family back in China, natal and in-laws, are understanding enough to have excused my absence in many important family occasions and to make me relaxed

during short visits back home. In particular, I thank my mother Luo Baofeng for being an inspiration of my life who believes in strong willpower, perseverance and endless self-improvement. I thank my two siblings (Yun and An) and their families, for providing instrumental help besides emotional support. Yun transcribed my interview data with great accuracy and offered her own insightful comments on the data. An arranged for my accommodation in Shenzhen and dragged me to social occasions which revealed multiple dimensions of this city.

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Dissertation Summary

Informed by ecological systems theory, this mixed-method research integrates analyses of both a quantitative national survey dataset (China Education Panel Survey 2014) and qualitative field data (interview and observational data in two sites in Hunan and Shenzhen) to explore how multiple contexts (at the family-, the school- and the region- levels) stratify Chinese rural migrant adolescents' educational achievement. Taken together, this dissertation documents the coexistence of emerging opportunities and persisting barriers after rural migrant children's move to urban areas.

At the family level, the CEPS data show that migrant adolescents significantly outperform their peers remaining in rural communities in cognitive skills, which could be accounted by their higher family SES, better educational resources and parental aspirations, while the slightly strained mother-child relationship in migrant households seems to have negative effect upon their performance. However, such advantages in cognitive skills do not translate into higher educational aspirations. Qualitative research with 23 migrant families in Hunan and Shenzhen reveal that these families engage in a process of "doing family" to advance children's education, in which family members, sometimes including extended families, strategize to fill in the "care deficit", mobilize resources within their reach and motivate adolescents' commitment through a repertoire of social indebtedness and parental sacrifices. On the part of migrant students, living as migrants' children subjects them to an obligation of 'understanding things' (*dongshi*) and repays for the sacrifices that the adults in the household make for them through hard work in school.

At the school level, multilevel analysis shows that after accounting for between-school variation, migrant children's advantage relative to rural peers has disappeared, which may be related to comparatively favorable school environment in urban areas. However, Cross-level interactions between migrant adolescent group and school-level contextual factors suggest that they confront a school segregation system in host cities, since they are more likely to be channeled to low-ranking and less academically competitive schools. The qualitative case study of two schools illustrates how school institutional inequalities are reproduced in the organizational process under the institutional context of "centralized decentralization" in post-reform era. In particular, there emerges two different school regimes in Bright School (public school in Lake County, Hunan) and Eastern Bay (migrant school in Shenzhen), with the former illustrating a model which I described as "*school as competitor*" while the latter illuminating a model of "*school as charity organization*". These shape divergent patterns of migrant students' educational opportunities and experiences.

At the regional level, preliminary evidence suggests that attending schools in the economically prosperous Eastern area is positively associated with migrant adolescents' cognitive skills.

Theoretically, this research contributes to our understanding of how multiple layers of social structures and institutional arrangements shape the stratification dynamics in a transitional economy, thus contributing new empirical evidences to the market transition debate among sociologists of China.

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CHAPTER ONE INTRODUCTION

1.1. The Chinese economic reform and the market transition debate revisited

At the 3rd Plenary Session of the 11th Central Committee of the Communist Party of China in December 1978, the CCP-led government officially pulled a brake to its socialist engine and began to embrace the “socialist market economy”, which refers to “the coexistence of the state apparatus and market mechanisms which exert control over investment, allocation of resources, and priority of development” (Fan, 1999). Since then, China’s economic performance in transitioning out of a stagnant socialist planned economy on the verge of bankruptcy has often been depicted as a miracle.

Sociologists of China have debated whether this economic transition is accompanied by attending transformations of the country’s social stratification system, i.e. the market transition debate. Influenced by Szelenyi’s (1978) ideal-types of redistributive versus market economies, in 1989 and a series of following reformulations in the 1990s, Victor Nee proposed a theory of market transition which argues that in a transitional economy, the bases of socioeconomic attainment (and power) shift from the hands of redistributors (e.g. the state) to the hands of the direct producers (e.g. the markets) (Nee, 1989; 1991; 1996; Nee and Matthews, 1996). When this happens, the new lever of status attainment is human capital, rather than ascriptive positions such as one’s cadre status. Since then, much has been written about the evolving nature of China’s transitional economy with the ‘new’ broad consensus about the coexistence of market and redistributive mechanisms (Walder, 1992; Oi, 1992; Rona-Tas, 1994; Bian and Logan, 1995; Lin, 1995; Szelenyi and Kostello, 1996; Xie and Hannum, 1996; Zhou, Tuma and Moen, 1996; Walder, Li and Treiman, 2000; Zhou, 2000).

While the market transition debate has stimulated intense sociological engagement on how marketization after reform has transformed the stratification order in China, it has left considerable conceptual and methodological muddles to be cleared (Walder, 1996).

First, the main explanatory variable (respondents' cadre status) at the center of this debate could be problematized as an adequate measure of redistributive power in state socialism, as Szelenyi and Kostello (1996) aptly pointed out.

“One of the most sensational issues in the market transition debate is whether current or former cadres benefit or lose from reforms. It is clearly related, but not identical, to the more general question of changes in overall inequality”.

In fact, I argue that this variable itself is a source of confusion and inconsistency for scholars involved in this debate, given that its performance in rural and urban contexts are qualitatively different. Among the rural populations, which Victor Nee has mostly written about, with the collapse of collective farming and retreat of “the three tiers of agricultural organization- commune, brigade and production team” (Ash, 1991), it is expected that the significance of party membership and political loyalty among rural cadres would decline as a lever of socioeconomic attainment. However, in urban China where individuals' work-unit remains an important organizer of everyday life and social benefits, which makes membership loyalty an organizational imperative in work-units (Lin and Bian, 2001), it would be plausible to see persisting and substantial rewards for political capital, in addition to human capital (Walder, Li and Treiman, 2000).

Instead, I contend that the validity of the market transition debate could be better achieved by addressing the country's most fundamental redistributive scheme, i.e. the urban-rural divide due to implementation of the infamous *hukou* institution (Chan, 1994; 2014; Chan and Zhang, 1999; Chan and Buckingham, 2008; Wang,

2005; Zhang, 2012), which dimension has been largely ignored in current discussions by transition theorists. As a matter of fact, while the market transition theorists built their arguments upon data collected in rural villages and households (Nee, 1989; 1991; 1996), their opponents mainly focused on samples from urban populations such as the Tianjin Survey (Walder, 1992; Bian and Logan, 1996; Zhou, 2000; Lin and Bian, 2001; Xie and Hannum, 1996). In neither case, the rural-urban divide was directly tackled in analysis, simply because this variable was virtually “controlled for” through statistical elimination.

Secondly, existing literature on market transition relies on rather narrowly defined or even weak measurements of socioeconomic attainment (i.e. the dependent variable), with most studies using income to measure former cadres’ relative gains or losses after reform (Nee, 1989; 1991; 1996; Walder, 1992; 1995; Xie and Hannum, 1996; Bian and Logan, 1996; Zhou, 2000). However, as Song and Xie (2014) commented, income or earnings as the outcome variable for the effect of market transition is potentially problematic, given that “it was distributed on the basis of egalitarian or formulaic principles and thus did not reflect the true dimension of social inequality in pre-reform or early reform China”. Thus, this discussion would benefit from a discussion of a wider range of socioeconomic indicators to get a holistic assessment, such as housing (Song and Xie, 2014), career mobility (Walder, 1995) and gender stratification (Hannum, 2005).

Last, as Chapter 2 will elaborate, in an incremental fashion, China’s reform since 1978 is characterized by interlocking systems of stratification mechanisms at different contextual levels, which is inadequately accounted for in the market transition debate. While most studies use micro-level data, with a few exceptions (Nee, 1996; Xie and Hannum, 1996), the sweeping argument of changing stratification order is made on

the national scale. In other words, there is a conspicuous absence of insights at the meso-level that could explicate the social processes that translate between macro-level structures and micro-level social phenomena (Faist, 1967). This project fills in this gap through an ecological analysis of multiple social contexts at various levels that jointly shape migrant children's achievement under the framework of ecological systems theory (Bronfenbrenner, 1979; 1999; Bronfenbrenner and Evans, 2000; Bronfenbrenner and Morris, 2006). In particular, I reveal that the family process and the schooling process are working sometimes at different or even opposite directions to influence children's learning.

In the current project, I revitalize the market transition debate through examining the relative gains and losses of one particular social group who have “transgressed” the rural-urban boundaries to assess the consequences of China's market transition in post-reform era upon its social stratification dynamics, i.e. the 23 million rural migrant children under 14 [the author's calculation based on ACWF (2013)]. Specifically, I marshal various sources of data in a mixed-method design to explore one important aspect of migrant children's development in contemporary China—their educational achievement. By investigating the relative gains and losses of migrant children over reference groups after the move from rural to urban areas, I directly examine whether the most fundamental retributive system (i.e. the rural-urban divide) in China has undergone transformation after reform. By looking at educational achievement of children from different origins as the outcome variable, I extend the market transition literature to explore its consequences in intergenerational transmission of inequalities, beyond its focus on intra-generational socioeconomic attainment (Korinek, 2006). Moreover, by bringing the effects of multiple social

contexts in analysis, I present a more realistic picture of China's post-reform social stratification order in relation to child development.

1.2 Migration and social transformation in post-reform China

Internal migration from rural to urban areas gained momentum in the 1990s as a result of a combination of top-down development policies that the state adopted to encourage the achievement of “allocative efficiency” (Cai, Du and Wang, 2009) through a massive transfer of cheap labour from agriculture to non-agricultural sectors, as well as bottom-up pursuit of economic opportunities by peasant workers to move away from underdeveloped rural areas.

Statistically, growth of this population of rural cheap labourers, known in different historical periods as “blind floaters” (*mangliu*¹) or “*dagong mei/zai*” or “migrants (*mingong*)”, is phenomenal. Official records estimate that in the decade between 1983 and 1993, its size hiked from merely 2 million to 62 million (ibid.). According to the 2010 population census, rural migrants living away from their home villages have reached 220 million (Peng, 2011). These numbers could have shocked sociologist Fei Xiaotong (1939) who wrote extensively on Chinese peasantry and their attachment to the land, were he still alive to see the wide-spread abandoned farmland, under-maintained rural infrastructure and dwindling of community life in villages across the country.

Institutionally, governance of this huge migrant population in post-reform China is based on a system that is largely a socialist legacy, albeit successive reforms. At the core of this system is the institution of *hukou* which binds an individual's citizenship rights and social entitlements to a particular category of population

¹ The term “*mangliu*” derives from a policy document issued in 1953, which was entitled “Instruction on persuading peasants from blindly floating to cities”. This was repeated in many other documents until the 1990s.

(agriculture versus non-agriculture *hukou*) and a particular locality (local versus non-local *hukou*) (Cheng and Selden, 1994; Chan and Zhang, 1999; Solinger, 1999; Wang, 2005). Under this framework, while rural migrants are allowed to work in urban places, their access to social benefits and services in host cities is restricted, which poses tremendous constraints for them to maintain their households and raise their children. As a result, some migrants leave their children in home villages under the care of left-behind spouses or other substitute caregivers (usually grandparents), hence the group of “left-behind children”. In other occasions, children join in their parents’ migration and relocate in cities, who are described as *liudong ertong*, proper translation of which could be “floating children”, “brought-along children” or “migrant children”². According to demographic studies, the population of migrant children witnesses a steady growth over the past decades. For example, within the decade between 1990 and 2000, its population increased from less than 4 million to 14 million (aged below 14). The recent 2010 census data showed that the figure rose to 23 million (ACWF, 2013).

While the body of literature on left behind children concerning many dimensions of their life in social science is large in volume [see Yang and Zhu (2013) for a detailed literature review], relatively less is known about migrant children’s wellbeing, let alone consensus reached in academia.

1.3 Literature Review: one group, two stories

Two competing narratives about migrant children in post-reform China have emerged in academic literature as well as in mass media.

² Throughout this dissertation, following the terminology in international literature, I refer to them as “migrant children”.

The dominant narrative presents a gloomy picture, in which these children are generally described as academic underachievers, psychologically traumatized and socially isolated, due to institutional barriers in their access to public education in urban areas and disadvantages in family socioeconomic status and cultural capital (Kwong, 2004; Wang, 2008; Goodburn, 2009; Cheng, 2011; Li, 2011; Wang and Holland, 2011; Zhou, 2011; Ming, 2013; Xiong, 2015). Though studies under this camp shed light on the tremendous negative impact of institutional exclusion and social discrimination upon children's life, it is limited in at least two ways. Methodologically, this line of research is characterized by the exclusive nature of research design that focused only on the targeted population, migrant children in cities, without taking into account of their comparable groups, hence a consistent lack of reference groups. While these studies implicitly adopted the group of local urban-*hukou* children as the comparison group which underscores the institutional exclusion in Chinese cities, this comparison strategy could not single out two compounding factors: the *hukou* effect and the migration effect. In terms of sampling strategy, data were generally collected from one or several cities, in particular popular destinations such as Beijing and Shanghai, which makes generalizability an issue. Theoretically, while it underscores the negative consequences of structural barriers such as the institution of *hukou* that render rural migrants and their families systematically disadvantaged in China's "incomplete urbanization" (Chan, 2010), it essentializes the image of rural migrants and their dependents as merely of "role-playing creature(s)" (Wrong, 1961), losing sight of their agency as human beings.

A new story emerges from quantitative studies with the recent China Family Panel Studies (CFPS) data by comparing migrant children's achievement patterns with their urban-*hukou* and rural-residing peers (Treiman and Ren, 2013; Xu and Xie, 2015; Jordan, Ren and Falkingham, 2014; Yeung and Gu, 2016), which argues that migrant

children benefit from the move relative to their rural peers remaining in rural communities and their development outcomes could reach parity with urban-*hukou* peers if adjusting for selection effect. The strength of this literature derives from the national representative data with rich and high quality family variables that allow researchers to rigorously compare migrant children with their reference groups. However, a limitation of this dataset is the lack of school-level variables, which could potentially lead to biased results. As ecological systems theory (Bronfenbrenner, 1979) that informs the current project posits, child development is a process of interactions between multiple social contexts that a child is embedded in, where the family and the school constitute two primary contexts. In the case of China's rural migrant children, ample empirical evidence suggests that the school context makes a huge difference (Chen and Feng, 2013; Lu and Zhou, 2013; Lai et al., 2014; Chen et al., 2015). Hence, further analysis taking account of both family and school factors is needed to better our understanding of migrant children's education. In addition, investigations from other national representative data sources are warranted to replicate results from the CFPS data.

In this dissertation, I take a conscientious effort to bridge this narrative gap in existing literature by analyzing both a large quantitative survey data (China Education Panel Survey 2014) and qualitative field data to examine how factors at multiple contexts interact to affect migrant children's development.

1.4 Research questions

In this dissertation, informed with ecological systems theory (Bronfenbrenner, 1979; 1999; Bronfenbrenner and Evans, 2000; Bronfenbrenner and Morris, 2006)., I open the black box between China's internal migration and rural adolescents' education to examine whether, and how, factors at the family-, the school- and the regional levels

predicted by key sociological theories mediate this relationship. Methodologically, I take advantage of a combination of a large national representative survey dataset (China Education Panel Survey, 2014) and qualitative interview data with 23 rural migrant families from two field sites (Hunan and Shenzhen) collected during my fieldwork in September 2014 and February 2015 in a mixed-method research design that provides a solid empirical basis for data analyses. These rich sources of data allow me to address the following key questions about Chinese rural migrant children's educational achievement.

- What are the mechanisms across multiple levels of structures, i.e. the family, the school and regional development levels, which drive the particular empirical patterns of migrant children's educational outcomes?
- How do different school contexts shape migrant children's educational opportunities and experiences?
- How do the rural migrant families, whose life history entails lengthy periods of separation between parent(s) and children, strategize to advance children's educational prospects (or the failure of it) against local structural constraints?

In addressing these questions listed above, I explore both empirical patterns of migrant children's educational achievement relative to their reference groups in urban and rural areas as well as social processes in the family and the school contexts that affect migrant children's learning opportunities and experiences. These inquiries are embedded in a larger theoretical and empirical question that this dissertation aims to answer with regard to China's market transition. Namely, how do we conceptualize and assess the massive internal migration in relation to China's social stratification system regarding child achievement? Do we conceptualize internal migration as a process of upward social mobility, in which children's educational achievement is

anticipated by families' improved socioeconomic positions, as market transition theorists would predict? Or do we conceptualize peasants' and their dependents' migration as a process of reproducing inferiority bounded by their rural-*hukou* status and attendant institutional constraints, as opponents of market transition thesis would predict?

1.4 Analytical framework

This study is informed by ecological systems theory (Bronfenbrenner, 1979; 1999; Bronfenbrenner and Evans, 2000; Bronfenbrenner and Morris, 2006). The relative strengths of this theoretical approach are two-fold. First, it foregrounds the multiple contexts that constitute individuals' living environment, which is apt for migration studies. As is known, migration across geographic/political boundaries involves negotiation with macro-level social policies pertaining to economic opportunities and immigration reception (Lee, 1966; Ravenstein, 1985; Stark and Bloom, 1985; Portes and Zhou, 1993; Zhou, 1997), maintenance of social ties and cultural communications that link migration origins and destinations (Levitt, 1998; Gold, 2005) as well as reconfiguration of family life (Boyd, 1989; Foner, 1997; Yeoh, Huang and Lam, 2005). In post-reform China, the institutional arrangements and differentiations between urban versus rural *hukou* (Treiman, 2012; Wu and Treiman, 2007), between social entitlements in different regions (Fan, 2005; Shen, 2013; Liu et al., 2014) and local-level migration policies (Hao and Xiao, 2015) are part and parcel of rural migrants' living experiences, hence indispensable in the analysis.

Secondly, in this ecological framework, environment is not analyzed "by reference to linear variables but in systems terms" (Bronfenbrenner, 1979:5). In other words, this approach takes into consideration the nested nature of diverse social settings that individuals are embedded in. In a like manner, scholars of childhood and education

have long conceptualized the process of child development as a product of constant interplays between children and the environment (at different levels), which may include the institution of family (Blau and Duncan, 1967; Lareau, 2003; McLanahan and Percheski, 2008), neighborhood and communities (Wilson, 1987; Leventhal and Brooks-Gunn, 2000), school context (Coleman et al., 1966; Collins, 2009) and the linkages (Coleman, 1988; Teachman, Paasch and Carver, 1996) among them.

At the family level, in the quantitative analysis of CEPS (2014), I examined four sets of mediating pathways between children's family types and their achievement patterns with a synthesis of theoretical traditions in social stratification, child development and migration studies, namely family SES (Blau and Duncan 1967; Bourdieu 1986; Coleman 1991; Lareau 2003), educational resources (Duncan, Yeung, Brooks-Gunn & Smith, 1998; Smith, Brooks-Gunn and Klebanov, 1997; Yeung and Pfeiffer, 2009), parental expectations (Sewell et al., 1969; Chen and Uttal, 1988; Schneider and Lee, 1990; Kim and Chun, 1994; Chao, 1994; Hsin and Xie, 2014)) and family social capital (Coleman 1988; Teachman et al., 1996). To complement and consolidate the quantitative findings, I also analyzed interview data from 23 migrant families collected in Hunan and Shenzhen respectively to illustrate the processes of "doing family" in these migrant households, where parents strategize to fill in the "care deficit", mobilize resources motivates adolescents' commitment in educational achievement while migrant adolescents' themselves participate in household chores, doing "emotion work" (Hochschild, 1989) and strive to repay parents' sacrifices through hard work in study. By examining these diverse family mechanisms for migrant children's educational patterns, I aim to unravel the process of family-based social stratification in post-reform China and whether and how migration plays a role in this process.

At the school level, in the quantitative analysis, I tested hypotheses about the effects of school institutional characteristics and school organizational features upon migrant children's educational achievement through integrating literature on China's hierarchical educational system (Pepper, 1996; Gasper, 1989; Wang, 2008; Ye, 2015; Gasper, 1989; Wang, 2008; Ye, 2015; Hannum, 1999; Tsang, 1996; Tsang, 2002; Hannum & Wang, 2006; Ma, 2010), effective school research (Rutter et al., 1979; Tylor, 1988; Sammons et al., 1995; Teddlie and Reynolds, 2000; Townsend, 2007) as well as literature on migrant children's schooling experiences (Shen, 2008; Chen and Feng, 2013; Lu and Zhou, 2013; Lai et al., 2014; Chen et al., 2015; Xiong, 2015). The quantitative findings are confirmed and complemented by a case study of two schools in the field. In this qualitative chapter, I explicated how China's education administration system which is characterized by "centralized decentralization" preserves, and to a great extent, exacerbates existing institutional inequalities, which gives rise to divergent school organizational processes.

At the regional level, I investigated how China's post-reform regional development policies (Yang, 1991; Fan, 1992; 1995; 1997) affect migrant children's educational outcomes by adding dummy variables of regions in multilevel analysis of the CEPS data. My field study of the two schools in Shenzhen and Hunan provided rich contextual information about regional development that structures the macro-level population dynamics and educational policies to affect migrant children's schooling.

By incorporating these different layers of social structures and mechanisms in a multilevel framework, this analysis advances knowledge about migration and child development in contemporary China in view of its unique institutional context.

1.4 Central arguments

This research extends the literature on child development in Chinese rural

migrant families by examining how multiple layers of social structure, such as the family and the school, affect their achievement patterns in a three-thronged analysis, under a sequential explanatory design of mixed-method study (Morse, 1991; Ivankova, 2006). I first establish the empirical patterns of migrant students' educational outcomes through a bivariate analysis of China Education Panel Survey (2014). This is followed by multivariate analyses (single level and 2-level) to explore the working mechanisms in various contexts. I then supplement and triangulate the quantitative analysis with qualitative data from 23 migrant families sampled from two schools in Hunan and Shenzhen. My central arguments are as follows.

First, with the CEFPS data, I demonstrated that multiple social systems, such as the family, school and the regional context in adolescents' life are stratifying migrant children's educational achievement. In terms of cognitive score, migrant children significantly outperform their rural peers: the gap between them and those in non-migrant households stands at 0.07 standard deviation ($p < 0.05$) and between them and those left behind at 0.18 standard deviation ($p < 0.05$). This effect is mediated by their higher family SES, better educational resources and parental aspirations, while the negative effect of strained mother-child relationship due to migration has been neutralized in the full model. However, in terms of educational aspiration, migrant children do not report significantly higher aspirations than their peers living at hometowns. In other words, the family conditions that promote their cognitive skills do not seem to directly translate into their higher achievement goals. Combining these two indicators, we observe an obvious paradox. Moving to or/and living in another place other than their *hukou* registration, presumably a more prosperous environment, seems to be associated with migrant children's improved cognitive ability. This same process does not seem to lift their future aspirations to the same extent. However, when we shift the

comparative lens to bring urban-rural differentials into the picture, there leaves limited room for a grandeur optimism. In either cognitive test or educational expectation, the gaps between urban-*hukou* teenagers and all rural-*hukou* groups, including migrants, are glaring and enduring, which could not be fully explained by blocks of family-level mediators and control variables.

Further analysis of cognitive score under a multilevel framework reveals a more complex situation. After controlling for school-level average score (variance component partition in baseline model show that inter-school variation accounts for 24% of total variation in students' cognitive score), the “surprising” twist becomes that the differences in test performance between three groups of rural teenagers are completely wiped out, but the urban advantage remains strong until school organization process and regional effects are accounted for ($p < 0.05$ in Model 3). This highlights the significance of an ecological approach in deciphering educational inequalities in contemporary China to incorporate feedback from multiple contexts such as family, school and regional development and processes in adolescents' schooling experiences (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). Cross-level interaction terms between migrant children group and contextual factors reveal more nuances. On the one hand, migrant children enjoy comparatively favorable school environment in urban areas, relative to their peers staying in rural schools. However, they encounter persistent barriers to access high quality education as migrants. Instead, they are more likely to be channeled to low- ranking and less academically competitive schools that do not serve as an optimal learning environment. On the other hand, the move of their families to economic hubs along eastern coast areas seems to benefits their cognitive scores, which might be related to better educational infrastructure in these areas.

Second, in the qualitative case study of two schools in field research, I documented two different school regimes in Bright School (public school in Hunan) and Eastern Bay (migrant school in Shenzhen), with the former illustrating a model which I described as *School as Competitor* while the latter illuminating a model of *School as Charity Organization*. I argue that these two models emerge from negotiation between a web of institutions, key actors and community resources to gain legitimacy in China's post-reform institutional background of "centralized decentralization".

Third, qualitative interview data with migrant parents and adolescents in 23 households recruited from the mentioned two schools illustrate an elaborate process of "doing family". I developed this conceptual tool to describe the processes of how rural migrant families (including extended families) strategize to fill in the "care deficit", mobilize resources within their reach and motivate adolescents' commitment through a repertoire of social indebtedness and parental sacrifices. This complements the quantitative analysis with more emphasis on the migration effect upon adolescents' educational and family experiences.

Finally, in a mixed-method design that combines a solid quantitative component, a concrete qualitative component, and the connection of the two through various linking strategies (Yin, 2006), this dissertation advances an argument that is conceived under a broader sociological debate concerning China's market transition in post-reform era. What is revealed is a complex picture of China's social stratification system in relation to rural migrant children's education, providing partial support for the market transition thesis and partial support for its counter-argument, depending on the reference group one chooses in interpretation.

Compared with their rural-*hukou* peers, migrant children gain modestly from moving to more economically prosperous urban places, which could be attributed to

higher family SES, more educational resources, boosted parental aspiration and more importantly better school environment. This is in general agreement with Nee's (1989; 1991; 1996) prediction of positive effect of marketization, with increasing salience of human capital in promoting individuals' socioeconomic attainment. At the meantime, the social positioning of migrant children relative to their urban-*hukou* peers is overshadowed with the legacies of redistributive mechanisms such as *hukou* status (Wang, 2005), school segregation (Shen, 2008; Chen and Feng, 2013; Lu and Zhou, 2013; Lai et al., 2014; Chen et al., 2015; Xiong, 2015) and regional development policies (Yang, 1991; Fan, 1992; 1995; 1997; Hao and Xiao, 2015). In other words, migrant children do not unanimously reap benefits after their move to urban areas, which defies the sanguine prediction by market transition theorists.

1.5 Significance of the Project

Through exploring the impact of multiple social structures upon children's educational achievement and its mediating channels, this study advances our knowledge about child development and social stratification in contemporary China, which has significant implications in different ways.

From the perspective of individual well-being, education, in the Chinese context, is still one of the limited ways of upward social mobility with high economic returns (Hannum, William & Xie, 1994; Hannum, 1999; Murphy & Johnson, 2009), particularly for rural youths whose change of *hukou* status is contingent on their obtaining of credentials (Bian, 2002; Wu and Treiman, 2007). Knowledge about what works and what does not work for children's education will significantly facilitate practitioners and professionals in the field to develop intervention programs.

From a broader perspective, with more knowledge of household-level, school-level and societal-level factors that enhance or inhibit children's educational

achievement, policy makers might be better informed in formulating group-specific policies to leverage the negative impact of inequalities upon social development. As numerous studies in sociology show, cumulative advantages or disadvantages can cause growing social polarization and fragmentation between communities, ethnic groups, regions and social classes (MacLeod, 2008; Wilson, 1987). Moreover, China is confronted with a shrinking labor force and an accelerating pace into an aging society, as is projected that the proportion of people aged 60 and above shall swell to 30% of the total population in 2050 (Banister, Bloom & Rosenberg, 2010), which places enormous pressure for a productive workforce in the coming generations. Knowledge pertaining to children's educational development is important not only on its own merits, but also in terms of the effects on children's developing into healthy, happy and productive adults for China's future.

Thirdly, this research engages with the sociological discourse to generate original knowledge on solid theoretical and empirical foundations. Theoretically, this research contributes to our understanding of how multiple layers of social structures and institutional arrangements shape the stratification dynamics in a transitional economy, thus extending market transition literature through broadening its scope of analysis by incorporating multiple contexts and through contributing new empirical evidence with regard to child development to the debate (Szelenyi and Kostello, 1996). Methodologically, this study adopts a much needed mixed-methods approach that provides a coherent and interactive framework of analysis to achieve generalizable and in-depth social knowledge about Chinese rural migrant children (Small, 2011), especially when there exists a noticeable gap in scholarly narratives about the topic at hand.

1.5 Structure of Dissertation

This dissertation consists of eight chapters. Following this introductory chapter,

I outline the institutional background for this study. The political economy of China's rural-urban divide reveals a striking but persistent fact in its century-long quest for modernization, the "peasant question", together with rural development and agriculture issues, has been sidelined to serve the teleological goal of national development, which has been institutionalized through discriminatory policies such as the *hukou* system and attendant policies. The pro-coastal development strategy in the post-reform era adds another dimension of China's uneven development, which induces decades-long migration from its vast hinterland towards ecological growth poles along the coast. An additional layer of complexity pertains to the educational system, one of the primary institutions for migrant children's development, which is hierarchical and fragmented under a decentralized financial scheme after reform. These three stratification systems, rooted in China's post-reform political economy, intertwine in shaping the opportunity structures for migrant children's education.

Chapter 3 reviews the voluminous literature on migrant children's educational issues and identifies research gaps in terms of both theoretical lenses and methodological approaches, which constitute the point of departure for this study. As will be shown, existing literature concerning migrant children's educational achievement is divided. One line of research frames migrant children's educational development in a *problem paradigm*, which is ill supported by quality and generalizable data. The other camp using representative national survey data yields sanguine conclusions about their relative advantages over their rural peers, which, however, is questionable for their lack of consideration of contextual factors beyond individual characteristics and family background factors.

Chapter 4 describes the methodological approach that this study adopts to investigate migrants children's achievement patterns and underlying working mechanisms. To bridge the gaps identified earlier, I exploit both quantitative and

qualitative data in a sequential explanatory design to complement, triangulate and consolidate each other, thus yielding a holistic picture of the research topic.

Chapter 5 focuses on quantitative analyses of the CEPS data. I examine how a host of family, school and county level factors jointly shape the educational outcomes for Chinese rural migrant children. The results reveal a complex situation where migrant children negotiate emerging opportunities and remaining obstacles at the multiple levels of their ecological systems.

Chapter 6 explores how the school context influences migrant children's educational experiences and engagement, using Bright School (Hunan) and Eastern Bay School (Shenzhen) as illustrative cases. Through examining interview data with school staff, administrators and students in each school, observational data as well as policy documents, I show that these schools operate with divergent education objectives, management strategies, and pedagogical styles in line with their perceived positions in local educational systems, available educational resources, as well as educational philosophies of key actors in administrative positions. Thus, there emerges two different school regimes, namely *School as Competitor* and *School as Charity Organization*, which generate different school cultures for students' educational engagement.

Chapter 7 presents a discussion of family processes in migrant households to facilitate adolescents' education. I develop the concept of "doing family" to capture the many dimensions of family life as rural migrants in urban areas.

Chapter 8 concludes by reviewing important research findings and putting them into perspective in a detailed discussion. I also draw theoretical and practical/policy implications from this study. The chapter ends with a brief note on the limitations and future plans to extend this study.

CHAPTER TWO RESEARCH CONTEXT

This chapter sketches the socioeconomic and institutional landscape for understanding labor migration and child development in post-reform China. The first section traces the political economy of China's rural-urban divide, which shapes unique patterns of labor migration and family strategies for rural households after economic liberalization. This is followed by a discussion of regional socioeconomic inequalities, another dimension of the post-reform political economy, which further drives unbalanced distributions of human populations with regard to perceived economic opportunities. The last section delves into the education system under the scheme of fiscal decentralization. This system works in combination with the tracking system and the restrictive *hukou* policy, resulting in substantial gaps in terms of educational opportunities and resources available for children of different social groups. The combination of these three social stratification systems, i.e. urban-rural divide, regional disparities and school segregation, constitutes the social context for the study of rural migrant children's school access and outcomes in contemporary China.

2.1 Rural-urban relations in historical context: “the peasant problem”

“During the years of collectivization in Mao's China, peasant labor underwrote industrialization, but peasants themselves were largely viewed by the state as impediments to socialist modernization.

In the early 1980s, an unprecedented infusion of state funding into the rural economy together with institutional changes gave rise to unprecedented rural prosperity, and the problem of the peasant was regarded as resolved once and for all... From the late 1990s into the early 2000s, an intense debate on the future of the peasant and rural reform erupted into mainstream discourse...The peasant question continually returns no matter how many times state authorities and intellectuals declare that it has been definitely resolved.” (Day, 2013:2)

As quoted above, across different stages of China's development under the reign of the Chinese Communist Party, the “peasant problem” together with rural

development has resurfaced as a political and social issue to be tackled with. However, the problem of rural decline has a longer history in the nation's anxious pursuit of a "modernization agenda" (Duara, 1991), which for generations of cultural and political elites is the path to regain its past glory and rise up to competition in the world.

2.1.1 In search of modernity: decline of the rural

The glaring gap between China's rural and urban areas, as Treiman (2012) aptly describes as "difference between heaven and earth", is a recent phenomenon.

Historians have demonstrated that "there was a rural-urban continuum in China prior to the mid-nineteenth century in which towns and countryside were harmoniously integrated" (Lu, 2010:29). This continuum is reflected in many aspects of social and cultural life. For example, Mote's (1977:116) study of Nanking in the 14th and 15th centuries revealed much uniformity between the city and the countryside in either architectural designs and layout, or daily life such as styles of dress and dietary culture. This, Motes (ibid.) believed, derives from a deep-rooted attachment of cultural elites to rural ideals. Indeed, a cursory glance of China's traditional writings among the literati confirms this observation. According to Lin Yutang (1935:121), the ideal traditional Chinese life was not the Greek type of exercising powers 'along lines of their excellence', but 'the enjoyment of the simple rural life, together with the harmony of social relationships.'

Moreover, van der Sprenkel (1977:610) analyzes it from a political perspective and maintains that in dynastic China governance of either the city or the country was practiced through two interlinking organizational forces, i.e. the bureaucratic network "reaching from the top downward to the family or household at the base" and the unofficial kinship/clan groups from below. Likewise, regarding social status and mobility, peasants as "primary producers of wealth" were considered comparatively

more important than artisans or merchants, thus were “always entitled to take civil-service examination” (Ho, 1962:41) to ascend through climbing the bureaucratic ladders.

However, this picture of harmonious integration began to be shattered with China’s fateful encounters with Western powers since the late 19th century, hence the prevalence of “logic of modernizing legitimation” (Duara, 1988). The imperial court of Qing dynasty attempted to build up towns to develop domestic industries, and “economic and social deterioration in the countryside in the late Qing period and early 20th century widened the gap between cities and the countryside” (Lu, 2010:30). Meanwhile, there emerged a cultural discourse on the “feudal backward” rural life of peasants among the elites in search of China’s modernity (Cohen, 1993). The most celebrated writer and social critic Lu Xun depicted a series of such literary images: the pedantry rural scholar Kong Yiji who failed to make a living and was reduced to destitute and humiliation, the listless peasant Run Tu who lost his childhood carefree and passionate spirit, and the desperate maid Ms. Xianglin who survived untimely deaths of two consecutive husbands and a son, with a sole earthly concern to escape hell after death (Lu, 1980).

2.1.2 Socialist economy and development policies: rural-urban dualism

After half a century of warfare and political chaos with successive warlord domination, civil war and foreign invasions, the national economy was basically crippled on the eve of the establishment of People’s Republic of China in 1949 (Naughton, 2007:50-51). The ruling Chinese Communist Party under the leadership of Mao Zedong pursued a socialist development strategy modeled after the Soviet Union which was characterized by

“...the system of collective agriculture, state enterprises, central planning, the administrative allocation of production factors, the use of price scissors to extract agricultural surplus to finance heavy industrial development.” (Chai, 2011:111)

This development model fundamentally restructured the rural-urban relation, with consequences felt today. Its logic is to be understood with some knowledge of the urban-biased developmental strategy by the Chinese Communist Party as a central planner (Nolan and White, 1984; Oi, 1993; Selden, 1993; Yang and Cai, 2000).

According to Sjoberg (1999), in a resource-constrained economy in socialist countries, central planners rationalize the preferential policies and allocation of resources to priority sectors as necessary conditions to achieve development plans. In the case of China since the 1950s, this line of rationalization gave rise to a series of ambitious 5-year plans that “subordinated agriculture and the collective and countryside to the state’s industrial, military, and urban priorities” (Selden, 1993:182) in order to realize “four modernizations” (*sige xiandaihua*)³ (Hsü 1990). To this end, three policy institutions were adopted to restructure the rural and urban populations. First, the labor policy of “unified allocation” (*tongyi fenpei*), which allocated urban residents stable jobs in state sectors while denying peasants employment chances in the cities. Further, the grain policy of ‘unified purchase and sale’ (*tonggou tongxiao*) that guaranteed urban residents food rations procured from peasants (80%-90% of their total harvest) at depressed prices while requiring the communes to provide for rural residents from the meager left-overs. Last, the *hukou* system that classified rural and urban populations as different categories subject to differential state welfare treatments (Cheng and Selden, 1994; Lei, 2001; Wang, 2005).

³The notion of “four modernizations”, i.e. industrial modernization, agricultural modernization, national defense modernization and science/technology modernization, was generally credited to the then premier Zhou Enlai in a government report in the 4th National People’s Congress in January 1975. It had been written into the party constitution and the state constitution. It has since become an important lexicon for different generations of the CCP government to articulate their development goals, albeit variations in the interpretations of its scope, timetable, and practical implementation (Hsü 1990:92-117).

These policies jointly segregated the rural China from the urban, widening the gaps between the two sectors in almost every aspect. In terms of public investment, by 1978 state investment on assets per peasant was one-thirtieth of those for industrial workers (cited from Selden, 1993:166). In terms of state provision of subsidies, annual average provision reached 526 yuan per state worker, i.e. 13% of national income, in stark contrast to less than 10 yuan per person for those in the rural sector (cited from Selden, 1993:168). In terms of social status, belonging to the two *hukou* categories (rural versus urban) carried enormous symbolic meanings in everyday life. For instance, possession of an urban ID card and sources of one's rice (whether one "eats state's rice" (*chi guojialiang*)) displayed social distinctions (Potter, 1983). This clear demarcation between the rural and the urban, through the state's active social engineering, announces the end of China's historical rural-urban continuum. Consequentially, this led to a dualist society divided by the rural-urban fault line in two simultaneous social processes: the uneven development of rural and urban economies as well as the creation of two political classes with categorically different citizenship rights.

Noteworthy is an added dimension of the *hukou* system, besides its symbolic and political distinctions, in restricting rural peasants' physical mobility in urban space during Maoist era, which resembled considerably the apartheid system in South Africa prior to its abolition (Alexander and Chan, 2004). While some scholars have noted the ancient pedigree of *hukou* in dynastic periods in Chinese history (Wang, 2005; Ma, 2010), what distinguishes the *hukou* system in socialist China is its teleological function to justify the subjugation of rural citizens in the name of achieving national prosperity. The following quote from the party mouthpiece *People's Daily* illustrates this well.

"These functions of *hukou* registration system in our country fully reflect the superiority of socialist institutions. It is inherently different from the ancient *hukou* systems in China's ancient antirevolutionary regimes and other imperialist countries. The old *hukou* system in ancient Chinese regimes served the class interests of landlords

and capitalists, and was in nature oppressive devices against the working people. They used *hukou* to extract labor, to tax, and to suppress patriotic movements and revolutions among the people, in order to maintain their antirevolutionary rules... But our *hukou* system serves one important measure for socialism and for serving the people. ... **As a socialist country, our goal is to build a happy communist society.** But in order to make this ideal come true, many matters of livelihood of the people must be entrusted to the state to make proper arrangements. *Hukou* registration is in accordance with this guideline. ... **By limiting these inappropriate actions [out-migration], this does not mean that we deny citizens' freedom to choose residence and to migrate. This is because the freedom of our nation is a disciplined freedom (*you jilv de ziyou*).** It does not equal absolute personal freedom. It is not anarchy. But the blind migration of a small number of people acted out a type of absolute individual freedom that refuses to be disciplined.” (People’s Daily, 1957, December 19, p1.; cited from Ma, 2010:50; emphasis added.)

2.1.3 “Socialist market economy”: migration and the rural-urban encounter

In 1978, the CCP government led by Deng Xiaoping pulled a brake to its socialist engine from the chaotic decade of Cultural Revolution and began to embrace the “socialist market economy”, which refers to “the coexistence of the state apparatus and market mechanisms which exert control over investment, allocation of resources, and priority of development” (Fan, 1999). Under this unique political economy, the urban-rural relations have been undergoing a systematic reconfiguration. This reconfiguration, in an incremental fashion, influences peasant life in many ways. On the one hand, it redefines the peasant-state relationship through the state’s retreat, i.e. its sophisticated apparatus including “the three tiers of agricultural organization-commune, brigade and production team” (Ash, 1991), from directly controlling and participating in agriculture production, heralding an era where rural laborers rapidly transition out of under-developed agriculture. On the other hand, this reconfiguration of state-peasant relationship has not completely dismantled its discriminatory policies against rural citizens. Rather, it allows conditions for rural laborers to sell their cheap labor in the expanding market while restricting their claims for social benefits and services in their sojourning places.

In fact, a closer examination of the rural-urban relations in this great transformation does not lend much optimism, as the very hierarchical nature of development reproduces, or even enlarges the disparities between them. For one thing, despite an early period of rapid rural development due to the implementation of Household Responsibility system that led to many researchers predicting a Chinese model of “urbanization from below” (Ma and Fan, 1994), the legacy of urban-bias as a development strategy remains (Yang and Cai, 2000), since the protected priority sectors concentrate in the urban settings. For another, the “liberalized” non-state sectors that employ millions of rural surplus laborers are themselves systematically disadvantaged in terms of either the financial support or the limits of investment activities imposed by the state. Haggard and Huang (2008:339-361), for instance, argue that the policies in post-reform China are best described as “permitting the operations of private firms” rather than “supporting private-sector growth”. This is not conducive to labor protection. Most importantly, the widely contested *hukou* system which restricts rural migrants’ entitlement to public resources remains stubborn as “an invisible wall” against their integration into city life to varying degrees among different regions (Chan, 1994; Solinger, 1999), despite a general trend of relaxation (Chan and Buckingham, 2008).

The gradual shift of migration policies is jointly influenced by the endorsement of an export-led development model by pragmatic leadership under Deng Xiaoping, massive spontaneous migration flows following Foreign Direct Investment capital and a decentralized fiscal relation between the central and local governments (Hao and Xiao, 2015; Cai, Du and Wang, 2009; Alexander and Chan, 2008). At the national level, as shown in Table 2.1, the State Council has promulgated numerous documents and regulations that attempted to manage labor migration over the last 30 years. During the 80s and early 90s, the basic tone was to tie up peasants to their land (*lixiang bulitu*) and

keep the surplus labor in rural China from blindly “floating” (*mangliu*) to cities. For example, in 1982, the State Council issued a document that urged to “strictly control rural to urban migration” (c.f. Liang, 2007). In 1984, a new document relaxed its restriction and allowed peasants “to enter towns to do business as long as they can take care of their own grain” (Liang, 2007). In the following regulations in 1989 and 1991, however, the state resumed its tight control of out-migration and advocated “officials/government agencies at all levels should discourage migrants to migrate to Guangdong blindly” (ibid.). A drastic shift of the official tone happened in the mid-1990s, especially after Deng Xiaoping’s South China tour in 1992. Moreover, the collapse of the commune system in rural areas and urban work-units in the cities, together with a marketized grain system, all made migration feasible (Lei, 2001). Therefore, larger populations of migrants were drawn to urban areas. Between 1982 and 2005, annual growth rate of rural-to-urban migration reached 14.5%, and between 2005 and 2010, this figure stood at 8.4% (Duan et al., 2013).

Since the 2000s, the state began to take more pragmatic measures to manage migrants in host cities. According to Cai, Du and Wang (2009), the central government has introduced a new approach characterized by “treating rural migrants friendly” since 2000, reflected in policy documents that “display active support and encouragement for rural migration, clearly propose reforming the institutional segmentation between city and country, and eliminating the guiding ideas that unreasonably restrict rural residents migrating to the city for work”.

However, local governments of migrant destinations are less incentivized to integrate rural migrants under their jurisdiction, due to the decentralized fiscal structure. According to Chan, Henderson and Tsui (2008:780), the decentralization wave in reform era is featured with revenue-sharing rules “laid down by fiscal contracts between

successive tiers of governments”, following the principle of “eating from separate pots” (*fenzao chifan*). For the governments of host cities, *hukou* system continues to serve as an exclusion mechanism to dodge fiscal liabilities to provide for rural migrants. Recent years have witnessed attempts of reform in various localities, such as the introduction of “blue-stamp” or “locally valid” urban *hukou* (Wong et al., 1998; Wang, 2005) to provide quasi-local *hukou* status for more desirable migrants, and the points system (*jifen ruhu*) in many cities in Guangdong (Zhang, 2012) to selectively accept “talents” as local citizens. In these new schemes, however, governments of migrant destinations follow a purely economic logic that prioritizes human resources and capital, seemingly “personal” attributes, to justify their unequal treatment of different categories of migrants. As the following sections specifically address regional disparities in relation to labor migration and the country’s compulsory education system, suffice it to say here that local conditions in migration destinations contribute considerably to the generation of different “contexts of reception” (Portes and Zhou, 1993) for rural migrant children in China.

2.2 Regional development and space hierarchy in post-reform China

China’s massive internal migration is also driven by increasing regional developmental disparities. At the superficial level this resembles the patterns of internal migrations in developed capitalist societies where migration is explained by individual-level weighing of costs and benefits such as wage differentials, geographic distances between migration destinations and export areas and information availability (Greenwood, 1975; Dennett and Stillwell, 2010), described more vividly as the pull-and-push factors in neoclassic economic theories (Lee, 1966). However, a closer look at the Chinese case reveals that it is better understood in relation to both market forces and government interventions in a transitional economy (Fan, 1999; Liu et al., 2014).

Like the reconfiguration of rural-urban relation described in the previous section, regional inequality and production of space hierarchies in post-reform era is largely a result of state interventions.

2.2.1 From “Third front” to “Three economic belts”

Geographer Cindy Fan (1992; 1995; 1997) has traced the political economy of uneven regional development and linked it to several background factors in transitioning from Maoist to Dengist development models. One is the reflection upon the negative consequences of Maoist regional policies between 1950s and 70s that compromised economic efficiency. Specifically, partly under the influence of Soviet theories of regional development which aimed to balance coast-interior development for “economic and national security reasons” (Yang, 1997:16), Mao adopted a “Third-Front” (*san xian*) policy which prioritized interior and remote areas rather than the “vulnerable” coastal cities (presumably more exposed to foreign invasions) as sites of industrial projects. For example, during the First Five-Year Plan (1953-1957), 2/3 of major industrial projects and 1/2 of the total industrial investment were allocated to interior provinces (Kirkby, 1985:138, cited from Fan, 1995). Such a model was heavily criticized in the late 1970s for being “not feasible nor appropriate” for economic efficiency (Fan, 1997).

Second, appropriation of neoclassical regional development theories from developed countries gave rise to a theory of “primary stage of socialism” (Su and Feng, 1979; cited from Fan, 1997) which posited that China’s transition to full-fledged socialism defined by Marx and Lenin would be preceded by a long process of accumulation. In combination with the general pragmatism under the leadership of

Deng which is best illustrated in his famous “black cat/ white cat/” theory⁴, this justifies the accordance of priority to economic efficiency over equity during “primary stage of socialism”. The combined effects of learning from history and from developed nations and reconceptualizing China’s development stage have jointly contributed to post-reform regional policies that are basically the reverse of the Maoist tradition. Based on weighing “comparative advantages” of China and of different regions within the country, guided by neoclassical economic theories, the Sixth Five-Year Plan (1981-1985) officially adopted the “three economic belts” (*sanda jingji didai*) division across the nation. According to this division, each region was tasked to play specific roles that are able to tap on their comparative advantages—“exported-oriented industrialization and foreign trade in the eastern region; agriculture and energy development in the central region; animal husbandry and mineral exploitation in the western region” (*Beijing Review*, 1986; cited from Fan, 1997).

This marked the creation of a new space hierarchy in favor of eastern coast areas, with the establishment of Special Economic Zones and open zones which enjoyed a wide range of preferential policies and investment (Fan, 1997). Albeit intense intellectual and political debates within China, the central government’s pro-coast position remained unchanged throughout the 1980s till the late 1990s when policies in the Ninth-Five-Year Plan (1996-2000) were laid out to redress interior-coast disparities, including increasing centrally allocated investment, promoting overseas investment and urging the coastal provinces to provide more assistance to interior provinces (Yang, 1997:83-97). Since 2004, government policies have been issued to further address

⁴“It doesn't matter whether a cat is white or black, as long as it catches mice” is Deng’s most cited quote. The origin of this quote is usually traced to 1962, though Deng mentioned in different occasions that he could not remember it and the comment was context-specific (Goodman 1994:184).

regional inequalities by diffusing economic development to poor regions in interior provinces (Fan, 2008; Liu et al., 2014).

2.2.2 Regional inequality

Albeit recent attempts to equalize regional development, the legacy of “three economic belt” policies, also described by Yang Dali as “coastal development strategy” (1991), is a major driver of pronounced regional inequalities and sustained large-scale interregional migrations. With diverse sources of data, indicators and methodological approaches, scholars have documented tremendous interregional inequality and its trend over different historical periods (Tsui, 1991; Kanbur and Zhang, 1999; Fan, 2005; Kanbur and Zhang, 2005; Fan and Sun, 2008; Li and Wei, 2010; Liu et al., 2014). These empirical studies have reached a consensus about the increasing gaps between eastern provinces that enjoyed policy benefits and their counterparts in less favorable conditions, despite slight fluctuations during early 1980s and after 2000. For example, using three inequality measures (i.e. the coefficient of variation, Theil index and Gini coefficient), Fan and Sun (2008, Figure 2) showed similar trends of interprovincial inequality between 1978 and 2006: interprovincial inequality declined during 1980s as a result of economic rise of several previously laggard eastern region provinces, drastically increased in the 1990s, remained flattened during early 2000s and slightly dropped after 2005. These trends correspond well with the state’s policies in different historical periods. The authors also showed that despite a general trend of steady growth of GDP per capita for the nation as a whole and all three regions, the growth curve is far steeper for the eastern coastal region.

Similarly, with per capita consumption expenditure data from 1952 and 2000, Kanbur and Zhang (2005) showed that the post-reform era has witnessed rapidly growing regional inequalities and the magnitude of inequality measured by Gini

coefficient in 2000 exceeded the levels at the end of Cultural Revolution in 1976 and at the Great Famine in 1960. Further decomposing regional inequality into two main components, i.e. the rural-urban and inland-coastal disparities, they revealed that since the 1990s when “coastal development strategy” was aggressively implemented, both rural-urban and inland-coastal disparities have widened and while the former is large but stagnant, the former is low in magnitude but fast in speed. They concluded with a regression analysis of relevant policy variables (the ratio of heavy industry to output, the degree of decentralization, and the degree of openness) and confirmed their significance in influencing regional inequalities in post-reform China. In fact, regional gaps in terms of economic development are reflected in advantages of coastal areas with multiple indicators. According to Zhang and Zhang (2003), for example, trade volumes generated by coastal provinces (including 11 provinces and municipalities) accounted for over 86% of national total and FDI inflows to these coastal provinces accounted for over 87% of national total during the entire period between 1986 and 1998. In 1998, the top three provinces/municipalities, i.e. Guangdong, Jiangsu and Shanghai, contributed to over 60% of national foreign trade.

2.2.3 Migration geography and regional inequalities

The growing regional inequalities parallel with massive migration flows from China’s poor central and western provinces to the eastern coast region (Fan, 2005; Shen, 2013a; Shen 2013b; Liu et al., 2014). Analyzing the 1990 and 2000 censuses data, Fan (2005) concluded that the relationship between migration and unequal regional development has been strengthened over time. In both censuses, the eastern region registered net migration gains, while the central and western regions experienced negative net migration. Further, across the two data points, both the volumes of net migration and discrepancies between regions were found to have widened, which

suggests the prevalence of migration and concentration of migration flows over time. Likewise, Shen (2013a) documented substantial correlation between economic development and in-migration rates for different regions. As Table 2.2 shows, the influx of migrant populations to popular destinations along the eastern coast has gathered pace since the 1990s while their counterparts in central and western regions have only seen moderate fluctuations. Thus, he argued for two main drivers of internal migrations in post-reform era: while the surge of migration rates across the country between 1985 and 1990 could be explained by institutional factors such as the relaxation of *hukou* restrictions in 1985, the concentrated eastward migration thereafter should be attributed to the rapid and unbalanced economic development. In a separate paper, Shen (2013b) modeled the change of interprovincial migration between the 1990 and 2000 census data points by decomposing predictors into two parts, i.e. changes of regional development (socioeconomic factors) and changes of the migration system such as *hukou* policies (institutional factors). The result indicated that 62.28% of the increase of migrant population was due to changes in the value of the demographic, social and economic factors among various provinces, while 37.72% was due to the changes in the migration policy context. Liu and associates (2014) further traced the emergence of a few national economic growth poles over the decades after reform that migration flows are gravitated towards, namely the Pearl River Delta in the 1980s, the Yangtze River Delta in the 1990s and the Bohai Economic Rim in the 2000s.

In the above section, I outlined the geographic patterns of China's internal migration in relation to uneven regional development induced by the country's unique development model—"coast development strategy" (Yang, 1991). While population migration follows a neoliberal logic to chase after perceived economic opportunities which concentrate in a few economic growth poles (Liu et al., 2014), the paradox

between this neoliberal movement and the state's clinging to socialist population governance mechanisms against the backdrop of a more decentralized central-local relationship becomes more than obvious.

2.3 The compulsory education system in post-reform China

The following section introduces China's compulsory education system and its hierarchical nature, which, in combination with the exclusive *hukou* policy and "local protectionism" fermented through the financial decentralization scheme, systematically structures unequal educational opportunities to the disadvantage of rural migrant students.

2.3.1 The compulsory education system: the burden of finance

In 1986, China instituted the Compulsory Education Law to guarantee the right to 9 years of compulsory education for every school-aged child (Xia, 2006), ushering impressive progress in eradicating illiteracy and universalizing education in the country. Statistics show that among primary-school age children, net enrollment rate increased from 49.2% in 1952 to 99.5% in 2008, while entry to junior high schools rose from 44.2% in 1957 to 99.7% in 2008 (NBS, 1996; NBS, 2009).

Meanwhile, for the next two decades, the state has restructured its education funding scheme in which the share of financial responsibilities oscillated among different levels of the administrative structure. During the first decade, as part of a major adjustment in the public finance system (Park et al., 1996), China adopted a financially decentralized education system based on the principle of "local responsibility and administration by levels" (Tsang, 1996). In this scheme, the county government, the town/township government and the village government were held responsible for the provision, finance and administration of upper-secondary education, lower-secondary education and primary education respectively (ibid.), which is found

to have exacerbated regional inequalities and rural-urban gaps (Hannum, 1999; Tsang, 1996; Tsang, 2002; Hannum and Wang, 2006).

According to *China Education News* released on Oct. 27, 2000, the financial structure of rural primary schools and middle schools was overly dependent on lower levels of government: 2% from the central government, 11% from provincial/regional governments, 9% from county governments, and 78% from township governments (c.f. Zhang, 2002). As a result, a hefty proportion of this financial burden was delegated to peasant families through various taxes and fees levied by local governments: between 1993 and 1999, over 35% and in 1996 50.1% of the budgets for rural compulsory education were from taxes levied from rural families, including “local education surcharge” (*jiaoyu fujiafei*) and other miscellaneous fees (ibid.). The heavy financial burden on peasants and rural teachers’ outcry of low payment and wage arrears, and other concomitant issues led to a discourse of “education crisis” and “rural crisis” among scholars and even local administrative cadres across the nation (ibid.).

To address this “rural education crisis”, since 2001, new packages of policies were issued to alleviate the burdens of financing compulsory education in rural areas. The practices of levying education surcharges and other fees from farmers have been legally banned. The county governments, instead of village and township governments, are stipulated to fund rural compulsory education, with more contributions from the central government. And infrastructure in rural schools have improved and payment of rural teachers’ salaries is guaranteed. Since 2006, a further step has been taken to grant tuition and miscellaneous school fee waivers to rural students [See (Ding, 2008) for a detailed review].

2.3.2 A hierarchy of schools: the tracking system in a decentralized scheme

As sketched above, China's expansion of mass education, particularly through implementing a 9-year compulsory education for all school-aged children, significantly improves the literacy level of its citizens. Table 2.3 shows that across the span of 25 years, China's literacy rate, particularly among the younger cohorts, almost reaches 100% with a converge of both genders.

However, universal literacy does not translate into equal development. In fact, the combination of a tracking system that prioritizes selected schools and a decentralized fiscal scheme that devolves financial burdens to local jurisdictions creates a hierarchical school system that subjects different student populations to differential educational experiences.

Key-point schools: public resources on selected groups

The Key-point school system, despite its dubious origin, follows a similar logic of prioritizing a small number of schools at the expense of equality to speed up development of education and cultivation of "talents" for China's modernization. Many believe that this concept surfaced as a policy directive in 1953, but interrupted during Cultural Revolution. The following quote from *People's Education* (a popular magazine) in 1953 illustrates the rationale of a key-point system.

"The various provinces and cities should select some middle schools with better conditions to serve as key-point [*zhongdian*] schools. Their human and material conditions should be strengthened in a planned manner (by assigning them better teachers and improving their facilities), and so should their teaching-research organizations for the various subjects be strengthened, to lead in the collective study of teaching materials and methods and the study of the Soviet Union's advanced experience." (Cited from Pepper, 1996:205)

It was reinstated in reform era as part of the new leadership's initiative to spur up science and technology development as well as experiment new teaching and learning models (Gasper, 1989; Wang, 2008; Ye, 2015). By the end of 1979, key-point

schools enrolled more than 10 million students (Gasper, 1989). These schools, like the Special Economic Zones, were given preferential policy and resources in a wide range of areas, including candidates with the highest test scores, a favorable staff-student ratio, commendable facilities and qualified staff, and more competitive and ‘scientific’ curriculum designs. Although the 2006 revision of compulsory schooling legislation forbids the categorization of key-schools and non-key-schools, this system survives under new masks, such as “experiment schools” (*shiyan xuexiao*) and “model schools” (*mofan xuexiao*). The next section on urban enrollment regime will illustrate this.

The fiscal reform of decentralization in the 1980s adds another layer of complexity. Despite the new reforms in education financial scheme as mentioned earlier, the system remains largely decentralized. For example, in 2011, the ratio of total educational fund and expenditure from the central government to that from local governments stands at approximately 10.9% (¥ 23.36 billion versus ¥215.34 billion) (ESYOC 2012), which means that local administrations of various levels have considerable autonomy in investing resources intensively on a few key schools that promotes local reputation. This has significant implications for China’s educational stratification.

For one thing, Liang and associates (2013) with data of 50 years (1952-2002) from two universities concluded that the key school system serves as a meritocratic way to select best students from all walks of life, particularly those from the lower rung, thus breaking the monopoly of ruling classes in elite institutions. For another, other scholars argue that the key school system exacerbates inequalities by clustering family class, spatial hierarchy and rural-urban divide. For example, Wang Xiangli (2010) demonstrated that enrollment in key-point schools is associated with higher family economic powers, higher parental occupational status, and residence in key-school

catchment areas, i.e. overall privileges. Likewise, Ye (2015) observed a significantly negative effect of rural origin on students' attendance at senior high schools. Particularly, rural students face a trade-off between a key-point senior high school and employment right after junior middle school, as they perceive no prospect in entering ordinary high schools.

Proximity enrollment: collusion of schools, parents and governments?

In response to public outcry against rampant school choice practices that hamper educational equality, since the 1980s, the central government has been actively advocating proximity enrollment (*jiujin luqu*). It is until recent years that the policy has been put into practice with the Ministry of Education setting the target of 95% enrollment in junior middle schools through the proximity principle by 2017 in all big cities. However, due to the legacy of uneven distribution of educational resources, such as the presence of the key school system and its variants of 'demonstration schools' (Wu, 2011) in urban centers, concomitant with development of the "real estate heat" and *hukou* policies, a new enrollment regime has evolved that systematically benefits the upper and middle classes families, to the exclusion of migrant children and urban lower classes.

Article 12 of Compulsory Education Law (2006) mandates that "the local people's governments at various levels shall ensure that school-age children and adolescents enroll in school near the places where their *residence is registered* (emphasis added)", which opens a space for heated real estate development in catchment areas near prestigious schools, as property ownership is considered a premise of *hukou* registration in the particular district. Anecdotal information about prices of catchment properties reveal that it is a money game. For instance, the property price of an apartment in Haidian district (Beijing) reached ¥100,000 per square meter in 2013,

whereas the average annual salary in Beijing stands at ¥ 69,521 the same year⁵. Wu Xiaoxin's (2011) case study of Nanning (capital city of Guangxi Province) notes the unaffordability of catchment properties, hence "obviously relocation is an option open only to middle and upper class families".

Rural schools: the left-behind

Education in China's rural areas tells a more disheartening story. As listed in Table 2.4, against the remarkable GDP growth which is often neatly weaved into a narrative of "Chinese miracle", public expenditure of the country in proportion to GDP is less progressive: only until 2012 did it reach above 4%, which was overdue by more than a decade than promised by the central government⁶. The rural sector is consistently under-provided through public funding, and only since the 2010s the gap is abridged but still not closed, which does not account for regional disparities, another compounding factor. For example, according to the Statistical Report on National Education Expenditure (2013), per capita government funding in public primary schools in Beijing is ¥20407.62, approximately 5.8 times that of primary schools in Henan (¥3458.02).

Table 2.5 presents the vast differentials concerning teachers' qualifications in China's rural and urban areas, broken down by regions. As shown, in 2001 at both levels of primary schools and junior middle schools, proportions of teachers with higher educational training ("junior college degrees and above" for primary school teachers and "university degrees and above" for junior middle school teachers) almost unanimously fell below 50% those of their urban counterparts. The gaps are the most pronounced in poor western provinces and regions.

⁵ See details in the news site: <http://news.sina.com.cn/c/2013-08-13/053927932459.shtml> (accessed on August 19th, 2016)

⁶ See <http://news.sciencenet.cn/htmlnews/2011/4/246681.shtm> for details (accessed on August 19, 2016)

A growing body of literature has documented the detrimental consequences of this uneven development. With the 1988 national household sample survey, Knight and Li (1996) reported a huge rural-urban gap in respondents' educational attainment, in favor of urban *hukou*-holders by more than 4.5 years. And the drop-out rate of the rural population aged 14-19 reached almost 50%. Moreover, recent studies of rural schools raise a concern about teachers' demoralization, due to the authoritarian administration that denies teachers' autonomy in teaching and participatory decision-making in a formalistic and corrupt bureaucratic system (Wang, 2008). The grim reality of household and community levels of disadvantages adversely affects the quantity and quality of education in rural areas, which in turn handicaps local development.

2.3.3 Education of rural migrant children

Education of rural migrant children in urban areas is a controversial issue of increasing visibility in press and scholarly studies. As described earlier, China's internal migration happens in the context of substantial rural-urban and regional developmental gaps generated by state policies to improve efficiency in economic liberalization while minimizing its cost. To the achievement of such goals, the *hukou* system, largely a socialist legacy, remains binding as a governing mechanism to capitalize on rural migrants' labor power while restricting their entitlements to the cities where they work (Chan, 1994; 2014; Chan and Zhang, 1999; Chan and Buckingham, 2008; Wang, 2005; Zhang, 2012). Put in simpler terms, they are welcome as potential economic contributors to urban economies but denied full citizenship rights in the localities where they are legally defined as "strangers" (Zhang, 1999) by their rural and/or non-local *hukou*. One important aspect relates to their children's education, as Hao and Xiao (2015) commented that "the national and local policies pertaining to the education of rural-urban migrants were designed for circular migration". Below I

briefly sketch major policies in relation to migrant children's education at both national and local levels.

2.3.3.1 Central policies

Following a similar trajectory of migration control described in Section 2.1, the central government has gradually shifted its policy orientation from restriction to relaxation in educating migrant children in urban public system, while the thorny issue of divergent central versus local interests in a decentralized fiscal relationship in the post-reform era has resurfaced to create gaps in implementation. As is displayed in Table 2.6, the national policies with regard to migrant children's education can be roughly divided into two phases.

Phase 1: "strict prevention and steadfast defense"

During the initial stage of reform in the 1980s and the 1990s, the general attitude towards migrant children's education in cities was exclusionary. In indigenous terms, migrants and their children are subject to "strict prevention and steadfast defense" (*yanfang sishou*) against their "encroaching" on urban benefits. Meanwhile, there was a gap in the legal framework to guarantee these children's educational rights in cities (Xia, 2006). The binding restrictive *hukou* policy and the Compulsory Education Law in 1986 (1986 Law) defined them as unworthy "illegal" students in these places, as they had transgressed out of their own *hukou* localities. For example, Article 8 of the 1986 Law stipulated that "under the leadership of the State Council, **local authorities** shall assume responsibilities for compulsory education, and it shall be administered at different levels" (emphasis added). Such an exclusive regulatory framework was inherited in two policy documents in the late 1990s that specifically targeted at migrant children, i.e. *The Provisional Regulations on Schooling for Children of Migrant Populations in Cities and Townships in 1996* (1996 Regulation) and *The Interim*

Measure of School Education for Temporary Migrant Education (1998 Measure). In line with the 1986 Law, local governments of “sending areas” were held responsible to “strictly control the outmigration of school-aged children” (Hao and Xiao, 2015). In the case of migrant children whose *hukou* and residence localities are separated, local governments in their host cities could easily dodge responsibilities of providing educational service even if they had adequate capacity to accommodate these children in its public education, which unfortunately was not rare in reality. Some scholars estimated that between 1995 and 2002, Shanghai had left about 520,000 placements⁷ for compulsory education unused, while the population size of migrant children in this municipality was around 40,000. Likewise, Beijing “wasted” 32,000 placements while 30,000 migrant children were left on their own device to access education (cited from Zhu, 2014).

Against such durable barriers in school access, migrant families resorted to two measures. One is to enroll children in unlicensed private migrant schools. Nationwide data of migrant schools remain unavailable, as many of them are not operating under the purview of government regulations. Media reports and scholarly works based on small samples in single sites tend to agree that the quality of education provided by these schools is suspect (Han, 2001a; 2001b; Lv and Zhang, 2001; Xiong, 2015). These schools are also found to operate in a legal vacuum. For example, in 2007, among the 297 migrant schools which enrolled 130,000 students in Beijing, 239 were unlicensed (Wu, 2010).

⁷ In the current Chinese compulsory education system, admission in public schools follows a quota (*xuewei*) set by local education bureaus in accordance to the estimated student population and the school capacity to accommodate. The estimation is based on a set of criteria which define illegible candidates, including *hukou* status, family residential area, parents’ employment status and so on. Given the one-child policy which was put into strict implementation during the 1980s and after, vacancies in public schools in Shanghai or Beijing were expected. However, as Han (2009:65) pointed out, urban schools are “reluctant to add migrant children to the mix, fearing it may undermine the learning process of urban children. One oft-used excuse is that a school has no more vacant seats.”

Despite the fact that most migrant parents would prefer to enroll their children in public schools, educational barriers besides *hukou* status still make public schools a tough choice. Due to the aforementioned decentralized education system and funding scheme, policies issued by the central government sometimes lose their binding force for local authorities. For migrant children to be admitted in public schools, various types of extra fees were charged: “borrowed placement” fees (*jiedu fei*), education compensation payment (*jiaoyu buchangfei*), and school selection fee (*zexiao fei*), which were exorbitant compared with the meager household income in migrant families. For example, in 1999, migrant parents had to pay quite a few extra fees to enroll their children in public schools: a 480-yuan temporary student fee, a 2,000-yuan education compensation payment and a one-off 1,000-yuan school selection fee (*zexiao fei*) (See China Labor Bulletin, 2009).

Phase 2: “under the same blue sky”

A substantive change of policy orientation only came in the 2000s, with the promulgation of a series of regulations that specify responsibilities and funding schemes to secure migrant children’s rights to education in host cities. On Teachers’ Day (September 10th) in 2003, the then premier Wen Jiabao visited a migrant school in Beijing and wrote on the blackboard “under the same blue sky; walking together towards progress” (*tongzai lantianxia, gongtong jinbu chengzhang*)⁸, which has been widely interpreted as a symbolic reversal of the state’s previously exclusive stance towards migrant children’s education.

In *The State Council’s Decision on the Reform and Development of Basic Education* in 2001, for the first time the central government required that 1) governments of hosting cities bear the responsibility of providing education for migrant

⁸ See details in the following link: http://education.news.cn/2004-11/17/content_2227120.htm (accessed on July 15th, 2016).

children, and 2) urban public schools shall accommodate migrant children in their system (see from Hao and Xiao, 2015). In *The Notice of Improving Education of Children of Rural Migrant Workers* in 2003, the central government further stipulated that 1) receiving governments shall arrange for budget for migrant children's education while encouraging donations from social organizations and individuals (Article 7), 2) local receiving governments shall strengthen the regulation of migrant schools and improve their educational quality (Article 8), and 3) urban schools shall reduce or waive extra fees for migrant children and charge them the same amount as local pupils (Article 6). In 2012, to solve the contested issue of migrant children's school progression after compulsory education⁹, a new policy to allow migrant children's participation in college entrance examination in host cities has met vehement resistance by local urban citizens (Zhu, 2014).

In principle, these new policies represent a commendable progress in the central government's efforts to integrate migrant children in public education. However, they fail to "tackle the core issue, financing, and make no difference in the sense of devolving financial responsibilities to local governments" (Jie, 2010). The imaginable consequence is that local governments would improvise countermeasures to protect their finances and the interests of their *hukou* citizens within their jurisdiction. For example, though the Ministry of Education and the State Council, China's cabinet, have officially banned "school choice" and other unregulated fees five times since 2005, school officials and relevant government departments keep finding creative ways around the ban, allowing them to keep the cash flowing.

⁹ Despite uniformity in the implementation of 9-year compulsory education across the nation, school progression for a college education in China is decided by the *Kaogao* system which allocates university admission quotas within provinces. Given the quota in a specific locality is contingent on a number of factors, such as the competitiveness of local students, the number of prestigious institutions, the administrative level and so on, rural migrant students are generally regarded as threats by local urban citizens to have diluted their chances. Prior to 2012, migrant students were not allowed to sit in college entrance examinations in host cities (*yidi gaokao*).

2.3.3.2 Local countermeasures

Local responses to the central government's request to provide for migrant children's education vary markedly (Hao and Xiao, 2005). In general, small or medium sized cities tend to adopt more lenient policies to admit migrant students in public schools, while in eastern and big cities obstacles remain (Duan and Liang, 2005). Local governments resort to two measures to restructure migrant education, namely through reorganizing the existing migrant schools and through recalibrating enrollment thresholds into public schools. There are at least three models of managing migrant schools arising out of this process, namely the Beijing model, the Guangdong model and the Shanghai model.

Against a prevailing liberal discourse, the Beijing municipal government has adopted more stringent policies to close the door on the face of migrants¹⁰. Some scholars contend that such stringent policies serve as an "education-based population control strategy"¹¹ practiced in Beijing to exclude migrants. First, migrant schools are under more strict regulations to get licensed or closed. According to media report, many schools were forced to move and be demolished multiple times over the years to obtain approval as authorized institutions¹². Second, the threshold to public school admission remains high. Reluctant to finance migrant children's education, the local government raises the standard for their enrolment in the public system. A common practice is to require numerous documents. As reported by Han (2009:58), in tandem with a campaign to tighten the rope of regulating migrant schools in 2006, parents of migrant

¹⁰ In August 2016, the Beijing municipal government introduced a new point system to selectively convert migrants' *hukou* to local *hukou* status, similar to the practices in Guangdong. The new policy will take effect on January 1st, 2017. See <http://society.people.com.cn/n1/2016/0811/c1008-28629575.html> for details (accessed on August 16, 2016)

¹¹ See <http://china.caixin.com/2015-10-29/100867843.html> for details (accessed on June 18, 2016)

¹² See the following links for details: <http://www.nytimes.com/1999/12/12/world/for-china-s-rural-migrants-an-education-wall.html?pagewanted=all>; <http://www.asianews.it/news-en/Only-NGOs-take-care-of-migrant-children's-education-5624.html> (accessed on July 31, 2016)

children whose schools were ordered to shut down were advised to apply for placements in local public schools with five additional certificates: the *hukou* register (*hukou ben*), temporary residence permit (*zanzhu zheng*), employment permit (*wugong zhengming*), residence registration (*juzhu zhengming*), and permit to leave their hometowns due to availability of guardians in hometown (*zai dangdi meiyou jianhutiaojian zhengming*). A 5-year longitudinal study reveals that banning substandard migrant schools while excluding them in public education system fail the purpose of reducing its migrant population as intended by the Beijing government. Many migrant children, not incentivized to return to their hometowns as expected, simply drop out and join manual labor¹³.

As seen in Table 2.7, the Guangdong model is characterized by selectively subsidizing “qualified” candidates in migrant schools and purchasing placements in these schools to ease the burden in local public schools which are reserved for *hukou* citizens (Zhang, 2012; Hao and Xiao, 2015). However, it is often not easy to satisfy the eligibility requirements. For example, since 2005, Shenzhen has been implementing a policy of “5+1” in conditionally accepting migrant children in public schools¹⁴. Eligible candidates should be able to show the following papers: temporary residence certificate (*zanzhuzheng*), family planning certificate (*dusheng zinv zheng*), school transfer letter (*zhuanxue guanxi han*), birth certificate (*chushengzheng*), social insurance certificates of both parents (*fumu shuangfang shebao*), and property deed or rental contract (*fangchanzheng/zulin hetong*). For many migrant families, the family planning certificate alone could disqualify their children in admission, since a significant proportion of rural families have violated their birth quota in line with the family

¹³ See <http://china.caixin.com/2015-10-29/100867843.html> for details (accessed on June 18, 2016)

¹⁴ See http://www.sz.gov.cn/zfgb/2005/gb449/200810/t20081019_94830.htm for details (accessed on June 18, 2016)

planning policy (Greenhalgh and Winckler, 2005).

Shanghai, among the “first-tier” cities, shows the most liberal attitude towards integrating migrants. In 2008, the Shanghai municipal government launched a 3-year campaign to incorporate migrant children in its public education system. Ambitious targets were set: with 70% of migrant children in primary education while 100% into secondary education (Lan, 2014). A notable pattern in Shanghai is the restructuring of the school system to transform migrant schools into private institutions with public subsidies (*minban gongzhu*), which some scholars credit as the public-oriented Shanghai model (Yang, 2010:181). As Table 2.7 shows, the scale of transformation and subsidization of migrant schools in Shanghai is indeed unrivaled than its comparable cities. According to official statistics, the proportion of migrant children enrolled in public schools increased from 49% in 2005 to 69% in 2009; the proportion of them attending unlicensed migrant schools declined from 51% to merely 3%; meanwhile, 28% of migrant students were transferred to state-subsidized private schools (Lan, 2014).

2.4. Summary

This chapter sets the context for the current study on labor migration and child development in post-reform China. The political economy of China’s rural-urban divide reveals a stunning but persistent fact in its century-long quest for modernization. Across different historical periods, the “peasant question”, together with rural development and agriculture issues, has been sidelined to serve the teleological goal of national development, which has been institutionalized through discriminatory policies such as the *hukou* system. Further, the “coastal development strategy” (Yang, 1991) adopted by the developmental state creates every uneven development between different regions, which drives massive waves of interregional migration whose

“transgression” of their *hukou*-localities render them in structurally disadvantaged positions. The education system, hierarchical in nature and decentralized in its financial basis, further channels different student populations into very unequal systems. These three stratification systems, rooted in China’s post-reform political economy, intertwine in shaping migrant children’s educational opportunities and experiences, which will have implications for their development.

Table 2.1 Selected Migration Policies by the Central Government

| Year | Title |
|-------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| 1982 | Notice to Strictly Control Rural Labor to Work in Urban Areas and the Change from Agricultural to Non-agricultural <i>Hukou</i> (<i>nong zhuangfei</i>) |
| 1984 | Notice on Farmers' Obtaining of Local <i>hukou</i> in Townships |
| 1989 | Emergency Notice on Strict Control with Farmers to Move out of Rural Areas |
| 1993 | Decision of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of China on Some Issues concerning the Improvement of the Socialist Market Economy |
| 1994 | Provisional Regulations regarding Interprovincial Migration |
| 1998 | Opinion on Ways and Means of Resolving Major <i>Hukou</i> Management Issues |
| 2003 | Notice on Completing the Management and Services System to help farmers obtain Employment in the Cities |
| 2006 | State Council's Opinion on Ways and Means of Resolving Migrant Worker Issues |
| 2014 | State Council's Guidelines on Further Reforming <i>Hukou</i> -Registration System |

Source: Liang (2007: 197-215); CRESMOA (2010); Hao and Xiao (2015)

Table 2.2 In-migration rates of temporary population by region (1985-2005 :%)

| Province | 1985-1990 | 1990-1995 | 1995-2000 | 2000-2005 |
|-----------------------|-----------|-----------|-----------|-----------|
| Eastern region | | | | |
| Shanghai | 5.0 | 5.0 | 13.7 | 17.5 |
| Beijing | 6.2 | 5.4 | 14.4 | 15.1 |
| Guangdong | 2.0 | 2.8 | 14.3 | 13.7 |
| Zhejiang | 0.8 | 1.1 | 6.1 | 10.9 |
| Tianjin | 2.8 | 2.3 | 5.1 | 9.0 |
| Central region | | | | |
| Jiangxi | 0.6 | 0.3 | 0.7 | 1.3 |
| Anhui | 0.6 | 0.3 | 0.6 | 1.2 |
| Hubei | 0.8 | 0.5 | 1.2 | 0.9 |
| Hunan | 0.5 | 0.3 | 0.6 | 0.8 |
| Jilin | 1.0 | 0.6 | 1.0 | 0.8 |
| Western region | | | | |
| Xinjiang | 2.3 | 3.3 | 6.0 | 3.1 |
| Inner Mongolia | 1.2 | 1.2 | 1.4 | 1.7 |
| Guizhou | 0.6 | 0.4 | 0.8 | 1.5 |
| Qinghai | 2.6 | 1.0 | 1.6 | 1.4 |
| Ningxia | 2.0 | 0.9 | 2.4 | 1.4 |

Source: Shen (2013a; Table 3)

Table 2.3 Adult and youth literacy rate in China, 1990-2015

| | 1990 | 2000 | 2010 | 2015 projection |
|-------------------------------------|-------|-------|-------|--------------------|
| Adult literacy (15 and over) | | | | |
| Total | 77.8% | 90.9% | 94.3% | 95.5% |
| Male | 87.0% | 95.1% | 97.1% | 97.8% |
| Female | 68.1% | 86.5% | 91.3% | 93.2% |
| Gender parity index | 0.78 | 0.91 | 0.94 | 0.95 |
| Youth literacy (15-24) | | | | |
| Total | 94.3% | 98.9% | 99.4% | 99.6% |
| Male | 97.0% | 99.2% | 99.5% | 99.6% |
| Female | 91.5% | 98.5% | 99.3% | 99.5% |
| gender parity index | 0.94 | 0.99 | 1.00 | 1.00 |

Source: Huebler and Lu (2012)

Table 2.4: Public expenditure (% GDP) & government budgeted fund per student

| | % GDP | Government budgeted fund per student | | | | | |
|------|-------|--------------------------------------|---------|-------|----------------------|---------|-------|
| | | Primary school | | | Junior middle school | | |
| | | National average | Rural | Ratio | National average | Rural | Ratio |
| 1995 | 2.46 | 265.78 | 219.31 | 83% | 492.04 | 392.59 | 80% |
| 2000 | 2.79 | 491.58 | 412.97 | 84% | 679.81 | 533.54 | 78% |
| 2005 | 2.82 | 1327.24 | 1204.88 | 91% | 1498.25 | 1314.64 | 87% |
| 2010 | 3.66 | 4012.51 | 3802.91 | 95% | 5213.91 | 4896.38 | 94% |
| 2011 | 3.93 | 4966.04 | 4764.65 | 96% | 6541.86 | 6207.10 | 95% |
| 2012 | 4.28 | 6128.99 | 6017.58 | 97% | 8137.00 | 7906.61 | 97% |

Source: Ministry of Education, National Bureau of Statistics and Ministry of Finance, Statistical Report on National Educational Expenditure (1995-2013).

Table 2.5: Full-time teachers' qualifications in urban and rural areas, 2001

| | National mean | East | Central | West |
|-----------------------------------------------------------------|---------------|-------|---------|-------|
| % qualified primary school teachers | 96.81 | 98.25 | 97.32 | 94.40 |
| Urban areas | 98.26 | 98.74 | 98.27 | 97.41 |
| Rural areas | 96.04 | 97.91 | 96.87 | 93.10 |
| % primary school teachers with junior college degrees and above | 27.04 | 32.47 | 27.31 | 21.18 |
| Urban areas | 40.94 | 44.38 | 41.36 | 34.20 |
| Rural areas | 20.25 | 24.20 | 20.67 | 15.58 |
| % qualified junior mid. school teachers | 88.81 | 90.96 | 88.45 | 86.03 |
| Urban areas | 92.32 | 93.34 | 92.36 | 90.47 |
| Rural areas | 84.74 | 87.44 | 84.71 | 81.40 |
| % junior mid. teachers with university degrees and above | 16.95 | 19.85 | 15.56 | 13.04 |
| Urban areas | 23.51 | 26.15 | 23.39 | 18.95 |
| Rural areas | 9.35 | 10.50 | 10.07 | 6.88 |

Source: Wang (2003)

Table 2.6 Education Policies Related to Migrant Children by the Central Government

| Year | Title |
|----------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Phase 1 | |
| 1986 | Compulsory Education Law of the People's Republic of China |
| 1996 | The Provisional Regulations on Schooling for Children of Migrant Populations in Cities and Townships |
| 1998 | The Interim Measure of School Education for Temporary Migrant Education |
| Phase 2 | |
| 2001 | State Council's Decision on the Reform and Development of Basic Education |
| 2003 | The Notice of Improving Education of Children of Rural Migrant Workers |
| 2010 | Ministry of Education's Decision of Revision and Annulment of Certain Regulations |
| 2012 | Opinion on Ensuring Migrant Children's Participation in Local Entrance Examinations on Completion of Compulsory Education |

Source: Xia (2006); Zhu (2014); Hao and Xiao (2015)

Table 2.7 Information on Migrant Schools in Selected Cities¹⁵ (fees in Yuan)

| Time | Province/city | # school | #student | Tuition fee | Government subsidy |
|------|---------------|---------------------|-----------|-------------|----------------------------------------------------------------|
| 2014 | Beijing | 130 (67 licensed) | 95,000 | 1000-2000 | ---- |
| 2012 | Shanghai | 157(all subsidized) | 136,000 | Free | 5000 /per student/per year |
| 2012 | Guangzhou | 308(all private) | 367,300 | 1500-4500 | 450 for primary/ 725 for junior middle school |
| 2013 | Shenzhen | 239(all private) | 398,000 | 2000-5000 | “5+1” subsidy: 5000 for primary/ 6000 for junior middle school |
| 2011 | Jiangsu | 145 | 118,000 | --- | --- |
| 2013 | Zhejiang | -- | 353,100 | --- | --- |
| 2014 | Chengdu | 60 | 70,000 | --- | --- |
| 2014 | Guiyang | 200 | 150,000 | --- | --- |
| 2010 | China | --- | 2,050,000 | --- | --- |

Source: NCP (2014)

¹⁵ Notes:“---”indicated that “data not available”; the data on Guangzhou and Shenzhen might be slightly overestimated, as they included a few expensive private schools; information from other sources about Jiangsu province (Hao and Xiao 2015) suggests that migrant schools might also be heavily subsidized, though no conclusive evidence is found.

CHAPTER THREE LITERATURE REVIEW

This chapter critically reviews existing scholarship, both in Chinese and in English, on rural migrant children's education in contemporary China to identify theoretical and empirical gaps, which contextualizes the current project in the academic discourse. To add a caveat, I do not intend to have an exhaustive review here, but to sketch major advances in substantive topics, findings and methodological approaches. Further, as will be shown later, there is no overarching theoretical models in this field. This review focuses on three relevant topics in the discussion of migrant children's education in contemporary China, i.e. the demographic account of this particular social group, migrant children's school access and their educational performance.

3.1 Chinese rural migrant children in the age of migration: a demographic account

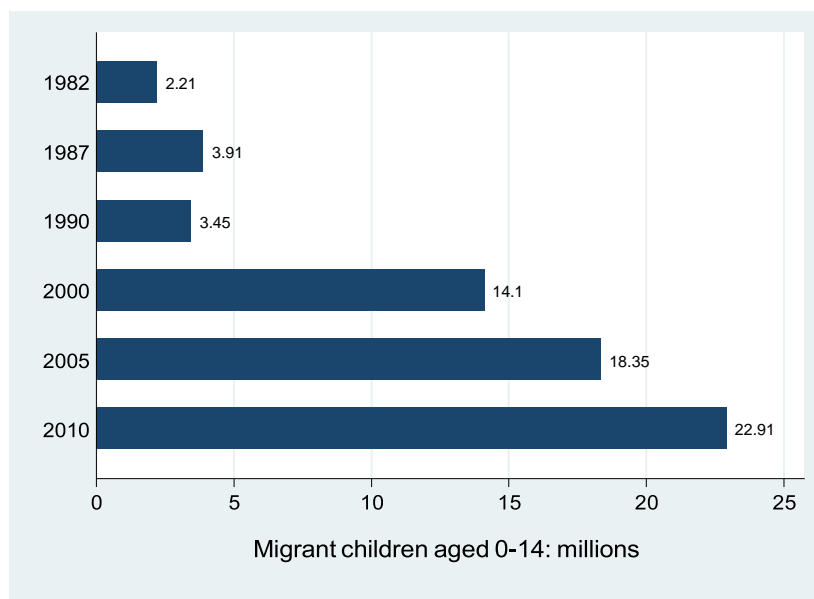
In this section, I provide a brief account of the demographic patterns in China's internal migration over decades, with a particular focus on children on the move.

Migration Patterns and Trends: In response to the relaxation of migration policies and substantial disparities of interregional development, migration flows grew exponentially from the first phase of strict control in the 1980s and early 1990s to the latter phase since mid-1990s. Demographically, the sheer size of the migrant population is unprecedented in human history, from the initial estimate of 7 million in 1982, to 79 million by 2000 (see Liang and Ma, 2004) and to the most recent 262 million in 2012 (NBS Statistics, 2012). Between 1982 and 2005, annual growth rate of rural-to-urban migration reached 14.5%, and between 2005 and 2010 this figure stood at 8.4% (Duan, Lv and Zou, 2013).

Children on the move. Demographers have also documented the growth pattern of China's migrant children population over decades (Duan and Liang, 2005; Duan and Yang, 2008; Duan et al., 2008; Duan, Lv and Zou, 2013; ACWF, 2013). As shown in Figure 3.1, the

population of migrant children aged below 14¹⁶ remained relatively stable prior to 1990 and has grown exponentially thereafter. Within the decade between 1990 and 2000, its population increased from less than 4 million to 14 million, following a similar trend of total migration during the same period, which suggests that migration has gained momentum as China’s economic liberalization accelerates during the 1990s. The more receptive policies towards migrant children’s education introduced in the 2000s, at least propagated by the central government, have further propelled steady growth of the migrant children population. In 2010, approximately 23 million migrant children below 14 are living outside their *hukou* registration place and about 80.35% of them are with agriculture *hukou* (ACWF, 2013).

Figure 3.1 Migrant children population over time



Source: figures calculated by the author based on statistics reported in Duan and Liang (2004); Duan, Yang, Zhang and Lu (2008); Duan (2015); CNP (2014)

This massive exodus of child migrants also indicates a significant change of the nature of China’s internal migration, that is, it has evolved from single-person to family movement

¹⁶ Some scholars categorize all those aged below 17 as migrant children, while others set the age of 14 as the threshold which conforms to the definition of young dependent population as below 15 in demographic studies (Duan and Liang 2004; OECD 2016). I adopt the second definition here based on availability of information, especially regarding the 1982 and 1987 census data, and this definition also fits the purpose in this study of children in compulsory education stage.

(Lu and Zhou, 2013; Duan, 2015). According to the 2010 census data, two-generation migrant households and three-generation households constitute 38.52% and 5.04% of all migrant households respectively (Duan, 2015). In Beijing, three-fourths of married migrants are living with their spouse while more than half have moved their children along (Chen and Liu, 2012). According to a large-scale survey of migrant population in 2011, 15% of these migrant children were born and raised locally, 14.3% were born in another city away from their hometowns and moved later to their residential places at the time of interview, while 27.5% spent at least half of their lifetime in the then residential place. These figures challenge the *hukou* system that categorizes them as “outsiders” in the cities where they are *de facto* long-term residents (Duan, 2015).

As described in Chapter 2, another distinctive feature of China’s internal migration after reform is the huge interregional migration moves towards a few economic growth poles, given the country’s uneven regional development. For example, based on statistics from the 2010 census data, 14.42% of the country’s migrant children reside in Guangdong province, followed by Zhejiang, Jiangsu and Fujian. In some megacities, the proportion of migrant children in the overall child population is rather high, 36.27% in the case of Shanghai (Duan, 2013). Estimates by New Citizen Program (NCP, 2014) indicate that the top five migration destinations, namely Guangdong, Zhejiang, Jiangsu, Fujian and Shandong, have attracted about 6.8 million migrant children in compulsory education age, which constitute 47.6% of the national total.

3.2 Existing literature on rural migrant children’s education

According to Xiang and Tan (2005), one of greatest accomplishments among Chinese social science since the 1990s has been “the establishment of a *migrant-centered* narrative which focuses on migrants’ experiences and problems”. In particular, it has generated a huge literature documenting, analyzing and understanding life of children in migrant families. A survey from the China Knowledge Resource Integrated Database (CNKI) indicates that

academic studies on migrant children emerged in the 1990s and flourished in the 2000s (Zhou and Rong, 2011; Zhou and Weng, 2011). According to Zhou and Rong (2011), research of migrant children in Chinese academia has undergone three phases. During the initial stage (1994-2000), researchers generally focused on identifying institutional barriers for migrant children's school access, investigating migrant schools and living conditions of migrant children, yielding a rather low volume of research, approximately 9 papers per-year. The second stage (2001-2005) corresponded to the time when policies issued by the State Council specified that education of migrant children be the main responsibility of host cities. In terms of research volume, the year 2005 alone saw the publication of over 200 papers. The third stage was induced by the amended Compulsory Education Law (2006) passed by the National Congress which legislated migrant children's equal education rights. Thereafter, the migrant children literature reached a boom, evidenced by the 630 publications in 2008. This copious body of literature covers a wide range of topics related to education policies, school enrollment and performance, social integration and well-being of migrant children (Huang 2014). In a similar vein, publications in English language have been growing to discuss how the unprecedented massive migration from rural to urban areas in China impacts children's well-being (Guo, 2002; Nielsen et al., 2006; Liang and Chen, 2007; Wu and Zhang, 2015; Wang, 2008; Goodburn, 2009; Montgomery, 2012; Kwong, 2004; Wang and Holland, 2011; Woronov, 2004; Hao and Xiao, 2015).

In what follows, I review existing literature on main topics related to migrant children's education in urban areas.

3.2.1 Migrant children's School access

Similar to the story of left-behind children, migrant children whose precarious position in urban educational system became visible through journalist reports. In 1995, articles were published in government mouthpieces such as *Guangming Daily* and *China Education Daily*,

exposing alarming levels of school dropout among migrant children in cities (cited in Huang, 2014; Xia, 2006). Based on small-scale enumeration, these earlier reports tended to overestimate the situation and some claimed that the enrollment rate of migrant children was as low as 12.5% (cited in Shi, 2002; Lv and Zhang, 2001).

3.2.1.1 School enrollment: empirical patterns

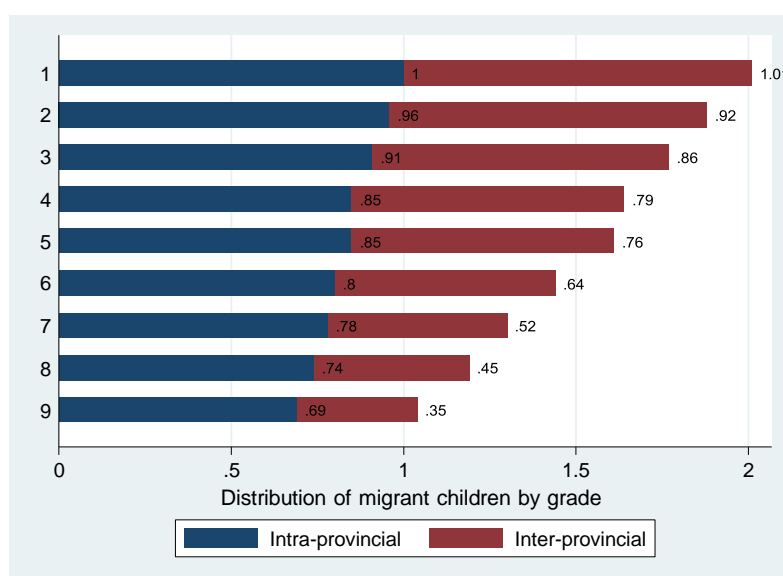
Empirical results by social scientists present a complex picture. Estimates from a variety of data sources indicate that migrant children in general are indeed at a greater risk of low enrollment, though the reported statistics vary considerably. For example, Solinger (1999) calculated that in the mid-1990s merely 40% of migrant children between 5 and 12 attended school in Beijing. Guo Fei's (2002) study based on the 1997 Migrant Census in Beijing showed that 88% of migrant children aged between 6 and 14 were receiving formal schooling. The National Survey of Temporary Migrant Children (NSTMC, Chinese scholars also call it "9-city survey") in 2002 showed that the proportion of national average rate of school attendance among migrant children stood at 91.7% (Duan and Liang, 2005; Zou et al., 2005; Liang, Lin and Duan, 2008). With the 1995 China 1% Population Sample Survey data on Guangdong province, Liang and Chen (2007) differentiated children's migration status and residential length in hosting cities, finding that temporary migrant children (those without local *hukou* registration) were less likely to be enrolled in schools than either their urban local peers or their counterparts from the same origin. Besides, the duration of residence in local areas was found to be a significant factor. In particular, the enrollment rate of those temporary migrant children residing in their current location for less than 1 year was merely 60%. With micro-data from Chinese population censuses in 1990 and 2000 and mini-census in 2005, Wu and Zhang (2015) followed Liang and Chen's (2007) origin-destination approach and reported that compared with enrollment rates of non-migrant children in both origin (rural) and destination places (urban), rural-urban migrant children fared significantly worse. For example, in 2000, 93.8%

rural-urban migrant children aged 7-14 (corresponding to compulsory education stage) were enrolled in school, compared with 98.4% urban non-migrant children and 96% rural non-migrant children in the same age bracket. Alarming, their chances of attending schools were even lower than those of left-behind children. The same patterns were repeated in the statistics from the 2005 mini-census data.

The huge discrepancies of reported enrollment rates possibly derive from two reasons. One is related to sample selectivity and specificity. As discussed in Chapter 2, a host of socioeconomic, demographic and political factors contribute to the emergence of divergent migration regimes across the nation, which makes estimation based on regional or municipal data and that based on national data differ to a great extent. Secondly, from a historical perspective, due to mounting pressure from central government and public appeals for educational equality, host cities have increased migrant student enrollment substantially, albeit enduring obstacles (Hao and Xiao, 2015). Thus, the overall trend of enrollment for migrant children is on the rise.

However, research also shows that educational barriers build up as children transition to higher grades, particularly in big cities (Yan, 2005; Lu, 2007). As shown in Figure 3.2, descriptive statistics based on information released by Ministry of Education in 2012 indicate that the student population size dwindles as migrant students move toward higher grades. This pattern is especially salient among the inter-provincial migrant group. For example, the ratio between 9th graders and 1st graders in number is about 70% among intra-provincial migrants and merely 35% among interprovincial migrants. No large-scale longitudinal data is available to lend a conclusive explanation for this pattern. However, it is plausible to attribute at least part, if not full, of the reason to growing educational barriers in migration destinations in higher grades, where interprovincial migrants are subject to more institutional exclusion and social discrimination which could lead to higher chances of drop-out.

Figure 3.2 Distribution of migrant children by grade (million)



Source: NCP (2014)

Multivariate analyses have identified a host of factors that contribute to migrant children's attendance in urban schools. Family socioeconomic conditions, including parents' education, *hukou* status and household income, are found to exert significant impacts (Guo, 2002; Nielsen et al., 2006). The duration of families' residence in receiving cities is also consistently found to be significant (Guo, 2002; Nielsen et al., 2006; Liang and Chen, 2007; Wu and Zhang, 2015), which may be a proxy of parents' educational and employment status or social network in destinations. Likewise, city-level contextual factors are found to be potential determinants of rural migrant children's school attendance and the type of schools they are registered. For example, based on the 9-city survey (NSTMC), scholars confirmed the hypothesis that the size and the location of migration destinations affect the reception of migrant children in public schools. Specifically, compared with eastern provinces, higher percentages of migrant children in central or western regions were enrolled in urban public schools. In addition, relative to big cities, higher rates of migrant children in small and medium-sized cities were admitted in public schools (Duan and Liang, 2005; Zou et al., 2005; Liang, Lin and Duan, 2008). With the same data, Lu (2007) further added two contextual variables

from publicly available statistics: GDP per capita and migrant ratio in relation to local resident population. Results from logistic regression analysis supported the claim that migrant children in coastal regions are disadvantaged in enrollment rate compared to central and particularly western regions. The migrant-resident ratio at the destination was negatively correlated with and GDP per capita was positively associated with school attendance¹⁷, which suggests two countervailing mechanisms in popular migration destinations in influencing migrant children's school access.

3.2.1.2 Institutional exclusion: discourse analysis

Another group of researchers focused on discursive analysis of the relationships between the state, schools, urban citizens and migrant communities with regard to migrant children's educational opportunities (Wang, 2008; Goodburn, 2009; Montgomery, 2012), given the country's institutional constraints based on "the intricate relationship between *hukou* status and social service entitlement" (Ming, 2013:6). For example, Goodburn (2009) discussed the two discourses that shaped migrants' vulnerabilities. First, "the floating population" as a whole are stigmatized as 'poor, illiterate, ill-mannered and backward', which link them directly to 'low quality' that could potentially hinder the progress of China's modernization project. Moreover, they are simultaneously considered by local citizens and state agencies as a threat to drain urban resources, under the existing institutional framework which links one's entitlement to social benefits to *hukou*-locality. These two discourses work in tandem to justify exclusion of migrant children in urban schools in the name of improving population quality and maintaining social stability.

Montgomery (2012) examined the legal framework concerning migrant children's entitlement to compulsory education through analyzing relevant laws and regulations, such as

¹⁷ Lu's (2007) interpretation of data regarding GDP per capita in the paper was contradictory to data presented in Model 4, Table 5 when she reported that "the share of temporary migrants at the destination was negatively associated with school attendance, which was also true for per capita GDP".

the Constitution, the Education Law, State Council directives, the Compulsory Education Act and other local regulations. She pointed out that the “gray areas” in such laws and regulations allow for much space where local governments could interpret and implement these vague directives at minimal cost. For example, whereas the amended Compulsory Education Act in 2006 stipulates that local governments of host cities be responsible for enrolling migrant children in public schools (Article 12), it also states that “the concrete measures shall be formulated by provinces, autonomous regions and municipalities directly under the Central Government”. As a result, to minimize the impact of influx of migrant children upon local educational budget and maintain the status quo of concentrating public resources on local *hukou* children, governments at local levels shape a system of school segregation that would systematically channel migrant children to low-performing schools.

3.2.2 School segregation and migrant children’s education

As detailed in the previous section, Chinese rural-origin migrant children in urban areas, particularly big cities, face institutional exclusion and social discrimination in accessing state sponsored public schools, which force many of them either to quit early or enroll in private migrant schools (Han, 2001a; 2001b; Kwong, 2004; Wang, 2008; Goodburn, 2009; Wang and Holland, 2011). Since the 2000s, in response to the central government’s request of accommodating migrant children as part of local public service, local governments take various measures to reform and reorganize existing migrant schools while recalibrating enrollment thresholds into public schools, hence the diversity of local practices. As a result, while growing numbers of migrant children are admitted in public schools in line with locally stipulated eligibility requirements, roughly 2.05 million are still enrolled in migrant schools [NCP, 2014].

3.2.2.1 Migrant children in migrant schools

A burgeoning body of literature has focused on migrant schools as a context for migrant children’s development (Han, 2001a; 2001b; Lv and Zhang, 2001; Kwong, 2004; Wang, 2008;

Goodburn, 2009; Wu, 2010; Zhou, 2011; Wang and Holland, 2011; Xiong, 2015). Given the dearth of national data, most researchers draw samples from one or two sites, providing descriptive accounts of structural problems faced by these schools to facilitate students' learning. The Beijing Migrant Children Compulsory Education Report by Han (2001a; 2001b) is one of the first comprehensive investigations of migrant children's education in these low-end private schools, based on a sample of 102 teachers and 2161 students in 50 migrant schools in Beijing. The study revealed rich information on four broad issues. First, the emergence of migrant schools as a channel of grassroots self-initiative to satisfy migrant children's educational need. The market of private education for migrant children expanded rapidly between 1993 when the first such school in the sample was established and 2000 when the research was completed. In the academic year 2007-2008 alone, 21 migrant schools were opened. The school sizes varied enormously, with 4 of the schools catering to less than 50 students and 2 of them registering over 1000 students. With low tuition rates and easy access, these migrant schools to a great extent eased the pressure of the public education system to accommodate migrant children for the municipal government. As reported by Han (2001a), by the end of 2000, the drop-out and non-attendance rates for migrant children aged between 6 and 15 in the sample were lower than 3%, which was much lower than figures calculated by scholars for earlier periods (Solinger, 1999; Shi, 2002; Lv and Zhang, 2001). Second, the somber conditions of migrant schools. According to the report, migrant schools were usually run by former or retired teachers, located in city outskirts, with shabby classrooms and below-standard facilities, as well as arbitrary curriculum design and textbook selection. Third, the teaching quality compromise. Migrant schools were found to be characterized by a high level of instability. Students could quit due to haphazard chances, whereas new students might show up in the middle of a semester. Teachers were generally not well trained, lacking either the credentials or experiences for teaching positions in public schools. However, surprisingly,

survey results of teacher-student bond in these schools indicated that the majority of teachers were rated high by students and their parents. Last, migrant children's ambivalent subjectivities as "familiar strangers" in Beijing. While 58.8% of them were born locally or stayed over 5 years, merely 10% identified themselves as "Beijing citizens". While 67.2% of them liked the "modern and advanced life" in Beijing and a high percentage hoped to work there in future, 58.2% rated negatively about local children due to experiences of being bullied (26.1%) or discriminated against (37.1%).

Another report by Lv and Zhang (2001) about migrant schools in Beijing confirmed many of the results in Han's report (2001a; 2001b). With student diary data, the authors also showed that while recognizing and literally experiencing unequal treatments as poor and inferior citizens in Beijing, these children expressed a deep sense of gratitude towards their parents' hard work and commitment to their wellbeing and a strong incentive to repay this debt through superior educational performance.

While recording the strikingly inferior conditions of migrant schools in comparison to local public schools, a few studies in English publications (Wang, 2008; Woronov, 2004; Goodburn, 2009; Wang and Holland, 2011; Yi, 2011) discussed how broader systems of inequalities shape the social marginalization of students in these institutions, not least the *hukou*-based institutional exclusion and the *suzhi* discourse that justifies and perpetuates discrimination. For example, Woronov (2004) observed that migrant children's lack of important symbols of "normative childhood" in public schools, such as school uniforms and Little Red Pioneer scarves, marked them visibly 'out of place' in the national capital--Beijing. Moreover, in an outing to a tourist site Summer Palace, students from the migrant school were criticized by local citizens for their "lack of discipline", although the author commented that the children did not commit serious offenses for such public censure. These are indicative of a nuanced cultural and symbolic system in urban China that creates a hierarchy of *suzhi* where

migrant children are constructed as underachievers. Interestingly, Yi (2011) conducted a study in a school which was promoted from a rural village school in outskirts Xiamen, with three groups of students, i.e. local urban students, migrant students and local rural students (recently granted urban *hukou* due to urban expansion of the city). The author found that while compared to urban students who were considered well-mannered with good learning habits, migrant children's rural background and lack of family education were believed to contribute to their lower *suzhi*. However, when compared to local new urban citizens, migrant children were rated positively by teachers for their drive to work hard and spirit of adventure. Thus, the author commented that "by this criterion, migration is associated with modern moral values, and represents an adventurous, entrepreneurial spirit of capitalism", which somehow added to migrant students' *suzhi* values.

Informed with literature on social reproduction in western contexts (Bourdieu and Passeron, 1977; Willis, 1983; Fordham and Ogbu, 1986; MacLeod, 2008), some studies recorded the formation of counter-school sub-cultures in migrant schools (Zhou, 2011; Xiong, 2015). According to Zhou Xiao (2011), students in a migrant school in Beijing rebelled through violating school rules such as smoking, gambling, violating school discipline and video-gaming, which at the surface level resembled the lads' school resistance in Paul Willis' classic work of *Learning to Labor* (1983). However, these migrant children's resistance was not a complete rejection of the achievement ideology, but a self-denial of their capabilities to realize middle-class aspirations to escape from the fate of poverty, marginalization and insecurity as rural peasants. Similarly, in a migrant school in Shanghai, Xiong (2015) observed a counter-school culture where students challenged teachers' authority, dropped out early, fooled around and joined 'gang' groups. This reinforces the discourse among local citizens about their "lack of culture", inferior academic performance, disciplinary issues and "uncivilized" living habits.

3.2.2.2 Migrant children in public schools

With increasing numbers of migrant children registered in urban public schools, related research is yet to catch up. Constrained by data limitations, the few published papers tend to focus on a few sites such as Shanghai and Beijing.

Chen and Feng (2013) collected data from 20 primary schools (11 public schools and 9 migrant schools) in Shanghai and found huge gaps across the board between the two types of schools: teachers' characteristics, student performance and parental evaluation. For example, 94% of teachers obtained an associate degree or higher in public schools, about 20% higher than the figure in migrant schools; 85% had over 10 years of working experience, exceeding those in migrant schools by 50%; and over 70% in public schools earned a monthly salary of 5000 yuan, in comparison with 0% in migrant schools. They further estimated regression models on students' test scores (Chinese and mathematics). As expected, students' performances are stratified by school types and *hukou* status. In public schools, Shanghai local students on average scored higher in both Chinese and math tests, exceeding those for migrant children by a modest margin of 3 points. However, the gaps between migrant children in public schools and those in migrant schools are much larger, 10.6 points in Chinese and 16 points in math.

With data from Panel Study of the Development of Migrant Children in Beijing, Lu and Zhou's study (2013) supported a modified segmented assimilation theory (Portes and Zhou, 1993; Zhou, 1997). After controlling for family background and demographic factors, migrant children in urban public schools significantly outperformed their counterparts in migrant schools in both language achievement and psychological adjustment, whereas the gaps between them and their urban local counterparts were statistically insignificant. Results from fixed-effects models indicated that over time, the gaps between migrant children in urban schools and migrant schools seemed to narrow down but remain significant.

By pooling data from three samples covering migrant schools and public schools in Beijing as well as rural schools in Shaanxi, Lai and associates (2014) investigated students' math achievement gaps. Net of demographic and family characteristics, there exists an achievement hierarchy among students in different types of schools: with migrant students in public schools slightly outperforming their urban peers (not significant), followed by migrant students in migrant schools (the gap between migrant children in public and migrant schools is significant), and students in rural schools in Shaanxi finishing at the bottom (the gaps between them and both groups of migrant students in Beijing are significant). By comparing both family background and school characteristics between migrant children in migrant schools (Beijing) and their peers in rural Shaanxi, the authors discovered two countervailing processes: in terms of family background, there was strong evidence of selection effect to the advantage of migrant children; with regard to school quality, given the deficiency in many aspects such as teachers' training, school facilities and teacher-student ratio, migrant schools were negatively associated with student performance. In a replication study in Hangzhou (capital city of Zhejiang Province), the same research team confirmed that the inferior conditions in migrant schools and negative selection of family background jointly contributed to migrant school students' lower performance (a marked 0.56 standard deviation gap) than their counterparts in public schools (Chen et al., 2015).

However, Xiong's (2015) comparative study of migrant children's values in both types of schools revealed much more complexities. For one thing, compared to their peers in migrant schools, migrant children in public schools were found to be more likely to espouse the mainstream achievement ideology such as the importance of diligence and self-reliance. For another, parallel to adolescents' overt rebellions in migrant schools, migrant children in public schools grew to be pessimistic over time as they became aware of a "ceiling effect" that bottlenecked their development. For example, in response to a hypothetical scenario "if you have

a classmate whose dream is to become the mayor of Shanghai, would you think that...”, migrant children in the public school were 20% less likely than their counterparts in migrant school to choose the item indicating a high level of support.

3.2.3 Migrant children’s academic achievement: evidence from national data

Another line of research, albeit small in volume, investigates migrant children’s performance by comparing with non-migrant groups in both rural and urban contexts.

Using the Beijing Migrant Children Compulsory Education Survey, Guo (2011) found that migrant children did not underperform in math in comparison with their local non-migrant peers once child and family characteristics are controlled. Further, household income, parental educational expectation and migrant children’s own educational aspiration were all significant covariates.

For a long time, research on migrant children’s wellbeing has been compromised by a lack of national representative data. With the recent development of China Family Panel Study (CFPS) [see Xie and Xu (2015) for details] and China Education Panel Survey (CEPS) (see CEPS data manual for details), researchers are facilitated with better empirical foundations. Studies using China Family Panel Study data (CFPS) consistently reported positive outcomes for rural migrant children as compared with their rural non-migrant peers, net of family SES and demographic factors (Jordan, Ren and Falkingham, 2014; Xu and Xie, 2015; Yeung and Gu, 2016). By differentiating family structure based on parents’ migration status, child’s migration status and *hukou* status, Yeung and Gu (2016) explored how family-level mediating pathways affect adolescents’ educational and emotional wellbeing. In general, rural-origin migrant adolescents’ outcomes were found to lie in between their urban peers and rural peers, leaning more towards urban groups. Specifically, the authors found that compared with their rural residing counterparts, including those from both left-behind and non-migrant households, rural migrant students enjoyed a range of advantages in family resources and parenting

behaviors, which boosted their well-being. Using propensity score matching in the analysis of the 2010 baseline data, Xu and Xie (2015) reported that children's migration had significant positive effects on their objective well-being but no negative effects on their subjective well-being. In other words, if accounting for selection effects, indicators of migrant children's general well-being could reach parity with their urban peers.

Jordan and colleagues (2014) incorporated several county-level indicators (industrialization level, average county GDP per capita, average county education and historical proportion of out-migration) from other sources in the 2010 wave of CFPS data and estimated hierarchical regression models for three education indicators: school pacing, verbal achievement and math score. Bivariate analysis revealed significant positive outcomes for rural migrant children as compared with all rural residing groups, which are accounted for by a set of individual, family and county-level covariates. Noteworthy are the effects of county contextual variables upon students' education outcomes. The results showed partial evidence of positive effects of average county education upon students' school pacing, county industrialization level (measured by ratio of urban to rural population) upon students' verbal scores, negative impact of historical out-migration rates upon both school pacing and math score. With regard to geographic location, compared with Shanghai sample, the Guangdong sample consistently showed negative correlations with all three student outcomes.

As reviewed above, studies with the CFPS data in general report positive outcomes for migrant children and relevance of mechanisms within the institution of family. A limitation in this dataset is the lack of school-level variables which are important given China's school segregation system with regard to migrant education. A newly released dataset, the China Education Panel Survey (CEPS) data complement with abundant school information in a nested sampling design. Using the CEPS data, Hao and Xiao (2015) reported mixed results about migrant children's school access based on bivariate analysis. By distinguishing interprovincial

and intra-provincial migrants and comparing them with rural and urban reference groups, the authors showed that in terms of admission requirements, school climate and teacher-student bond, both groups of migrant children seemed to be more disadvantaged, especially interprovincial migrants. However, in terms of school ranking, school facilities and class size, migrant children enjoyed an advantage than their rural residing peers did. Adding valuable empirical evidence to the topic, however, this paper only reported descriptive statistics in student admission, without tapping into the possible mechanisms and consequences of such school processes upon migrant children's educational achievement.

3.3 Summary and critique

It is useful now to ruminate upon the literature reviewed above and identify possible new methodological and theoretical approaches towards a better understanding of how migration affect Chinese rural adolescents' education.

3.3.1 Research gaps: methodology

Methodologically, existing literature is compromised on three fronts.

First, due to a historical lack of national representative data, insufficient attention has been given to regional variations across China, while there is an overrepresentation of several cities, such as Shanghai and Beijing. This significantly limits our understanding of the general picture of migrant children's educational development across the nation.

Second, the issue of "reference groups". With the exception of a few recent studies (Jordan, Ren and Falkingham, 2014; Xu and Xie, 2015; Yeung and Gu, 2016), the dominant paradigm in extant literature is characterized by the exclusive nature of research design that focuses only on the targeted population, migrant children in cities, without taking into account of their comparable groups, hence a consistent lack of "reference groups". While these studies implicitly adopted the group of local urban-*hukou* children as the comparison group which underscores the institutional exclusion in Chinese cities, this comparison strategy could not

single out two compounding factors: the *hukou* effect and the migration effect. Moreover, given the fact that substantial numbers of Chinese rural families engage in the practice of circular migration (Fan, 2009) or ‘relayed migration’ (Sung, 1987) where families take years to complete the migration process, it is expected that a high proportion of migrant children have lived for extended periods in rural communities prior to migration. As such, when they move to urban areas which are generally more economically developed, it would be plausible to suspect that their past rural life or their peers remaining in rural communities constitute their reference point in their own subjective evaluation of urban experiences (Zuccotti et al., 2015).

Third, the level of analysis. Previous empirical literature has largely examined the relationship between migration and children’s educational well-being (i.e. performance or enrollment) with individual level data, while ignoring the substantial variations at contextual levels. As a matter of fact, most quantitative data adopt multi-stage sampling strategies where data are nested within different units. However, with a few exceptions (Lu 2007; Jordan et al. 2014), previous studies have neglected the multilevel nature in their analysis. Substantively, as discussed in Chapter 2, given China’s unique post-reform political economy where three systems (i.e. the rural-urban divide, uneven regional development and a hierarchical educational system) interlock with each other in structuring the patterns of internal migration and children’s educational opportunities, current practices in existing literature that focus on single level analysis are found unsatisfactory.

Last, there is a poverty of literature that capitalizes on diverse data sources with multiple methods to validate and triangulate research results. For example, while quantitative research yields results that have more power in generalizability, it could benefit with more qualitative data towards “understanding migrations as cultural events rich in meaning for individuals, families, social groups, communities and nations” (McHugh, 2000). In the case of migrant households, information from qualitative interviews and observation concerning

family migration history, living arrangements, family values and processes could add to the depth of research. Likewise, the small-sample qualitative research which reveals nuanced understanding of the topic at hand could only yield meaningful interpretations through being contextualized in broader general patterns in quantitative studies. As Chapter 4 will elaborate on, the current project abridges these epistemic gaps by interrogating both national representative survey data and qualitative interview data to examine how migration affects children's education in Chinese rural migrant families.

3.3.2 Research gaps: theory

I propose the following two theoretical aspects to advance the research agenda, which extant literature did not adequately address.

First is issue of under-theorization. Despite the rising numbers of publications in both Chinese and English, there is an evident lack of theoretical development in researching the wellbeing of China's migrant children, as most studies are trying to establish the empirical patterns. While scholars contextualize their studies with the Chinese institutional exclusion created by the *hukou* system, rarely do they theorize two major institutions in migrant children's life—the family and the school, and how they interact to shape migrant children's educational opportunities and experiences. In this dissertation, following ecological systems theory (Bronfenbrenner, 1979; 1999; Bronfenbrenner and Evans, 2000; Bronfenbrenner and Morris, 2006), I delve into the inner mechanisms within/between rural migrant families and urban schools that have theoretical implications for the field.

Second is the balance between structure and agency. In the case of migration and education in Chinese rural migrant families, existing scholarship tends to conceptualize the children and their adult guardians “as passive and depicted as problems” (Murphy, 2014) or, as Johnson puts, as “structurally imprisoned, boxed into hopelessly predetermined constraints” (2001). The dominant paradigm, i.e. *the problem paradigm* as I would refer to it, focuses

primarily on the social and structural barriers (the *hukou* institution in particular) that are imposed on rural migrants in their maintaining a family life in cities, which is deemed to cause dysfunctional families and children's academic underachievement. This reductionist research paradigm reveals little information pertaining to how migrant parents, children and other substitute guardians in a "care triangle" (Graham et al., 2012) negotiate migration and family life in real life. To move beyond this reductionist paradigm, following the call of Anthony Giddens (1984:327), I combine analyses of both large quantitative data and qualitative narratives to present a balanced picture of "institutional orders that determine the operation of rules and distribution of resources" and "the strategic conduct of situated individuals, their practical and discursive consciousness".

In the following chapter, I introduce the research methodology and data sources employed in this study to abridge the research gaps identified earlier.

CHAPTER FOUR METHODOLOGY AND DATA

This chapter presents methodology and data for tackling the research questions in this dissertation. I first discuss the employment of a mixed-method approach, including the philosophical foundation, the mode of application in this study and how this design facilitates my inquiry in this project. I then describe the data sources and data collection process—the first wave of China Education Panel Survey (CEPS 2014) and qualitative interview and observation data from a fieldwork study in two sites in China. By integrating analyses of national representative survey data, qualitative interview data and other sources, I try to disentangle the multiple facets of migration which affect migrant children’s education through situating the research subjects in their embedded social contexts, i.e. the family, the school and regional context.

4.1 Transcending methodological dualism

In this dissertation, I take a mixed-method approach as my mode of inquiry based on the following reasons:

First, in this research project, as stated above, I aim to understand not only *the general achievement patterns* for rural migrant children and how migration may influence their development through two of their most important life contexts (i.e. the family and the school), but also more *nuanced and local perspectives* of rural children, their families and school staff in their negotiating opportunities and barriers after migration.

Second, in relation to the above-mentioned research questions, I believe that the commensurability of both quantitative and qualitative research is an achievable goal, as each tradition brings a unique perspective in investigating the research subject (Johnson and Onwuegbuzie, 2004; Onwuegbuzie, Johnson and Collins, 2009; Biesta, 2010; Yardley and Bishop, 2007; Shannon-Baker, 2015).

This is a diversion from the deeply-entrenched ‘paradigm war’ between ‘quantitative purists’ and ‘qualitative purists’ (Johnson and Onwuegbuzie, 2004) in the discipline of sociology. As maintained in this ‘war’, quantitative research follows a positivist paradigm that is predicated on an epistemologically objective social reality to be studied, whereas qualitative research follows an interpretivist position which posits that the ‘social reality’ per se is socially constructed (Berger and Luckmann, 1967). For those who advocate the incompatibility thesis, these two paradigms offer uncompromising views, thus “accommodation between paradigms is impossible” (Guba, 1990:81). However, this incompatibility thesis can be challenged on three fronts: 1) it is a dualist position that polarizes two ontologically separate categories-- quantitative and qualitative research (see Platt 1996:69), which narrows the scope of academic studies in social science; 2) it is unproductive to conceptualize human thinking either falling into the objective theory testing mode or the subjective grounded theorizing mode. Rather, a realistic picture might be a process of moving “back and forth between theory construction and data analysis” through attempts “at both subjective and objective frames” (Pearce, 2012); and 3) as Onwuegbuzie and associates (2009) argue that it is an *a priori* argument which “seems to be based on rationalistic, foundational, deductive logic” that remains to be verified in practice.

Furthermore, many illuminating studies have generated rich insights of the complexity of social life with a mixed-method approach. Yoshikawa and associates (2008), for example, call for fruitful combinations of quantitative and qualitative methods in studying human development such as child development under the family context, on four accounts: 1) to assess developmental or contextual constructs that are difficult to measure using either set of methods, 2) to integrate the study of beliefs, goals and practices in socialization and development, 3) to estimate and understand developmental change at multiple time scales, and 4) to examine reciprocal relationships between contextual and individual-level factors. Sometimes, the effort of mixing quantitative and qualitative methods could yield unexpected

findings. Pearce's (2002) research on the impact of religion on childbearing preferences in Nepal illustrates this point. She conducted extensive fieldwork with 28 deviant cases, informed by results from analyzing a representative survey data. It turned out that the fieldwork research provided feedback to the validity of survey questions that ignored an important dimension of media influence on childbearing preferences: the exposure to family planning messages through TV. In other words, even when conflicting findings emerge from quantitative and qualitative methods, it is conducive to more nuanced understanding of the research subject through a complementary approach (Teddlie and Tashakkori, 2008).

4.2 How to mix: “The concrete operations at the technique level”

There are different ways to integrate multiple methods in each stage of a research project [see Small (2011) for a detailed literature review], i.e. the “concrete operations at the technique level of research” (Sandelowski, 2010). The following section deals with how the current research employs mixed methods to gain knowledge about migration and youth education in contemporary China.

In research design, the way different methods combine varies with the research objective. Greene and associates (1989) identified five purposes through an analysis of 57 empirical mixed-method evaluations: triangulation, complementarity, development, initiation, and expansion. In this current project, I intend to integrate multiple methods to obtain such goals, i.e. complementing, triangulating and developing the thesis arguments. In particular, I use data from different sources and of different nature to elaborate, enhance and illustrate each other, thus gaining a more comprehensive view of social life in post-reform China. Moreover, as mentioned earlier, I inquire both the structural and cultural aspects of the topic, each of which extends and develops analytic leverage of the other. For example, with the national representative survey data, I explore how multilevel (regional, school and family levels) structural factors, affect the relationship between migration and adolescents' educational

outcomes. The huge sample allows me to gain general patterns, test theories and claim the generalizability of my statistical results. The interview and observation data collected from my 6-month fieldwork in two sites expose me to rich and detailed accounts of the lived-in experiences of the informants in relation to their family dynamics, school life, local socioeconomic development and policy changes, which fleshes out the central argument in this dissertation. These multiple sources of data are employed to support and triangulate each other, thus strengthening the reliability and validity of research findings in this dissertation.

Further, Leech and Onwuegbuzie (2009) proposed a conceptual framework on mixed-method designs in terms of implementation. According to them, these designs can be represented as a function of the following three dimensions: a) level of mixing (partially mixed versus fully mixed); (b) time orientation (concurrent versus sequential), and (c) emphasis of approaches (equal status versus dominant status). As a result, there are 8 ($2*2*2$) types of designs to conduct mixed-method research. The current project, following this typology, falls into the category of “partially mixed sequential equal status design”. In this project, I mix the different methods of data collection (secondary data versus fieldwork interviews/observation) and the different types of data (quantitative and qualitative data), but I do not mix analytical strategies extensively, such as quantifying narrative data, or qualifying the survey data. In other words, I select the most “natural” analysis plans for each type of data in order to enhance its explanatory power.

Regarding the sequence of data collection, this project is sequential, instead of being concurrent, in that the quantitative data, secondary and publicly available, serve as the basis for a preliminary exploration of the research topic, which further guide the sampling strategy and interview plans for in-depth inquiry in the fieldwork. The fieldwork data, in turn, help interpret the “puzzles” unresolved in the statistical analysis of survey data. This sequential nature of data collection substantially benefits the current research, since it provides a coherent

and interactive framework between the quantitative and qualitative parts, as observed by Small (2011), “sequential studies have exploited several of the advantages of mixed methods studies, such as the ability to understand the mechanisms behind newly discovered associations or to test emergent hypotheses”.

In terms of emphasis dimension, which refers to whether equal weight is given to both qualitative and quantitative phases of the study, this project aims to balance in its exploitation of data of different types. For example, the China Education Panel Survey (2014) entail rich information about family dynamics, school life and regional context, which facilitates a multilevel analysis of migrant children’s education in China. However, the qualitative field data provide more contextual and lived-in accounts of family life and school experiences for migrant children, which enhance our understanding by utilizing a grounded theory approach. Through this research design, I attempt to unravel the multi-layered, complex and dynamic effects of migration upon teenagers’ life in post-reform China.

With regard to data analysis, I adopt the explanatory sequential approach, which means that I use qualitative data and analysis to illustrate, validate and extend the quantitative analysis in an earlier phase (Morse, 1991; Ivankova, 2006). This approach allows for a step-by-step analysis of the research topic and fully exploit the rich data of different sources. Rather than focusing on how to “cram” different sources of data at the same time and smooth out the differences or even contradictions to patch up a coherent story, this approach takes a step back, giving sufficient space for the researcher to put the inconsistencies (if there are) into perspective (in the context of their own data sources) and reflect upon the sociological reasons for the inconsistencies.

I add a cautionary note here to avoid a rigid interpretation of this sequential approach. Like in all rigorous and robust research, the mixed-method researcher moves back and forth between different sources of data and during different stages of the project in an iterative

manner to get a satisfactory argument. For example, in this study, my previous “play” with another national representative dataset (China Family Panel Studies 2010 and 2012) informed me about how to draw a valid sample and what are the important questions to ask in the field, thus my qualitative chapters are built upon the results from quantitative analysis. Yet, in a later phase after “dialoguing” with qualitative data, I developed a “hunch” about the importance of motivation aspect of family relationships to explain the education of rural adolescents in migrant households, which triggered another round of quantitative analysis by incorporating parental expectations in addition to a resource-based analysis. My further analysis of the quantitative data with a multilevel frame yielded “surprising” findings about the school context, which triggered a new round of analysis of qualitative data at the school level, hence a circular process.

4.3 Quantitative data and methods

The baseline wave of China Education Panel Survey (CEPS 2014) data constitutes the major quantitative data source in this study, though data from China Statistical Yearbook statistics from local governments are also employed to provide contextual information about the field sites in qualitative field research. In this section, I briefly introduce the data and the analytical procedure to be employed, as Chapter 5 will elaborate on the details with formulation of research hypothesis and operationalization of key constructs.

4.3.1 Data and Sample

Designed and conducted by National Survey Research Center at Renmin University, CEPS is a large-scale, nationally representative, longitudinal survey with the 7th and 9th graders in the 2013-2014 academic year as the baseline sample. It adopts a stratified, multistage sampling design, with a random sampling of approximately 20,000 students in 438 classrooms of 112 schools in 28 county-level units or their administrative equivalents in mainland China.

The CEPS administers 5 different questionnaires to the samples of students, parents, homeroom teachers, main subject teachers and school administrators (CEPS, 2015).

In this study, I merge the student sample, parent sample, teacher sample and school sample (questionnaire filled by school principals) to explore multi-level factors that contribute to adolescents' educational achievement patterns. From the student questionnaire, I include variables pertaining to their demographic characteristics, educational indicators, migration status, parent-child relationship, their report of parental expectations, self-reported learning attitude and problems. From the parent questionnaire, I draw important variables about parents' demographic characteristics, migration status, educational investment for the child, expectations for the child's future attainment. From the homeroom teacher questionnaire, I pick up the important variable of school academic climate. From the school questionnaire, I incorporate information about the school type (public or non-public), the kind of community (rural, urban fringe or urban) that schools are located in and the school placement in the county-level ranking. The abundant information from the data allows me to examine how migration affects adolescents' education amid the rapid social transformation in contemporary China.

4.3.2 Analysis plan

Chapter 3 identified two methodological issues in existing literature on educational outcomes for migrant adolescents: 1) the lack of sophistication and rigor of statistical models to explore the multiple layers of social structures in the process of migration that impact children's life, and 2) the prevalence of non-representative data, as the majority focus on a few limited geographic units, which makes generalizability problematic. Fortunately, the CEPS data, with its well-designed sampling strategy, yield rich and valuable information which allows me to rigorously test my hypotheses on a solid empirical base.

As will be elaborated on in Chapter 5, my quantitative analysis proceeds in three major steps. I first present bivariate results of Chinese teenagers' educational outcomes by family types, in which rural migrant children are compared with their reference groups in both urban-*hukou* residents and rural-*hukou* residents groups. I then estimate a series of Ordinary Least Square regression models to explore how family and individual characteristics affect rural migrant children's educational outcomes in a single-level analysis, which allows me to understand what important mechanisms are at the family/individual level. To take advantage of the nested design during data collection, I then conduct a step-by-step analysis using multilevel modeling techniques. I estimate a series of 2-level models (individual/family and school levels) by successively adding blocks of variables pertaining to teenagers' family characteristics and school contexts in models. Given the limited sample size at the county-level (merely 4 schools are sampled in each of the sampled 28 counties) which does not satisfy the 30-30 rule advocated by scholars of multilevel modeling techniques (Kreft and de Leeuw 1998; Maas and Hox 2005), to account for broader regional variations, I add dummy variables representing regional geography as covariates rather than variance components in models. A known strength of multilevel analysis, compared with simple regression models, is that it estimates the statistical relationships between outcome and explanatory variables with more precision by "recognizing the partial interdependence of individuals within the same group" (Hofmann, 1997), thus accounting for heterogeneity at varying organizational levels. This is particularly suitable in dealing with hierarchically nested data structures, as is the case with CEPS data. Theoretically, multilevel analysis facilitates the formulation of hypotheses that bring more contextual information into the picture.

4.4 Field data: the interview sample and methods

While the quantitative part of this project establish the general patterns of how multiple layers of factors intervene with the relationship between migration and Chinese teenagers'

educational achievement, the objective of the qualitative part is to present a more holistic picture by integrating the informants' own perspectives and narratives into analysis.

4.4.1 Part of a mixed-method frame

Prior to fieldwork, I had some preliminary exploration of a large national survey data—China Family Panel Studies [See Xie and Xu (2015) for an introduction]. In combination with extensive exposure to literature on social stratification and family life in contemporary China, the survey data revealed some important variables for the project: regional inequality, *hukou* status, migration history of family members, family's role in children's education and the school context. These informed me of the strategy of *criterion sampling* in the field (Sandelowski, 2010).

Another aspect that merits attention is whether to use nested design in mixed-method research, which refers to the situation where different types of data are collected from the same respondents, organizations or entities. Lieberman (2005), for example, advocated intensive case-study analysis within statistical data. That is, the qualitative sample directly derives from the quantitative sample. However, two reasons prevented me from such a design: 1) given that the quantitative data used in this project are second-hand data, which limits my access to identifiable information of respondents, hence an unfeasible choice; and 2) such design might do a disservice if not handled properly, since such intense research is very time-consuming and invasive for participants which might strain or even jeopardize the researcher-participant relationships (Pearce, 2012). Therefore, in this current research, my fieldwork was conducted in two sites not directly related to the CEPS sampling frame, which nonetheless yielded adequate high quality data for analysis. The following section introduces the local contexts (Hunan and Shenzhen), sampling strategies and the field experience.

4.4.2 Field sites

Selection of the two field sites in this project was based on two considerations: 1) accessibility. As a researcher, I was afforded relatively easy access to research subjects in both sites, given a variety of contacts with key “gatekeepers” in each place through personal networks¹⁸, and 2) these two research sites offer a complete picture of migration and development in contemporary China: while Hunan is one of the largest migrant-sending provinces located in the central economic belt (Fan, 1997; Shen, 2013a, 2013b; Liu et al. 2014), Shenzhen, the first Special Economic Zone in Guangdong province (ibid.), is a major migration destination in the country. By recruiting research subjects from a county mixed-school and a migrant school from these two field sites respectively, I am able to provide an illustrative account of how local socioeconomic development and school environment shape teenagers’ educational opportunities and experiences as well as how families strategize to advance (or the failure of it) children’s education in aspiring for social mobility in a rapidly changing society.

4.4.2.1 Hunan: “south-bound birds’ passage”

Adjacent to Guangdong in the south, Hunan is an agricultural province in central China. In post-reform era, given its proximity to Guangdong, a rising economic power hub, and its less significant position in the country’s “coastal development strategy” (Yang, 1991), it becomes a huge migrant-exporting province. According to the 2005 1% population sample survey, the migrant population reached 11.7 million, accounting for approximately 18% of its total population. Among the 11.7 million out-migrants, 65.6% migrated out of Hunan province and 78.9% chose Guangdong as their destination¹⁹. In 2002, income from labor migration amounted to over 10% of the provincial GDP, which a research team from Hunan Provincial

¹⁸ However, as Appendix A on field experiences show, accessibility was an issue in Shenzhen since my personal contacts were not affiliated with educational institutions, neither they were able to access grassroots communities and social organizations. In the end, I solicited help from anthropologist Dr. O’Donnell who has done much ground work since 1995.

¹⁹ See <http://www.hntj.gov.cn/fxbg/2006fxbg/2006tjxx/200606220047.htm> for details (accessed on June 19, 2016).

Bureau of Statistics attributed to supportive policies of “releasing birds out of cages” (*fangniao chulong*) at the provincial level.

Lake County (pseudonym), my field site in Hunan province, lies in southeastern Hunan. According to local archival data²⁰, rich in natural resources, it was historically dominated by an agriculture economy. The census data in 1982 and 1990 respectively recorded that 86.2% and 85.3% of the working population in Lake County were engaged in the sector of “agriculture, forestry, pasturage and fishery” (AFPF, all under the category of *agriculture* industry in daily usage). Fast forward in the 21st century, based on published statistics, between 2004 and 2011, the share of the secondary industry in total GDP composition steadily increased, from 36.2% to 62%, whereas the share of agriculture (AFPF) dropped from 25.5% to 3.4%, which suggests that it is undergoing rapid industrialization. However, if examined from the *hukou* perspective, the percentage of rural-*hukou* holders (originally those in AFPF sectors) stood as roughly as 55%, which means that a sizable population of agriculture *hukou* holders are taking up non-farm jobs as their main livelihoods, either as migrant workers in the neighboring Guangdong province, or as new entrants to manufacture and construction in the local market. Below I introduce the field school in details.

Bright School (pseudonym). Bright School is located in the western wing of the county town. Like its many administrative equivalents across China, the speed of urbanization and population growth in this county town in the past three decades is phenomenal²¹. The municipal government outlined a plan to expand urban space to 60 square kilometers in 2017 from the 7 square kilometers in 1988, and to accommodate 600,000 residents instead of 80,000 in the same period²². The provision of education infrastructure, however, could not keep up with the influx

²⁰ I created a separate database for background information on Lake County. For the sake of anonymity, since the school could be easily identifiable if the county information is released, I will not reveal the related web-links.

²¹ The 2010 census data reveal that size of intra-county migrant population, majority of which are rural-to-urban migrants, reached 90.9 million by 2010, with a growth rate at 38.6% between 2000 and 2010 (Liu et al. 2015).

²² In 2008, the provincial government made urbanization rate a criterion for bureaucratic promotion, which means that county officials are incentivized to pursue urbanization, regardless of the attendant social problems.

of rural students. Bright school was established in 2012 as a government project to cope with this crunch. In 2014, it hosts 3512 students ranging from Grade 7 to Grade 9²³.

Bright School students come from diverse family socioeconomic conditions. In a typical 7th grade class, of the 55 students, approximately 40% (22) are from rural-*hukou* migrant families while the rest 33 are registered as local urban-*hukou* holders. It would be too bold to provide a brushstroke description of their neighborhoods and communities. Many rural-*hukou* students' parents operate their small-scale family businesses or are employed in the growing informal sector in the county and a non-trivial segment have parents who are returnees from their extensive periods of migration work in Guangdong, Zhejiang or other popular “developed” areas.

4.4.2.2 Shenzhen: “the city of migrants”

Shenzhen, China's first “lab” of transition to a market economy, has been “both a project and symbol of post-Mao modernization” (O'Donnell, 2001). In August 1980, the Shenzhen Special Economic Zone was established to experiment with “a socialist market economy with Chinese characteristics”, guaranteed by the central government of more policy flexibility. Since then, Shenzhen has been celebrated as a success story, i.e. a progressive narrative of turning a “backward and poor” fishing village into a cosmopolitan city in one generation. In official documents, the “Shenzhen miracle” represents a history of “alignment with objective economic rules, integration to global division of labor and constant structural transformations” (SZMG, 2011). Situated in the Pearl River Delta area, one of China's few economic growth poles (Liu et al., 2014), Shenzhen's earlier model of development illustrated an ideal formula for special economic zones: offshore capital/technology plus cheap labor from

²³ In 2014, netizens complained in an online forum that public education provision in the county is far from satisfactory, which led to an investigation by a delegate from the Province-level Inspection Committee. A following report confirmed netizens' complaints regarding issues like severe shortage of school placements, expensive school fees and unreasonable teacher-student ratio. It further ordered that the municipal government build up education infrastructure and strengthen the quality of education to accommodate the growing student population.

vast interior provinces. Since 2000, the municipality of Shenzhen began to engineer an industrial upgrade to diverse new industries such as “high-tech companies, finance sector, logistics industry and cultural industry” (SZMG, 2011).

Less highlighted in this celebratory narrative of “Shenzhen miracle” which goes hand in hand with well-publicized slogans valorizing spirits of innovation, pragmatism and adventure²⁴ is the unique population structure that sustains the city’s development. Since 1979, the population size has increased by 32 times. However, the breakdown by *hukou* statuses reveals a strikingly segregated pattern. Compared to the slow growth of local *hukou* resident population, the population growth for non-local *hukou* residents is drastic. As of 2011, non-local *hukou* population (7.79 million), including a small segment of professionals with urban *hukou* in other cities, is three times the size of that of local *hukou* population (2.68 million). In this sense, Shenzhen lives up to its reputation as a “city of migrants” (*yimin chengshi*). Between September and December 2014, I conducted a four-month field research in a migrant school in Shenzhen, as the paragraphs ahead show.

Eastern Bay School (pseudonym). Eastern Bay School is located in an ‘urban village’ (*chengzhongcun*)²⁵ in the eastern tip of Nanshan District, one of the originally designated four districts in Shenzhen Special Economic Zone since 1990. The history of this school reflects intersections of the population dynamics, local development and shifting state policies towards migrants in Shenzhen. According to Mr. Zheng²⁶, the school chancellor and vice chairman of

²⁴ In 2010, the 30th anniversary of the establishment of Shenzhen as a Special Economic Zone, the Shenzhen Press Group launched a campaign among netizens to select “Top 10 Most Influential Concepts in Shenzhen”. These concepts include some well-known slogans during the earlier period in Shekou industrial zone by Yuan Geng, such as “Time is Money, Efficiency is Life, (*shijian jiushi jinqian; xiaolv jiushi shengming*)” “Lip-service Harms the Country, Hard Work Makes the Country Prosperous, (*kongtan wuguo, shigan xingbang*)”, and newly coined propaganda such as “You are a Shenzheners Once You Come Here (*lajiu jiushi shenzhenren*)”. See <http://en.people.cn/90001/90782/7191993.html> for details.

²⁵ Also known as ‘village-amid-the-city’, ‘urban villages’ are residential buildings constructed by former villagers in Shenzhen (In 1992 and 2004, Shenzhen ‘urbanized’ all its local agriculture-*hukou* citizens by granting them urban *hukou*). With massive immigration, these buildings host migrant enclaves and low-income neighborhoods. Official discourse tends to portray these neighborhoods as dirty, chaotic and backward barriers towards a modern global city. Research and activism on Shenzhen’s ‘urban villages’ have recently been popular among urban planners, artists, anthropologists and NGO groups. See Pu (2012) for details. MaryAnn O’Donnell’s blog “Shenzhen Noted” also provides insightful observations and analysis of this topic.

²⁶ Interview conducted on December 3rd, 2014.

the school board, by the early 1990s, school access was denied for migrant children who were considered “outsider population” (*wailai renkou*). In response to the educational need for this marginalized group, there emerged many private migrant schools in shabby buildings or in makeshift shacks (*wopeng*), hence the name “shack schools” (*wopeng xuexiao*). These schools were outside the purview of state regulation and deemed illegal. In 1997, prior to China’s take-over of Hong Kong, these “shack schools” across the border were believed to potentially tarnish the image of socialist China. Local authorities were ordered to establish Eastern Bay²⁷ to accommodate the 800 students from two big “shack schools” in this neighborhood. With literally no financial support from the government, it operated with tuition fees from migrant families (600¥ a semester in 1997). Not until 2005 did the school receive government budgeted fund to compensate tuition fees for students who are eligible to attend public schools. As of 2014, Eastern Bay has enrolled 1613 students, ranging from Grade 1 to Grade 6.

Eastern Bay parents have migrated from all over China. About 80% have been working in Shenzhen for over 5 years. Regarding their employment, teacher estimates provide the following approximation: less than 10% belong to the professional or semiprofessional group, about 30% are self-employed, while the rest are unskilled workers serving in supermarkets, fast-food stores and other private employers. A majority live in a ‘village’ which is a 5-minute walk from school, typically in a one-room rental house, crammed and poorly lit.

4.4.4 The interview sample and data sources

In the following section, I describe the sampling strategy and briefly note the main characteristics of the sample. This is followed by an account of data sources that would support my arguments in later chapters.

²⁷ Officially, Eastern Bay is called a “charity-people-run” school, which is distinguished from both unregulated migrant schools and public schools. It does not operate with government fund, but it is supported by the local village collective and local public schools.

Sampling strategy

Adolescent, schools and families. Due to time and budget constraints, I did not draw a random probability sample in each site. Instead, I followed a strategy of *criterion sampling* based on my knowledge of important variables with the survey data (CFPS data), such as *hukou* status and migration history of family members. I recruited 15 families from Eastern Bay and 8 families from Bright School respectively. (See **Appendix A, B and C** to get detailed information of the recruitment process and contact schedule).

This study focuses on two major institutions related to rural migrant children's life, i.e. the school and the family. The two schools were drawn from a convenience sampling strategy, where key "gatekeepers" in each institution granted me access and facilitated my research on campus. I visited each school on a regular basis, which suited the school schedules, and had many opportunities sitting in teachers' offices, observing classes and sitting at dinner tables with the schoolteachers and administrators. Upon invitation, I delivered a talk about the educational system in Singapore in Eastern Bay School. With regard to the migrant families, my original plan was to conduct in-depth interviews and participant observation research with a parent-child dyad in each family, in order to gain comprehensive information about their family life. However, due to out-migration or lengthy working hours in some cases (about 22%), I was unable to interview the parents. Under such circumstances, the parents' information was compensated with teachers' comments.

In interviewing both students and adult informants, I followed a semi-structured interview plan, which balances between retaining focus and allowing for flexibility. The duration of interviews ranged from one hour to two-and-half hours. Data with students were gathered through face-to-face interviews in venues conducive to private conversation such as in empty classrooms, family living room or even the school sports field. Interviews with parents or other guardians were conducted in various forms and locations to their convenience, such as

telephone interviews, or face-to-face interviews in teahouses, family living room, or coffee shops (only in Shenzhen).

In interviewing students, I intended to gather information on four broad categories: 1) their life history such as family moving history, shifts in living arrangements and main caregivers, 2) interactions with their parents or other significant others in the family, 3) their school life, such as curriculum, friendship with peers, and school activities, plus 4) their self-assessment of general well-being, self-concept and future plans or ambitions. With parents or other guardians, I attempted to gain better knowledge of their personal educational, occupational experiences, their ways of raising or ‘cultivating’ their children and the difficulties or dilemma encountered in this process (See **Appendix D** for interview questions template). Interviews or conversations with schoolteachers and administrators did not follow a prepared template, as I spent a substantial amount of time in school and could gain information through casual talks, observing routines and seeking for clarification on the spot.

Other Data Sources. In order to make a strong case of comparative study, I also tried to balance between confirming conceptual arguments from quantitative data and letting the local context speak (Chabal and Daloz, cited in Ho, 2008:9), thus diversifying research methods. On the one hand, I conducted in-depth interviews and participant observation with teenagers and families. On the other, I did extensive library research on each city to gain more contextual knowledge. To be specific, I gathered policy documents from each research site and other contextual information such as newspaper report, such as school registry data.

4.4.5 Data analysis

I created a separate data file for each school, which include teacher/administrator interviews, my field notes, policy documents and school-registry data (if there are any). I coded and thematized the school life under a few domains, such as student-teacher bond, school climate and class organization, which become my analytical domains in Chapter 6.

Given the focus on teenagers in this study, I paired up the student interviews with their adult guardians' interviews in analysis. To protect informants from being easily identifiable, I use pseudonyms in the write-up. I coded generated data from interviews, policy documents and observations based on themes and patterns. I focused on the narratives by adolescents, juxtaposing with their guardians', to identify consistencies and inconsistencies in their articulation of the problems they face, the way they organize daily life and the values they hold towards living as migrants.

4.6 Linking strategies in mixed-method research

To produce a truly integrated and balanced analysis, one needs to attend to “the linking process” (Wooley 2009) between quantitative and qualitative components of the study during various stages of research, such as the research questions, units of analysis, samples for study, instrumentation and data collection, and analytical strategies (Yin, 2006). For example, Yin (2006) suggests a linking strategy for raising research questions in a single study, i.e. to split the question into a part about “process” and another part about “outcome”, with the former being addressed by qualitative research and the latter by quantitative methods.

In the current study, a conscientious effort is made to integrate the quantitative and qualitative components through various linking strategies in order to balance the presentation of structural constraints and agency in Chinese rural migrant children's educational experiences in urban areas, as Table 4.1 shows. First, the research objective of this study incorporates both the “outcome” and the “process” components that have been achieved through an explanatory sequential approach where the qualitative data and analysis confirm, consolidate and complement the quantitative segment. Second, given that my quantitative data are from secondary sources that did not allow my interference in data collection, the qualitative field research is built upon valuable information from my previous handling of the data. For example, I recruited migrant students from schools based on useful variables that could be readily linked

to quantitative data, i.e. the *hukou* status, migration status, family SES and school types. I also included important questions from the CEPS questionnaires to solicit answers from field respondents, such as parents' educational involvement, family learning environment, educational expectations, teacher evaluation of family involvement, school climate etc. These form the crucial connections for making the two sources of data compatible and relatable for further analysis. Third, regarding units of analysis, both the quantitative and qualitative segments in this study overcome the fallacy of single-level analysis in previous research, as noted in Chapter 3, by examining multiple levels of social structures and organizations in migrant children's life. Specifically, the quantitative multi-level modeling teases out the family effect and the school effect in a step-by-step fashion, while the qualitative part examines more contextualized processes in migrant children's families and schools with sufficient consideration of "the motivations, goals and aspirations of the people" (Massey et al., 1993:455). Fourth, "counterpart analyses" (Yin, 2006) are conducted to examine similar domains in each source of data, which is facilitated by the fieldwork sampling strategy and shared interview questions during data collection period. As noted in Section 4.2, albeit the sequential nature in research design, the analysis proceeds in a more iterative rather than linear fashion to match commensurable theoretical constructs and yield comprehensive findings.

4.5 Summary

This chapter has sketched the methodological approach of this research project. By adopting a mixed-method approach, I intend to integrate both quantitative national survey data and qualitative field data to examine how the multiple-layered mechanisms shape diverse patterns of educational experiences and outcomes for Chinese rural migrant adolescents. The following three chapters elaborate on the data analyses and report major findings. Chapter 5 presents how multiple levels of factors shape migrant children's cognitive achievement through a multilevel analysis of China Education Panel Survey (2014), which focuses on the structural

constraints that rural migrants are confronted with in the society. Chapters 6 and 7 zoom in to examine two major institutions in migrant children life—the school context and the migrant family, where qualitative interview data and observation data are employed to illuminate the social processes of negotiation with institutional constraints and cultural expectations that have tremendous implications for migrant children’s education. These chapters together form a complete picture of the research topic.

Table 4.1 Integrating Quantitative and Qualitative Research

| Research process | Quantitative part (structure) | Linking strategies | Qualitative part (agency) |
|------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Research questions | What are the mechanisms across multiple levels of structures, i.e. the family, the school and regional development levels, which drive the particular empirical patterns of migrant children's educational outcomes? | the "outcome" question + the "process" question | 1) How do different school contexts shape migrant children's educational opportunities and experiences? 2) How do the rural migrant families, whose life history entails lengthy periods of separation between parent(s) and children, strategize to advance children's educational prospects (or the failure of it) against local structural constraints? |
| Sampling and data collection | Second-hand data | Criterion sampling | Informed data collection |
| Units of analysis | Multilevel analysis | Organizational levels | Contextualized analyses of the family and the schooling processes |
| Data analysis | Questionnaire instruments | Domains | Thematic coding |

CHAPTER FIVE

AN ECOLOGICAL ANALYSIS OF MIGRANT CHILDREN'S EDUCATION

In this chapter, informed by ecological systems theory (Bronfenbrenner, 1979; 1999; Bronfenbrenner and Evans, 2000; Bronfenbrenner and Morris, 2006), I examine how a host of family-, school- and regional level factors jointly shape the educational outcomes for Chinese rural migrant children with a national representative dataset—China Education Panel Survey (2014). This framework recognizes the diverse sets of interrelated inputs from multiple layers of contexts upon child development. It is also deeply rooted in the country's complex political economy in the post-reform era where rural migrant children's educational opportunities and experiences are structured by interlocking systems of uneven regional development, school-based educational hierarchy and class stratification (see a detailed account in Chapter 2). This approach of studying migrant children's education to incorporate multiple layers of social structures carries both theoretical and methodological significances. Theoretically, it facilitates the formulation of a theory of social inequality and child development in post-reform China which gives due attention to the “set of nested structures” (Bronfenbrenner, 1979:3) in children's life. Methodologically, it rigorously accounts for the nested nature of human life through a multilevel analysis framework, thus avoiding overgeneralizing conclusions at the expense of accuracy.

This chapter proceeds as follows. I first introduce the theoretical framework and lay out major hypotheses to be tested. This is followed by a brief account of data and methodology. The third section presents a step-by-step analysis of empirical data and main findings. I conclude the chapter with a brief discussion of the findings.

5.1 Conceptual Framework and research hypotheses

As identified in Chapter 3, existing literature has yet to provide satisfactory answers to how the multiple layers of social structures that rural migrant children encounter in their educational experiences are translated into micro-level outcomes. Below I briefly outline a theoretical framework to fill in the gaps and research hypotheses to be tested in this analysis. In this theoretical framework, I synthesize literature from child development studies, social stratification studies, migration studies as well as China's political economy studies to unpack the multiple mechanisms that may affect migrant children's educational achievement.

5.1.1 Conceptual framework

The quantitative analysis applies the ecological systems theory (Bronfenbrenner, 1979; 1999; Bronfenbrenner and Evans, 2000; Bronfenbrenner and Morris, 2006) to investigate how migration affects rural teenagers' education in post-reform China. The relative strengths of this theoretical approach are two-fold. First, it foregrounds the multiple contexts that constitute individuals' living environment, which is apt for migration research. As is known, migration across geographic/political boundaries involves negotiation with macro-level policies pertaining to economic opportunities and immigration reception (Lee, 1966; Ravenstein, 1985; Stark and Bloom, 1985; Portes and Zhou, 1993; Zhou, 1997), maintenance of social ties and cultural communications that link migration origins and destinations (Fawcett, 1989; Levitt, 1998; Gold, 2005) as well as reconfiguration of family life (Boyd, 1989; Foner, 1997; Yeoh, Huang and Lam, 2005). Moreover, in post-reform China, the institutional arrangements and differentiations between urban versus rural *hukou* (Treiman, 2012; Wu and Treiman, 2007), between social entitlements in different regions (Fan, 2005; Shen, 2013a; 2013b; Liu et al., 2014) and local-level migration policies (Hao and Xiao, 2015) are part and parcel of rural migrants' living experiences, hence indispensable in the analytical framework.

Secondly, in this ecological framework, environment is not analyzed “by reference to linear variables but in systems terms” (Bronfenbrenner, 1979:5). In other words, this approach takes into consideration the nested nature of diverse social settings that individuals are embedded in. In a like manner, scholars of childhood and education have long conceptualized the process of child development as a product of constant interplays between children and the environment (at different levels), which may include the institution of family (Blau and Duncan, 1967; Lareau, 1989, 2003; McLanahan and Percheski, 2008), neighborhood and communities (Wilson, 1987; Leventhal and Brooks-Gunn, 2000), school context (Coleman et al., 1966; Collins, 2009) and the linkages (Coleman, 1988; Teachman, Paasch and Carver, 1996) among them.

In later reformulation of the theory, Bronfenbrenner and colleagues (Bronfenbrenner and Evans, 2000; Bronfenbrenner and Morris, 2006) proposed a PPCT (Process-Person-Context-Time) research design that incorporates simultaneous investigation of the developmental human beings and their environment. As such, we propose the following theoretical framework to guide the analyses ahead, as Figure 5.1 shows.

[Figure 5.1 about here]

In this framework, the family, the school and the region are conceptualized as three interrelated ecological systems for migrant children’s growth. While the family and the school constitute migrant children’s microsystems where they “can readily engage in face-to-face interaction” (Bronfenbrenner, 1979:22), the regional context and the broader post-reform political economy form the macrosystem which map out the opportunity structures and provide consistencies that sustain the functioning of lower-order systems such as the school or the family systems. To add a caveat here, I cannot empirically test factors at all levels and all interactions directly in the quantitative analysis due to data limitations, though I will discuss relevant findings more qualitatively in the next two chapters. In the paragraphs ahead, I

formulate hypotheses in line with the theoretical framework to test the effects of the multiple contexts upon migrant children's educational results.

5.1.2 Migration and the family context

The family SES effect. Social scientists have long established family SES or social class as one of the most critical determinant for intergenerational transmission of educational inequalities in modern societies (Blau and Duncan, 1967; Bourdieu, 1986; Lareau, 2003). Parents of high SES are found to be able to transmit differential advantages to children in various ways. As Lareau (2003) documented, American middle class parents tend to adopt a parenting style of *concerted cultivation* which is marked by parents' attempts to foster children's talents by incorporating organized activities in their children's lives and encouraging children's negotiation with authorities and elaboration of their own views in discussions. In contrast, Working-class and poor families facilitate a model of *accomplishment of natural growth* in childrearing, in which parents and other guardians are less likely to arrange for organized activities and more likely to use directives in communication with children.

In the context of post-reform China, scholars have reached an agreement on the increasing salience of family SES in contributing to individuals' educational attainment after reform (Hannum, William and Xie, 1994; Hannum, 1999; Li, 2003; Li, 2006; Murphy and Johnson, 2009; Yeung, 2013). Recent scholarship reports relative better socioeconomic conditions of migrant children's families in comparison with their remaining peers in rural areas. For example, based on data from China Family Panel Studies (2012), Yeung and Gu (2016) cross-tabulated family SES variables by family types (Table 2), revealing that migrant children's families have the highest levels of family income and father's education among all rural groups. As such, I propose the following hypothesis.

H1a: Compared with rural non-migrant children, migrant children enjoy higher family SES, which could benefit children's educational outcomes.

The educational resources effect. One important pathway between family SES and children's educational achievement pertains to the resources to provide better home environment and more stimulating activities (Duncan, Yeung, Brooks-Gunn & Smith, 1998; Smith, Brooks-Gunn and Klebanov, 1997; Yeung, Linver & Brooks-Gunn, 2002; Yeung and Pfeiffer, 2009). For example, with the Panel Study of Income Dynamics data to explore how money matters for child development, Yeung and colleagues (2002) concluded that "much of the association between income and children's W-J scores was mediated by the family's ability to invest in providing a stimulating learning environment."

With regard to migrant children's education, recent evidence suggests that their families tend to invest more in their education. For example, Yeung and Gu's (2016) work reported that they are provided with highest levels of educational expenditure among all rural-*hukou* families. With the above information, I hypothesize the following.

H1b: Compared with rural non-migrant children, migrant children enjoy more education-related resources that could contribute to their education.

The parental aspiration effect. I synthesize two bodies of literature about parental aspiration as motivational resources that promote children's achievement. One derives from the classical Wisconsin social psychological model of status attainment (Sewell et al., 1969). This line of research underscores the critical role of educational aspirations from one's significant others, parents in particular, to influence their educational attainment. The other line of research pertains to immigration studies on the *model minority* phenomenon in America (Chen and Uttal, 1988; Schneider and Lee, 1990; Kim and Chun, 1994; Chao, 1994; Hsin and Xie, 2014). This body of literature draw direct links between the prevalence of achievement

ideology and the educational success of Asian Americans. For example, Lee and Zhou (2015) demonstrated that immigrant parents of Asian heritages aspire for their children's high educational attainment, partly to offset the racial discrimination they believe their children would encounter as a minority group in the American society.

In the case of Chinese rural-urban migrant children, there are sufficient reasons to speculate that their families are an aspiring group. First, the country honors a long tradition that celebrates educational achievement as the most important way to realize social mobility, where the family, the lineage or the community at large has a stake in supporting aspiring individuals (Lee, 2000; Pepper, 1996:47; Kulp, 1925:127). Second, given the significance of *hukou* as an institutional divider, migrant children's families encounter substantial discriminations and barriers to successfully integrate into urban life (Solinger, 1999), which could incentivize them to change children's *hukou* status through obtaining higher education (Bian, 2002; Wu and Treiman, 2007). Considering the above institutional and cultural factors, I posit that:

H1c: compared with rural non-migrant children's parents, migrant children's parents are hypothesized to hold higher educational aspirations for their children's future attainment, which contributes to their better educational outcomes.

The family social capital effect. The family social capital model postulates that the relational context within the family comprises an important source for children's education, particularly the parent-child dyad. According to Coleman (1988), higher levels of social capital within the family can create a condition where children benefit from parents' human capital advantages. He defines the family social capital in two measures: 1) "the physical presence of adults in the family" and 2) "the attention given by the adults to the child". The former pertains to the family structure that has been long researched to be an important mechanism of social stratification, particularly among divorce scholarship (McLanahan and Percheski, 2008). The second part of the definition pertains to the intensity of interactions across generations. Studies

have found that a higher level of parental involvement in children has a long-term positive legacy on children's well-being (Lareau, 2003; Teachman et al., 1996).

The family social capital perspective could lend insights into the research of China's migrant families, since migration is a significant event that reshapes household arrangements and organization of everyday life, especially in terms of care provision, emotional and academic support for children. Immigration literature indicates that family migration is usually a later stage in a long process of 'relayed migration' or 'serial migration' that has strained parent-child relationships and weakened ties with extended families (Zhou, 1997; Duan et al., 2013). Another compounding factor is insufficient time that parents could devote to children in migrant households in urban areas, due to lack of labor protection for Chinese rural migrants. For instance, a survey conducted in Beijing shows that working overtime is normal for migrant workers: approximately 60% had to work over 10 hours a day, one third over 12 and 16% over 14 (cited from Tan 2003). Such tensions in parent-child relationship in migrant households in urban areas could have detrimental effects for migrant children's achievement, especially when their social networks have been uprooted and disrupted due to migration. For example, Hagan and associates' study (1996) of Canadian adolescents revealed that the negative effects of family migration are significantly more pronounced in families with uninvolved fathers and unsupportive mothers. With the above information, I formulate following hypothesis.

H1d: compared with adolescents in rural non-migrant households, migrant adolescents are less likely to have a close relationship with their parents, which may pose negative effects upon their educational development.

5.1.3 The school context

Over half a century after the Coleman Report (Coleman et al., 1966), sociologists of education have yet to develop a consensus concerning the relationship between schools and inequality (Downey and Condrón, 2016). Arguments for class reproduction thesis and for

equalization thesis coexist. While the Coleman Report famously concluded that “schools bring little influence to bear on a child's achievement that is independent of his background and general social context” (1966:325), a huge body of literature has been devoted to examining school-based reproduction of class inequalities in modern societies (Bowles and Gintis, 1976; Willis, 1977; Bourdieu, 1977; 1986; Lareau, 2003; Collins, 2009). However, the critical class-reproduction perspective has been challenged by recent scholarship using the seasonal comparison method to unpack school effect upon child outcomes, with the narrowing socioeconomic gaps in skills during school year suggesting a compensatory role of schools (Heyns, 1978; Downey et al., 2004).

Nonetheless, comparative analyses of different national contexts indicate that the school effect is stronger in developing countries, which could be related to “inadequate or very unequally distributed educational resources” (Buchmann and Hannum, 2001). In other words, in developing nations where public resources are in scarcity, besides spillover from family SES, the education system itself tends to operate in the interest of a minority of “elites” against the principle of meritocracy. In this study, I broadly examine two aspects of school effect in post-reform China upon rural migrant children’s education.

The school institutional characteristics. The first aspect pertains to the institutional characteristics of organizations that correspond to and are enhanced through various mechanisms by the institutional environment (Meyer and Rowan, 1977; DiMaggio and Powell, 1983). As described in Chapter 2, the development of compulsory education in post-reform China follows a few “institutionalized myths” (Meyer and Rowan, 1977), which would bear nontrivial consequences for migrant children’s schooling opportunities. One is the practice of a key-point system, which follows a logic of prioritizing a small number of schools at the expense of equality to speed up development of education and cultivation of “talents” for China’s modernization. These high-ranking schools are given preferential policies and

resources in a wide range of areas, including candidates with the highest test scores, a favorable staff-student ratio, commendable facilities and qualified staff, and more competitive and ‘scientific’ curriculum designs (Pepper, 1996; Gasper, 1989; Wang, 2008; Ye, 2015). Second is a decentralized education financial system based on the principle of “local responsibility and administration by levels” (Tsang, 1996). In this scheme, the county government, the town/township government and the village government were held responsible for the provision, finance and administration of upper-secondary education, lower-secondary education and primary education respectively (ibid.), which is found to have exacerbated regional inequalities and rural-urban gaps (Hannum, 1999; Tsang, 1996, 2002; Hannum and Wang, 2006). Additionally, the encouragement of *minban* education²⁸ (literally translated as ‘people-run’ schools, as against the state-run schools) to divert the burden of public finance aggravates the existing inequalities (Wang, 2002; Chan and Wang, 2009; Yan and Lin, 2004). My hypotheses are as follows.

H2a: The school ranking (key-point schools are of the highest ranking) is positively associated with students’ educational outcomes.

H2b: schools in urban centers benefit students’ educational outcomes most, followed by those in urban-rural fringes, while those in rural settings are negatively associated with students’ outcomes.

H2c: Attending public schools instead of *minban* schools would significantly benefit students’ educational outcomes.

The school organizational process. The second perspective looks into how the inner dynamics in schooling processes within schools affect students’ outcomes, which has drawn insights from a rich body of literature in school effectiveness research (Rutter et al., 1979;

²⁸ *Minban* education currently caters to two social groups at the socioeconomic extremes. The majority are those disadvantaged who are excluded from the public system. Migrant schools are such examples. In recent years, a growing number of high SES families in big cities who are dissatisfied with the public system for its rigidity and dampening of students’ creativity have begun to patronize a new type of ‘elite education’ modeled after private schools in western societies.

Tylor, 1988; Sammons et al., 1995; Teddlie and Reynolds, 2000; Townsend, 2007). Studies under this camp generally conceptualize the school as “a moral community” (Tylor, 1988:10) to find empirical support for effective factors that promote student learning. Albeit inconsistent findings regarding the magnitude of school effect in different grade groups (primary versus secondary schools) across different national policy contexts (Sammons et al., 1995), scholars have reached consensus on some common features of effective schools which are conducive to shape “some kind of school-wide set of values and norms of behavior” (Rutter et al., 1979:192). These include professional leadership, shared vision and goals, positive school climate and high expectations (Rutter et al., 1979; Slater and Teddlie, 1992; Sammons et al., 1995; Lee and Burkam, 2003). Given that the CEPS data do not have adequate measures for all these factors, I focus on one main constructs (school climate) in this quantitative analysis while leaving a holistic description of these diverse school factors in case study in Chapter 6.

Ample empirical research has explored the impact of school climate on multiple domains of students’ learning such as experiences of violence and peer victimization, behavior problems, school progression and academic achievement (see literature reviews in Anderson, 1982; Cohen et al., 2009; Thapa et al., 2013). However, a major issue in this literature is the *elusive* nature of the definition of school climate among scholars. By the 1980s, such was the case that Anderson (1982) compared it to the beast of Unicorn—“a mythological beast to be hoped for and dreamt about but one which can never be found”, which included taxonomic categories such as ecology (school physical environment and composition), milieu (characteristics of individuals in the school), social system variables (patterns or rules of operating and interacting in the school), cultural variables (norms, belief systems, values, cognitive structures and meanings of persons in the school) (Tagiuri, 1968). In other words, everything inside the school is conceptualized as part of the inflated concept of school climate, albeit weak empirical support of the effect of objective and structural measures of school

climate upon student outcomes such as building characteristics, school size, teacher and student composition, type of instruction program, administrative organization (as reviewed in Anderson, 1982). Ever since, scholars and policy-makers have gradually reached an agreement on two key characteristics of school climate. First is the emphasis on the *cultural aspect* of school life that individuals within jointly shape, including shared values, norms and expectations. Second is the *collective and relational aspect* of school climate which refer to “the general ‘we-feeling’” (Nwankwo, 1979:268). As such, in 2007, the U.S. National School Climate Council recommended a definition of school climate as below:

“School climate is based on patterns of people’s experiences of school life and reflects norms, goals, values, interpersonal relationships, teaching and learning practices, and organizational structures...(a positive) climate includes norms, values, and expectations that support people feeling socially, emotionally and physically safe.” (c.f. Thapa et al., 2013)

Research based on this narrowed concept of school climate proves to be fruitful. On the one hand, scholars have found that a positive learning atmosphere with an academic emphasis in a school could promote student performance and lift up their aspirations significantly [Weber (1971), Mitchell (1967), cited in Anderson (1982)]. On the other hand, the sense of connectedness cultivated among school personnel, students and families, i.e. the ‘we-feeling’, tends to generate more social capital at a community level (Coleman, 1988; Teachman et al., 1996; Leana and Pil, 2006), which in turn impacts student outcomes [see Thapa et al. (2013) for a summary of literature]. Accordingly, I formulate the following set of propositions at the school level to test the effect of school climate on students’ test scores.

H2d: at the school level, the school’s general academic climate is likely to be positively associated with students’ cognitive scores.

H2e: at the school level, higher school-home partnership is likely to be positively associated with students’ cognitive scores.

5.1.4 Regional context

As described in Chapter 2, the “coastal development strategy” (Yang, 1991) is a major

driver of pronounced regional inequalities and sustained large-scale interregional migrations in post-reform China (Tsui, 1991; Kanbur and Zhang, 1999; Fan, 2005; Kanbur and Zhang, 2005; Fan and Sun, 2010; Li and Wei, 2010; Liu et al., 2014). Meanwhile, in the 1980s, as part of a major adjustment in the public finance system (Park et al., 1996), China adopted a financially decentralized education system based on the principle of “local responsibility and administration by levels” (Tsang, 1996), which makes schools increasingly reliant on local economic and social development. According to the industrialization hypothesis (Treiman, 1970; Forsythe et al., 2000), economic development could translate into investment in social infrastructure, with more urbanized areas offering better quality education systems and other public goods (Hannum and Wang, 2006; Kotakorpi and Laamanen, 2010). In other words, geographic development disparities could potentially be a stratifier for individuals’ educational chances and attainment. For example, Hannum and Wang (2006) investigated the relationship between individuals’ birth province and educational chances among seven birth-cohorts using the 2000 census data, revealing striking disadvantages of birthplace in western provinces. For the 1976-1980 birth cohort, a Tibet origin is associated with a 9-year shortage in education than a Beijing origin, while a Qinghai one is correlated with a 5-year gap. As such, I test the following proposition:

H3: relative to western counties, eastern and central counties in China are positively associated with teenagers’ cognitive scores, with the effect of living in eastern counties the bigger.

5.1.5 Interaction effects: migration and “contexts of reception”

Scholars on social integration of second-generation immigrants in America have long argued for the importance of “contexts of reception” (Portes and Zhou, 1993; Zhou, 1997) or the “destination effect” (Levels, Dronkers and Kraaykamp, 2008). With reference to migrant children’s education in urban China, it is important to look at how migrant children fare in local

conditions, hence interaction effects between the migrant children group and school-level and region-level contextual variables. It is plausible to speculate that opportunities and constraints coexist in migrant children's educational experiences in urban areas.

At the school level, moving out of rural schools that are considerably lagging behind may boost migrant children's educational outcomes. However, their access to public schools in host cities has long been restricted, not to mention access to high quality education, which may hamper their performance and aspiration (Shen, 2008; Chen and Feng, 2013; Lu and Zhou, 2013; Lai et al., 2014; Chen et al., 2015; Xiong, 2015).

At the regional level, on the one hand, when rural migrants from villages and interior provinces move to economically prosperous urban areas along the eastern coast, the huge differentials in county-level development indicators such as educational expenditure, infrastructure and education technologies between their home and host communities would benefit their children's education (Hannum and Wang, 2006; Jordan et al., 2014). On the other hand, migration policy context at local levels (see Section 2.3 in Chapter 2) is expected to matter as well. As Lu (2007) presented, immigration destinations in eastern coast provinces are found to be associated with migrant children's lower enrollment rate, lower chances of attending public schools and delayed school progression, which the author believed is related to more stringent policies in these areas.

In this last section of analysis, I test the significance of a set of interaction terms to examine how contextual factors at the school and regional levels could affect migrant children's educational performance. The interaction terms are as follows:

Differential impact of school institutional settings on migrant children's cognitive scores:

- [migrant child X public school]
- [migrant child X school in urban center]
- [migrant child X school in rural-urban fringes]

-- [migrant child X school rank]

Differential impact of school organizational features upon migrant children's cognitive scores.

-- [migrant child X school-level academic climate]

-- [migrant child X school-level family-school partnership]

Differential impact of regional effect upon migrant children's cognitive scores.

-- [migrant child X eastern counties]

-- [migrant child X central counties).

5.2 Data and measures

The data used in this analysis are from the first wave of China Education Panel Survey (CEPS) collected in 2014 by National Survey Research Center at Renmin University. The CEPS applies a stratified, multistage sampling design with probability proportional to size (PPS), randomly selecting a school-based, nationally representative sample of approximately 20,000 students in 438 classrooms of 112 schools in 28 county-level units in mainland China (See CEPS 2015 for a detailed description of the study design). The student sample focuses on adolescents aged between 12 and 18, with supplementary information from a parent questionnaire, a school questionnaire and teacher questionnaires that provide rich knowledge about their family and school life. The current analysis takes advantage of the nested design and incorporates individual/family level, school level and region level variables in a multilevel frame.

In this analysis, I take account of two interlocking factors that are simultaneously affecting migrant children's life in the Chinese context, i.e. the *hukou* effect and the family structure effect. To disentangle these two factors would require a careful selection of reference groups. For example, when comparing migrant children with their urban counterparts, we need to control for family structure. Likewise, when comparing them with rural peers, since the

hukou factor is implicitly controlled for, we are allowed to explore a range of different family structures due to migration (non-migration, parent-migration versus. child migration). To control for family structure in the comparison between urban children and rural migrant children, I excluded 2743 cases of teenagers in urban *migrant families* from the original sample of 19487 cases. This is also reasonable because under the current *hukou*-based migration regime, urban families and rural families encounter qualitatively different migration experiences, with the former group described as “*hukou* migrants” instead of “floating population” (Wang 2005). I also excluded 334 rural migrant children with either parent absent in their families due to unidentifiable reasons. The final analytic sample includes 16410 adolescents in four groups: 1) urban-*hukou* children in non-migrant two-parent families; 2) rural-*hukou* migrant children in two-parent families, 3) rural children in two-parent non-migrant families, 4) rural left-behind children. Below I describe the variables, measurement and their univariate distributions, as Table 5.1 shows.

Level-1 variables

Independent Variable. The independent variable was constructed out of two variables indicating parents’ residence pattern and *hukou* status, as well as children’s migration status. It includes 4 categories: 1= urban non-migrant household, 2= rural migrant household, 3= rural non-migrant household (reference group) and 4= rural left-behind household. Of the sample of 16410 students, 37% are with urban-*hukou*, while the rest 63% are with rural-*hukou* origin. Among all rural *hukou* adolescents, those in non-migrant households comprise of 36% of the total population, 15% are left behind, and 12% are migrant themselves, a figure slightly higher than the 10.3% estimated from the 2010 census data (I calculated the figure based on statistics reported in ACWF 2013).

Dependent Variables. The present study employs two measures to assess teenagers' education. First is a composite cognitive score from a test that covers three domains: language, geometry and space, and calculation/logical reasoning, adapted from the Taiwan Education Panel Survey [see Wang and Li (2015) for details]. Students received a test of 20 (for 7th graders) or 22 questions (for 9th graders) within 15 minutes. I use the standardized score constructed by the CEPS staff (CEPS 2015). The second is about students' educational aspiration, which was recoded into years from the original 9 categories. For example, the category of "primary school" was transformed into "6 years", while "junior middle school" into "9 years". On average, Chinese adolescents in junior middle schools hope to attain 16.24 years of education, which is equivalent to a university degree.

Family SES. The family SES is measured with two indicators. First is the family economic conditions variable which was constructed by the CEPS staff by combining and triangulating results from a question asked to parents and students respectively about their assessment of family economic conditions (a 5-point Likert scale, 1=very poor, 5=very rich). The derived variable used in analysis was further collapsed into three categories (1=poor, 3=rich). As shown in Table 5.1, over 70% of the sampled families reported rated their economic conditions as "poor", about 20% rated "average" and less than 10% rated their families "rich". The other family SES measure was also constructed by the CEPS staff out of questions about parents' education attainment (taking the higher one in each household), which was recoded into years from the original 9 categories. The mean parental education stands at 10.60 years, which is below the high school level (12 years) in the Chinese system.

Family educational resources. Two indicators are employed to measure education-related resources in the family, the first question asking about whether students have their independent working desk at home and the other about how many books there are at home with

a 5-point likert scale (1=very few, 5=a lot). About 79% of adolescents reported having an independent working desk for their own use in the households. On average, adolescents reported the level of books at home to be 3.13 out of 5 points.

Parental aspiration: it was recoded to be an interval variable indicating years of schooling (8=low/junior middle school level; 22=high; PhD level). As Table 5.1 shows, Chinese parents generally hold quite high educational aspirations for their children future (mean=16.88, $\sigma=3.16$), which is higher than their own attainment by 6.08 years and even higher than their children's own aspirations by a small margin ($\Delta=0.64$ year).

The family social capital: I measure the family social capital with a variable on the mother-child relationship reported in student questionnaire. The selection of this measure is based on solid research findings. Previous research has shown that in the post-reform, while a high proportion of women are joining workforce in dual-income families, a concurrent discourse sponsored by the state is advocating women's role in nurturing children and caring for family as "socialist housewives" and "guardians of social order and morality" (Robinson, 1985; Jacka, 1997; Short et al., 2002; Leung, 2003). In the questionnaire, teenagers were asked to assess their closeness with mothers with three categories (1=not close, 2= average and 3=very close). As shown in Table 5.1, the average level of closeness between adolescents and their mothers stands at 2.72 out of 3.

Demographic control Variables. Demographic factors are controlled, including the teenagers' age (in years), gender and whether their only-child status given China's implementation of one-child policy until very recently (Greenhalgh and Winckler, 2005). Gender and only-child status are all dichotomous variables. In this analytic sample, adolescents are on average 14.5 years old. Males constitute 51% of the whole sample. Over 40% are only children in their families.

Level-2 variables

School institutional characteristics. I include three measures of school institutional characteristics. First is the distribution of school locations (1=urban center, 2=urban-rural fringes and 3=rural areas) which is quite balanced, with 38% of the schools located in urban centers, followed by 37% in rural areas and the rest 25% in urban-rural fringes. Second pertains to the type of school (1=public, 0=*minban* or non-public). Data show that the majority of schools (93%) are publicly funded. The last is the school ranking variable, which is an ordinal variable (1=low, 5=high). As seen in Table 5.1, the mean ranking of the 112 schools is about 3.88 ($\sigma=0.82$).

School organizational process. I use two school climate measures to examine the inner dynamics of schooling process and organizational features that might affect student performance. First is the school-level academic climate reported by homeroom teachers. The original question asked the teachers to evaluate the school learning atmosphere at a 5-point likert scale, which was further collapsed into three categories (1=not good, 2=average and 3=good). On average, the 112 schools sampled were rated 2.55 in the academic climate indicator. The second variable pertains to the school-family partnership as reported by the school principals. The question was about how many times that the school launched parent-school meetings (1=0 time, 2=1 time, 3=2 to 4 times and 4=over 5 times). Of the 108 schools with valid principal report, the school initiated on average 2.7 meetings with parents during the semester earlier.

Regional dummies: To account for regional effect upon child development, I create three dummy variables out of a region variable generated by the CEPS staff, which includes three categories (1=East, 2=Center, 3=West—reference). As mentioned earlier, with only 28 counties, the lowest frequency among the three categories is 6, which makes it insufficient for

analysis of variance components (Maas and Hox, 2005; Stegmueller, 2013). Therefore, I place the dummy variables as control variables at the school level.

5.3 Analytic strategy and major findings

My analyses proceed in three steps. First, I first fit a baseline model without any predictors for both cognitive score and educational expectation to check whether these outcomes are nested and how much they are “nested” within the level-2 unit (schools in this case) (Hayes, 2006). This produces evidence to support or negate the use of multilevel analysis in the following steps. Results from this procedure indicate that adolescents’ cognitive test scores are highly nested within schools, while their educational aspirations are less so. I then estimate a series of step-wise OLS models to examine family/individual level factors that are correlated with teenagers’ educational outcomes (both measures are included). Next, I estimate 2-level hierarchical linear (HLM) models for adolescents’ cognitive scores.

5.3.1 Baseline models: do students’ educational results differ between schools?

I fitted two baseline models to check whether the outcome variables (students’ cognitive test score and expected years of education) differ systematically between schools, using the following equation.

$$y_{ij} = \beta_0 + u_j + e_{ij}$$

This form of the model shows that the outcomes for each student i in school j is a function of three components: the school mean (β_0), difference between school j ’s mean and the overall mean (u_j) and the individual-level residual (e_{ij}). For each outcome, I used a likelihood ratio test (LR test) to test whether a 2-level analysis is preferred. Further, I calculated the VPC (variance partition coefficient) for each outcome to see how much of the total variance is attributed to differences between schools.

As seen from Table 5.2, the LR test results for both students' cognitive score and educational expectations indicate that 2-level models than 1-level linear models are more suited to the data. Further, the intraclass correlation coefficients (ICC) show that between-school variation accounts for about 24% of the total variation of students' cognitive score but less than 10% of the total variation of their educational expectation. This constitutes strong evidence for a two-level analysis for cognitive test (see Figure 5.1 for a visual presentation of school effects), while leaving space for a more conservative plan for analyzing education expectations. Therefore, I treated the educational aspiration outcome in single-level analyses and estimated both single-level and multilevel models for cognitive scores.

5.3.2 Determinants of students' educational results at level-1

In this section, I present data, including both bivariate and multivariate analyses, to examine individual/family level factors upon both students' cognitive scores and educational aspiration. In particular, my focus is on migrant students' achievement patterns.

5.4.2.1 Bivariate comparisons

[Table 5.3 inserted here]

Dependent variables. Cross-tabulations between household types and adolescents' cognitive test score reveal substantial gaps between urban-*hukou* and all rural-*hukou* groups of adolescents, in favor of the former group. In particular, urban-*hukou* adolescents scored almost 0.50 standard deviation higher than the left-behind group, while the gaps between urban adolescents and rural migrants/ rural non-migrants remain significant but smaller in magnitude ($p < 0.01$). Among all the rural-*hukou* groups, migrant students are found to score significantly higher than those from non-migrant families as well as those left behind ($p < 0.05$ and $p < 0.01$ respectively in scheffe's test). Likewise, when it comes to self-reported educational aspirations, we observe a significant urban advantage over all rural-*hukou* groups ($p < 0.01$).

Comparisons between all rural-*hukou* groups reveal a similar picture as in cognitive test results: migrant adolescents reported the highest numbers of years, followed by those in non-migrant households, and those left behind. However, none of the differences are statistically significant at the 95% confidence level.

Family SES. As expected, the salient pattern is that urban families are the most advantaged in terms of family SES, followed by migrant children's households in urban areas, rural non-migrant households and at the bottom left-behind households. The contrasts are glaring at the two extremes. For example, 36% of informants in rural left-behind households rated themselves "economically poor", which is over 3 times the figure in urban households (11%). Similarly, the average educational attainment of parents in urban families (12.49 years) overtakes that in left-behind households (9.19 years) by 26%. Among all rural-*hukou* groups, migrant students' families are significantly less likely to fall in the category of "economically poor", and their parents in general have received more education (scheffe's test result is significant at 95% confidence interval between migrant children's and left-behind children's parents' educational attainment).

Family educational resources. With reference to education-related resources, we observe a consistent pattern in line with the SES indicators. While the urban advantage remains pronounced, migrant children who have moved along with families to urban areas are afforded with a superior learning environment at home relative to their rural peers in the countryside. For example, the proportion of them owning an independent working desk is about 10% higher than those in non-migrant rural families, and 24% higher than those in left-behind households. This is in general agreement with what Yeung and Gu (2016) documented with the China Family Panel Studies data.

Parental expectation. Over all, two patterns of the distribution of parental educational aspiration by household type are noteworthy. First is the urban-rural distinction, to the advantage of urban households. Scheffe's tests show that the differences between urban families and all other groups are statistically significant ($p < 0.01$), though the differences are modest in magnitude (no more than 0.8 years). Again, migrant children's parents hope for slightly higher education for their children (not significant at 90% confidence interval). Second is the high levels of average parental aspiration across all types of households, about 16 years, i.e. with a bachelor's degree. In other words, consistent with what is documented in migration literature among Chinese immigrants in America (Hsin and Xie 2014; Lee and Zhou 2015), Chinese parents on average do esteem higher educational achievement to their children's future prospect (I will elaborate on this in Chapter 6).

Family social capital. The family social capital as measured by mother-child relationship suggests that migrant households as a whole, including those with children brought along and those with children left behind are structurally disadvantaged in this aspect. In contrast, regardless of *hukou* status, non-migrant families are characterized by closer mother-child ties. Put in Coleman's terms, this reflects a heightened level of "attention given by the adults to the child" in these structurally "intact" families (Coleman, 1988).

Demographic controls. Statistics of demographic features show that there is little evidence for gender selection across all family types, while both groups of rural residing adolescents are relatively older in age ($p < 0.01$ for scheffe's tests). As expected, the proportion of only children is significantly higher in urban areas than the national average (69% versus 42%) (Greenhalgh and Winckler, 2005). Among all rural-*hukou* families, it seems that children in migrant households, whether they move along to cities or are left at home in villages, are more likely to have siblings.

Summary. The bivariate analysis above provides ample information about China's migrant households as a context for adolescents' development. In general, we observe statistically significant differences across both educational outcomes between urban-*hukou* adolescents and their counterparts with rural *hukou* living in rural areas, to the advantage of the former by large margins. Rural migrant children relocated to urban settings seem to perform at an intermediate level. Cross-tabulations of a set of family-related factors and control variables by household type reveal interesting dynamics at the household level. Theoretical constructs at the family level seem to suggest that while migrant teenagers in general benefit from more favorable family SES, resources and higher parental expectations, they encounter considerable constraints in family social capital, which might be related to more pressure living as migrants in the cities or lengthy separation with migrant mothers prior to their settlement in cities.

5.3.2.2 Multivariate Analysis at Level-1

After establishing the basic descriptive empirical patterns, I wanted to see if the effect of migration on student educational results could be accounted for by the four blocks of intervening variables (family SES, educational resources, parental expectation and family social capital). I therefore estimated a series of OLS models for each educational outcome, adding sets of key variables in steps. I also added models with standardized coefficients for better comparison of different factors' relative contributions to each outcome variable²⁹. For the sake of clarity, I only present models with standardized coefficients in Tables 5.4-5.5.

Cognitive test score

[Table 5.4 about here]

²⁹ I also estimated a separate set of regression models based on constant N by eliminating cases with missing values (N=14596 for cognitive score; N=14502 for educational aspiration). The analyses yielded almost identical results, with slightly narrower gaps between rural migrant children and rural non-migrant children in both cognitive score and educational aspiration.

As seen in Table 5.4, we observe striking discrepancies in terms of test scores for students living in different household types. There seems to be strong evidence for an achievement hierarchy in descending order, with robust and persistent advantages for urban-*hukou* students, followed by rural migrant students and at the bottom rural left-behind students whose scores are significantly lower, relative to rural non-migrant teenagers. For example, prior to controlling for other factors, urban-*hukou* teenagers on average score 0.20 standard deviation higher in cognitive test than their rural peers in non-migrant families do, while rural left-behind teenagers score 0.05 standard deviation lower. Those who have migrated out of rural communities seem to have a non-trivial edge as well ($b=0.03$, $p<0.01$).

With the blocks of mediating variables and control variables entered into models, we observe drastic changes of effect sizes and/or significance levels in expected directions, which indicates that the hypothesized theoretical constructs (i.e. family SES, educational resources, parental expectations and family social capital mediators) are effective to explain the variations in teenagers' test score among different household types. Noteworthy is the unique pattern of urban-*hukou* teenagers' scores. When taking account of all these family-level predictors, we still observe persistent and significant advantages of their performance ($p<0.01$ across all six models), albeit sizeable reduction of effect size (by 0.17 standard deviation from Model 1 to Model 6), which suggests mechanisms in other contexts in adolescents' environment than the family are working to urban teenagers' advantage. Multilevel analysis (Table 5.5 to be presented later) will illustrate that the school and the regional contexts could finally wipe out this urban advantage.

Adding to the models separately, while we observe robust results for all four sets of mediators ($p<0.01$ for all mediating variables), the explanatory power for each set varies. Family SES and parental expectations have reduced the advantages of migrant children relative to rural non-migrant children, though the results are still significant. However, as shown in

Model 4, when *educational resources* at home are held constant, we see the differences between various types of rural households become statistically insignificant (from $p < 0.01$ in Model 1 to $p < 0.05$ in Model 3 for migrant children and left behind children), which suggests that it is not as much family SES in itself as the way families organize to provide learning environment and opportunities at home that matters for youths' cognitive development (Duncan, Yeung, Brooks-Gunn and Smith, 1998; Smith, Brooks-Gunn and Klebanov, 1997; Yeung and Pfeiffer, 2009). In other words, it takes adults' intentional investment and nurturance in children that affects their cognitive skills instead of mere family wealth. Also noteworthy is the family social capital variable which tests the migration effect upon teenagers' performance. As expected, after controlling for this variable, migrant children's advantage in cognitive skills becomes strengthened in magnitude (from $b = 0.02$, $p < 0.01$ in Model 2 to $b = 0.03$, $p < 0.01$ in Model 6), which confirms the negative effect of strained parent-child relationships due to migration upon teenagers' performance. However, in the full model, this negative effect seems to be compensated by other family-level mediators ($b = 0.00$, $p > 0.1$ in Model 7). Though the quantitative analysis here could not provide more nuanced explanations for such an interesting pattern of family dynamics due to data and methodology limitations, Chapter 7 offers a useful grounded theory of "doing family" that details this family process.

Controlling for all variables in the model, we see that parents' higher educational attainment ($b = 0.10$), better family economic situation ($b = 0.06$ and $b = 0.04$ respectively for average income and above-average income families), having independent working desk ($b = 0.06$) and more books to read ($b = 0.12$), and higher parental expectations toward teenagers' future attainment ($b = 0.16$) are correlated positively with their cognitive skills ($p < 0.01$ for all mentioned predictors). Taken as a whole, variables in the models explain 15% of students' total variation in cognitive scores ($R^2 = 0.15$ in Model 6).

Self-reported educational expectation

[Table 5.5 about here]

The analysis of students' educational aspiration shows a less dramatic pattern, as shown in Table 5.5. In Model 1 with no control variables, compared with the reference group and other rural-*hukou* teenagers, the advantage of urban teenagers in their reported aspiration is substantial ($b=0.14$, $p<0.01$), while coming from different types of rural households seems to bear no significant consequences. As summary statistics in Table 5.3 reveal, all different groups of rural adolescents hoped to receive an education of around 15.8 to 15.9 years, slightly lower than the years to complete a bachelor's degree (16 years in smooth progression), about 1 year less than what urban teenagers reported.

Model 2-7 show that effects of the four sets of explanatory variables and demographic characteristics find empirical support to varying degrees. Added separately into the models, we find that parents' educational attainment ($b=0.19$, $p<0.01$), with independent working desk ($b=0.01$, $p<0.1$), numbers of books at home ($b=0.19$, $p<0.01$), parental expectations ($b=0.46$, $p<0.01$) and family social capital ($b=0.11$, $p<0.01$) all show significant results. In particular, the parental aspiration is highly associated with children's aspiration, which relationship could potentially be contaminated by the endogeneity issue. With the limitation of cross-sectional data, however, this analysis could not eliminate such a possibility. That said, as numerous studies on Chinese immigrants and Chapter 7 will illustrate, the enduring cultural belief in education-based social mobility drives parents to set high achievement goals for children, oftentimes transcending their class background and economic conditions (Hsin and Xie, 2014; Lee and Zhou, 2015). Somewhat surprisingly, family economic conditions seem to have trivial impact on adolescents' educational aspirations. This may suggest that parents' education and the family economic status might work differently to influence children's outcomes. Besides,

given the fact that the family economics variable is measured by self-report, which might have introduced some bias and thus warrant caution in interpretation. Taken together, these blocks of variables at the family/individual level explain about 28% of the total variation of students' educational aspiration.

Moreover, an interesting pattern emerges from the analysis which indicates that different child groups react to the proposed mediating pathways in different ways. As Table 5.5 shows, when controlling for family SES, educational resources, parental expectations and mother-child closeness consecutively, relative to rural non-migrant children, those with urban *hukou* have gradually lost their advantages in education aspiration, whereas those left-behind children have become significantly higher aspirants. In other words, those advantages or disadvantages observed in the beginning for urban and left-behind teenagers could be accounted for by the proposed theoretical constructs. However, as far as migrant children are concerned, throughout 7 models, the incorporation of various predictors seems to produce minimal and non-significant changes in their educational aspirations. This invites an intriguing question. In view of favorable conditions in terms of family SES, education resource and parental expectations that are provided in their urban environment, why do migrant children still do not report higher expectations? A plausible speculation might point to other mechanisms beyond the family are working that countervail these positive factors. In Chapter 6 and Chapter 7, I address this puzzle with qualitative data by analyzing their school contexts and their own narratives of future life and ambitions.

5.3.3 Multilevel Analysis of Cognitive Test Score

My next step of analysis is to present multilevel results for cognitive test score. In the MLM models, I retained the individual variables used in Table 5.4 and added dummy variables for different regions as predictors at the school level. I used school institutional characteristics

and school organizational features as contextual variables at the second level (Table 5.6)³⁰. I also tested three sets of cross-level interactions effects to examine the working mechanisms for the group of migrant children (Table 5.8).

[Table 5.6 about here]

Main effects. As shown in Table 5.6, compared with statistics presented in Table 5.4, the biggest “surprise” is that after allowing for random intercepts at the school level, neither the positive result for migrant children nor the negative result for left behind children remains significant anymore (from Model 1 to Model 5), relative to their peers in rural non-migrant families. This means that, within the same schools, migrant children and their counterparts from rural non-migrant households do **NOT** perform significantly different from each other. The same statement holds true for left-behind children and their non-migrant reference group. In other words, the considerable advantage enjoyed by migrant children in terms of cognitive score at the individual level is largely attributed to the better school conditions they are afforded after moving. Likewise, left behind children underperform mostly because of their school environment. Equally notable is the persistent positive effect of urban-*hukou* upon teenagers’ test score, which is reduced to non-significant levels only after accounting for school institutional and organizational factors and a bunch of family-level factors (from $b=0.10$, $p<0.01$ in Model 1 to $b=0.03$, $p>0.1$ in Model 4). In fact, as the baseline model in Table 5.2 shows, 24% of the total variance of students’ cognitive score is nested within schools. The above findings reveal the strength of multilevel modeling in capturing the nested nature of social life by “recognizing the partial interdependence of individuals within the same group” (Hofmann, 1997). In this case, it has corrected the overestimation of family effect modeled in single-level analysis by bringing school-level factors and processes into the picture.

³⁰ Again, I estimated an additional set of models with constant N (N=14596) which showed similar results, though the urban advantage remains persistent throughout all models.

With regard to the effectiveness of predictors both at level 1 and level 2, most are found effective in expected directions to influence Chinese teenagers' cognitive performance. As seen in Model 2, family SES variables (average family economic condition and parents' educational attainment), numbers of books at home and parental aspiration are positively associated with children's cognitive score. Similar to the pattern reported in level-1 analysis, mother-child closeness does not show significant results independently, which might suggest the domain-specific effect this variable could have on various child outcomes.

As seen in Models 3 and 4 in Table 5.6, school-level predictors exert impacts upon students' cognitive score in expected directions. In terms of school institutional characteristics, higher ranking ($b=0.10$, $p<0.01$), being located in urban centers ($b=0.25$, $p<0.01$) and being publically funded ($b=0.23$, $p<0.01$) are significant positive covariates. After adding school organization variables in the model, we see that the effect of public school is reduced to non-significant levels, which indicates that public school are in general better organized and provide a more favorable learning environment. The school climate ($b=0.04$, $p<0.01$) and the school-family partnership ($b=0.18$, $p<0.01$) variables are found to be robust predictors. As noted earlier, these two sets of school-level factors have explained away the advantages of urban-*hukou* adolescents' advantage in cognitive skills.

In Model 5, I added the region dummies as controls at the school level to explore the impact of increasing regional disparities in economic and social development upon child outcomes in contemporary China. Compared with counties in West China, those in the east seem to reap a significant benefit ($b=0.13$, $p<0.1$), though those in central regions do not enjoy significant advantages, which finds support in previous research on regional inequalities of education attainment in the post-reform era (Hannum and Huang, 2006; Jordan et al., 2014). Taken as a whole, all the family-, school-, and region-level variables in the multilevel models jointly explain about 13% of students' total variation in cognitive scores (from $ICC_{baseline}=0.24$

to $ICC_{model5}=0.11$).

[Table 5.8]

Interaction effects. To further elucidate the effects of school factors upon migrant children's performance, I tested a number of cross-level interaction terms between migrant children group and higher level factors, as shown in Table 5.8. To supplement the analysis, I also did a simple cross-tabulation of school characteristics by different child groups and regional distributions of child groups, as displayed in Table 5.6. and Figure 3. To better present the changing dynamics due to these interaction effects, I estimated the models in a stepwise manner.

Model 1 examines interactions between migrant children group and school institutional characteristics. While attending schools of higher ranking ($b=0.14$, $p<0.01$), being located in more urbanized communities ($b=0.16$, $p<0.01$ for schools in urban centers) and being publicly funded ($b=0.12$, $p>0.1$) are positively correlated with adolescents' cognitive skills, migrant children seem to be less likely to reap such institutional benefits, since the interaction terms are all negative, particularly between school ranking and migrant children group ($b=-0.07$, $p<0.05$). Although the overall pattern seems to work to the advantage of migrant children, evidence suggests lingering institutional exclusion for their access to quality education in urban China. Statistics in Table 5.7 provide a more detailed picture of their school conditions. For rural migrants, while the majority of them (88%) are enrolled in public schools and their chances of attending schools in urban centers are about twice those for their peers living in rural communities, they run highest risks of being channeled to low-ranking schools. This is consistent with previous literature on school segregation that systematically hampers migrant children's educational development (Shen, 2008; Chen and Feng, 2013; Lu and Zhou, 2013; Lai et al., 2014; Chen et al., 2015; Xiong, 2015).

When it comes to school organizational process, we see a similar picture. While schools

with better academic climate and school-parent relationships certainly provide positive learning experiences and school morale, migrant children seen to be in a less advantageous situation. As seen in Model 2, the interaction between migrant children group and school academic climate is significantly negative ($b=-0.08$, $p<0.05$) and that between migrant children group and school-parent relationship shows minimal and non-significant positive effect. In other words, on average, the schools that migrant children attend not only are institutionally of lower-ranking, but also are less effectively managed to encourage academic pursuit. As the case study in Chapter 6 will illustrate, the institutional disadvantages of the schools migrant children are enrolled in, migrant schools for example, further tie the hand of school administrators in many respects to manage their schools such as teacher recruitment, educational facilities and teachers' professional development resources.

In Model 3, I focus on regional effects upon migrant children's cognitive score, given China's very unbalanced regional policies in the post-reform era (Yang, 1991; Fan, 1992; 1995; 1997). The overall picture seems to suggest that migrant children benefit from moving to more economically prosperous areas, as reflected in the positive correlations between migrant children group and the eastern region ($b=0.13$, $p<0.05$), and between migrant children and the central region ($b=0.15$, $p>0.1$). Given that the dummy variables are merely crude measure of regional effect, it would be rather presumptive to draw any specific mechanisms at this stage. The tentative findings do resonate to some extent with previous studies on regional disparities of educational achievement in China (Jordan et al., 2014; Hannum and Huang, 2006). The full model incorporating all three sets of contextual variables leads to similar conclusions that support the school segregation thesis and modernization thesis, albeit with modification of effect sizes, as Model 4 displays.

5.4 Conclusion

In this chapter, based on a national representative survey in 2014 (CEPS), I examined migrant children's educational outcomes (i.e. cognitive test score and educational aspiration) in the context of multiple interlocking systems of inequality in post-reform China. By differentiating family types by *hukou* origin and by the different living arrangements necessitated by labor migration, this project avoided a prevalent methodological fallacy in existing literature in the research of migrant children's well-being--the lack of valid reference groups. So far, the empirical data and analyses allow me to conclude the following points.

At the individual level, I showed that in the case of cognitive score, migrant children significantly outperform their rural peers: the gap between them and those in non-migrant households stands at 0.07 standard deviation ($p < 0.05$) and between them and those left behind at 0.18 standard deviation ($p < 0.05$). This could be accounted by their higher family SES, better educational resources and parental aspirations, while the slightly strained mother-child relationship seems to have negative effect upon their performance. However, in the case of educational aspiration, migrant children do not report significantly higher aspirations than their peers living at hometowns do. In other words, the better family conditions that promote their cognitive skills do not seem to directly translate into their higher achievement goals. Combining these two indicators, we observe an obvious paradox. Moving to or/and living in another place other than their *hukou* registration, presumably a more prosperous environment, seems to be associated with migrant children's improved cognitive ability. This same process does not lift their future aspirations to the same extent. However, when we shift the comparative lens to bring urban-rural differentials into the picture, there leaves limited room for a grandeur optimism. In either cognitive test or educational expectation, the gaps between urban-*hukou* teenagers and all rural-*hukou* groups, including migrants, are glaring and enduring, which could not be fully explained by blocks of family SES and other related variables.

Further analysis of cognitive score under a multilevel framework reveals a more complex situation. After controlling for school-level average score (variance component partition in baseline model show that inter-school variation accounts for 24% of total variation in students' cognitive score), the “surprising” twist becomes that the differences in test performance between three groups of rural teenagers are completely wiped out, but the urban advantage remains strong until school organization process and regional effects are accounted for ($p < 0.05$ in Model 3). This highlights the significance of an ecological approach in deciphering educational inequalities in contemporary China that incorporates feedback from multiple contexts such as family, school and regional development and processes in adolescents' schooling experiences (Bronfenbrenner 1979).

Cross-level interaction terms between migrant children group and contextual factors reveal a nuanced picture. On the one hand, migrant children enjoy comparatively favorable school environment in urban areas, relative to their peers staying in rural schools. However, they encounter persistent barriers to access high quality education as migrants. Instead, they are more likely to be channeled to low-ranking and poorly managed schools that does not provide an optimal academic environment. On the other hand, the move of their families to economic hubs along eastern coast areas seems to benefits their cognitive scores, which might be related to better educational infrastructure in these areas.

Limitations. While the quantitative methods allow me to unravel a series of complicated results concerning how multiple contexts in migrant children's life affect their education achievement, I am also cognizant of its limitations.

First, the strength of this quantitative analysis lies in its multilevel framework to incorporate multiple layers of social structure, presentation of valid and different reference

groups and exploration of both objective and subjective educational measures, which allows insights of ‘population heterogeneity’ (Xie, 2007). However, as identified in Chapter 3, in the study of Chinese rural migrant children’s wellbeing, it is important to disentangle two intertwining effects—the effect of urban-rural divide which is a unique problem in the Chinese context given the nation’s developmental contours and the migration effect which has been widely documented in international migration studies. A limitation with the CEPS data is the lack of sufficient information on migration effects, such as migration-induced network disruption (Hagan et al. 1996) and acculturation in destinations (Zhou 1997b). In this analysis, I accounted for family social capital that is compromised as a result of migration, which yielded meaningful findings, albeit insufficient.

Moreover, the nature of cross-sectional data precludes analysis of temporality. For example, this study could not address the transition among different family living arrangements over a longer period of time, such as the practice of circular migration which is found to be a prevailing family strategy to maintain “flexible work, flexible household” in China (Fan, 2009), or ‘relayed migration’ (Sung, 1987) in which process families take years to complete the migration and realize reunion in their host culture or community. This lack of account for the temporality in migrants’ life course and family cycles in the analysis might lead to biased conclusions.

Third, while the quantitative analysis in this chapter produces compelling evidence of the relationship between an ecology of structure and migrant children’s educational outcomes, it leaves important questions unanswered, particularly those pertaining to “the dynamics of meaning-making and boundary construction” (Levitt, 2005) during the social process of migration. For example, how do we reconcile the seemingly contradictory outcomes between migrant children’s significant higher cognitive score and leveled educational aspiration in comparison to their peers living in home villages? How do families and schools negotiate with

institutional constraints and cultural expectations to affect migrant children's educational chances and experiences?

In the following two qualitative chapters, I address these issues by analyzing rich field data of 23 rural-*hukou* families in two schools located respectively in Lake County and Shenzhen. By tapping into informants' narratives and life history, I flesh out main findings developed in this chapter and bring out the human agency that previous research on migrant children's education did not sufficiently address. I demonstrate that research delving into the dynamic interplay between structural constraints and the agency social actors exercise to cope with their specific conditions enables the researcher to "grasp history and biography and the relations between the two within society" (Mills, 1959:6).

Figure 5.1 Conceptual framework

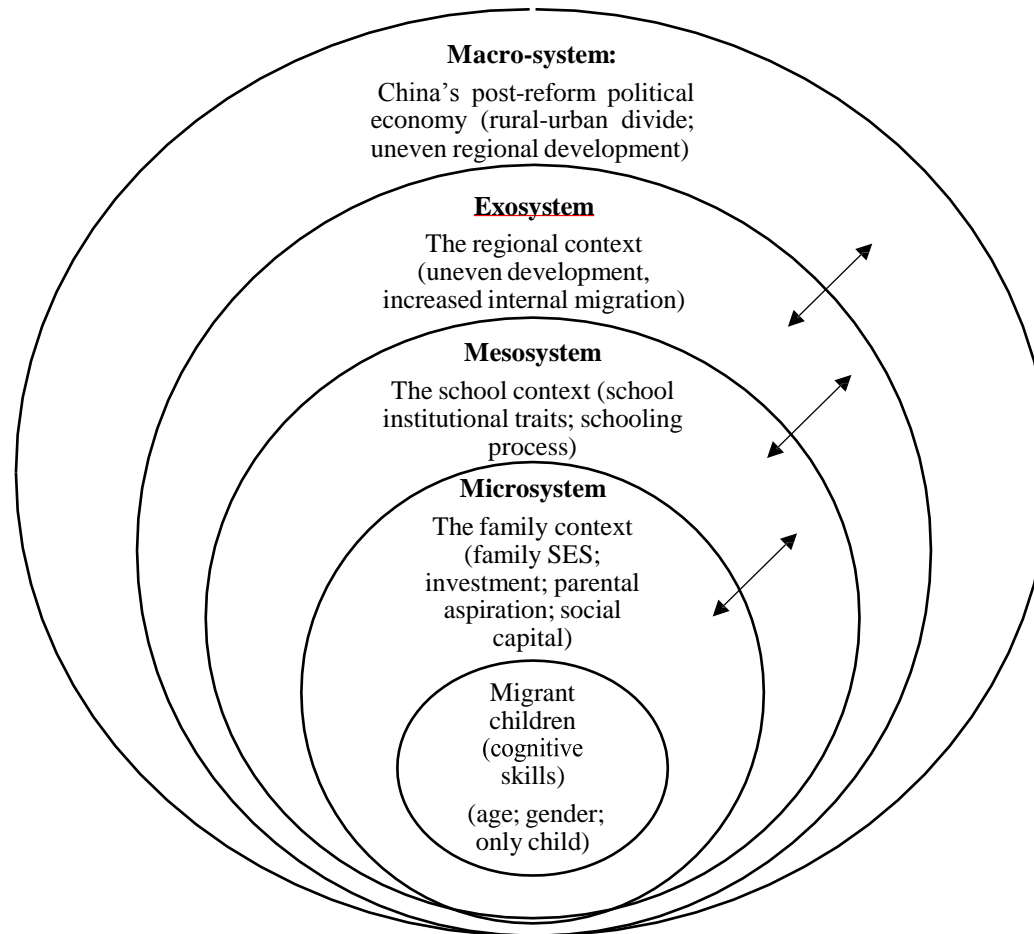


Table 5.1 Summary statistics of all variables (unweighted)

| | Distribution | |
|----------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------|-------------|
| Level 1 variables | N | Mean (S.D) |
| DVs | | |
| Cognitive score (st.) | 16410 | 0.00 (0.86) |
| Ed expectation (years) | 16275 | 16.24(3.62) |
| IVs | | |
| Hukou-residence-migration status | 16410 | |
| Urban non-migrant | 6057 | 0.37(0.48) |
| Rural migrant | 1893 | 0.12(0.32) |
| Rural non-migrant | 5961 | 0.36(0.48) |
| Rural left-behind | 2499 | 0.15(0.36) |
| Parental educational attainment (years) | 16381 | 10.60(2.95) |
| Family economic conditions | 16366 | |
| Below average | 3514 | 0.21(0.41) |
| Average | 11916 | 0.73(0.44) |
| Above average | 936 | 0.06(0.23) |
| With independent working desk (1=yes) | 16097 | 0.79(0.41) |
| How many books at home (1=L, 5=H) | 16369 | 3.13(1.20) |
| Parental educational expectation (years) | 16368 | 16.88(3.16) |
| Mother-child closeness (1=L, 3=H) | 16340 | 2.72(0.49) |
| Demographic controls | | |
| age (range: 12-18) | 16410 | 14.52(1.24) |
| male (1=yes) | 16410 | 0.51(0.50) |
| Only child (1=yes) | 16410 | 0.42(0.49) |
| Level 2 variables | | |
| School location: | 112 | |
| Urban center | 42 | 0.38(0.05) |
| Urban-rural fringes | 29 | 0.25(0.04) |
| Rural areas | 41 | 0.37(0.05) |
| Whether is a public school (1=yes) | 112 | 0.93 (0.02) |
| School ranking (range:1-5) | 112 | 3.88(0.82) |
| School academic climate(1=L, 3=H) (homeroom teacher report) | 112 | 2.55(0.61) |
| School-family meeting last semester (1=0, 4=more than 5 times) | 108 | 2.73(0.62) |

| | | |
|--------------------------|-----|------------|
| Region (dummy variables) | 112 | |
| Eastern | 68 | 0.54(0.50) |
| Central | 20 | 0.22(0.41) |
| Western | 24 | 0.24(0.43) |

Table 5.2 Baseline models for 2-level analysis

| | Cognitive scores | Ed. Expectations (years) |
|---------------------------------|-----------------------------|-----------------------------|
| Fixed effects | | |
| Intercepts | 0.015 (0.04) | 16.187 (0.102) |
| Random effect variances | | |
| Var (school) | 0.179 (0.025) | 1.061 (0.155) |
| Var (residual) | 0.568 (0.006) | 12.031 (0.129) |
| Variance partition (ICC) | | |
| School effect | 23.9% | 8% |
| LR test | LR chi2(1)=3763.88; p<0.001 | LR chi2(1)=1088.43; p<0.001 |

Figure 5.2 Caterpillar plot of school effects upon students' cognitive score (95% confidence intervals)

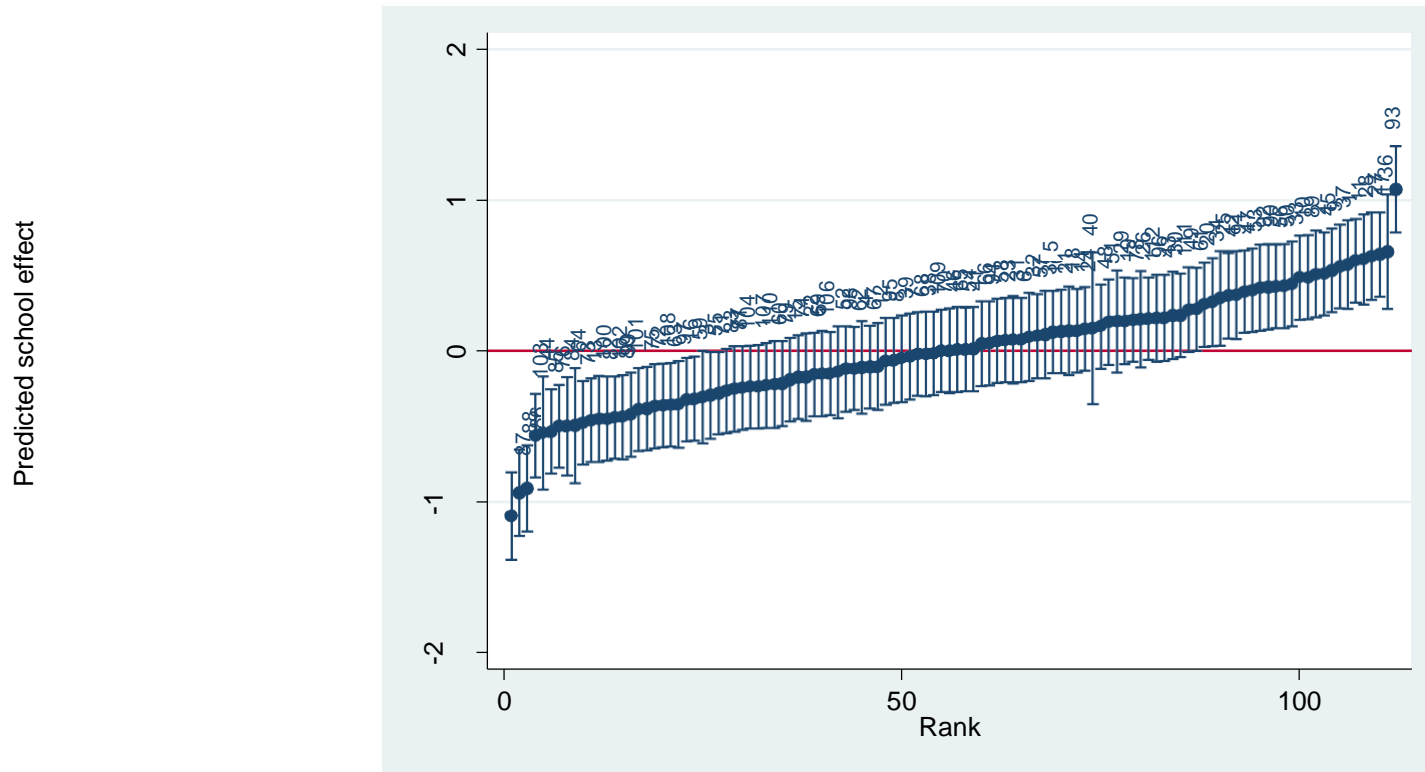


Table 5.3 Bivariate comparison of level-1 variables by household type (unweighted)³¹

| | All respondents | | Urban non-mig. | Rural mig. | Rural non-mig. | Rural LB |
|-----------------------------------------------|-----------------|-------------|----------------|--------------|----------------|----------------|
| | N | Mean | Mean (S.D) | Mean (S.D) | Mean (S.D) | Mean (S.D) |
| Dependent variables | | | | | | |
| Cognitive score (st.) | 16410 | 0.00 (0.86) | 0.23(0.89) | -0.05(0.85)a | -0.12(0.82)bd | -0.23(0.77)cef |
| Child's ed aspiration (years) | 16275 | 16.24(3.62) | 16.89(3.58) | 15.93(3.61)a | 15.86(3.61)b | 15.81(3.74)c |
| Independent variables | | | | | | |
| Family economic conditions | 16366 | | | | | |
| Poor | 3514 | 0.21(0.41) | 0.11(0.31) | 0.19(0.39)a | 0.27(0.44)bd | 0.36(0.49)cef |
| Average | 11916 | 0.73(0.44) | 0.81(0.39) | 0.76(0.42)a | 0.68(0.46)bd | 0.61(0.48)cef |
| Rich | 936 | 0.06(0.23) | 0.08(0.27) | 0.05(0.21)a | 0.05(0.21)b | 0.03(0.17)cf |
| Parental educational attainment (years) | 16381 | 10.60(2.95) | 12.49(3.13) | 9.64(2.30)a | 9.57(2.15)b | 9.19(2.14)cef |
| With independent working desk (1=yes) | 16097 | 0.79(0.41) | 0.92(0.27) | 0.82(0.39)a | 0.73(0.44)bd | 0.58(0.49)cef |
| How many books at home (1=L, 5=H) | 16369 | 3.13(1.20) | 3.64(1.11) | 3.16(1.12)a | 2.86(1.14)bd | 2.53(1.13)cef |
| Parental edu. aspiration for children (years) | 16368 | 16.88(3.16) | 17.32(2.86) | 16.77(3.24)a | 16.64(3.28)b | 16.55(3.41)c |
| Mother-child closeness (1=L, 3=H) | 16340 | 2.72(0.49) | 2.75(0.46) | 2.65(0.52)a | 2.75(0.46)d | 2.60(0.59)cef |
| Demographic controls | | | | | | |
| age (range: 12-18) | 16410 | 14.52(1.24) | 14.38(1.17) | 14.44(1.25) | 14.67(1.26)bd | 14.74 (1.34)ce |
| male (1=yes) | 16410 | 0.51(0.50) | 0.50(0.50) | 0.53(0.51) | 0.51(0.50) | 0.54(0.50) |
| Only child (1=yes) | 16410 | 0.42(0.49) | 0.69(0.46) | 0.25(0.43)a | 0.29(0.45)bd | 0.21(0.40)cef |

³¹ **Scheffe's test results (significant at the 95% confidence level):**

a: urban & rural migrant are different; b: urban & rural 2-parent are different; c: urban & rural left- behind are different; d: rural migrant & rural 2-parent are different; e: rural migrant & rural left- behind are different; f: rural 2-parent & rural left-behind are different

Table 5.4 Regression models for cognitive scores on level-1 variables (standardized coefficients)³²

| | (1) | (2) | (3) | (4) | (5) | (6) | (7) |
|------------------------------------------|--------------------|--------------------|--------------------|--------------------|--------------------|--------------------|--------------------|
| Household type (ref.= rural non-migrant) | | | | | | | |
| Urban non-migrant | 0.20*** (0.02) | 0.12*** (0.02) | 0.05*** (0.02) | 0.07*** (0.02) | 0.11*** (0.02) | 0.12*** (0.02) | 0.03*** (0.02) |
| Rural migrant | 0.03*** (0.02) | 0.02*** (0.02) | 0.02* (0.02) | 0.00 (0.02) | 0.02** (0.02) | 0.03*** (0.02) | 0.00 (0.02) |
| Rural left-behind | -0.05*** (0.02) | -0.03*** (0.02) | -0.02*** (0.02) | -0.01 (0.02) | -0.03*** (0.02) | -0.03*** (0.02) | -0.01 (0.02) |
| Male (1=yes) | | -0.02*** (0.01) | -0.02** (0.01) | -0.01 (0.01) | -0.01 (0.01) | -0.02*** (0.01) | -0.00 (0.01) |
| Age (range:12-18) | | -0.12*** (0.01) | -0.10*** (0.01) | -0.09*** (0.01) | -0.09*** (0.01) | -0.11*** (0.01) | -0.07*** (0.01) |
| Only child (1=yes) | | 0.16*** (0.01) | 0.11*** (0.01) | 0.12*** (0.01) | 0.15*** (0.01) | 0.16*** (0.01) | 0.09*** (0.01) |
| Parental ed. attainment (years) | | | 0.17*** (0.00) | | | | 0.10*** (0.00) |
| Family economic conditions (ref.=poor) | | | | | | | |
| Average | | | 0.08*** (0.02) | | | | 0.06*** (0.02) |
| Above average | | | 0.06*** (0.03) | | | | 0.04*** (0.03) |
| With independent working desk (1=yes) | | | | 0.08*** (0.02) | | | 0.06*** (0.02) |
| Numbers of books at home (1=L, 5=H) | | | | 0.17*** (0.01) | | | 0.12*** (0.01) |
| Parents' ed. Expectations (years) | | | | | 0.18*** (0.00) | | 0.16*** (0.00) |
| Mother-child closeness (1=L, 3=H) | | | | | | 0.04*** (0.01) | 0.00 (0.01) |
| Constant | -0.12*** (0.01) | 0.99*** (0.08) | 0.22*** (0.08) | 0.31*** (0.08) | -0.11 (0.09) | 0.79*** (0.09) | -0.88*** (0.10) |
| Observations | 16,410 | 16,089 | 16,025 | 15,752 | 15,545 | 16,022 | 15,155 |
| R-squared | 0.04 | 0.08 | 0.11 | 0.12 | 0.12 | 0.08 | 0.15 |

³² Note: Standard errors in parentheses, results are significant at following levels: *** p<0.01, ** p<0.05, * p<0.1. So are the cases in Tables 5.5-5.8.

Table 5.5 Regression models for self-reported educational expectation on level-1 variables (standardized coefficients)

| | (1) | (2) | (3) | (4) | (5) | (6) | (7) |
|------------------------------------------|--------------------|--------------------|--------------------|--------------------|--------------------|--------------------|--------------------|
| Household type (ref.= rural non-migrant) | | | | | | | |
| Urban non-migrant | 0.14*** (0.07) | 0.10*** (0.07) | 0.03*** (0.07) | 0.06*** (0.07) | 0.07*** (0.06) | 0.10*** (0.07) | 0.02* (0.07) |
| Rural migrant | 0.01 (0.09) | 0.00 (0.09) | 0.00 (0.09) | -0.01 (0.09) | 0.00 (0.08) | 0.01 (0.09) | -0.00 (0.08) |
| Rural left-behind | -0.00 (0.09) | 0.01 (0.09) | 0.01 (0.08) | 0.02*** (0.09) | 0.01 (0.08) | 0.02** (0.09) | 0.03*** (0.08) |
| Male (1=yes) | | -0.10*** (0.06) | -0.10*** (0.06) | -0.09*** (0.06) | -0.08*** (0.05) | -0.10*** (0.06) | -0.08*** (0.05) |
| Age (range:12-18) | | -0.15*** (0.02) | -0.13*** (0.02) | -0.13*** (0.02) | -0.08*** (0.02) | -0.14*** (0.02) | -0.06*** (0.02) |
| Only child (1=yes) | | 0.06*** (0.06) | 0.01 (0.06) | 0.02** (0.06) | 0.04*** (0.06) | 0.05*** (0.06) | -0.00 (0.06) |
| Parental ed. attainment (years) | | | 0.19*** (0.01) | | | | 0.08*** (0.01) |
| Family economic conditions (ref.=poor) | | | | | | | |
| Average | | | -0.01 (0.07) | | | | -0.01 (0.06) |
| Above average | | | 0.00 (0.13) | | | | -0.01 (0.12) |
| With independent working desk (1=yes) | | | | 0.01* (0.08) | | | 0.00 (0.07) |
| Numbers of books at home (1=L, 5=H) | | | | 0.19*** (0.03) | | | 0.11*** (0.02) |
| Parents' ed. Expectations (years) | | | | | 0.46*** (0.01) | | 0.43*** (0.01) |
| Mother-child closeness (1=L, 3=H) | | | | | | 0.11*** (0.06) | 0.06*** (0.05) |
| Constant | 15.86*** (0.05) | 22.35*** (0.34) | 19.34*** (0.36) | 19.79*** (0.35) | 10.78*** (0.35) | 19.66*** (0.38) | 7.46*** (0.40) |
| Observations | 16,275 | 15,956 | 15,900 | 15,630 | 15,433 | 15,904 | 15,056 |
| R-squared | 0.02 | 0.05 | 0.08 | 0.09 | 0.26 | 0.07 | 0.28 |

Table 5.6 Multilevel models for cognitive test score: direct effects models

| | (1) | (2) | (3) | (4) | (5) |
|---------------------------------------------------|-------------------|--------------------|--------------------|--------------------|--------------------|
| Level 1: individual/family | | | | | |
| Family structure (ref.= rural non-mig.) | | | | | |
| Urban non-mig | 0.10*** (0.02) | 0.04** (0.02) | 0.04** (0.02) | 0.03 (0.02) | 0.02 (0.02) |
| Rural migrant | 0.00 (0.02) | -0.01 (0.02) | -0.02 (0.02) | -0.02 (0.02) | -0.02 (0.02) |
| Rural left-behind | 0.00 (0.02) | 0.01 (0.02) | 0.01 (0.02) | 0.02 (0.02) | 0.02 (0.02) |
| Male (1=yes) | | 0.01 (0.01) | 0.01 (0.01) | 0.01 (0.01) | 0.01 (0.01) |
| Age (range:12-18) | | -0.02*** (0.01) | -0.02*** (0.01) | -0.02*** (0.01) | -0.02*** (0.01) |
| Only child (1=yes) | | 0.02 (0.02) | 0.02 (0.02) | 0.01 (0.02) | 0.01 (0.02) |
| Parental edu. attainment (years) | | 0.02*** (0.00) | 0.02*** (0.00) | 0.02*** (0.00) | 0.02*** (0.00) |
| Self-rated family economic condition (ref.= poor) | | | | | |
| Average | | 0.05*** (0.02) | 0.05*** (0.02) | 0.05*** (0.02) | 0.05*** (0.02) |
| Above average | | 0.03 (0.03) | 0.03 (0.03) | 0.04 (0.03) | 0.04 (0.03) |
| With an independent working desk (1=yes) | | 0.03 (0.02) | 0.02 (0.02) | 0.01 (0.02) | 0.01 (0.02) |
| Books at home (1=few, 5=large amount) | | 0.05*** (0.01) | 0.05*** (0.01) | 0.05*** (0.01) | 0.05*** (0.01) |
| Parental edu. aspiration (years) | | 0.04*** (0.00) | 0.04*** (0.00) | 0.04*** (0.00) | 0.04*** (0.00) |
| Closeness with mother (1=L, 3=H) | | 0.02 (0.01) | 0.02 (0.01) | 0.02* (0.01) | 0.02* (0.01) |
| Intercept | -0.02 (0.04) | -0.89*** (0.10) | -1.61*** (0.20) | -2.02*** (0.21) | -2.04*** (0.22) |
| Level 2: school | | | | | |
| School ranking (range:1-5) | | | 0.10*** (0.04) | 0.12*** (0.03) | 0.14*** (0.03) |

| | | | | | |
|-------------------------------------------------------------------|--------|--------|---------|---------|---------|
| School location (ref.=rural areas) | | | | | |
| Urban centers | | | 0.25*** | 0.18*** | 0.15** |
| | | | (0.07) | (0.07) | (0.07) |
| Urban-rural fringes | | | 0.11 | -0.01 | -0.01 |
| | | | (0.07) | (0.07) | (0.07) |
| Public school (1=yes) | | | 0.23** | 0.09 | 0.07 |
| | | | (0.11) | (0.10) | (0.10) |
| School academic climate (1=L, 3=H) | | | | 0.04** | 0.04** |
| | | | | (0.01) | (0.02) |
| School-parent meeting last semester (1=0, 4=more than 5 times) | | | | 0.18*** | 0.14*** |
| | | | | (0.04) | (0.05) |
| Region (ref.=western counties) | | | | | |
| East | | | | | 0.13* |
| | | | | | (0.07) |
| Centre | | | | | 0.06 |
| | | | | | (0.08) |
| ICC | 0.225 | 0.164 | 0.128 | 0.107 | 0.103 |
| Observations | 16,410 | 15,155 | 15,155 | 14,277 | 14,277 |
| Number of groups | 112 | 112 | 112 | 108 | 108 |

Table 5.7 School context for different adolescent groups

| School variables | Urban non-mig | Rural migrant. | Rural non-mig | Rural left-behind |
|-------------------------------------|----------------------|-----------------------|----------------------|--------------------------|
| School ranking (range:1-5) | 4.18(0.01) | 3.60(0.02) | 3.87(0.01) | 3.85(0.02) |
| School location | | | | |
| Urban centers | 0.62 (0.01) | 0.37 (0.01) | 0.20 (0.01) | 0.15 (0.01) |
| Urban-rural fringes | 0.21 (0.01) | 0.35 (0.01) | 0.26 (0.01) | 0.24 (0.01) |
| Rural | 0.17(0.00) | 0.28(0.01) | 0.54(0.01) | 0.62(0.01) |
| Public school (1=yes) | 0.98(0.00) | 0.88(0.01) | 0.92(0.00) | 0.87(0.01) |
| School academic climate (range:1-3) | 2.70(0.54) | 2.42(0.70) | 2.59(0.60) | 2.54(0.64) |
| School-parent meeting (1=L, 4=H) | 2.81(0.56) | 2.85(0.61) | 2.59(0.57) | 2.33(0.51) |

Figure 5.3 Distribution of child groups by region

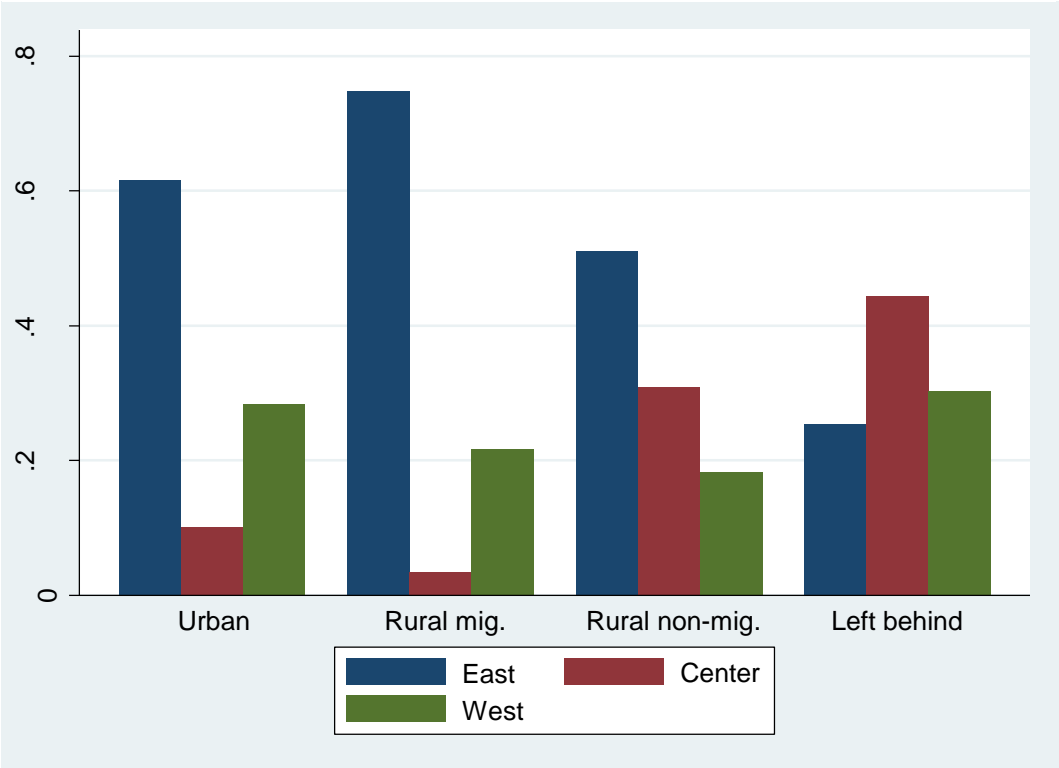


Table 5.8 MLM models of interaction effects

| | (1) | (2) | (3) | (4) |
|---------------------------------------------------|--------------------|--------------------|--------------------|--------------------|
| Level 1: individual/family | | | | |
| Family structure (ref.= rural non-mig.) | | | | |
| Urban non-mig | 0.03 (0.02) | 0.03 (0.02) | 0.03 (0.02) | 0.03 (0.02) |
| Rural migrant | 0.32** (0.13) | 0.16 (0.14) | -0.14** (0.07) | 0.26 (0.18) |
| Rural left-behind | 0.02 (0.02) | 0.02 (0.02) | 0.02 (0.02) | 0.02 (0.02) |
| Male (1=yes) | 0.01 (0.01) | 0.01 (0.01) | 0.01 (0.01) | 0.01 (0.01) |
| Age (range:12-18) | -0.02*** (0.01) | -0.02*** (0.01) | -0.02*** (0.01) | -0.02*** (0.01) |
| Only child (1=yes) | 0.01 (0.02) | 0.01 (0.02) | 0.01 (0.02) | 0.01 (0.02) |
| Parental edu. attainment (years) | 0.02*** (0.00) | 0.02*** (0.00) | 0.02*** (0.00) | 0.02*** (0.00) |
| Self-rated family economic condition (ref.= poor) | | | | |
| Average | 0.05*** (0.02) | 0.05*** (0.02) | 0.05*** (0.02) | 0.05*** (0.02) |
| Above average | 0.04 (0.03) | 0.04 (0.03) | 0.04 (0.03) | 0.04 (0.03) |
| With an independent working desk (1=yes) | 0.02 (0.02) | 0.01 (0.02) | 0.01 (0.02) | 0.02 (0.02) |
| Books at home (1=few, 5=large amount) | 0.05*** (0.01) | 0.05*** (0.01) | 0.05*** (0.01) | 0.05*** (0.01) |
| Parental edu. aspiration (years) | 0.04*** (0.00) | 0.04*** (0.00) | 0.04*** (0.00) | 0.04*** (0.00) |
| Closeness with mother (1=L, 3=H) | 0.02 (0.01) | 0.02 (0.01) | 0.02 (0.01) | 0.02 (0.01) |
| Intercept | -2.14*** (0.22) | -2.11*** (0.22) | -2.05*** (0.22) | -2.14*** (0.22) |
| Level 2: school | | | | |
| School ranking (range:1-5) | 0.14*** (0.03) | 0.13*** (0.03) | 0.13*** (0.03) | 0.15*** (0.04) |

| | | | | |
|-------------------------------------------------------------------|---------|---------|---------|---------|
| School location (ref.=rural areas) | | | | |
| Urban centers | 0.16** | 0.16** | 0.16** | 0.15** |
| | (0.07) | (0.07) | (0.07) | (0.08) |
| Urban-rural fringes | 0.00 | -0.01 | -0.01 | -0.00 |
| | (0.07) | (0.07) | (0.07) | (0.07) |
| Public school (1=yes) | 0.12 | 0.11 | 0.09 | 0.13 |
| | (0.10) | (0.10) | (0.10) | (0.11) |
| School academic climate (1=L, 3=H) | 0.05*** | 0.06*** | 0.05*** | 0.05*** |
| | (0.01) | (0.02) | (0.01) | (0.02) |
| School-parent meeting last semester (1=0, 4=more than 5 times) | 0.14*** | 0.14*** | 0.14*** | 0.13** |
| | (0.05) | (0.05) | (0.05) | (0.05) |
| Region (ref.=western counties) | | | | |
| East | 0.12* | 0.11* | 0.10 | 0.11 |
| | (0.07) | (0.07) | (0.07) | (0.07) |
| Centre | 0.06 | 0.06 | 0.05 | 0.05 |
| | (0.08) | (0.08) | (0.08) | (0.09) |
| Cross-level interactions | | | | |
| Migrant child X school rank | -0.07** | | | -0.06* |
| | (0.03) | | | (0.03) |
| Migrant child X school in urban centers | -0.03 | | | -0.00 |
| | (0.06) | | | (0.07) |
| Migrant child X school in rural-urban fringes | -0.08 | | | -0.08 |
| | (0.06) | | | (0.06) |
| Migrant child X public school | -0.03 | | | -0.07 |
| | (0.08) | | | (0.09) |
| Migrant child X school academic climate | | -0.08** | | -0.05 |
| | | (0.03) | | (0.04) |
| Migrant child X school-parent meetings | | 0.01 | | 0.02 |
| | | (0.04) | | (0.04) |
| Migrant child X East China | | | 0.13** | 0.12* |
| | | | (0.06) | (0.07) |
| Migrant child X Central China | | | 0.15 | 0.21* |
| | | | (0.12) | (0.13) |
| ICC | 0.103 | 0.105 | 0.104 | 0.106 |
| Observations | 14,541 | 14,541 | 14,541 | 14,541 |
| Number of groups | 108 | 108 | 108 | 108 |

CHAPTER SIX ONE SYSTEM, TWO TRACKS: THE SCHOOL CONTEXT AND MIGRANT CHILDREN'S EDUCATION

As the quantitative analysis in Chapter 5 presented, the combination of a hierarchical educational system and divergent school organizational features creates coexisting opportunities and barriers for the huge population of rural migrant children after their move to urban areas. In this chapter, I attempt to explicate how China's education administration system which is characterized by "centralized decentralization" preserves, or to a great extent, further exacerbates existing inequalities due to school segregation in the post-reform era. The data are drawn from my field study in two schools in two field sites, i.e. Bright School and Eastern Bay School³³, with 23 rural migrant adolescents and their families. Through examining interview data with school staff, administrators and migrant students, observational data as well as policy documents, I present a localized and contextualized analysis of the school organizational process with theoretical insights from neo-institutionalism on educational organizations (Meyer and Rowan 1977; DiMaggio and Powell 1983) as well as from *the effective school* literature by education researchers (Rutter et al., 1979; Tylor, 1988; Sammons et al., 1995; Teddlie and Reynolds, 2000; Townsend, 2007). Moreover, to answer Dimaggio's (1988) call of bringing agency back in institutional analysis, I conceptualize school principals as key players in negotiating institutional support and organizational processes in these two schools.

As the chapter unfolds, I have documented two divergent school regimes, namely *school as competitor* and *school as charity organization*, in response to the perceived ranking in local educational systems, available educational resources, as well as educational

³³ Comparing Bright School and Eastern Bay School runs the risk of being accused of sampling bias, as neither school could be considered "typical" or "representative" in statistical sense. To clarify it, I use these two schools as illustrative cases which could inform future studies using more rigorous sampling strategies. Further, if evaluating the extent of deviation of these two schools from "representative" cases, I would consider that both are sampled in the same direction: they are in more favorable conditions than their comparable average schools. While Bright School garners enormous support from the county government in response to citizens' complaints of lack of school placements due to influx of migrant children in the city, Eastern Bay's location in a middle-class neighborhood with rich community resources gives it an edge in many respects over other migrant schools in less prosperous communities in outskirt districts such as Long Hua and Long Gang in Shenzhen.

philosophies of key actors in administrative positions, which in turn generates different school cultures for students' engagement. By capitalizing on multiple sources and types of data with a "thick description" (Geertz 1973) of the two schools as contexts for migrant children's educational development, this chapter presents a holistic and nuanced picture of migrant children's schooling processes which complements, triangulates and develops the arguments in Chapter 5.

This chapter is organized as follows. I first sketch an analysis framework on school organization based on theoretical threads from new institutionalism. This is followed by a brief introduction to two major aspects of China's institutional context for compulsory education after reform. The next section draws on empirical data collected from field research to illustrate the organizational process of two different schools for migrant children's education in line with the institutional environment depicted in the earlier section, which leads to two emerging school regimes. The "thick description" covers their historical profiles, educational objectives, and many other dimensions of the emerging school cultures, such as school climate, class organization, teacher-student bond and peer interactions. I then conclude the chapter with a discussion of major findings.

6.1 School organization: an institutional perspective

As summarized in Chapter 3, scholars have paid increasing attention to the effect of school segregation upon Chinese migrant children's educational outcomes (Han, 2001a; 2001b; Kwong, 2004; Wang, 2008; Goodburn, 2009; Wang and Holland, 2011; Chen and Feng, 2013; Lu and Zhou, 2013; Lai et al., 2014; Xiong, 2015). This body of literature records considerable disadvantages of migrant schools as a context for child development through either impressionist descriptions which lack valid reference groups or crude achievement gaps in the form of development indices. Whichever is the case, the social processes of how different types

of schools along the institutional hierarchy organize school life remain a “black box”. In the analysis ahead, I combine theoretical insights from new institutionalism on educational organizations (Meyer and Rowan 1977; DiMaggio and Powell 1983) with those from *the effective school* literature by education researchers (Rutter et al., 1979; Tylor, 1988; Sammons et al., 1995; Teddlie and Reynolds, 2000; Townsend, 2007) in an attempt to open the “black box”.

Organizations of any kind do not exist in a vacuum. For theorists of new institutionalism, the key to understanding the inner dynamics of an organization lies in the analysis of the relationship between the organization and its institutional environment (Meyer and Rowan 1977; DiMaggio and Powell 1983). The underlying logic goes that for an organization to survive in particular institutional environments, it needs to adopt well-established structures, values, practices and rules to gain legitimacy (Meyer and Rowan 1977; Meyer and Scott 1983; Scott 1988). Usually the legitimacy comes from “from those power-conferring sources outside organizations boundaries” (Zhou 1991:9). This logic is simple, but it is a significant step beyond the Weberian thesis of bureaucratization in the form of formal rationality as a result of economic modernization (Weber 1968).

Following this line of research, I attempt an institutional analysis of school organization in contemporary China, with particular attention to its potential influences upon migrant children’s education. As the conceptual framework in Figure 6.1 shows, I bring two major institutional factors in the analysis, i.e. the system of “centralized decentralization” and the principal accountability system. Through the two cases of Bright School and Eastern Bay School, I demonstrate how these institutional factors, in combination of China’s post-reform school hierarchy, are played out in shaping different patterns of school life that migrant children are accommodated with. My analysis of school life on a wide range of domains, such as school

climate, teacher-student bond and family-school partnership, is based on a large body of literature on effective schools with sufficient empirical support (Rutter et al., 1979; Tylor, 1988; Sammons et al., 1995; Teddlie and Reynolds, 2000; Townsend, 2007).

6.2 Institutional background of China's post-reform compulsory education

The Chinese education administration system after reform is best described as a system of “centralized decentralization” where schools are delegated to administer and implement education policies with certain discretionary power while being evaluated based on centrally imposed curriculum requirements and a standardized testing system (Chan and Wang, 2009). To facilitate the implementation of such a “centralized decentralization” system, a new “school principal accountability system” has been established, which designates school principals full responsibility in managing their schools, from carrying out policy initiatives from above, controlling the school budget to supervising teaching in the schools (Liu, 2013; He, 2009; Feng, 2003). In combination with a hierarchical way of distributing resources which is biased against rural, *minban* and low-ranking schools (see Section 2.3 in Chapter 2 for details), it would be expected that existing institutional inequalities would be reproduced in schools and profoundly shape divergent school cultures, which further create different educational experiences for migrant children in these institutions.

6.2.1 Education reform in China: “centralized decentralization”

Since reform, efficiency in marketization has been promoted as the dominant theme through urban-biased and region-biased social policies, which is manifested in the late paramount leader Deng Xiaoping's well-known slogan “let a small group get rich first” (*rang yixiaobufen ren xian fu qilai*³⁴). Likewise, in education, decentralization has been pursued to

³⁴ Deng first expressed such an opinion in 1985 in his meeting with a delegate of entrepreneurs from America and repeated this in various other occasions. The official interpretation is that it is a pro-market gesture to encourage entrepreneurship, competition and a rewarding system based on economic incentives, which could have a demonstration effect for the society at large. See <http://cpc.people.com.cn/GB/34136/2569304.html>, accessed on March 30, 2016.

improve efficiency in implementation of education policies and spur regional competition (Chan and Wang, 2009; Hawkins, 2006; Ngok, 2007). This trend of marketization and decentralization is reflected in two government documents, namely *the Decision of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of China on the Reform of the Educational Structure* issued in May 1985 (hereafter referred to as “the 1985 Decision”) and *the Program for Education Reform and Development in China* in 1993 (hereafter “the 1993 Program”) (c.f. Ngok, 2007).

This leads to a series of adjustments in the educational system. First, a decentralized financial scheme holds local governments accountable for funding primary and secondary schools. Schools are encouraged to diversify channels of fund raising to include not only government budgetary appropriation but also donations from individuals, communities, local enterprises and other social organizations, tuition fees as well as income from school-run enterprises. Second, education administration also sees a devolution to local administrative units under a framework where the Ministry of Education (MOE) provides macro-regulation and local governments and education bureaus implement national policies to accommodate local conditions. Moreover, a hierarchical curriculum management system consisting of the central government, provinces and schools has been established to allow some autonomy and experimentation for localized curriculum. Lastly, a policy of diversifying text compilation and publication has been adopted to enrich the textbook choices in the market (Qi, 2011:27-31).

Despite the considerable retreat of the central state in this trend of decentralization in the post-reform China, as Qi argues, it does not relinquish its authority in education governance by various means. Though administration and implementation of educational policies have been localized, a national system of education inspection is developed to inspect and evaluate individual schools based on a set of centrally imposed curriculum requirements and standardized testing system (2011:32-34). For example, regardless of school type and location, the most important goal for schools in basic education level is to train students through

progression to sit in the high-stake College Entrance Examination or *gaokao*. With an ancient pedigree stretching back to imperial examinations in dynastic eras, the *gaokao* system in the People's Republic of China was first established in 1952 and resumed after the Cultural Revolution in 1977 and thereafter remains a test required for college enrollment (Zhang, 2016:7-10). It also shapes an examination-oriented educational system in which school progression from primary school on is largely determined by test scores. Schools are ranked based on students' performance in examinations, teachers are incentivized to tailor the teaching materials to examinations and students are indoctrinated to spend excessive time on examination preparation.

6.2.2 The principal accountability system (*xiaozhang fuzezhi*)

An important component of the decentralization of school administration is a principal accountability system that has been promoted since 1985. It was first put into implementation in 1993 and further legislated in the 1996 Education Law (Liu, 2013). The few studies point to Xiao's (1990) framework as the orthodox in introducing the principal accountability system in China, which states that principals take charge of all school-related affairs under the leadership of local educational bureau, while the party branch (*dangzhibu*) and the teacher/staff representative committee (*jiaogongdaibiao*) play a role of check-and-balance in school management. This system was developed as a critique of the lack of accountability of the party branch and lack of efficiency in educational bureaucracy in Maoist era (Feng, 2003). By granting principals more power while holding them accountable, this policy intends to develop school principals' leadership and create 'quality schools'. However, limited research on this topic has found that the implementation of this policy could be constrained by other contextual factors (Liu, 2013; He, 2009; Feng, 2003).

6.3 One system, two tracks: school context and migrant children's education

The following section delves into the school organizational process to examine how institutional environment affects migrant children's school life under the framework proposed earlier. To answer the call of Scott (2004) in bringing agency to institutional analysis, "to affirm their (varying) potential for reconstructing the rules, norms and beliefs that guide—but do not determine—their actions", I also investigate how the school principals and their leadership teams as active players negotiate institutional support, define and modify school missions to gain institutional legitimacy and garner resources in local communities.

6.3.1 Schools and missions

In this section, I first sketch general conditions of the two schools in discussion, i.e. Bright School in Lake County and Eastern Bay School in Shenzhen, including their histories, student compositions, local communities, funding resources and faculty profiles. I then proceed to delineate the school principals' initiatives to define the missions of their schools, build up administrative teams and cultivate school cultures.

Bright School. As Table 6.1 shows, Bright School, located in the western wing of the town center of Lake County, was established in 2012 with a total ¥170 million investment by the county government (subsidized by the provincial government) to ease the deficit of school placements due to steady flows of migrant students from village schools all over the county since the late 1990s. Local newspapers relished the advanced facilities in this school, including a library of 310,000 books, laboratory rooms for chemistry classes and computer rooms with a capacity of 340 students in class at one time. In the fall semester of 2014, the school enrolled 3512 students, ranging from 7th to 9th graders.

According to published information on the school website, Bright School recruits its students mainly through three channels: 1/3 are from neighborhood primary schools in the same

school district, 1/3 from random assignment by computer “lottery”³⁵ assignment and the rest 1/3 are selected from school recommendations³⁶. Despite the façade of equal opportunities, the admission process disproportionately screens out rural students. To increase the odds, a rural student has to move out of his/her village and live in the school district for at least 1 year (for the 1st condition), or attend any other urban school to be on the list of computer assignment (for the 2nd condition) or be a top student to get recommendations (for the 3rd condition). The following quote from a teacher with Bright School makes it clear.

“If you come from a rural school and with rural *hukou*, but you have the abilities (*you shili*) and can impress us, you can directly come to our school. Otherwise, if you’re just an average student from a rural school and with rural *hukou*, little chance.... So *hukou* restriction only applies to those from rural schools who are not top students. In other cases, if you are an average student with rural *hukou*, but you attended an urban primary school, you could still have a fair chance to enroll in our school either through school proximity allocation or computer assignment.”

As such, the mixed formula of admission which combines ‘sponsored mobility’ (school location and *hukou* status), ‘contest mobility’ (academic performance) (Turner, 1960) and even serendipity (random assignment) creates a system of ‘reasonable inequality’ where *hukou*-based and class-based exclusion is veiled by a discourse of individual competitiveness and luck.

Similarly, the recruitment of faculty in Bright School demonstrates that this school is “elite” enough to choose the best. Among the 170 teaching staff, over 60% are either dispatched from other urban middle schools by the local education bureau or promoted from experienced teachers in rural schools through an examination organized by the bureau³⁷. Many of those teachers from rural schools consider this a huge leap in their career. The following excerpt from a discussion with a former rural teacher reflects her boosted morale after the promotion.

³⁵ In mandarin, 电脑派位 (*diannaopaiwei*), it is adopted widely in cities across China as a way to promote equal access to good education, which theoretically ensures equal chances for all students in Lake County. However, in the case of Bright School, for example, students from rural schools are not on the list of this process.

³⁶ Daily conversation with schoolteachers revealed that a significant number of students were recruited through other channels than the three published on line, namely those with “connections” (*guanxi hu*) and those whose families could afford exorbitant sponsor fees.

³⁷ In my conversations with principals from two rural schools, they lamented on the “talent drain” in their schools due to extraction of their best teachers in this way. One pessimistically declared that “I have no hopes for rural schools”.

“First, I feel different now...more responsibilities. And I find a team, my colleagues and I share some common ideas of doing some projects. This could happen if we work together. Back in the rural schools, even if you wanted to do things, there was no support, could not mobilize resources in whichever way.”

Eastern Bay School. As mentioned in Chapter 4, the establishment of Eastern Bay School in Shenzhen in 1997 served largely an ideological purpose in politics revolving Hong Kong’s handover to mainland China: to take care of migrant children who were dispersed in unregulated “shack schools” which would pose a bad image for the socialist country. Despite the fact that local government (the local district office, *jiedaoban*) “ordered” that this school be opened, little substantial support was provided. First, as a *minban* school, its major source of funding was tuition fees collected from migrant families. It was only after 2005 when Shenzhen began to implement the “5+1” policy to selectively admit migrant children for free education (Zhang, 2012; Hao and Xiao, 2015) that Eastern Bay has received government subsidies to cover the tuitions for students who are eligible for fee exemption. At the time of my fieldwork in 2014, about 60% of the students were covered by government budget under the “5+1” scheme, though at a significantly lower rate than were their counterparts in local public schools³⁸. Moreover, in terms of school infrastructure and facilities, Eastern Bay did not have its own independent campus until 2004, as Principal Hu (pseudonym) who joined the school since 1997 recalled as below.

“(in 1997) we borrowed a shabby school building from a public school in this district...Our desks were also borrowed, even with the name of that school on. We saved every little money and tried to be frugal as much as possible. We asked our students and staff to turn off all electricity when no one was around. But in 2004, the school we ‘borrowed’ our space needed to renovate the building and we once again became homeless.”

³⁸ Shenzhen government issued the “5+1” policy (elaborated in Chapter 2) to selectively admit migrant children. The budget support for students in public and migrant schools remains different, however. Government budgeted fund per student in Shenzhen public primary schools stands at over 10,000 yuan per student per year. However, if these students are enrolled in Eastern Bay, the district government only pays 4800 yuan per student, equal to the tuition fees that Eastern Bay charges for students who could not meet the conditions of public admission. For the students who meet the fee waiver criteria according to the “5+1” policy, the 2400 yuan paid at the beginning of each semester will be reimbursed at the end of the semester. (Data source: interview with Mr. Zheng on Dec. 3rd, 2014)

The problem was only solved when a local community leader Mr. Mo (nicknamed Lord Mo), the “village head”³⁹ of their current school site, who offered at a very low rent (about ¥1 per square meter) to relocate the school in an old factory building owned by the village collective⁴⁰. As will be elaborated on later, the fact that Lord Mo sat on the school board as a key stakeholder played a vital role in his generous bargain in the interest of Eastern Bay.

As of the fall semester of 2014, Eastern Bay had an enrollment of 1613 primary school students whose *hukou* registration places cover over 10 provinces across China. Unlike public schools, such as Bright School in Lake County, which enjoy generous financial support from the government and whose students are all exempted tuition fees as part of the free compulsory education scheme promised by the central government, Eastern Bay could not afford to be selective in recruiting students. Based on my interviews with parents and teachers, there is literally no threshold for enrollment. Instead, considering the seasonal moving patterns of migrant families, the school adopts rather flexible policies in its grading system. For example, with the imminence of Spring Festival during the fall semester, many migrant families would leave Shenzhen one or two months prior to the official holiday period to avoid transportation congestion and expensive fees during that time. Under such circumstances, students could not participate in the final examination. To accommodate this, Eastern Bay waives their examination and reports their grades according to daily performance.

The contrasts between the two schools in teachers’ qualifications and experiences are equally striking⁴¹. In terms of either school reputation or income, teaching in Eastern Bay is

³⁹ As briefly described in Chapter 4, the current location of the school is beside an “urban village” which used to be a local village. This area has been gentrified with the establishment of Shenzhen Special Economic Zone and “villagers” have been converted to local urban *hukou* holders in 2004. (Data source: interview with Mr. Zheng on Dec. 3rd, 2014)

⁴⁰ Lord Mo convinced his “villagers” that housing this migrant school in their community would also benefit the villagers themselves, because many of the migrant families would settle down in the “urban village” which would mean steady rent income for villagers who owned apartments. Thus it became a win-win situation.

⁴¹ Based on my field observations, the contrast between Eastern Bay and elite public schools in Shenzhen is even more dramatic, as public schools in Shenzhen pride themselves in leading educational technological renovation and teaching quality and the district education bureaus do not hesitate to pump huge sums of money into supporting such explorations. According

considered a less desirable choice for competitive candidates. As Table 6.1 displays, only 25% in this school have a Bachelor's degree, in comparison with the 60% in Bright School. It is also evident that teachers in these two schools have different career trajectories. As noted before, a majority of the teaching faculty in Bright School are promoted or dispatched from their earlier positions in other schools, many of who have established themselves in their specialized subjects. In Bright School, however, this is far from the case. Among the 71 teachers, only 8 have been transferred from other teaching positions, oftentimes due to personal reasons. Teacher Yang, for example, had taught in a township public school in Shandong Province for 15 years before she moved with her family to Shenzhen in 2009. Knowing that she had no competitive edge in public schools in this cosmopolitan city, she happily took the job in Eastern Bay. For many other teachers, teaching in a *minban* school carries a stigma. Teacher Zhang, a Hubei native who joined Eastern Bay in 2005, described his embarrassment whenever he returned to his hometown.

“You know every time I go back, people would say. You work in Shenzhen, must have very high salary!! If I tell that my school is *minban*, they'd say oh then wage is low. They immediately make the judgment, you know. Then ask, why are you still teaching in a *minban* school? Why not take exams and test yourself into public school. They don't know that we are not eligible for such tests. Only university graduates could⁴². And we in *minban* schools could not apply for professional ranks⁴³ either...Sometimes I feel teaching here does not bring me dignity.”

In fact, among all the migrant schools in Shenzhen, Eastern Bay could be rated as a top one, given the community resources, a dedicated school board and an efficient leadership team under Principal Hu. However, the institutional barriers loom large and pose tremendous

to Principal Hu from Eastern Bay, teachers' salary in public schools is about 4 times that their equivalents in Eastern Bay could get.

⁴² Teacher Zhang graduated from a specialized college, which he believes makes him less eligible for tests into public teaching in Shenzhen. Indeed, a survey of published advertisements for public schools shows that most require that candidates have obtained a “four-year Bachelor's degree or above”. See the following link for details: <http://www.shenzhenjiaoshi.com/> (accessed on August 5, 2016)

⁴³ Professional ranking (*zhicheng*) is widely practiced in public institutions to reflect a person's standing in their field. For example, teachers' professional titles are officially certified by educational authorities. One's title is closely reflected in the remuneration and other benefits one could get.

constraints on the organization of the school and creation of its culture to facilitate teachers' professional development and migrant children's learning.

6.3.2 Principals' headaches and school organizational cultures

In what follows, I focus on how the school principals in these two schools define the mission of their schools and organize their schools, which have considerable implications for cultivating specific school cultures to shape students' educational engagement and achievement patterns.

6.3.2.1 Principal Guan: “the ideal education” versus “the examination game”

The 52-year old Principal Guan (pseudonym) in Bright School was an award-winning physics teacher and a vice principal in the most prestigious high school in Lake County, No.2 middle school⁴⁴. His promotion to the headship of this new school was a recognition of his achievement both as a teacher and an administrator. As a founding principal in this new school, Guan needs to prove the ability to bring a group of teachers with diverse background and experiences together and work towards a lofty mission.

Under Guan's leadership, the school operates with several layers of administrative structures. He has set up a leadership core consisting of three vice principals, three directors responsible for student affairs, teaching affairs and logistics affairs respectively, an administrative manager in the principal's office and a union chairperson. Each of them has a specific line of duties, while Principal Guan works as the chief administrator in developing and implementing policies, programs, curriculum activities and budgets and defines the responsibilities and accountability of staff members. Outside the core, there are two additional layers of structures: the grade coordinators (*nianji zhuren*) and the teaching-research sections (*jiaoyanzu*). The grade coordinators are responsible for general affairs related to all students in

⁴⁴ For three decades, No. 2 and No.1 key high schools are the two “dragon schools” in this county. The two schools compete with each other in terms of student achievement in *gaokao* every year. Based on past record, local people generally consider No.2 more prestigious, particularly in arts subjects, whereas No.1 is famous for science subjects.

their grade levels (i.e. 7th grade, 8th grade and 9th grade) and they regularly organize class-based competitions to develop students' teamwork spirit and honor (*jiti rongyugan*). They also supervise homeroom teachers in their handling of student affairs. The teaching-research sections are subject-based, which divide all teachers into specialized groups and group leaders coordinate the plan of curriculums.

For Principal Guan, with an intention to create a legacy in this new school, his major concern is to build a prestigious institution among its kind in the county—junior middle schools. To achieve this goal, the school needs to balance between reform and school progression rate (the proportion of students who test into key high schools in High School Entrance Examination in Grade 9). On the one hand, since the 2000s, many education scholars and practitioners within China have engaged in intense debates on reforming its education to move away from the traditional teacher-centered and highly regimented system which is believed to have stifled students' creativity, critical thinking and originality [see Lou (2011) for a summary of the debate]. The new discourse advocates a student-centered and application-based pedagogy, with textbooks that allow students to explore and experiment in research groups, which is thought to be conducive to cultivating students' overall '*suzhi*', or quality. Principal Guan obviously agreed with this argument when he distinguished students with high marks and students with high abilities in the following quote.

“The ideal education is student-centered education! No only scores! Think about our students. I'm telling you, with decades of teaching experience, those with highest grades are not necessarily the best students. Their minds are frozen (*siwei jianghua*) and no creativity... Well, those rebellious kids, they don't work hard enough. Once they do, they are more creative.”

On the other hand, given that *gaokao* remains the most important mechanism of screening “talents” in the country, the proportion of students progressing to key high schools in *zhongkao*, i.e. high middle school entrance test, would determine the rank of Bright School against seven other competing schools in Lake County. To secure success in this “examination

game”, the school sets clear targets during the first faculty meeting in each academic year, which Principal Guan presides. The vice principal in charge of teaching, the teaching affairs director and the 9th grade coordinator each makes a presentation about their plans to improve instruction, enhance learning and prepare for *zhongkao*. For example, in 2015, the school aimed to send 700 out of their 1200 graduates into the two key high schools, which was an ambitious plan, considering that there were about 2000 placements for the county as a whole.

To solve the tension between reform and competition, Principal Guan and his team adopt a strategy echoing the late paramount national leader Deng Xiaoping’s approach—“to feel the stone while wading through water”, namely to allow experimentation in small scales and replicate the success model if these experiments come to fruition. In each grade, a class is selected to be the experiment class, led by a group of experienced and reputable homeroom teacher and subject teachers who are willing to try different pedagogical styles. These teachers and school management personnel have been arranged with regular training trips to some “model” middle schools across the country⁴⁵. These field trips and many other training sessions have exposed teachers to different pedagogical styles and teaching philosophies, which could further translate into new practices in Bright School. Based on my recent conversations with schoolteachers there, the reform initiatives have largely lost their momentum on the top of the school agenda. The school returns to its “normal” path that prioritizes cultivating students’ test skills, leaving some space for individual teachers’ explorations.

6.3.2.2 Principal Hu: “A Small Temple with No Big Buddha”

Principal Hu is a 43-year old woman with a friendly smile and a humble tone in talking about her school—Eastern Bay Migrant School. Her childhood experience as a rural

⁴⁵ For example, a group of teachers from Bright School attended classes for a week in Dulangkou Middle School in December 2012. This rural middle school in Shandong Province has been celebrated for a new pedagogy, in which students take the control of class, while teachers are merely facilitators rather than lecturers. Teachers collectively work on a ‘guiding-curriculum-plan’ (*daoxue’an*) to provide a general guidance for students to explore and research before class. Students do group projects, presentations, performance and contests in class, different from the passive learner role in a traditional Chinese classroom (see details in <http://baike.baidu.com/view/2377302.htm>, accessed on April 16, 2016).

migrant in Shenzhen makes her dedicated to her current career. A native Fujianese, she and her big family migrated to Shenzhen since her father was working in a factory across the border in Hong Kong. In the early 1980s, the door of public education was closed to migrant children and the Hu family went great lengths (through a relative's *guanxi*) in getting their children enrolled. In 1997 when Hu graduated from a teachers' college, this happened to be the time when Eastern Bay was established and the school principal designated by the authority was Hu's high school teacher. She was hired and groomed by the senior Principal Liu, working in various teaching and administrative positions. Till 2006 when Principal Liu retired, Hu assumed the command to be the chief administrator of this growing migrant school.

Eastern Bay is officially registered as a "charity *minban* school"⁴⁶, which straddles the division between a public school and a private school. For one thing, it was established by the local district office (*jiedao banshichu*) and regulated by the local education bureau. For another, its funding scheme is not from public finance, but mainly from tuition fees with occasional donations from social organizations. In terms of its administrative structure, it is operated under a system of "the school principal leadership under the guidance of board of directors"⁴⁷, which again is a creative combination of the public system (the principal accountability system) and the Hong Kong experience (the school board system). From Principal Hu's perspective, this unique nature of the school makes it independent from excessive state control while forging a cooperative relationship with local communities and government offices. Those board members with influences among local affairs provide Eastern Bay access to diverse community resources. For example, the fact that Lord Mo, the late

⁴⁶ As of now, "charity *minban* school" exists as an experiment of the Shenzhen government to build high-quality-low-cost schools that cater to migrant children. There is no clear definition concerning this type of school. My sense is that it is distinguished as a new model from profit-oriented private education that is the typical condition for migrant schools.

⁴⁷ Eastern Bay practices a system of "the school principal leadership under the guidance of board of directors" (*dongshihui lingdaoxia de xiaozhangfuzezhi*) (quote by Zheng, 2014), which is different from China's public education system in the role played by the school board. In Eastern Bay, the school board consists of representatives from major stakeholders: a cadre from the village collective corporation where the school is located, the school chancellor, the school principal, a teacher representative and a "villager" (local *hukou* residents) representative. Major decisions concerning school affairs are jointly made in board meetings and the principal of the school and her team of administrators are responsible for implementing the policies. This system is believed to have drawn from experiences in Hong Kong.

“village head” of the “urban village” where the school is located, sat in the school board made his bargaining over the rent with villagers more persuasive. Other members such as Chancellor Zheng and Mr. Chen, another well-respected educator in local public education, have also cemented the connections with local education bureau branches and officials.

Compared to other migrant schools that are basically left on their own device, Eastern Bay is in a better position in terms of the available community support. However, if compared with public schools, in Principal Hu’s words, it is still “a small temple with no big Buddha” and thus disadvantaged on many fronts. For example, as mentioned earlier, being a *minban* school offering non-competitive salaries has affected Eastern Bay’s recruitment of teachers. Take the year 1997, Bright School could only offer a monthly salary of ¥900, compared with the average rate of ¥1378 in Shenzhen, which made it hard to attract full-time university graduates. Most Bright School teachers are secondary normal school graduates (*zhongji shifan sheng*), and those with college degrees are from correspondence courses (*hanshou*) or open universities (*dianda*)⁴⁸. Over about two decades, against such constraints in finance and recruitment, the 7-member management team in Eastern Bay under the leadership of Principal Hu and her predecessor Principal Liu have built a quite stable faculty which is governed by a clear set of regulations and well-defined incentive mechanisms⁴⁹. About 30% of the current faculty members are “old comrades” who joined before 2000, while 92% have been working in the school for at least 6 years. This is quite unusual for a migrant school, as existing literature has documented the prevalence of high rates of teacher turnover in such schools (Han, 2001a; 2001b; Goodburn, 2009).

⁴⁸ As far as Principal Hu and her management team are concerned, there are four distinctive categories of teacher qualifications: 1) secondary normal school graduates (those who spend 3 years for teaching jobs after junior middle school); 2) distance education college degree earners (including *hanshou* and *dianda* graduates who have the degree but without university experiences); 3) full-time 3-year college degree earners; 4) full-time 4-year university degree earners. The proportion of the 4th category in a school is believed to be an indicator of a school’s teacher qualification level.

⁴⁹ Eastern Bay has its own “book of law” which is over 500 pages covering every detail concerning teaching, promotion, bonus, student performance and so on. Every semester, the school board sit together to review some of the regulations and add new rules.

6.3.3 Institutional stratification and organization of school life

In the section ahead, I document two emerging school regimes (*school as competitor* versus *school as charity organization*) which differ substantially in school climate, classroom organization, teacher-student bond and school-family partnerships. These all combined have shape different patterns of socialization of educational achievement for migrant children.

6.3.3.1 Bright School: school as a competitor

General condition. Figure 6.1 shows some school scenes in Bright School. The campus, walled with the only access through a grandeur gate guarded by two security officers, is divided into three sections: the teaching buildings (“the learning district”), the canteen, dormitory and sports area (“the living district”) and the administrative building (“the management district”). The three blocks of teaching buildings are all 7-story redbrick buildings, each with a well-meant name in Mandarin such as “Glorious Perseverance Building” (*hongyi lou*) and “Lofty Morality Building” (*mingde lou*). Inside each homeroom, one finds blackboards in the front and at the rear on the wall, movable desks and chairs which are sometimes clustered for group discussion, a desktop installed on a big table in front, though the décor of the spaces varies. For example, Mr. Liu’s 7th grade homeroom looks like this. On the right of the front blackboard, a piece of plate with the homeroom group vow is displayed⁵⁰. On the side walls, posters that display students’ achievement called “the hero list” (*fengjiangbang*) and motivational slogans such as “every effort moves you a step closer to your best performance and every sweat moves you closer towards opportunities” (*meiyici nuli doushi zuiyou de qinjin, meiyidi hanshui doushi jiyu de zirun*) attract visitors’ immediate attention.

School climate. One’s first impression about Bright School students is the confidence

⁵⁰ The vow is loosely translated as follows: “I vow in the name of my youth: to honor my homeroom group’s reputation, improve its unity and be loyal to its interests; to tap on all my potentials, try my best to be self-disciplined, be confident and progress with my class; to live up to teachers and parents’ expectations and my own dreams; to brave difficulties and wade through waters to embrace success”.

that oozes from their youthful faces and playful jokes with each other. As high-performing students selected from their primary schools across the county, Bright School students carry with them a sense of pride and optimism. The well-equipped school facilities and experienced and devotional teachers further make their learning experiences rich and vibrant. From observations and interviews, it is obvious that students generally hold the faculty members and school administrators in high regard. Besides, there is a sense of closeness between them, as students often lovingly and playfully refer to their teachers as “Old Chen” (*laochen*) “Old Zhang” (*laozhang*) instead of the more respectful but distant “Teacher Chen” and “Teacher Zhang” in other schools.

The relationship among faculty members could be characterized as professional and cooperative. Homeroom teachers of the same grade who also cross-teach each other’s homeroom groups in their specialized subjects or teachers affiliated with the same teaching-research sections have more opportunities of communication, as they either share a common office or have regular meetings together to discuss student affairs and teaching materials. Having meals in the school canteen or dining outside in restaurants together is quite often among faculty members. The hour-long dinner break between 5:30 and 6:30 is another occasion where students, teachers and colleagues stroll in the sports field and exchange casual remarks.

Class organization. As described earlier, Principal Guan and his teachers try to reconcile two objectives in education: to carry out educational reform and to excel in traditional examination skills. The strategy adopted by the school to balance between these two objectives has been a gradualist approach, namely to pilot in small scale and further spread to the whole school. Over the years, there is a sign of a stalled reform and the school seems to prioritize the second objective in the fierce competition towards better high school entrance examination

results⁵¹. Nevertheless, residual influences of reform are visible in class organization, where students are encouraged to actively participate in classroom studies and self-management.

The math class in Mr. Chen's 9th grade homeroom group is such a combination of teachers' and students' efforts. Prior to class sessions, students are divided into research groups and assigned topics for presentation. The school library and computer rooms are accessible to facilitate such explorations. In class, they are invited to present their findings and their performance is evaluated by their fellow classmates and the teacher, which yield a composite score for the group⁵². This is followed by a second session for the teachers to reinforce learning points and extend the content, where teachers also take questions from students. While the reformed pedagogy requires students' contribution in lesson preparation and presentation that make them active learners in the process, the final benchmark for class effectiveness is determined by students' performance in monthly tests. Both individual students and homeroom groups are ranked accordingly. Names of high-performing students and homeroom groups are made public on a red notice board.

Teacher-student bond. Like their counterparts in schools all over China, homeroom teachers are responsible for direct contact and guidance of students under their 'jurisdiction', who are under the supervision of three grade coordinators (*nianji zhuren*). As Bright School offers a boarding program, homeroom teachers also live on campus catering to students' schedule. Teacher Pan described his typical school day.

"You know the students have morning exercise at 6:30am, right? As a teacher, you should be earlier. I am up at 6 and get myself ready for exercise and do some stretches with them. Then I supervise their morning self-study hour and keep an eye on some lazy ones who do not show up. I myself have lectures in most mornings as a Chinese teacher and spend the afternoons preparing lessons, revising students' homework and doing individual talks with those who deserve some reminding. After dinner, I rotate to evening self-study hours to the groups that I teach or my own group. It lasts till 9:30pm. As a homeroom teacher, I have to do

⁵¹ As Teacher Chen and his fellow reformers admit that there is less talk about reform now, while much of the rhetoric by the management level focuses on preparing for *zhongkao*. The second-phase reform plan has not been put into schedule and the reformer teachers are assigned other work than their planned work. In other words, reform is neither encouraged, nor completely forbidden. Teachers can continue their good practices from reform era, but their focus should be to improve students' test scores.

⁵² The best performing team over a month is celebrated and applauded during a homeroom discussion session.

dormitory check and rush them to bed. Almost till 10am. Think about it, 17 hours a day!”

As the new school sets its target to be a strong competitor in the county, teachers and administrative staff are all geared up to improve students’ performance. Homeroom teachers are particularly tasked to work with every student and push them ahead academically. Different from rural schools where homeroom teachers shoulder many responsibilities as substitute caregivers for left behind children, Bright School homeroom teachers’ work is more academically oriented. They spend time doing pep talks to motivate low performing or less confident students, devising study plans suitable to their conditions. They give high performing students more demanding tasks to sharpen their abilities and push their limits. They have regular homeroom group sessions, i.e. “evening sessions” (*xihui*) or “reflection session” (*fansihui*), in which disciplinary violations and emerging problems are discussed. They also liaison with subject teachers and convey their students’ requests to guarantee class quality. In general, teachers and students in Bright School are in cordial terms, in which teachers adopt different strategies to deal with different students and keep them motivated and students are given chances to make their opinions heard and work as part of a team.

School-parent meetings and parental involvement. In Bright School, school-parent meetings could be formal or informal occasions. The formal ones are presided by the grade coordinators and attended by school leaders in the school auditorium, usually at the beginning of the 2nd semester (right after Spring Festival) for 9th graders’ families. The major purpose for such meetings is to invite students’ families in a collaboration towards preparing for students’ successful tests into key-point high schools, with school leaders making motivational speeches to stress the importance of this examination and requesting families’ efforts in providing best conditions for their children. Informal meetings are usually initiated by homeroom teachers who are concerned with specific students whose performances are below expectations, which has been an enduring tradition in Chinese schools. Under such circumstances, teachers and

parents would exchange information about these students and come up with some compensation strategies. Sometimes the students would be invited to participate in the discussions. Given Bright School's reputation which opens opportunities for students' future success, families tend to be compliant and cooperative in such occasions and many reiterate their authorization of disciplinary power to schoolteachers.

Academic achievement and "the way out" (zouchulqu). The pursuit of academic excellence is wired in every aspect of life in Bright School. With advantageous conditions in terms of either school finance, infrastructure, student abilities, teachers' professionalism and leadership's vision, Bright School teachers and students are confident in their prospect of superior performance and their goal is to compete with best schools in the province or beyond. In Chapter 3, I discussed China's post-reform regional inequalities influenced by the political economy of urban-rural divide and coast-development strategy, where migration flow follows the country's geography of economic development, i.e. urban and eastern places. Lake County, ranked low in development (by either objective measures or subjective evaluation), is not considered a desirable destination for its best students. Teachers and administrators in Bright School urge their students to push for "way out" (*zouchuqu*) and see the outside world by climbing the academic ladder. In other words, the reference point for Bright School students' future lie way beyond the county-level city it is located. For them, their city is a backward and provincial one, which limits their students' ambition. In mid-January when 9th graders finished their final exam in Semester 1 (2014), Teacher Ma began to remind parents of test schedules in the coming semester in prestigious high schools in Changsha, the capital city of Hunan province. When asked to explain his rationale, he made the following point.

"This is a typical problem, what people call educational inequality, very unequal. You see, if you live in the countryside, you would want to move to the county. If you have higher abilities, then Changsha. If Changsha is not advanced enough, send the child to Beijing. See, my friends in Changsha, they planned on relocating to Beijing long before their children reach school age. Always to the best places you can reach."

While acknowledging the root of inequality in the system, Teacher Ma and his colleagues obviously do not challenge it. Instead, the limits of one's mobility up the hierarchy is interpreted as a measure of individuals' ability and aspiration. Thus, individual efforts are always encouraged by teachers, even for lower achievers.

Though noted earlier, the threshold to be enrolled for rural students (especially those who attended primary schools in rural areas) are higher, it would be overstretched to argue that teachers and administrators or urban students in Bright School discriminate against rural students. First, with the rigorous and seemingly fair screening process, rural students who manage to be admitted are deemed qualified for a good education in this school. Without large survey data, a rough estimate of the school demography by teachers would suggest that a 40% of its total student population are with rural-*hukou*. A considerable proportion of them have stayed in the county town for years, while a small segment are newcomers who've made it through their test scores. In other words, these rural students by virtue of their test scores or attendance in urban schools have demonstrated their abilities to be equally competitive with their urban peers. Additionally, for intra-county or even intra-provincial migrants, the fact that one has not transgressed out of one's native province (a boundary significant enough to define one's identity) confirms an identity as a local. If anything, teachers seem to harbor a positive stereotype that students with rural origin show more potentials in schooling, since they are deemed more diligent and motivated to achieve academic success as a channel for upward mobility.

6.3.3.2 Eastern Bay: school as charity organization

General condition. Surrounded by a middle class community whose residents are mostly affiliated with a local giant state enterprise, Bright School is less than 5-minute walk from a few blocks of old and poorly furnished buildings, i.e. the "urban village", which houses the migrant enclave in this area. Shown through glimpses of the campus in Figure 6.2, as is

with Bright School, the campus of Eastern Bay is enclosed by brick walls and accessible only through a gate, which makes it a little world of its own. The campus area includes three connected 4-story buildings which used to be a garment factory, with an open concrete square facing the gate serving as the congregation area and sports field. Every Wednesday afternoon, the school holds a faculty basketball contest and Principal Hu intends to make this a collegial event. Unlike Bright School which has separate quarters for school dormitories/canteen as well as administration, the three school buildings in Eastern Bay constitute the major space for learning and teaching, with all teachers and students commuting back home outside campus after school. Inside the school buildings, each classroom is equipped with movable chairs and desks, a computer board, a projector and a reading section where several dozens of books are placed. According to vice Principal Zhou, many of the computers, projectors and books are donated from charitable individuals and organizations. On the backside wall, students' drawings and writing assignments are posted, with seasonal festival decorations.

School climate. Eastern Bay students are polite and friendly. They greet teachers, the principle, the chancellor and visitors with sweet smiles, short exchanges, and sometimes even hugs that does not happen a lot in Chinese schools. As over half of the students have been transferred from rural schools, they evaluate the school facilities, class content, teachers' attitude and school activities to be of higher quality than expected. According to 6th grader Ming, who migrated from a village school in Hunan 5 years ago, he had to repeat Grade 2 in Eastern Bay, because the textbooks used in the two schools were very different and he did not have any English class in his former school. Catching up with his classmates in Eastern Bay, however, brings him some sense of satisfaction. For 5th grader Nan, whose *hukou* registration is in Sichuan, attending school in Shenzhen involves an exciting part—school trips outside of campus organized in every semester, which never happened in his village school.

Another salient feature about the campus life in Eastern Bay is the rich

extracurricular activities under the guidance of teachers. Among the 15 students who I interviewed, the majority (80%) talked about training sessions, responsibilities and interactions with their groups as part of their daily routines. According to Chancellor Zheng, there are about 20 student associations and groups on campus⁵³. Some of these student activities in Eastern Bay are gaining increasing attention among other schools and local education authorities. For example, the male basketball team has won many awards in competitions against public schools in the same school district. For many students, these extracurricular activities provide a source of support and a sense of achievement, which compensate for the emotional strain these migrant children may feel after sustained family separation due to either parental migration or divorce, as well as financial difficulties. For Principal Hu and her colleagues in the leadership team, carving a niche in sports also plays an important part in raising the school's reputation and bringing more resources from the local education bureau. For example, in 2012, Eastern Bay was rewarded ¥500,000 for their excellence in student activities, which greatly boosted the teachers' confidence.

Class organization. The pedagogical style in Eastern Bay is traditional in the sense that teachers still dominate the class, while students take a passive learning role. For teachers, it entails considerable workload: preparing lessons and checking homework. In 2014, the school administered a questionnaire among teachers concerning their everyday schedule and the vice principal reported two main concerns out of this survey in a faculty meeting. First, the survey showed that Eastern Bay teachers spent most time on revising students' test papers, more than they did on preparing lessons. Second, to the leadership's disappointment, most teachers did not incorporate sufficient materials beyond the textbooks, which was considered a setback for improving teaching quality. At the end of the meeting, the school announced a few policies to address these issues, including discouraging teachers to assign too much after-

53 Data source: interview with Mr. Zheng on Dec. 3rd, 2014

class homework and installing books shelves in every office to create a reading culture among teachers.

However, in terms of educational technology, compared to rural schools where classroom learning still relies on chalks and blackboard, Eastern Bay teachers use multimedia and other instruments to make classes more interesting, such as projecting PPT slides, playing English songs and videos on the TV screen installed in each classroom. As mentioned earlier, a high percentage of these facilities comes from donation. For example, music teacher Lin uses an electronic piano donated by a local entrepreneur to play tunes in music lessons, which induces waves of exciting giggles and hand clapping among students. For many migrant children, the piano was never part of their educational experiences in rural schools.

Teacher-student bond. As Table 6.2 shows, a large segment of students in Eastern Bay have endured years of separation with their migrant parents before they finally joined them in Shenzhen. Living in the same households does not always mean more intimate intergenerational relationships, partly due to the enormous financial pressure for parents to support the families, and partly due to a process of doing “emotion labor” (Hochschild,1979) where many of these teenagers suppress their negative feelings for fear of adding to the pressure on adults, which Chapter 7 will show. An important source of social support derives from teachers.

Such is the case with Teacher Liang and her student Ling. Ling is an overaged student whose school progression has been delayed by at least 3 years—a 14-year old 6th grader. The reason for such a delay is related to a lingering son preference⁵⁴ in her family. As the only daughter in a four-child household, Ling is given many household tasks such as cooking, grocery shopping and other chores, while her academic achievement is deemed secondary. In

⁵⁴ Without support from large sample survey data, my observation and conversations with teachers and administrators seem to suggest that son preference is practiced as a norm only in a few places such as Chaoshan areas in Guangdong. Ling’s family, for example, come from this particular area.

interviews with Ling, there was a lengthy pause in talking about her relationship with parents, but she glowed in talking about her school teachers. My interview with Teacher Liang showed a similarly positive mood, as the quote below displays.

“I think she is very understanding (*dongshi*) and independent. Sometimes, she would say to me, teacher, I can do more house chores than you can! Indeed! (laugh) She is also quite popular in class, so I give her chances to help manage the class. We, sometimes, joke with each other. She is in some way more mature than me, like a young parent to her younger brother (also a 6th grader) who is a bit spoiled.”

Such emotional support and positive feedback from teachers are pivotal for migrant children such as Ling to build their self-esteem and negotiate difficult situations in life. On another front, for teachers like Liang, despite their own inferior conditions in payment and career development in this *minban* school, to have the students’ trust and help contribute to their well-being generates a profound sense of satisfaction.

School-parent partnership and parental involvement. As Chapter 7 will elaborate, compared with that in Bright School, living arrangement of Eastern Bay students’ households are more diverse and more stratified. Information from my small interview sample (n=15) and report by school administration indicate that for the majority of migrant families which are struggling to survive economically in Shenzhen, a major issue with their involvement in children’s education and in school-family partnership is their long working hours in low-end service jobs. A small number of families that are relatively well off seem to be more involved. Principal Hu’s comment below summarizes the general condition⁵⁵.

“Yes, we have parent committees⁵⁶ set up in each grade. We also try to organize more activities to bring parents in the education...But it is very difficult to find common time,

⁵⁵ Data source: interview with Principal Hu on Dec. 5th, 2014.

⁵⁶ In 2012, the Ministry of Education in China issued a “guiding opinion” document to encourage schools, including kindergartens and schools in compulsory education, to set up parent committees. This, as the document claims, is an important step to forge close cooperation between “schools, families and the society”. See the following link for details: http://www.china.com.cn/policy/txt/2012-03/13/content_24886697.htm (accessed on Oct 17th, 2015). The implementation of this policy, however, varies in different parts of the country. For example, in my fieldwork in Shenzhen and Hunan, it is found that almost all Shenzhen schools have set up their parent committees, including non-public migrant schools such as Eastern Bay. In some schools, there is a separate office for the parent committee. In many school-organized activities, parents are widely involved, particularly in providing logistic support. In Lake County, the situation is dramatically different.

because many parents work most of the day and all days in a week. Family-school cooperation (*jiaoxiao hezuo*) is a good idea, but it is sometimes not realistic to ask too much from parents...If I roughly estimate, in all sorts of activities we've organized, we have only about 30% of parents who are actively participating.”

My interviews with parents and adult guardians reached similar albeit more complex conclusions. While most of the parents would prefer more interactions with teachers in order to gain better knowledge about children's progress, besides the time constraints, some were hesitant to take the initiative for fear of being rejected or ridiculed by schoolteachers and administrators, particularly for those who are less educated. For example, Mei's adopt mother (also her paternal aunt) repeatedly cited her “lack of culture (*mei wenhua*)” to explain her rather passive role in dealing with the school. Moreover, there exists a generation gap between older mothers (those in their 40s and above) and their younger counterparts, with the latter group more willing to attend school events and engage with school through popular social media such as through QQ or WeChat.

Academic achievement and future aspirations. Unlike school life in Bright School in Lake County that is academically oriented, the general atmosphere in Eastern Bay does not revolve around scores and tests, though the leadership and teachers strive to improve teaching quality. This could be attributed to two reasons. First, given the constraints in resources, teacher qualification and other “hardware”, Principal Hu and her leadership team know that their comparative advantage is not academic performance. Instead, as described earlier, by carving a niche in sports and other student activities, Eastern Bay has risen to prominence for the district education bureau to credit it a model for all migrant schools in Shenzhen to emulate. Further, as a primary school, the pressure is not there for Eastern Bay to prove their ranking, as school progression to junior middle school is not competitive⁵⁷ if students' goal is not to get enrolled

⁵⁷ Parents and teachers in Eastern Bay seem not to worry much about students' enrollment in local public junior middle schools after graduation from the migrant school.

in the “four elite” schools⁵⁸ (migrant parents generally do not aim that high). Under such circumstances, the focus of Eastern Bay School is to create a positive but not too stressful learning environment. As mentioned earlier, the grading policies in this school are relatively relaxed and teachers are generally encouraging and helpful to those who are low performers.

6.4 Conclusion

In this chapter, I pursued an institutional analysis of how school organizational processes in line with China’s educational environment which is characterized by “centralized decentralization” shape migrant children’s educational opportunities and experiences through closely investigating two cases—Bright School in Lake County and Eastern Bay School in Shenzhen. I contextualize the analysis with a discussion of different layers of structures in the educational system: the policies from the central government which constitute the macro-level environment towards migrant children’s school access, the local education bureau in distributing resources and evaluating the performance of schools as well as the school principals as key actors in mediating between educational authorities above as well as teachers, students and other stake-holders within the school community. As a result, there emerges two school regimes (*school as competitor* versus *school as charity organization*) which are distinctive in their divergent educational objectives, management strategies, school cultures, school-family partnerships, thus shaping different schooling experiences for rural migrant children. I summarize major findings and discuss the implications as follows.

First, institutional environment and school organization. Throughout this chapter, I documented two different school regimes in Bright School and Eastern Bay, with the former illustrating a model which I described as “school as competitor” while the latter illuminating a

⁵⁸ Like anywhere else in China, Shenzhen has its own league of “four elite” middle schools (*sida mingxiao*): Shiyuan Middle, Shenzhen Middle, Shenzhen Foreign Languages Middle and Shenzhen Senior High. The competition is fierce to get into these schools and preparation takes years ahead.

model of “school as charity organization”. I argue that these two models emerge from constant negotiation between a web of institutional forces, key actors and community resources to gain legitimacy. In particular, I demonstrate that under the system of “centralized decentralization” in the reform era institutionalizes the inequalities between schools of different types, at different locations and with different rankings. On the one hand, the decentralization in resources allocation and school administration has aggravated existing conditions in the school system, as the two case schools illustrate clearly. On the other hand, the educational assessment and “legitimacy” that schools are competing to be awarded are based on standardized school tests and school progression rates.

Bright School, the publically funded school in Lake County (Hunan), enjoys considerable advantages over an average middle school in the county: generous financial investment from the government on superior school facilities, a rich supply of experienced teachers and administrators selected or dispatched from all over the county and high scoring students. Under the leadership of Principal Guan who intends to build a prestigious institution among its kind in the county, the school creates a culture that stresses academic achievement in which teachers, students and administrative staff are all geared up to improve students’ performance. Superior facilities and resources, teachers’ innovative pedagogy and students’ teamwork spirit are all tapped on to facilitate classroom teaching. Regular homeroom sessions are practiced where students and their homeroom teachers collectively deal with disciplinary issues, deliver motivational speeches and negotiate with other staff to address students’ concerns. What merits special attention is the struggle among the leadership to balance two contradictory goals, i.e. educational reform and pursuit of school progression rate, with the latter gaining momentum in the end. From a new institutionalist perspective, this demonstrates the process of Bright School in its search for legitimacy (Meyer and Rowan 1977; Meyer and

Scott 1983; Scott 1988) in the context of China's educational assessment system which screens students and rank schools in accordance to test scores.

Compared with Bright School, Eastern Bay School, the migrant school in Shenzhen, faces tremendous barriers to educate migrant children in an "urban village": minimal levels of government financial support that poses substantial challenge for it to recruit teachers with high qualifications and rich experiences. However, Eastern Bay School has advantageous community resources, thanks to its school board which include members with public influences in local affairs. Under Principal Hu's leadership, the school has developed a reputation in sports events, which builds a positive image of rural migrant children in Shenzhen. As a result, the school gets more recognition from the local community and education bureau, hence more resources. While the school leaders and board members jointly create a positive learning culture, Eastern Bay does not compete with its counterparts in public system academically, given their disadvantages in many respects. From an institutionalism perspective, Eastern Bay school, with its dedicated school board and administrative team, negotiated resource constraints and creatively carved a niche in sports events that would increase its legitimacy among schools of its kind (Meyer and Rowan 1977; Meyer and Scott 1983; Scott 1988).

Second, the results from this comparative study between Bright School and Eastern Bay in this chapter further corroborate a few findings in Chapter 5 which analyzed contextual factors at the school and regional levels upon migrant children's education results. First, the institutional differentiations of school type and school ranking **MATTER**. As seen throughout this chapter, I showed that the hierarchy and divide between public schools and *minban* schools not only creates huge gaps in the resources the schools could access but also shapes the subjectivities of those in these different institutions. For example, the favorable position of Bright School as a public school with an ambition to be the top among its kind is mirrored in teachers' buoyant morale and students' confidence in daily interactions. In contrast, teachers

in *minban* schools like Zhang suffer from social stigma and institutional discriminations attached to their occupation, which undoubtedly would affect their teaching and how their students are socialized towards their future achievement and attainment. Besides, this qualitative case study not only supported the quantitative findings about the effects of school institutional characteristics, but also **organizational processes**. As was shown in this chapter, the divergent school cultures in these two schools shape different patterns of student educational engagement and future aspirations, which is reflected in many dimensions of school life. Moreover, this chapter also points to the differences between intra-provincial and inter-provincial migrations, and confirms that the latter process is subject to more stringent and exclusive policies. During my many conversations with migrant youths in both sites, I cannot help but notice a pronounced pattern in terms of students' sense of identity. Among the intra-provincial migrant children, rarely do they need to justify their stay in the county town center, while their counterparts in Shenzhen frequently refer to their home provinces to confirm their identity as a "guest" in this cosmopolitan city.

Third, while revealing the marked differences in macro-level structures between these two schools, I do not intend to pass a normative judgement that Bright School is the advantaged while Eastern Bay is the opposite. Instead, I demonstrated that both schools are constrained in one way or another. In the case of Eastern Bay, their disadvantage in institutional support poses tremendous pressure for the school administration to negotiate with many stakeholders in order to make the school survive, which further levels the ambition for this school to excel as a competitive school. In the case of Bright School, despite the tremendous resources distributed by the local government, its reform project, part of Principal Guan's ambition to explore new models of education, has finally stalled. Meanwhile, the abundance of community resources that are open to Eastern Bay is equally remarkable, which is absent in Lake County.

Last, as is hinted in this chapter, withstanding the various constraints and pressure in migrant children's schooling in urban areas, the educational facilities and experiences are comparatively better than in village schools. Students tend to positively evaluate their new school environment, ranging from better facilities to diversified curriculum and activities. This is indicative of the glaring urban-rural divide in China, which in Charles Tilly's terms (1998:8), constitutes the "durable inequality" built upon "the institutionalization of categorical pairs". By simply crossing the dualist divide, migrant children gain from a more enriching education.

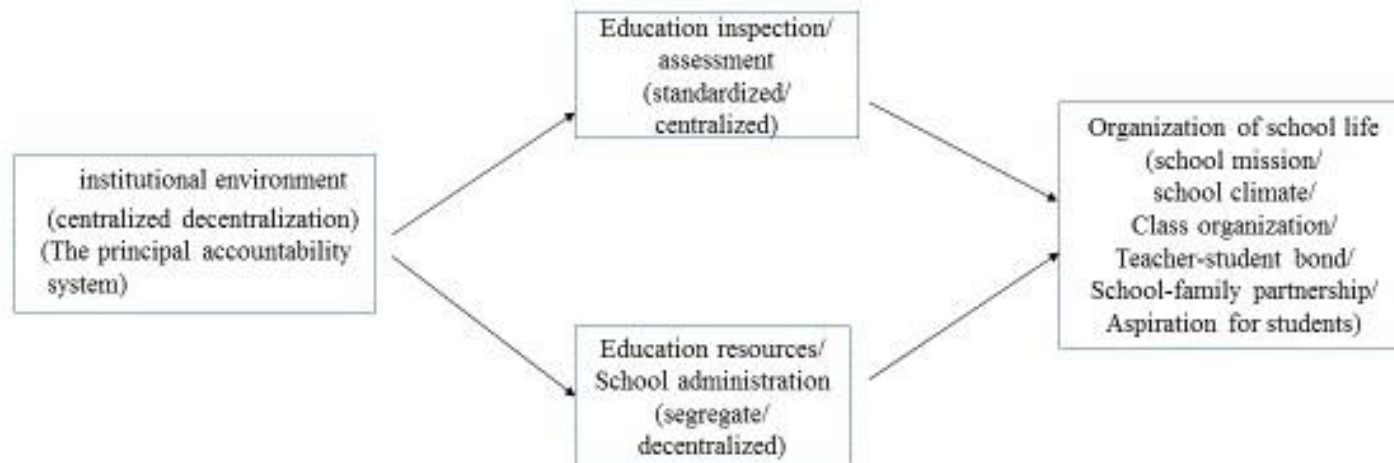


Figure 6.1 A conceptual framework

Table 6.1: School Profile

| | Bright School | Eastern Bay |
|------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------|
| Year of establishment | 2012 | 1997 |
| Student population (2014 Fall) | 3512 | 1613 |
| School type | Public | <i>Minban</i> |
| School location | Urban center | Urban center (migrant enclave) |
| Student composition | Mixed | Migrants only |
| Enrollment criteria | 1/3 neighborhood school; 1/3 by computer lottery; 1/3 test-based | No entry threshold; “5+1” for subsidy |
| Government budget per student | 10068.21(Yuan) | 4800 (Yuan) |
| Teachers’ education | | |
| Bachelor’s degree | 100(59%) | 15(25%) |
| Specialized normal schools/specialized college | 70(41%) | 46(75%) |
| Sources of recruitment | | |
| Transferred from other schools | 107(63%) | 8(13%) |
| Fresh graduate | 63(37%) | 53(87%) |

Figure 6.2 School scenes in Bright School



Upper left: corridor in school building Upper right: classroom front



Bottom: classroom rear

Figure 6.3 School scenes in Eastern Bay



Upper left: PE class

Upper right: inside classrooms



Bottom: weekly faculty sports event

CHAPTER SEVEN “DOING FAMILY”: THE MOBILITY PROJECT AND MIGRANT CHILDREN’S EDUCATION

As reviewed in Chapter 3, existing literature on rural migrant children’s education in urban China presents a lopsided view that makes the human agency eclipsed. The bulk of literature focuses on structural barriers in the form of *hukou* exclusion (Wang, 2008; Woronov, 2004; Goodburn, 2009; Wang and Holland, 2011; Yi, 2011) and school segregation (Han, 2001a; 2001b; Kwong, 2004; Wang, 2008; Goodburn, 2009; Wang and Holland, 2011; Chen and Feng, 2013; Lu and Zhou, 2013; Lai et al., 2014; Xiong, 2015) that these individuals and their families are confronted with, which is of course an important aspect of the migration story in contemporary China. However, such a one-sided scholarly discourse has unintended consequences, as Johnson (2001) puts it, it renders migrants as “structurally imprisoned, boxed into hopelessly predetermined constraints”. In this chapter, I attempt to bring agency back to the picture by analyzing how rural migrant families strategize to advance migrant children’s education (or the failure of it). I draw on data from 23 rural migrant families in two field sites across China (Hunan and Shenzhen) which provide rich information about informants’ lived-in experiences.

I first describe the sampled families with a focus on their family socioeconomic conditions and family migration history, which lay out the foundation for further analysis. I then unpack the multiple and interrelated social meanings that educational success holds for rural families to achieve upward mobility, which explains the relatively high parental expectations in migrant households. In the following section, I proceed to explore how rural migrant families (including extended family members) strategize to fill in the “care deficit”, mobilize resources within their reach and motivate adolescents’ commitment through a repertoire of *social indebtedness* and *parental sacrifices*, a process which I term as “doing family”.

7.1 The demographic profile of rural migrant families

As Table 7.1 shows, the majority of migrant parents in the 23 families received less than a high school education and work in non-public sectors. The Shenzhen sample, however, displays more heterogeneity, with a higher proportion (27%) of them having attended high school or above and two of the fathers working as professionals (but with no Shenzhen *hukou*).

Patterns of family migration history in the Lake County sample and Shenzhen sample are different. In Lake County, the proportion of children moving along before the age of 3 is higher (about 40%), which could be related to less social barrier and economic pressure in short distance migration. Parents in these families are usually self-employed as either subcontractors of construction project or retailers of various products, similar to what other scholars reported in small towns across the country (Murphy, 2000; Wang, Huang, Zhang & Rozelle, 2011). As children transition to higher levels of education, some migrants working in coastal provinces such as Guangdong who used to leave children under the care of grandparents would return from their migration destinations and settle the family in the county. Such is the case of Cheng's family. The parents put Cheng under the guardianship of grandparents until Primary 2 when they found that after three years in kindergarten and a year in the village school, the child still could not write his own name, as the father narrated below.

“We enrolled him in the kindergarten as early as when he was two and a half years old, and then in Long Valley (the primary school in local village)...I followed him to Long Valley one day in my trip home, the teacher was sitting in front, shaking his legs, and my son sat in the very back of the classroom, playing with paper scraps. My family has no connections and we did not know the teacher, he just let the kid do whatever he wanted. I used to buy picture-story books and handwriting copybooks (*zitie*) and mailed them home. And the teachers only taught him ‘blank eye books’ (*baiyanshu*, meaning “only read aloud but don’t recognize words”). I could not stand it and decided to transfer him to the city.”

The couple quit their jobs in Guangdong, relocated back to the county and enrolled the boy in an urban school through a distant relative who “knows someone” in the county education

bureau. At the time of interview, the father was working as a construction worker and the mother as a part-time cashier in a neighborhood store while taking care of family chores. The story of Cheng's family reflects an important aspect of migrants' decision-making—to improve children's chances of educational success, which I will elaborate in the next section.

Unlike in the county public school, most families in Eastern Bay School have undergone a 'serial migration' pattern that entails an earlier stage of adults-only migration. Usually, children's move is finally made when parents feel more settled after years of working in the city and local education policies are more relaxing to for migrant children's admission. In some cases, elder left-behind siblings have already graduated from junior middle school or dropped out until their parents could relocate the younger ones to Shenzhen. Nan's elder sister and Yong's elder brother, for example, became second-generation migrant workers in their mid-teens. In terms of family socioeconomic conditions, as described earlier, in this sample, a small number of parents are relatively highly educated and have stable income. For example, three families were operating small businesses ranging from logistics, retailing to snacks shop, while Bo's father was employed in a state-owned Petroleum Supply company and Mei's adopt father (a retired teacher) offered Mandarin tuition classes to foreigners at home. Under such circumstances, children moved along at very early ages (before 3). The majority of parents in sampled families, however, did not finish junior middle school and worked low-end service jobs in local community.

7.2 Educational success and the family mobility project

In this section, I unpack the meanings that rural migrants ascribe to education and social mobility through analyzing their narratives of educational aspirations for children in the family. These expectations project a future with such "an imaginative horizon of multiple plans and

possibilities” (Schutz 1967 c.f. Mische, 2009), have considerable implications for the families in their everyday experiences, as Mische (2009) described below.

“Hope is both constituted and constitutive; it provides the emotional substratum, so to speak, of the dialectic between the old and the new, between the reproduction and the transformation of social structures as these figure in thinking and acting individuals”.

Chinese rural migrants, despite their relatively lower socioeconomic conditions, hold relatively high expectations towards children’s educational attainment, unlike what the class-based status attainment model predicted in western contexts (Blau and Duncan, 1967; Sewell et al., 1969; Willis, 1977; MacLeod, 2008). In the sampled 23 families, when asked about their expectations for the focal adolescents’ future attainment, almost all adults in the households would suggest a college education, or “as long as he/she could make it”. This is consistent with the quantitative data presented in Chapter 5 (Table 5.3). Through analyzing the narratives by migrant parents, I show that educational success holds multiple meanings for these families, which is related to the country’s unique structural and cultural patterns in post-reform era. On the one hand, educational success is pursued in line with the ideology of meritocracy in the Confucian tradition, which rewards “winners” with “social rank, job positions, higher incomes or general recognition and prestige” (Tan, 2008). On the other hand, in view of China’s dualist social structure which renders rural-*hukou* citizens disadvantaged in almost all arenas of social life (Treiman, 2012), educational success constitutes one of the few limited ways that rural people can change their status (Wu and Treiman, 2007), thus joining the “elite club” of urbanites. These two dimensions of educational success in contributing to social mobility intertwine and reinforce the value attached to educational achievement in rural families, which has tremendous implications for these families in their endeavor to overcome social barriers and collectively pursue this mobility project.

7.2.1 Educational success and the “meritocracy myth”

The “meritocracy myth” (McNamee and Miller, 2009) which legitimizes the selection of an elite class through nation-wide examination systems, i.e. the ancient “civil examinations” (Elman, 2013) and its modern equivalent of the “*gaokao* system” is deeply rooted in the Chinese mind. As an “ideology of inequality” (Tan, 2008), meritocracy often obscures structural factors other than individual merit that contribute to a person’s success (McNamee and Miller, 2004; Campbell and Lee, 2011). In dynastic China, it generated an examination culture where the extended family, the lineage or the village community at large had a stake in supporting aspiring individuals, regardless of their family background (Lee, 2000; Pepper, 1996:47; Kulp, 1925:127). This tradition has been retained in the People’s Republic of China, despite temporary interruptions during the Cultural Revolution Years (Parish, 1984; Deng and Treiman, 1997; Hannum, 1999). In the post-reform era, education assumes a more importance position with rising economic returns in the transitional economy (Davis, 2000).

My interview data indicate that migrant parents often frame themselves as “losers” in line with the meritocracy ideology, thus their low educational attainment is invoked as the explanation of the harsh working environment, inferior social status and low remuneration they have to reconcile with. For example, they refer to their jobs as migrants in factories, construction sites or low-end service industries as ‘*kuli*’ (menial labor), inferior to the occupations which require people with ‘*naoli*’ (work with brain), a distinction made by Mencius over 2000 years ago (Verwilghen, 1967). While lamenting on their own “failure”, they set their mind to enhance chances of educational success for their children in social climbing.

For example, Lu’s father, a 40-year-old construction worker in Shenzhen, described his many experiences of working overtime, payment arrears and occasional unemployment in

between construction projects. He regretted quitting school at 10, without knowing the tremendous consequences. His expectations toward his son's future occupation, though not as clear as what low class Asian American parents described (Lee and Zhou, 2015), i.e. four high-status professions, have a status symbol—"an air-conditioned office".

"(sigh) words know me, but I don't know them...I quit school at the age of 10... finished only Grade 3...such a young age. That's why I ended up doing this labor (*'kuli'*), day and night...regret...but no use... This should not be the fate for my son...He should at least work in an air-conditioned office".

41-year old Ms. Liu, a return migrant in Lake County, noted the narrow pathway for low class people to move ahead in a stratifying society, by invoking a pair of status categories, i.e. "super-riches" and "commoners".

"Let me tell you. We are not like those super-riches, we are merely commoners (*putong renjia*). The only way out is education, no other options."

Others realize that China has become a "credential society" (Collins, 1979) after reform, where one's opportunities, status and social claims are directly tied to one's degrees. Particularly after higher education expansion since the late 1990s, a college degree is not only desirable but necessary for a middle-class life.

A 37-year-old migrant mother in Shenzhen who ran a small noodle shop with her husband commented upon a TV news in which the host questioned the relentless pursuit of education at the expense of students' mental health⁵⁹. She observed that those advocating a more liberal attitude towards educational success are actually the beneficiaries of the current education system, i.e. those who received higher education and held "iron rice bowls" (*tiefanwan*). As a rural migrant, she could not afford such a slack philosophy, especially in view of an emerging "knowledge economy".

⁵⁹ In recent years, there has merged a discourse among the middle-class educated urbanites in first-tier cities such as Beijing and Shenzhen against the current examination-oriented education (*yingshi jiaoyu*). According to this discourse, the current competitive test-based system stifles children's creativity and exert too much pressure upon them.

“Some people say credentials are not important anymore, but you got to have it to say so, right? My child does not have the foundations they lay for their children...a college education, that’s basic requirement...Society in the future, as they say, needs knowledge.”

Like these examples cited above, the vast majority of migrant parents and other guardians link educational success with an achieved middle class status. In line with the meritocracy ideology, they frame their own inferior social position as migrant workers in precarious working conditions as a result of their lack of education, or in their own terms, “lack of culture” (“*mei wenhua*”). Therefore, they attach great importance to a university degree as a desirable, or even the only pathway for their children to obtain a middle life class.

7.2.2 Educational success and the “jump out of a peasant’s gate”⁶⁰

For rural people, educational success is also valued for its potential to change one’s *ascribed status* in the country’s dualist social structure, i.e. *hukou* status (Wu and Treiman, 2007). As described in Chapter 2, despite recent attempts of reform in various localities (Wong et al., 1998; Wang, 2005; Zhang, 2012), a rural-*hukou* person’s prospect to be granted a local urban *hukou* and related social benefits in his/her migration destination is still not guaranteed, particularly in big cities such as Shenzhen. Instead, local governments follow a purely economic logic that prioritizes candidates’ human capital and employment status, seemingly “personal” attributes, to selectively “naturalize” those who are considered “talents” (“*rencai*”). According to Zhang Li (2012), in the points system (“*jifen ruhu*”) to select those eligible for *hukou* conversion in Guandong, one’s educational credentials carry the heaviest weight, followed by job skills, occupation and awards.

My informants confirmed the importance of *hukou* conversion as a source of motivation for them to enhance children’s educational performance, which is metaphorically

⁶⁰ This is an allusion to a phrase “*liyu tiao longmen*”, a literal translation of which is “The carp has leaped into the dragon’s gates”. In Chinese, “*long*” (dragon) and “*nong*”(peasant) are homophonic. It is a metaphor for a transformation out of a peasant identity.

described as a “jump out of the peasant’s gate” (*tiao nongmen*). The “jump out of the peasant’s gate” means promising opportunities in big cities and chances of “making it” as elite urban citizens. For example, Ms. Huang’s (migrant mother, 38 years old) eldest daughter, who made the effort to get a university degree after working as a migrant (*dagong*) in Changsha (capital city of Hunan) for two years. This story is often deployed in family pep talks to encourage younger siblings to work towards a college education. As the following quote shows, working as a tourist guide in Beijing, this daughter now represents the farthest that this family has moved in the social hierarchy and thus serves as a “role model” to inspire younger ones.

“My eldest daughter, she first attended a technical school (*zhiye xuexiao*) and did two years of migration work. Later, she returned to school and got a college degree. Now she is a tourist guide in Beijing. She, and we parents, all want the two younger ones to study hard and attend university. Every time she calls, she would stress this.”

Landing a job in state bureaucracies or affiliated institutions (“*shiye danwei*”) moves a person a further step in “jumping out the peasant’s gate” and obtaining a new identity as an official “eating the state’s rice” (*chi guojialiang*).

Yi’s (13 years old migrant child in Lake County) 60-year grandfather talked about a nephew who managed to be admitted in a prestigious university (Nankai University) 15 years ago and tested into the statistics bureau in Guangzhou after graduation. This is what he expects from the grandson Yi.

“My second sister’s son, we call him “little Monkey”, he used to be very skinny. That boy is smart and diligent, all days reading books and not hanging out. Aha, he got into Naikai, you know, Premier Zhou Enlai’s university, very smart... Now an official, glory to his parents... For me, and my son and daughter-in-law, our biggest hope is that Yi could someday be like that. ‘Eating the state’s rice’, you don’t have anything to worry about. Everything is covered. The government is your boss.”

Summary. In this section, I showed that parents/grandparents in migrant families generally hold high expectations for children’s future educational attainment. By unpacking the multiple meanings of educational success, I revealed that the high educational expectations are driven by an impetus to increase children’s competitiveness in a “meritocracy” as well as

to successfully convert one's *hukou* to be an urban citizen with privileged social status and citizenship rights. In the following section, I demonstrate that pursuing children's educational success as a family mobility project shapes a process of "doing family" in migrant households.

7.3 "Doing family": negotiating migration and children's education

In the following section, I rely on "doing family" as an analytic concept to delineate the family processes among migrant households in a future-oriented family mobility project. I first sketch a theoretical framework for the concept of "doing family". I then use the concept to identify the strategies of migrant families to navigate through structural constraints and situated opportunities to advance children's education.

7.3.1 "Doing family": an under-theorized concept

"Doing family" is derived from West and Zimmer's famous concept of "doing gender" (1987) which advances a framework of understanding "gender as a routine, methodical and recurring accomplishment." They maintain that

"Though it is individuals who do gender, the enterprise is fundamentally interactional and institutional in character, for accountability is a feature of social relationships, and its idiom is drawn from the institutional arena in which those relationships are enacted." (West and Zimmerman, 1987)

In other words, the great contribution of this approach lies in its conceptualization of gender not as a narrowly defined static *structural* feature, or ascribed status, but as a *process* of social interactions that link individuals with the institutional background they are embedded in. This allows for a more dynamic understanding of gendered social processes in everyday life. "Doing family" as a conceptual tool has not gained prominence among sociologists, except for a few recent studies on "non-traditional" families such as same-sex unions (Silva and Smart, 1999; Carrington, 1999; Weeks, Donovan, and Heaphy, 1999; Naples, 2001; Sullivan, 2004), or single-mother households (Nelson, 2006; Cherlin, 2006; Hertz, 2006). Only one paper by

Strasser, Kraler, Bonjour and Bilger (2009) extends the concept to the discussion of migrant families in Europe.

In the Chinese case of massive internal migration, I maintain that this concept of “doing family” would prove to be useful in studying how family-level processes reconstituted in migration affect childrearing strategies in migrant households, given the nation’s unique institutional and cultural contexts. First, the fallback of the state as welfare provider for rural populations. Since the late 1970s, the state remains active in engineering economic development while retreating from welfare provision, except for a small segment of urban citizens (Treiman, 2012). Worse still, for the new migrant working class, the juxtaposition of their peasant/worker identities create a unique situation where neither the state nor capitalists claim responsibility to “undertake the costs of proletarianization and its generational reproduction” (Pun, 2005: 46). Instead, they are excluded in welfare regimes in the host cities where they work, a situation described by historian Qin Hui as a “negative welfare regime”⁶¹. Under this condition, the predominant burden of childrearing and old age support lies in the family. Second, culturally, China has inherited a long familist tradition which stresses economic and noneconomic exchanges among family members to advance collective familial interest (Kulp, 1925; Fei, 1939; Goode, 1970; Baker, 1979), thus offers a ready cultural repertoire for “doing family”. Furthermore, a typical Chinese rural migrant family splits households across geographic boundaries for at least partial time during children’s formative years (Duan, 2015), due to the *hukou* system as a forceful barrier against receiving migrants’ dependents in host cities, which does not conform to the normative family structure where both parents live with the child as a unit. This, however, makes it more imperative to explore the

⁶¹ A historian in Tsinghua University and also a recognized public intellectual, Qin Hui proposed the concept of “negative welfare” to critique both leftist and rightist intellectuals in China for their blind sight of the system which rewards the haves and penalizes the have-nots. See <http://dajia.qq.com/blog/279348015319073.html>.

“doing” of family, as it denaturalizes “the construction and achievement of a ‘naturally’ existing set of interpersonal arrangements” (Naples, 2001:33, cited in Nelson 2006).

7.3.2 “Doing family”: a theoretical framework

In this section, I develop the concept of “doing family” as a framework to analyze migrant families in their negotiation of migration and childrearing. I define the concept of “doing family” as a process of social interactions between individuals identified as members of a family group “through which their connection is created and rehearsed in the private domain” (Silva and Smart, 1999:7-9, cited in Nelson, 2006), guided by a set of cultural norms. This theoretical approach treats the family “both as an *outcome* of and a *rationale* for various social arrangements” (West and Zimmerman, 1987:126). As an outcome, family is an achievement which affirms, renews, consolidates or reconfigures existing social relationships during social interactions, which creates ties as well as boundaries (Cherlin, 2006). As a rationale, it entails a repertoire of cultural values and expectations which define “rights, privileges, and responsibilities within the nexus of the web of relationships of those we call ‘family’” (Nelson, 2001), thus organizing everyday practices and social life.

As shown in Figure 7.1, I use “doing family” as a framework to analyze how Chinese rural migrant families negotiate migration and childrearing, which involves two simultaneous social processes. First, a process of social *actions*, i.e. “material practices” (Naples, 2001:33). I examine how adult guardians in migrant households, including parents and grandparents, strategize to arrange the “care work” to maintain a family routine and mobilize educational resources with their reach in order to enhance children’s study. Second, a process of reconstituting family roles based on cultural norms and emerging situations, i.e. “cultural practices” (ibid.). I elaborate on two salient cultural notions—“eating bitterness” (*chiku*) and “understanding things” (*dongshi*) as guiding principles for adults and children in migrant

households respectively. This network of cultural obligations and expectations is predicated on each member's awareness of the familial collective interest while contributing their share of responsibilities.

7.4 “Doing” family: care work and educational involvement

In this section, I focus on the aspect of material practices in migrant families' “doing family” in two domains—care work and educational involvement.

7.4.1 Migration and care work: who does the dirty work?

In migrant households, “doing family” becomes an essentially gendered process. The intricacies of the gendered organization of family life are even reflected in the process of field research. Among the migrant families in Bright School (Lake County) and Eastern Bay (Shenzhen), in most cases when available, it was the mothers who accepted my interviews and answered my questions. In occasions where both parents were present, the fathers would naturally drop out of the conversation, as they believed that such topics regarding the child and family life are the wives' domain.

My field data show that most mothers face the conundrum of “the second shift” (Hochschild and Machung, 1989), as an “inside/outside” dichotomy remains in division of labor in the households (Zhang in Entwisle & Gail, 2000:194). Plus, their precarious working conditions exacerbate the situation. The majority of them are employed in low-end service jobs in supermarkets, fast food stores, bus stations and local markets with long working hours. However, a salient pattern among these households is the mothers' compact schedules to juggle work and household chores, particularly concerning home-cooked meals to cater to children's school schedule. Feeding the family, especially the child, has become an important occasion to manifest a mother's commitment and love (DeVault, 1991).

Such is the case of Jun's mother, a 45-year old cleaner with a public school in Shenzhen. She rises at 5am every day and gets the breakfast ready on table before boarding the bus to her workplace at 6:30am to mop the school corridors, teachers' offices and toilets until 11:45am. During the lunch break, she commutes back home to cook a meal, or packs a meal from the school canteen for Jun, before returning to work with a hurry bite of her own lunch on bus. When her work ends at 5:30pm, she races to the local wet market for vegetables and grocery. The only time she could stretch her body and sit comfortably before TV is after 8pm when dishes are done, the table cleaned and laundry hung.

Jun's mother is not an exceptional case. In my many conversations with migrant mothers, most of them noted a "labor crunch" in their households. However, rarely did they question the unequal share of household responsibilities between them and the husbands.

There is also an emotional dimension in migrants' mothering. For those who left their children with grandparents or other relatives in earlier years, many felt guilty for not being able to devote more time to their children and bore the brunt of being blamed for strained parent-child relationships. There is a salient compensation mentality among these mothers to make up for the lost years by performing more care work. Yang's mother, for example, reiterated her daily cooking as a way to confirm her motherly role in caring for the 10-year old who were left behind in their home village in Hubei until 6, as the following quote shows.

"You know, over the years, after she moved here with grandma. I felt there is something between us (sigh!). She complain that I don't have time for her, not true! Every day I cook her lunch before going to the store. I cook her favorite dishes. She is picky in food, and I try to not let her starve."

This echoes the similar sentiments as documented by Parreñas (2001) and Horton (2009) about international migrant mothers who are torn between their breadwinning role and their inability to perform the motherly role. For the mothers in Chinese rural migrant families,

cooking against their tight working schedule affirms their identity as the caring mother who is willing to prioritize children's well-being above their own.

I add a brief note on father's involvement in household chores and everyday life. What I described earlier is the general pattern gleaned from the data, which does not mean that fathers are completely hands-off. From my observations, many of them do some supportive work such as running errands to the shops, occasionally doing dishes and cleaning tables, which does not contradict with the dominant gender belief that all these are the wives' line of responsibility.

7.4.2 Migration and educational involvement

As Section 7.2 noted, migrant parents in both Bright School and Eastern Bay register great expectations of their children's future attainment, consistent with CEPS data (Table 5.3 in Chapter 5) which showed that migrant parents on average expect their children to attain 16.7 years of education (more than a university degree). Expectations could transcend class lines and institutional boundaries. How these expectations are translated into real life remains an empirical issue. In this section, I explore the strategies that migrant parents adopt to push for children's educational success. As data will show, a majority of families display a kind of *concerted cultivation* in parenting style (Lareau, 2003). However, considering the substantial gaps in school-based resources as well as family socioeconomic conditions, the way and the effectiveness of parents' involve are not exactly the same.

Bright School, an academically competitive public school in Lake County, opens opportunities for rural students to future success. Families organize their life revolving around their children's schedules and resort to many measure to ensure their smooth life on campus (students live in school dormitories during weekdays) and after school. First, though the boarding system does not allow the students to stay at home during weekdays, their families are just a telephone call away. One afternoon at 5:30pm during the one-hour dinner break when a lot of the students and teachers were taking a stroll in the sport field, Xin's mother, father and

younger sister arrived with a box of home-cooked beef rice, because Xin unintentionally mentioned her lack of appetite in a telephone conversation the previous evening. What's more, most Bright School parents believe that study is more labor-intensive than the manual jobs that they themselves are holding. During weekends when students return home for a break, families make great efforts in offering nice food and relegating almost none of the household chores to these "hard workers". Bright School parents also do not hesitate in enrolling their children in private tuition centers, which has been a prosperous industry across Chinese (Zhang, 2014). Among my small sample of interviewees, almost 90% had prior experiences of or were still attending private tuition⁶² with either a reputable teacher in their school or with an institution to improve their 'weak' subjects, particularly English, Math and Chinese, which are considered the main subjects with higher weights in high-school entrance examinations. The lessons offered in tuition classes tend to be test-based where the teachers teach many "knacks" to crack difficult questions.

In Eastern Bay School, the migrant school which is generally more relaxed in academic study, family socioeconomic conditions matter more. In the small group of high SES families, education undoubtedly is a central theme in everyday life, which entails intensive investment, clear labor division between parents, active service in parent committee, and constant parental self-education through new social media. Monetary investment covers regular consumption of books, stationery purchases and tuition classes, for which the mothers claim that they provide as much as the adolescents need. Besides, those parents with high school diploma tend to assume a more direct role in supervising homework. They would divide their jobs according to each other's strengths in different subjects. For example, in the case of 4th grader Bo's household, the father, who had an engineering degree, is responsible for tutoring math, while

⁶² There are cases where the teachers are moonlighting in private institutions and encourage students to attend the extra sessions there.

the mother takes charge of English and Chinese. This group of parents also show a greater interest in serving in parent committee to communicate with teachers and organize activities. Besides, they engage in self-initiated parent-education through reading popular parenting literature or subscribing to related We-chat public accounts⁶³. The mothers, for example, have read Yin Jianli's *A good mother is better than a good teacher* (2009)⁶⁴ and considered that the book thought-provoking, because their childhood experiences in rural areas did not seem to include such deliberation on parenting. One mother commented that "in our time, sticks⁶⁵ are the best education", but she soon remarked that children nowadays are more vulnerable. Some parents even try to experiment parenting strategies in accordance to books and We-chat publications, albeit limited effects. For example, Lin's mother complained about her son's non-cooperation in her new approach.

"Every day we're off work, you know, I read all the We-chat articles, they say parents in foreign countries would always communicate with the children. Asking about school life, whether he had happy experiences. He always says that he has forgotten. How can you forget whether you're happy or not?"

Education and childrearing in economically struggling families is a different picture. As described earlier, these parents are predominantly employed in service industry, such as table waiting in chained fast food brands like KFC and Pizza Hut, cleaning in formal institutions, and selling vegetables in wet markets and so on. Their work life spills over family life and affects the way they mobilize resources in instrumental ways. First, most are striving to make ends meet, which makes survival the most important theme in the household. It is not unusual for one parent or both to work for more than 12 hours a day, thus spending time with children is a luxury in these families. Jun's father, for example, works with a construction team

⁶³ We-chat is an instant messaging app developed by China's largest and most used Internet service portal Tencent, which has become the most popular social media in the country. By subscribing to public accounts which amount to online magazines, users can read latest updates of articles published by these accounts for free.

⁶⁴ Yin, J. Li. (2009) *A good mother is better than a good teacher* (hao mama shengguo hao laoshi). Beijing: China Writers Publishing House.

⁶⁵ A Chinese proverb goes "sticks are teachers of talents" (*gunbang dixia chu rencai*), which alludes to a traditional philosophy of harsh parenting.

whose projects move to different provinces across the country, while Yan's parents work in the wet market from 6am till 7pm. It is unrealistic to expect that these parents could devote substantial time in their children's education. Second, the precarious working conditions affects job security, which in turn affects student mobility. According to Principal Hong from Eastern Bay school, about 1/10 of the students would leave and never return to the school every semester. Sometimes when the family travel back to the hometown for Spring Festival reunion, the parents might make an ad hoc decision not to return if there are opportunities somewhere else from a conversation with a relative at dinner table.

However, the harsh and precarious life as 'floating population' does not mean that these families do not attach importance on education and mobilize resources to improve their children's educational performance. On the contrary, the belief that education is empowering is unchallenged, especially when many parents attribute their 'failure' to their "lack of culture", as the previous section shows. Despite various constraints, many try different means to improve children's education. First, given their own limited education, parents generally do not feel confident enough to tutor their children. However, the majority made a point of monitoring the homework and TV hours to make sure that the adolescents prioritize study in the evenings or weekends. For example, Qiang's mother, a cleaner in Lake County who had only 2 years of schooling due to poverty in childhood, has hired a retired teacher from a public school to coach her son's homework. Every Saturday morning and afternoon, Qiang takes the bus to the tutor's house for 6 hours, during which time he finishes homework, clears up questions in the past week and receives some supplementary class prepared by the teacher. The mother explained her motivations for doing this.

"He (a 6th grader) transferred here late..3 years ago...The education in hometown was backward (*luohou de*). At first, he could not catch up. I myself is an illiterate (*wenmang*). What I can do is to find someone who can help him."

There are similar cases in both field sites. What's interesting about this phenomenon is that, like Qiang's mother described, tuition class compensates for parents' lack of human capital to transmit to her child, which could potentially break the cycle of class reproduction widely documented in social stratification literature (Blau and Duncan, 1967; Bourdieu, 1987; Lareau, 2003).

Summary. In this section, I focused on parental involvement in children's education in migrant families. Data from the two schools indicate that migrant households come up with a variety of arrangements to enhance children's school performance. Enrolling them in tuition classes is a prevalent practice for parents whose own education limits their ability to supervise children's homework. Those who are capable to tutor their children do it in a strategic fashion: they divide their jobs according their strengths for different subjects, and they not only help children revise lecture contents, but go a step farther to train them with more advanced materials. A last strategy pertains to self-initiated parenting education among a small proportion of parents who keep up with new information fermented by internet and social media.

7.5 Doing “family”: adolescents' perspective

In this section, I look into cultural practices of “doing family” which define family roles, assign responsibilities and privileges among family members in migrant households. In particular, I bring to the fore two cultural notions that structural these practices—*parental sacrifice* and “understanding things” (*dongshi*). I first establish that since children's educational success is pivotal for the family mobility project, many migrant families prioritize children's wellbeing in family life, as the previous section demonstrated. For migrant parents and other adults in the households, privileging children's wellbeing entails considerable amount of *sacrifices*, given their precarious positions in the society and tremendous pressure

to provide, care and educate their offspring. For children growing up in migrant households, they have been exposed to the *sacrifices* that adults make for their sake and their emotional life is governed by a principle of “understanding things” (*dongshi*) to reward or repay for what adults have done for them. Through exploring the cultural practices of “doing family” from adolescents’ perspective, this study moves beyond existing literature which conspicuously ignored children’s agency (Bakewell, 2010; Huijsmans, 2011).

7.5.1 *Dagong* life and parental sacrifice

Sacrifice appears as a daily trope in many aspects of Chinese family life, which is deployed frequently by parents or other adults to reinforce the sense of indebtedness on children’s part. However, rarely do social scientists take this concept seriously and explore its potential as a conceptual tool to understand family dynamics, except for a few studies. In Hong Kong, for example, endorsement of positive beliefs about adversity, particularly parental expectation on children’s future and *parental sacrifice*, is found to be correlated with better school adjustment among economically disadvantaged adolescents (Shek, 2004; Leung and Shek, 2013). Murphy’s (2014) ethnography in rural left-behind households in Jiangxi underscores the importance of socialization of *parental sacrifice* as a mechanism to reaffirm a caring parenthood which strengthens left-behind children’s motivation to study harder. In my analysis ahead, the concept of *parental sacrifice* applies to all migrant households, which is related to the common low social status associated with migrant labor, or *dagong*.

Adolescents in migrant families are generally sensitive towards the word ‘*dagong*’, which is associated with menial labor, harsh working environment, long working hours, low payment, lack of job security and family separation. Migrant children who are experiencing their life in cities, the *sacrifices* are more vivid and concrete, which deepens their sense of

appreciation for their families. 5th grader Dong burst into tears in his description of the trip to the rental room that his parents and elder brother shared in Shenzhen three years ago.

“I made the trip in summer vacation. So hot, they lived on roof floor...sweats dripping all the time and taking a shower was useless...Until then, I realized that my elder brother was not a bullying me (*qifuwo*), but only strict with my study. He want me to be diligent, be strong and be tough...”

In the cases where the previously left-behind adolescents finally reunite with their parents, they develop a sense of profound happiness and indebtedness. 13-year old Zhi in Bright School compared his life before and after parents’ return.

“En, what to say? When Ba and Ma are staying with us together, I feel...just like...more at home...you know. Also, you feel ‘warmer’ (*wennuan*). I used to, when they were out (meaning when his parents were migrants in Guangdong), cry, secretly in the night, because I did not want my grandma to know about it... Ba and Ma sacrificed a lot to cultivate (*peiyang*) us. I do the best I can.”

What is most striking about children in migrant families is the ubiquity of this narrative of parental sacrifice and the deep sense of indebtedness, even among the relatively better-off families. To be fair, parents in these families also have experienced lengthy time of harsh life before they could settle down in cities with a certain level of economic security.

7.5.2 “Understanding things”: the pressure to perform

Children in migrant families are under enormous pressure to perform well in school. With the indigenous cultural tradition (Li, 2001) and the educational system of *gaokao* shaping the perception that ‘hard work’ is an important value for Chinese students (Chua, 2014), teenagers in migrant families are driven to pursue study as 24-hour career. In their narratives, being a top student is the best way for them to reciprocate the tremendous sacrifices adults have made for their ‘bright future’. Those who are high achievers in their class do garner attention from their family and teachers. They are deemed as the filial ones who reward their parents with good grades and demonstrate their potentials for ‘jumping out of the peasant’s gate’. This leads to a positive cycle of interaction between them and their migrant parents, with more

investment to the child's needs and closer intergenerational communications. At the meantime, it also involves constant self-discipline, self-motivation and drive to work, in which they find it hard to relax. Ni, for example, spends most of her spare time reading books from the library and working on exercises books. She never hangs out with peers in the neighborhood and only concentrates on study during weekends. However, during the interviews, she still expressed a lack of confidence in comparing her weak subjects with better performing classmates.

Those who are average or below average students in the class are under less pressure, but adults generally would urge them to work harder, as the Chinese cultural model of learning emphasizes “seeking knowledge as a lifelong orientation, diligence, endurance of hardship, steadfastness, and concentration” (Li, 2001). However, their low scores do have an impact on their projection of future life. For example, 14-year-old Jie in Bright School, left behind in village during early years, listed “study” as his foremost headache, because despite the many tuition classes he still found it difficult to catch up with his classmates. He later rated his confidence level of future prospects at 3 out of 10 points. When asked to elaborate, he sighed and said that bad scores did not bode well in the future. Another case, Ping, who joined his parents in Shenzhen at 6, was impressed with the superior facilities and interesting cityscape in Shenzhen. When asked about a university that he would want to attend if he intends to go to university, he commented in a sarcastic tone --“university life is a day-dream”. To further explain it, he said “who does not want to attend college? I just don't think it possible for me”. His assessment of the feasibility of expecting college education derives from a combination of personal educational performance, family financial condition and exclusive policies from the local educational system. In China's Age of Ambition⁶⁶, these teenagers have a premature taste of reality which has curtailed their aspirations.

⁶⁶ Evan Osnos, a staff writer with The New Yorker, published a book documenting his observation of China and prominent figures in the society during the first decade of 21st century, in which he coined the term “age of ambition” to refer to a situation of lofty dreams and the perseverance in the pursuit of these dreams.

7.5.3 “Understanding things”: doing “emotion work”

Regardless of school performance, growing up in migrant families involves considerable “emotion work” where the teenagers process their emotional needs, expectations and feelings to fit into acceptable displays (Hochschild, 1979). After migration, they have been exposed to their parents’ hardships in the migrant life in the cities, which engenders a deep-ingrained sense of indebtedness between adolescents and their families. For these teenagers, revealing their negative emotions to adults who have been busy shouldering family responsibilities to provide for them would increase their burden, thus violating the rule of rewarding adults through “understanding” (*dongshi*) attitudes, feelings and behaviors. In some cases, the adolescents go through an elaborate process of analyzing and reframing their thoughts to rationalize the emotional gaps. For example, Kai, who only joined her parents a year ago, described her birthday celebration when she was still attending the village school.

“Interviewer: Did your Ba and Ma come back and celebrate your birthday?

Kai: They had no time. Grandma and Grandpa sometimes bought my favorite cakes and cooked nice meals...Only four of us celebrated together. My sis sometimes is annoying and crying for attention this time.

Interviewer: What did you do then?

Kai: we fought sometimes. Normally I would apologize immediately, and make peace.

Interviewer: oh, why?

Kai: when you can control emotions, then do it. When you can forgive, just forgive!

Interviewer: who told you so?

Kai: from books (laugh). Many books say so.”

In the quoted conversation, Kai suppresses her needs for parents’ celebration of her birthdays by acknowledging their time constraints as migrants far away, while showing considerable gratitude towards the special efforts that the grandparents make to cheer her up. In dealing with sibling rivalry, she believes that she should be the one to strike peace, endure unreasonable demands from the younger sister and maintain harmony in the household, which is part of her responsibility as the elder child. My fieldwork research shows that many of the eldest children in migrant families share this similar sense of responsibility to ease the care burdens for the adults. In Kai’s case, her way of rationalizing this derives not only from

socialization of traditional family ideology, but also from emotion-management books.

In a later question about her general assessment of her life satisfaction, she rated 7 out of 10 points. Her explanation, shown below, reflects a similar pattern in which she reconciles her emotional needs with parental migration by subscribing a new meaning to her condition: parental absence, despite her unhappiness and insecurity, could foster her independence.

“About friendship, I have many friends and they treat me good. But for family relationships (*qingqing*), my Ba and Ma have no time for me! But, sometimes on reflection, I think maybe this cultivates my sense of independence.”

Kai may be one of the very articulate teenagers in my interview sample whose case illustrates the process of emotion work that these teenagers engage in ‘doing family’, but hers is not an exceptional case in the sense that a majority of teenagers in the 23 migrant families bear much of the emotional burden of maintaining a family life with various constraints by behaving, thinking and even feeling in line with social expectations.

7.6 Conclusion

In this chapter, I explored how Chinese rural migrant families engage in a process of “doing family” to advance children’s education as a family mobility project.

I explicated two social processes working simultaneously towards this goal. First pertains to the material practices in migrant households to provide care work and educational support for adolescents. To reconcile women’s participation in work and childcare responsibilities when parents and children move together in cities, the migrant mothers work “the second shift” to juggle both roles (Hochschild, 1989). There is a division of labor along the generation and gender lines (Fan, 2009; Murphy, 2014), where working mothers, sometimes with the assistance of grandparents, are taking up the “inside” work which has traditionally been devaluated. I also documented that migrant parents and other adults get involved in adolescents’ education through diverse ways. In both Lake County and Shenzhen, parents enroll their children in tuition classes to compensate for their lack of human capital.

Those who are capable do it in a strategic fashion through calculated division of labor and enrichment programs to expose their children to more advanced materials. A small group even initiate parenting education through social media and internet.

The second process of “doing family” refers to cultural practices that shape individuals’ sense of family roles and obligations. In the case of migrant mothers who were separated with children in an earlier stage, a compensation mentality similar to what international migrants experience (Parreñas, 2001; Horton, 2009) drives them to make up for previous years through performing motherly roles against tight schedules at work. In the case of adolescents in rural migrant households, I showed that two notions—*parental sacrifice* and “*understanding things*” shape their profound sense of indebtedness to adults (particularly parents) who endure harsh working environment, relinquish many pleasures in life such as leisure, consumption and spending time together with the family, as well as provide care, stay involved in their schooling. Living as migrants’ children subjects them to an obligation of ‘understanding things’ (*dongshi*) and repays for the *sacrifices* that the adults in the household make for them through hard work in school.

Taken together, the analysis in this chapter complements the quantitative study in Chapter 5 by answering important questions that were left unaddressed with data directly collected from migrants. As noted in Chapter 5, given data and methodology limitations, the quantitative analysis revealed little about the migration effect or the effect of family history upon migrant children’s achievement or the agency family members exercise as individuals in society. Throughout this chapter, I demonstrated that migration presents unique challenges for rural migrants’ family life, particularly in view of the Chinese context where *hukou*-based discriminations and inadequate labor protection impose enormous burden for parents to balance family and work arrangements and where prior parent-child separation in a “relayed migration” (Sung 1987) exerts lingering effects on intergenerational relationships. This process is laden

with “emotion work” (Hochschild, 1979) where parents, grandparents and children process their emotional needs, expectations and feelings to fit into acceptable displays as families. However, this chapter also documented a process of “doing family” in migrant families’ strategic actions to cope with migration as well as advance children’s education, thus rescuing rural migrants’ agency from an academic discourse that cast them as “structurally imprisoned, boxed into hopelessly predetermined constraints” (2001).

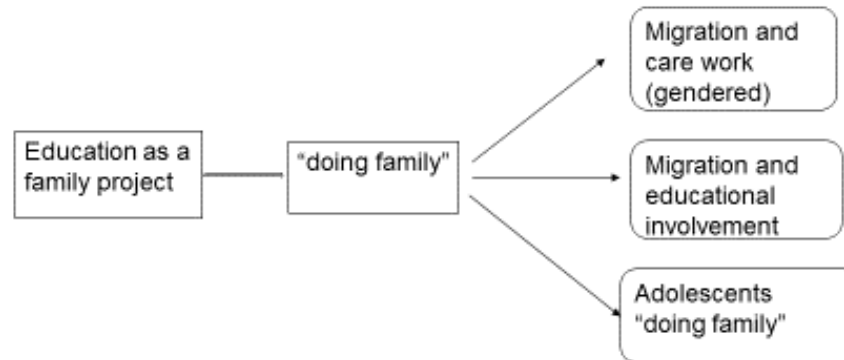


Figure 7.1 A conceptual framework

Table 7.1: migration history of sampled families

| | Bright School (n=8) | Eastern Bay (n=15) |
|-------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------|--------------------|
| Family SES | | |
| Parents' education (the higher) | | |
| High school and above | 1(13%) | 4 (27%) |
| Below high school | 7(87%) | 11(73%) |
| Father's occupation | | |
| Professionals (including state employees) | 0 | 2(13%) |
| Small businesses | 4(50%) | 4(26%) |
| Manual labor | 4(50%) | 9(60%) |
| Mother's occupation | | |
| Professionals (including state employees) | 0 | 0 |
| Small businesses | 4(50%) | 3(20%) |
| Service work (including contract workers with state institutions) | 4(50%) | 10(67%) |
| Housewife | 0 | 2(13%) |
| Family migration history | | |
| Child's average age (years) | 14.3 | 11.6 |
| Child's migration history | | |
| Born locally or moved before 3 | 3(38%) | 4(27%) |
| Moved after 3 | 5(62%) | 11(73%) |
| Father' migration history | | |
| Staying in current place for 10 years | 3(38%) | 8(53%) |
| With prior migration in other cities | 6(76%) | 6(40%) |

CHAPTER EIGHT CONCLUSION

In this concluding chapter, I summarize major research findings and more importantly, discuss their implications. The chapter is divided in three parts. In the first part, I sketch the main results and interpret these empirical patterns in relation to China's broader social and cultural context. I then discuss the theoretical and policy implications that this project yields and its contributions to the growing body of works on migration and child development. The last section is devoted to a brief account of the limitations and future research plans to extend this research topic.

8.1 Research findings: putting research results in perspective

What are the mechanisms across multiple levels of structures, such as family/individual characteristics, school contexts and regional development levels, which drive the particular empirical patterns of their educational outcomes? How do different school contexts shape migrant children's educational opportunities and experiences? How do the rural migrant families, whose life history entails lengthy periods of separation between parent(s) and children, strategize to advance children's educational prospects (or the failure of it) against local structural constraints? These are the central questions that I set out in the beginning of this research project and marshalled multiple sources of empirical data to address in the research process.

Research findings suggest a complex story which requires a nuanced interpretation sensitive to broader social and life-course patterns and a theoretical mind that reads through the interaction of structure and culture in shaping the choices and behaviors for this particular group in contemporary China.

8.1.1 Migrant children's achievement patterns

By differentiating family types by *hukou* origin and by different living arrangements necessitated by labor migration, this project avoided a prevalent methodological fallacy in

existing literature in the research of migrant children's well-being--the lack of valid reference groups. Overall, bivariate analysis of the CEPS data (2014) in Chapter 5 revealed that while migrant students are found to significantly outperform those from non-migrant families as well as those left behind ($p < 0.05$ and $p < 0.01$ respectively in scheffe's test), they do not report significantly higher educational aspiration than their counterparts in rural areas ($p > 0.1$). However, when we shift the comparative lens to bring urban-rural gaps into the picture, there leaves limited room for grandeur optimism. In either cognitive test or educational aspiration, the urban advantages over rural migrant adolescents are pronounced, with a gap of 0.28 standard deviation in cognitive score and almost one year in educational expectation (significant at the 95% confidence level for both outcomes).

These empirical patterns reveals a more nuanced and complex picture of Chinese rural migrant children's educational achievement than existing literature. Unlike the dominant narrative that casts rural migrant children as systematic underachievers (Kwong, 2004; Wang, 2008; Goodburn, 2009; Li, 2011; Wang and Holland, 2011; Zhou, 2011; Xiong, 2015), the overall picture shows relative advantages in cognitive skills and educational expectations ($p > 0.1$ in scheffe's test) for migrant children in comparison with their rural peers remaining in home villages, which is in general agreement with findings from studies using the CFPS data (Treiman and Ren, 2013; Xu and Xie, 2015; Jordan, Ren and Falkingham, 2014; Yeung and Gu, 2016). However, results from the CEPS dataset presents a less sanguine story of migrant children's achievement relative to urban adolescents, thus revealing more structural barriers in their educational adjustment in urban areas. For example, their educational expectations does not lift up as much as what predicts in CFPS-based research. Given that the CEPS data was designed to sample students and families based on schools, a plausible speculation is that it captures more of school segregation process than the CFPS data.

8.1.2 Migrant children's education and the family context

Quantitative results from OLS models show that family-level factors do matter, but the working mechanisms seem to vary between cognitive score and students' educational expectations. With regard to cognitive score, I found that higher family SES, family educational resources and parental aspiration are positively correlated with adolescents' results. In particular, when these three sets of mediators were entered in the models, performance of all three groups of rural adolescents, i.e. rural migrants, rural non-migrants and rural left-behind, converges and the differences among them is reduced to non-significant levels. However, net of all mediating variables and control variables, the urban advantage remains robust ($b=0.03$, $p<0.05$ in full model). When it comes to adolescents' educational aspiration, I showed that parents' educational attainment, numbers of books at home, parental aspiration and mother-child relationship are effective covariates. In particular, leveling the above-mentioned factors, rural left-behind children are reporting significantly higher educational aspirations ($b=0.03$, $p<0.01$ in Model 6). Somewhat surprisingly, migrant children's educational aspiration seems not to be sensitive towards these sets of mediators.

Combining with qualitative analysis as presented in Chapter 7, the above patterns shed light on two sociological insights concerning migrant children's education. First, migrant children's families are engaged in an education-oriented family mobility project, in which abundant resources within their reach are mobilized, tremendous efforts on the part of parents (mothers in particular) are made to maintain family life in face of competing demands from migrant work and household responsibilities and high expectations are professed for children's achievement. For instance, as Table 5.3 shows, despite parents' own relatively low educational attainment, migrant children's families resemble to some extent the patterns of educational investment and expectations of urban households. My interview data with parents and other significant others in migrant children's life confirm this mechanism. In the Chinese context, I

argue that educational success holds multiple meanings for rural migrant families. On the one hand, educational success is pursued in line with the ideology of meritocracy in the Confucian tradition, which rewards “winners” with “social rank, job positions, higher incomes or general recognition and prestige” (Tan, 2008). On the other hand, in view of China’s dualist social structure which renders rural-*hukou* citizens disadvantaged in almost all arenas of social life (Treiman, 2012), educational success constitutes one of the few limited ways that rural people can change their inferior status (Wu and Treiman, 2007), thus joining the “elite club” of urbanites. These two dimensions of educational success in contributing to social mobility intertwine and reinforce the value attached to educational achievement in rural families. This has tremendous implications for the migrant households in their endeavor to overcome social barriers and collectively pursue this mobility project.

Secondly, while migrant families’ relatively advantageous conditions in family SES, educational resources and parental expectations contribute significantly to their cognitive scores, such benefit does not show in their future aspiration. In other words, there seems to be counterpoising factors that are involved during children’s migration to urban areas which could offset their gains in performance. Further analyses indicate that this might be related to the multiple sources of tension and barriers confronted by migrant families in host cities, especially in cosmopolitan cities like Shenzhen. For example, the dual demands from work and family responsibilities significantly reduce the leisure time that migrant parents and their child could spend together, let alone quality communications. In Chapter 5, the variable mother-child closeness as a measure of family social capital provides a preliminary glimpse of such tension in migrant families. As Tables 5.4 and 5.5 show, though it is not a significant covariate for cognitive score, it is a robust predictor of adolescents’ self-reported educational expectation, which might explain why migrant children benefit less in future aspiration than in cognitive skills in comparison with rural-remaining peers. The qualitative analysis in Chapter 7 also

documented such a stressful condition for migrant teenagers and their families, where considerable “emotion work” is performed by teenagers to suppress their emotional needs and strive to achieve in order to compensate for parents’ *sacrifices*.

8.1.3 Migrant children’s education and the significance of school context

Findings in this study confirm the importance of school context for migrant children’s educational achievement, especially in view of a *de facto* school segregation system practiced in urban areas (Chen and Feng, 2013; Lu and Zhou, 2013; Lai et al., 2014; Chen et al., 2015). Results from multilevel analysis in Chapter 5 shows a “surprising” twist that the differences in test performance between three groups of rural teenagers are completely wiped out, but the consistence of urban advantage remains ($p < 0.05$ in full model), after allowing for random intercept at the school level. This suggests that the superior performance of rural migrant children’s test scores relative to their rural peers is largely due to their different school environment. Among the school-level predictors, we found that school institutional characteristics such as of higher ranking, being located in urban centers and being publically funded are positively correlated with students’ test score. Moreover, school organization processes such as the school academic climate and school-family partnership score also predict positive results. However, the cross-level interaction models between school environment and migrant children group revealed remaining barriers. As shown in Table 5.8, the interaction terms between school ranking and migrant children group ($b = 0.07$, $p < 0.05$), and between school academic climate and migrant children group ($b = -0.08$, $p < 0.05$) are significantly negative, indicating that migrant children are significantly more likely to be channelled to lower ranking and less academically competitive schools.

The qualitative case study in Chapter 6 (Bright School in Lake County and Eastern Bay School in Shenzhen) further illustrates the process of how institutional inequalities are

reproduced in everyday school organization, which shapes divergent patterns of migrant children's educational opportunities and experiences. Throughout the chapter, I demonstrated that the institutional inequalities between public schools and *minban* schools not only create huge gaps in the resources a school could get but also shape the subjectivities of teachers and students in these different institutions. For example, the favorable position of Bright School as a public school and a government project is well mirrored in teachers' buoyant morale and students' confidence in daily interactions. In contrast, teachers in *minban* schools like Teacher Zhang suffer from social stigma and institutional discriminations that are attached to their occupation, which undoubtedly would affect their teaching and how their students are socialized towards their future achievement and attainment. Moreover, such institutional differentiations, interacting with school management strategies by the leadership of school principals and their administrative teams, become an important force in shaping the school cultures. For example, in Bright School, I documented a model of *School as Competitor* where the superior institutional position, provision of better public resources and recruitment of more 'elite' faculty and students give the school an edge in pursuing an academically oriented strategy to produce high school progression rate at the expense of educational reform, which would further cement their elite status in the county. Such is not the case in Eastern Bay school which caters to migrant population in Shenzhen. Instead, what was found is a model which I termed as *School as Charity Organization*, where structural disadvantages in institutional support, resource provision and recruitment lead to an organizational process in which informal and community resources are mobilized by the school board in the name of educational equity for migrant children. To carve a niche in local educational system, the administrative team under the leadership of school principal resorts to students' performance in sports events rather than academic performance.

The quantitative and qualitative analyses in this dissertation presents compelling

evidence of the effect of institutional inequality at the school level upon migrant students' achievement. While migrant students are more likely to benefit from transferring to urban schools that are in better shape in resources, facilities and curriculum than the schools in rural communities, they are significantly more likely to be channeled to low quality schools in the urban educational hierarchy such as segregated migrant schools and low-ranking public schools. This is consistent with previous research based on single field sites (Han, 2001a; 2001b; Zhou, 2011; Xiong, 2015). In other words, the school segregation practiced in urban areas is systematically shaping migrant children's educational disadvantages. In combination with the analysis at the family level, we observe a huge gap between educational aspirations, particularly among migrant parents, for migrant children's future attainment and institutional barriers for their access to good quality education in migration destinations where they are perceived and treated as outsiders. The long-term consequences of such disparities upon migrant children's adult attainment could potentially loom large and warrant future research with longitudinal data.

8.1.4 Migrant children's education and the significance of regional context

Regarding the effect of regional context upon migrant children's achievement, the current project reveals preliminary but sociologically meaningful findings. As quantitative analysis in Chapter 5 shows (Tables 5.8 and Figure 3), migrant children reap some benefits from moving to more economically prosperous areas, which is reflected in the positive interaction terms between migrant children group and the eastern region ($b=0.13, p<0.05$), and between migrant children and the central region ($b=0.15, p>0.1$). Though the analysis does not provide evidence to specific mechanisms at the regional level that influence migrant children's educational achievement, which warrant future research endeavor, a plausible speculation points to the tremendous regional gaps in educational development in the context of China's uneven regional development policies (Yang, 1991; Fan, 1992; 1995; 1997; Hannum and

Huang 2006; Jordan et al. 2014).

8.2 Contributions

In what follows, I ruminate upon the theoretical and methodological contributions of this study in relation to research findings summarized above.

8.2.1 An ecological perspective of migrant children's education in China

Theoretically, this study adopts an ecological perspective (Bronfenbrenner, 1979; 1999; Bronfenbrenner and Evans, 2000; Bronfenbrenner and Morris, 2006) in exploring how multiple contexts affect rural migrant children's achievement by analyzing data sources of different types in a mixed-method design in an effort to bridge research gaps unaddressed in existing literature.

First, this analytical framework allowed me to contextualize rural migrant children's educational development in a web of individuals (migrant children, parents and school staff), institutions (the family, the school and the regional context) and interactions within and among them, thus yielding comprehensive and nuanced research findings. This is a step beyond conventional single-level analysis (at either the family or the school level) in existing literature (see Chapter 3 for details). The analyses of both quantitative national survey data (Chapter 5) and qualitative field data (Chapter 6 and Chapter 7) reveal coexisting "hurdles and hopes" for migrant children's education. For example, in the context of family, migrant parents (mothers in particular) engage in an elaborate process of "doing family" to organize family life against competing demands from work and childrearing, to invest heavily in children's education and motivate their commitment, and migrant teenagers are socialized to be achievers as a way to advance future prospects and repay parents' sacrifices. However, at school, they encounter a segregation system where they are systematically pushed towards low-quality education.

Second, the inherent Process-Person-Context-Time (PPCT) model under the ecological systems framework (Bronfenbrenner and Evans, 2000; Bronfenbrenner and Morris,

2006) recognizes another important dimension of human development, i.e. the interactive nature of structure and agency, as reflected in the following quote.

“Especially in its early phases, but also throughout the life course, human development takes place through processes of progressively more complex **reciprocal interaction between an active, evolving biopsychological human organism and the persons, objects, and symbols in its immediate external environment.**” (Bronfenbrenner and Morris, 2006:797, emphasis added).

As identified in Chapter 3, one unsatisfactory aspect of current research on rural migrant children’s well-being is inadequate attention to individuals’ agency (Johnson, 2001; Murphy, 2014), with a prevailing “over-socialized conception of man” (Wrong, 1961). In this project, I present a balanced analysis of structure and agency in understanding migrant children’s educational issues by explicating the “reciprocal interactions” in their family and schooling processes, particularly in qualitative research. For example, the conceptual tool of “doing family” that I used to describe family processes in migrant households captured many agentic dimensions of family life against sturdy structural barriers, such as family’s projection of children’s future attainment, parents’ purchase of private tuition to compensate for their inability to tutor children, as well as migrant children’s contribution to household chores and engagement in “emotion management”. Likewise, in analyzing the schooling process for migrant students in two schools in Chapter 6, I examined the role of school principals in negotiating institutional support, community resources and school administration, which is pertinent in contemporary China under the Principal Accountability System (*xiaozhang fuzezhi*) (Xiao, 1990; Feng, 2003; Liu, 2013).

In a nutshell, the ecological perspective adopted in this study enabled me to carry out a multi-level analysis of inputs of diverse social contexts upon migrant teenagers and the interactions between them and to present a balanced picture of structure and agency in analysis.

8.2.2 Market transition and social stratification in post-reform era

As mentioned in the introductory chapter, this project engages in a broader debate regarding the impact of market transition upon China's social stratification order in post-reform era (Nee, 1989; 1991; 1996; Walder, 1992; Bian and Logan, 1996; Xie and Hannum, 1996; Zhou, 2000; Lin and Bian, 2001). Findings in this research present a complex picture of China's social stratification order in relation to rural migrant children's education, depending on the reference group one adopts in interpretation.

Compared with their rural-*hukou* peers, migrant children gain modestly from moving to more economically prosperous urban places, which could be attributed to higher family SES, educational resources at home, boosted parental aspiration and more importantly better school environment. This is in general agreement with Nee's (1989; 1996) prediction of positive effect of marketization after reform. Meanwhile, the social positioning of migrant children with their urban-*hukou* peers is overshadowed with the legacies of redistributive mechanisms such as school segregation and exclusive migration policies, which is consistent with the counterarguments (Walder, 1992; Bian and Logan, 1996; Xie and Hannum, 1996; Zhou, 2000; Lin and Bian, 2001). As displayed in qualitative chapters, the consequences of entrance into public schools and *minban* schools loom large in almost every aspect of migrant children's educational experiences, from school facilities, school climate, curriculum and social expectations from significant others. Likewise, settlement in regions with higher levels of socioeconomic development benefits migrant students' educational performance.

In brief, crossing the geographic boundaries through migration to urban places brings modest gains for rural Chinese teenagers' education. However, such boundary-crossing from rural to urban areas is not fully achieved in the face of enduring systems of categorical inequalities in place (Tilly, 1998), in this case, the *hukou* system, the educational system and regional politics that are tied to rural-urban divide. Both quantitative and qualitative analyses

in this study document persistent and pronounced gaps between urban-*hukou* teenagers and all rural-*hukou* groups, whether in terms of educational performance or future aspirations. Such is the structural barrier that migrants are confronted with, which, according to Tilly, has a tendency to perpetuate existing categorical inequalities, as the following quote shows.

“Bounded categories deserve special attention because they provide clearer evidence for the operation of durable inequality, because their boundaries do crucial organizational work, and because categorical differences actually account for much of what ordinary observers take to be results of variation in individual talent or effort” (Tilly, 1998:6)

In the case of Chinese rural migrant children’s education, the *hukou* system ties up with the school segregation system and exclusive migration policies, which do “crucial organizational work” in generating divergent patterns of inequalities in their educational access and the quality of education they could receive. Two major mechanisms identified by Tilly (1998) also find evidence in this case, i.e. “exploitation” and “opportunity hoarding”. While the exclusionary state policies which legally restricts rural migrants’ social entitlements in urban places deny their children equal educational rights, the hierarchical educational system serves as a major agent in hoarding opportunities against migrant children. For example, in Chapter 6, I showed that the school admission process in the publicly funded elite school-- Bright School is designed to systematically screen out rural students. Likewise, the migrant school Eastern Bay itself is built upon the idea of segregating school opportunities and resources to protect the interest of local *hukou* citizens in Shenzhen.

8.2.3 Methodological contribution

The current study has proved the usefulness of the **mixed-methods approach** to achieve generalizable and in-depth social knowledge about Chinese rural migrant children. Scholars have recognized that quantitative and qualitative methods each have their strengths and weaknesses. By integrating them in one research project, one could complement, triangulate and consolidate research findings. In this research, I employed both national

representative data and qualitative field data, following a sequential explanatory design (Morse, 1991; Ivankova, 2006). This research design allows me to conduct a step-by-step analysis of the research topic supported by strong evidence from both national survey data and contextualized narrative data, as shown in the summary of main findings. Moreover, analyses of different types of data triangulate each other and reveal different dimensions of one particular phenomenon, which stimulate insights for further theoretical development. For example, the quantitative chapter painted a broad picture of migrant children's achievement patterns in relation to multiple social contexts in their life (i.e. the family, the school and the regional contexts), based on national representative data. However, it revealed less about the social processes in these contexts that influence migrant children's academic life. This was largely complemented and consolidated by the qualitative analyses in Chapter 6 and Chapter 7, in which I took a more localized account of how migrant children, parents and schools negotiate their educational opportunities against structural barriers. The dissertation as a whole presents a compelling and nuanced analysis of coexisting "hurdles and hopes" for migrant children in China's post-reform social transformations, thus providing a good case of mixed-method research in sharpening the analytical strengths and broadening the scope (Johnson and Onwuegbuzie, 2004; Onwuegbuzie, Johnson and Collins, 2009; Biesta, 2010; Yardley and Bishop, 2010; Shannon-Baker, 2015).

8.3 Policy recommendations

This research advances our knowledge about the working mechanisms that shape migrant students' achievement in post-reform China, which has practical implications for future intervention programs and policy initiatives. I have identified the following practical and policy recommendations out of this research.

First, pronounced urban-rural gap in children's educational achievement deserves urgent policy attention. Both quantitative and qualitative results in this project underscore the

glaring inequalities in line with the urban-rural divide. In Chapter 5, I found substantial gaps in adolescents' educational outcomes, in terms of both cognitive test scores and educational aspiration, between urban-*hukou* adolescents and all rural-*hukou* groups. Such gaps could largely be explained away by the combination of all family-level, school-level and regional level factors. In Charles Tilly's words, in the Chinese context, the urban/rural categories do "important organizational work" (1998:6) to generate class privilege, elite school attendance and regional development advantages in favor of urban children's development. From a policy perspective, China should readjust its development policies to channel more resources towards improving rural children's living environment. As laid out in the CCP 18th Third Plenum in 2013, the Chinese central government plans to reform the hukou system in order to clear obstacles for migrants' children in their entitlement to public resources and services. Equalizing public provision for the huge population of 100 million children in rural migrant families may release enormous human capital potential for China to harness, especially when the country accelerates its pace towards an aging society in its near future.

Second, this research underscores the school context as an environment for migrant children's learning, which is consistent with Buchmann and Hannum's (2011) observation of stronger school effects in societies where educational resources are "inadequate or very unequally distributed". Through quantitative analysis, we see that the school effect outweighs with the family effect in influencing adolescents' cognitive skills. Inter-school variation accounts for 24% of total variation in students' cognitive score. After controlling for school-level average score in the models, the differences in test performance between three groups of rural teenagers are completely wiped out. Meanwhile, this study also reveals remaining "hurdles" for migrant children to access good quality education in urban areas due to a school segregation system in practice. The qualitative study of two schools of different types (public versus *minban*) and of different ranking further provides a more nuanced account of

how institutional inequalities are reproduced in everyday school organizational process. To learn from international experiences, studies of the effect of desegregation policies have documented positive results for black students' educational opportunities performance (Guryan, 2004) and adult socioeconomic attainment (Johnson, 2011) in America. Therefore, from a policy perspective, phasing out the school segregation system and leveling the opportunities for migrant children to receive high quality education in urban areas would significantly boost their future attainment and life prospects.

Third, this study confirms the importance of the family context in mediating the relationship between migration and students' achievement, which is in general agreement with existing literature on the family effect on child development (Blau and Duncan, 1967; Bourdieu, 1986; Lareau, 2003; Sewell et al., 1969; Lee and Zhou, 2015). With reference to migrant children, we observe rather high levels of family socioeconomic resources, educational resources and parental educational aspiration, which explains their advantages over reference group in rural communities in cognitive skills. Our qualitative data reveal more heterogeneity among different migrant families, particularly in the Shenzhen sample. We observed the spill-over effect of market conditions that have implications for rural migrants' family life, where long and harsh working life leaves little parent-child time together, let alone parental involvement in children's study in some low SES migrant families. As a result, despite upholding lofty aspirations for children's future, some migrant parents encounter enormous constraints to exercise "concerted cultivation" (Lareau, 2003) which has been normalized among middle class families. From a policy perspective, we would recommend more family-friendly employment practices and policies to facilitate better involvement of migrant parents' involvement in their children's education. Further, the qualitative findings from Chapter 7 suggests an emotional process that migrant teenagers go through in "doing family", which might pose socio-psychological challenges in their development. Social work or counseling services should be made available to help children in migrant households deal with emotional

and psychological stress.

Finally, this study produces preliminary findings concerning the effect of regional development upon child well-being, which is a significant step beyond existing literature that did not account for “contexts of reception” (Portes and Zhou, 1993; Zhou, 1997a). I showed that the more economically prosperous Eastern areas are positively correlated to adolescents’ performance, including migrant children. Future research is warranted to explore specific mechanisms at the regional level that has implications for child development. As Chapter 3 described, uneven regional development and sustained migration towards a few growth poles along eastern coast provinces are largely induced by state policies in reform era. Findings in this study may suggest that China could readjust its regional policies to ameliorate social inequality.

8.4 Limitations and future research

My work suggests a few directions for future inquiry.

First, despite that I employed both quantitative and qualitative data and used them to complement, triangulate and consolidate each other, the **cross-sectional** nature of both sources of data pose a limitation to the strength and the interpretation of research findings. In particular, in the quantitative analysis, the key independent variable, i.e. the household type variable in CEPS, does not reflect informants’ life history and transitions between different living arrangements over the years, which might have introduced bias in estimating the effect of migration upon children’s well-being. In other words, the three rural groups—migrant children, non-migrant children and left-behind children are not necessarily qualitatively different groups and in many cases they could be the same group of children at different time points in their life. Thus, an important step forward is to work on longitudinal datasets and test the findings yielded in this study. Similarly, the results of qualitative chapters could be strengthened with follow-up studies on these informants in a longitudinal design, which the author intends to

pursue in coming years.

Second, as mentioned in Chapter 3, research on China's migrant children has to disentangle two interweaving factors: the effect of urban-rural inequalities as well as the migration effect. Due to data limitations, this study has only dealt with one dimension of the migration effect in Chapter 5 and Chapter 7, i.e. the strained parent-child relationships, while leaving important issues such as network disruption (Hagan, 1996) and acculturation issues (Berry, 1997) unaddressed. In future research, attention could be paid to such dimensions of migration to get a more complete picture of the topic.

Third, as described in Chapter 2, considerable disparities exist in social policies to accommodate rural migrants in different localities. In qualitative analysis, I analyzed two schools in Hunan and Shenzhen, which revealed patterned heterogeneity of inter-provincial and intra-provincial migrations and schooling experiences in public schools versus migrant schools, which constitutes preliminary findings for further development. In future research, I plan to extend this line of research to other sites such as Shanghai and Beijing. As Chapter 3 showed, despite that much has been written in different sites about migrant children's living conditions and constraints in their education posed by institutional and social environment, rarely do scholars undertake comparative research in different policy contexts in China to examine whether and how these divergent policies influence meso-level structures (Faist, 1997) during the migration process, such as the family, the school and the community that migrant children are embedded in. Such undertakings would facilitate better understanding of the mechanisms of how institutional context may play a role to reproduce or alleviate urban-rural inequalities and the processes by which this happens.

Fourth, as briefly touched upon in Chapter 7, there seems to be a profound socio-psychological dimension that China's internal migration engenders on migrant children's life, where culture-specific social expectations and structural constraints jointly shape their cultural

patterns of responding to their own life situations. For example, while a significant proportion of them experience tremendous strains in intergenerational interactions, they suppress their genuine frustrations and unhappiness by going through a process of “emotion labor” (Hochschild, 1979) to express feelings and emotions which fit to expectations. Similar processes could happen among other members in the migrant families such as the migrant mothers in their negotiation of a harsh working environment and family demands. In future research, I plan to develop theoretical perspectives regarding the emotional aspect of migration in the Chinese context.

Lastly, this dissertation contributes to the existing literature by bringing multiple layers of social structures into account to examine how migration affects rural children’s educational development. The quantitative analysis underscored the heterogeneous institutional and socioeconomic conditions in contributing to their outcomes. In qualitative analysis, I contextualize the analysis of the institution of school with different layers of social structures in the educational system: the policies from the central government as the macro-level environment towards migrant children’s school access, the local education bureau in distributing resources and evaluating the performance of schools as well as the school principals as key actors in mediating between educational authorities above as well as teachers, students and other stake-holders within the school community. This lays the ground for formulating a theory of migration and organizational processes in post-reform China in future research.

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Appendix A: Recruitment of research participants

I spent 6 months in these two field sites between September, 2014 and February, 2015, with the first three and half months in a vibrant community in Shenzhen and the latter two and half months in Lake County. It is worth noting that my fieldwork was a larger project than what is presented in this dissertation, as I mainly focus on migrant children and their families here (23 families), but the total sample included another 15 families with left-behind teenagers in rural Lake County, 7 urban families where the adolescent sample drew from the same class in Bright School in urban Lake County, and another 15 middle-class families who reside in high-rise blocks surrounding the “urban village” that most Eastern Bay students and their families currently stay. In this brief account of field experience, I describe the portions directly related to the migrant sample, leaving a full account of other samples in future writing.

Prior to fieldwork, I had some contacts in each place through personal networks such as family members, former colleagues and teachers. However, the recruitment proceeded in dramatically different ways in the two field sites. In Shenzhen, the first month saw a slow progress of recruitment, as there was no large pool of potential informants, given that each of my liaison persons had only a few families to introduce and these families tended to be homogeneous in many respects, mostly middle class families. Worse still, my letters and e-mails to school principals through their online publicized addresses for possible entry into schools for research were unanswered. New opportunities opened up when I wrote to anthropologist MaryAnn O’Donnell who has been living there for 20 years and who regularly blogs her experiences of and reflections on recent events in Shenzhen. She introduced me to a group of active parents and educators through a popular Chinese social media--We-chat, a free messaging and calling app that allow for easy communication.

This We-chat group, an open community, included around 500 parents, educators, and education-related professions, through which I got access to a large pool of potential

participants and their networks. Through this group, I was able to meet many families who were interested in participating in my research. The group organizer Ms. Qu Hong, a resourceful and former executive in a local state institution, also introduced me to the migrant school in this community. The school Principal Ms. Hu (pseudonym) was positive toward my intention of research in her school. She later helped in finding respondents according to my criteria--age, migration history and family economic condition. The class teachers would first talk to parents of potential participants during parent-teacher meetings and sought for their oral consent after explanation of my research project. Every Monday, Wednesday and Friday afternoons, I would ride the bus to the school and interviewed students in an empty office that is designated to be the venue for Youth League activities. Given the fact that most migrant parents are working long hours every day, only 40% families granted me the chance to have face-to-face interviews with them, in another 40% families, the mothers and I had a telephone interview and the rest 20% were not able to make the time. Under the last circumstance, parents' information was filled in by the students' home teachers who had sufficient knowledge about these families.

If in Shenzhen, my recruitment of informants benefited enormously from “weak ties”, the process in Lake County was more facilitated by “strong ties”, to use sociological jargons. In Bright School, I relied on a senior teacher Mr. Chang (pseudonym) whom I have known for 20 years to approach potential respondents. Mr. Chang is a well-respected veteran teacher in his mid-40s, with more than 20 years of teaching experience. After 15 years spent in a remote rural school, he tested into Bright School in the town center of Lake County in 2011, which is a major promotion of his professional life. Currently a homeroom teacher leader in this school, he served as an important liaison for me to talk with students, their families and school administrators. Students in this school have a rigorous curriculum and schedule, particularly at the end of semester (I worked with them mostly in December 2014 and January, 2015) when

students were busy preparing for final examinations. Mr. Chang helped schedule my meetings with students and their families and got parents' consent for the teenagers' participation in self-study hours in evenings and during weekends. Since it is a boarding school system, interviews with this group of respondents were conducted as we (usually one student and I) walked in the school sports field in the chilling winter evenings, given the students' tight schedules and the consideration of protecting their privacy. Until today, the memories of cold winter wind brushing my face and the rush to Mr. Chang's office to jot down information stored in my mind are vivid. While most of student interviews were conducted face to face as we "strolled" the school sports field, the talks, interviews or observations with parents and other adult guardians mostly took place in home visits after dinner, with a small number through phone calls.

Formal or informal conversations with other adult respondents (see Appendix C for detailed information) happened through more diversified channels and in various venues such as restaurants, community-based seminars, telephones, respondents' offices, tea or coffee shops. Surprisingly, the mention of a PhD on "family education" (*jiating jiaoyu*)⁶⁷ could be an easy opening to strike a conversation with parents, teachers and administrators in both research sites. Equally surprising, regardless the respondents' professional profile, institutional affiliations and educational background (I also have to admit that this sample is somewhat homogeneous), most were critical of the current system for having distorted what 'real education' should be, though from different perspectives.

⁶⁷ I was usually introduced and recognized as a scholar on "family education", despite multiple attempts to clarify that I am actually a sociology student on family and educational stratification.

Appendix B: Information of sampled families and contact schedule

| Family | Age | gender | Adult resp. | time/place |
|--------------------------------------|-----|--------|-------------|-----------------------------------------------------|
| Eastern Bay School (Shenzhen) | | | | |
| F1 | 10 | male | Mother | 10/11 home visit; 16/11 home visit |
| F2 | 13 | female | Mother | 13/11 school visit; 20/11 school visit; 21/11 phone |
| F3 | 12 | male | Mother | 13/11 school visit; 20/11 school visit; 20/11 phone |
| F4 | 11 | male | Mother | 13/11 school visit; 20/11 school visit; 20/11 phone |
| F5 | 14 | female | I5 | 15/11 school visit; 22/11 school visit |
| F6 | 13 | female | I4 | 15/11 school visit; 22/11 school visit |
| F7 | 12 | male | mother | 15/11 school visit; 22/11 school visit; 22/11 phone |
| F8 | 10 | female | Mother | 19/11 school visit; 26/11 school visit; 27/11 phone |
| F9 | 11 | male | I6 | 19/11 school visit; 26/11 school visit |
| F10 | 10 | male | Mother | 19/11 school visit; 26/11 school visit; 27/11 phone |
| F11 | 11 | male | Father | 6/12 home visit |
| F12 | 11 | female | Father | 26/11 home visit |
| F13 | 12 | female | Mother | 28/11 home visit |
| F14 | 12 | male | Mother | 5/12 home visit |
| F15 | 10 | female | Mother | 3/12 home visit |
| Bright School (Lake County) | | | | |
| F31 | 16 | female | Parents | 9/01/15 school visit; 11/01/15 home visit |
| F32 | 15 | female | Mother | 13/01/15 school visit; 14/01/15 home visit |
| F33 | 15 | female | I14 | 13/01/15 school visit |
| F34 | 14 | female | I14 | 15/01/15 school visit |
| F35 | 14 | female | Mother | 15/01/15 school visit; 17/01/15 home visit |
| F36 | 14 | male | Mother | 24/01/15 school visit; 24/01/15 home visit |
| F37 | 15 | male | Mother | 24/01/15 school visit; 25 /01/15 home visit |
| F38 | 14 | female | Mother | 24/01/15 school visit; 26/01/15 home visit |

Appendix C: Information of schoolteachers and administrators

| | Occupation | gender | Time/place |
|-------------|--------------------------|--------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Shenzhen | | | |
| 1 | School administrator | Male | 03/12/14 school visit |
| 2 | teacher | female | 08/12/14 telephone interview |
| 3 | teacher | female | 08/12/14 telephone interview |
| 4 | teacher | Male | 09/12/14 telephone interview |
| 5 | School principal | female | 08/02/15 school visit; prior to the interview, we also had discussions about migrant children in a few other occasions. |
| 6 | teacher | female | 10/02/15 restaurant; attended some seminars together |
| 7 | Student affairs director | female | I sat in her office during interviews with students, and interviewed once. |
| Lake County | | | |
| 8 | teacher | Male | 20/12/14 restaurant; he also served as the main gatekeeper in the urban school and helped sampling families. |
| 9 | teacher | female | We had many discussions during my stay as a guest in her office |
| 10 | teacher | female | We discussed frequently students' information and rural teachers' conditions as neighbors. |
| 11 | Grade coordinator | Male | 27/12/14 school visit |
| 12 | teacher | Male | School visit |
| 13 | School principal | Male | 15/01/15 restaurant |

Appendix D: Interview questions template

Adolescent Interview

Introductory, warm-up questions:

What is your favorite pastime? What is your favorite song?

Specific areas for follow-up questions:

Can you tell me about schedule of a typical weekday? And weekends? During winter vacation?

Is your current residence your *hukou* place? How long have you been staying here? Tell me your explorations in this place.

Did you move from one place to another? If yes, how did you adjust to it?

How close are you to your father?

How close are you to your mother?

How close are your parents to each other?

Do you have an independent working space at home?

How many books are there in your home that are appropriate for you to read?

Do you know which levels of education your parents want you to achieve?

What do your parents do when you do not understand the content of schoolwork?

What do your parents do when your exam scores are lower than expected?

What are the good things and what are the bad things about what your parents do for your education?

Do you enjoy school life?

What types of school are you in now? Where is it located? How is it ranked?

How do you like the school environment?

Which of the subjects do you enjoy most? And you do best in?

How do you like your classmates? And teachers?

Do you like the school atmosphere here?

Does your school regularly hold parent-school meetings? If yes, how often in a semester?

At which educational level do you think you can arrive at?

Which person in your life has motivated you the most?

Who do you admire the most?

What do you want to be when you grow up?

What do you do when you feel unhappy?

Parent/care-giver Interview

Specific areas for follow-up questions:

- Where is your hometown (*laojia*)? How long have you moved here? And the kid?
- Can you share a bit about your history of education, how your childhood/adolescence was like and your current work life (if retired, your work before retirement)?
- How close is the child to you or his/her father/mother?
- What does the child usually do after school in a school day? During weekends? In winter/summer vacations?
- How would you assess the child's academic performance?
- How much education do you expect the child to have? And why?
- What do you expect the child's job would be in the future?
- How do you help in the child's study if needed? Or whether/how do the parents get involved in the child's study?
- How did you choose the current school for your child to attend?
- How do you evaluate the school atmosphere for your child?
- How often do you contact his/her teachers? Or how often do the teenagers' parents contact teachers?
- What do you think are the most important lessons for raising a child nowadays?
- Do you talk with other people about the child-rearing experiences? Or do you read books, use internet or mobile phone Apps in getting information about child-rearing skills?

Teacher Interview

Specific areas for follow-up questions:

- How would you assess the student's academic performance?
- How would you assess the student's behavior?
- How does the student get along with his/her teachers, parents or classmates/friends?
- What are your rough estimates of his/her family conditions? Such as parents' education, employment, devotion to children's education, family learning environment and future expectations toward children's achievement.
- How do the adult guardians in this family get involved in the student's study?
- How often do the adult guardians attend school-parent meetings or parent committee meetings?