

WooJung Chang
ECON-480-001
Professor Hansen
12/17/07

Migrant Children's Education in China

ABSTRACT

The introduction of the Household Responsibility System in the late 1970s and the subsequent development of private markets had led to massive domestic migration in China. However, the children of migrants are ineligible to receive the nine-year compulsory education they are entitled to because of the Household Registration system (*hukou*) and the decentralization of educational finance. As public schools are unable to meet the demand of migrant children, private migrant schools with inferior quality have emerged. While the 1996 Trial Measures for the Schooling of Children and Youth among the Floating Population in Cities and Town was an effort by the government to improve the situations of migrant children's education, there has not been a systemic study on the impact of such policies. Did the 1996 Trial Measure increase the public school enrollment of migrant children? Due to the lack of sufficient data, a causal relationship cannot be established.

1. Introduction and Literature Review

Internal migration in China began in the late 1970s with the country's economic reforms. As agricultural productivity in the countryside boomed when the Household Responsibility System replaced the commune system, the excess labor headed to urban areas to find employment. This type of internal migration was previously unimaginable since no one could

survive without a local household registration status, known as the *hukou*. (Xu, Wang and Zou 2002, 542-43)

China's hukou system started in the early 1950s with the initial purpose of monitoring population movements and was adopted as a legislation in 1958. Under the hukou system all Chinese citizens were classified into two different types of categories—residential location and socio-economic eligibility. As China adopted the Soviet's model of industrialization through developing heavy industries, the state took the responsibility of providing employment and welfare to its urban population while leaving the rural residents on their own.

Hence, the hukou system became more than providing official identification of citizenship and status; it was related to every aspect of a Chinese person's life including obtaining food, clothing, shelter, education and employment, getting married and enlisting in the army. During the period when necessities were rationed, people could only obtain them through work units or collectives where their hukou belong and the assigned hukou of an individual had little hope in being changed. Geographical mobility of the people was effectively contained by the state as one would have great difficulty in obtaining such necessities to survive. (Chan and Zhang 1999, 819-22) However, as the Household Responsibility system allowed peasants to sell their above-quota production on the open market, it enabled people to obtain goods and services apart from official channels. While the hukou system remains intact, such private sector development significantly weakened the state's power to restrict population mobility. (Chan 1995, 63)

According to China's Fifth National Population Census in 2000, the "floating population (*liudongrenkou*)," migrants without local *hukou*, exceeded one hundred million and children under the age of 14 composed 13.78 percent of the total. The number of children entitled to

China's nine-year compulsory education, i.e. age 6-14, was over 8.8 million. (Han 2002, 25)

While the new phenomenon of massive migration to the cities reflects the weakened government control over mobility and its enforcement of the hukou system, these migrants nonetheless face numerous formal and informal discrimination against local residents.

Migrant workers engage in jobs with longer hours, poorer working conditions, lower pay and no benefits. For example, a 1997 study shows that in Shanghai, rural migrant workers work 54 hours per week on average while local residents work 43 hours per week. However, local residents earn approximately 40 percent more than migrant workers. They also receive in-kind benefits such as state-subsidized housing, healthcare and pensions that migrant workers do not qualify for. In addition, migrants are stereotyped as being uneducated, dirty, and causing crime, making it even difficult to integrate to the mainstream society. (Wang and Zuo 1997, 277-78)

Another serious problem related to migration is the education of their children. In general, migrant children have lower school enrollment rates and higher probability of dropping out of school. Migrants do have several options for their children's education, the most prestigious and desired option being sending their children to local public schools. However, without a hukou, migrant students face several obstacles in being admitted. In order to attend public schools the parents must have the Three Certificates of the original hukou, temporary residential certificate and labor contract, tax-paying certificate or operation license. However, many migrants who are street vendors, construction workers, janitors or security guards lack the second and third category of documents.

In addition to the hukou system, the Segmented Governmental Management of Education policy that makes the lowest level of government responsible for the nine-year compulsory

education of their residents also hinders migrant children from obtaining education. That is, local governments are not responsible for the education of migrant children without the proper hukou and they are not willing to take the financial burden of the increasing number of migrants. (Yan 2005, 4-8)

The high cost of public schools and the level of migrants' income is also a reason for the low enrollment rate of migrant children in local public schools. In fact, the absence of hukou increases the cost of public schools. On top of the tuition and miscellaneous fees that local students pay, migrant students without hukou are required to pay educational rental fee (*jiedufei*), school selection fee (*zexiaofei*) or education compensation fee (*jiaoyu buchangfei*). These extra fees are determined arbitrarily by each school and can be as high as 230,000 yuan. (Kwong 2006, 169) In many cases schools require such fees for the next several years in lump sum. The migrant parents' lower level of education, more labor-intensive work and lower incomes, which is partially due to the lack of hukou, constrains investment in their children's education as well. In addition, because migrant families are more likely to avoid the one child policy, they tend to have more than one child, increasing the family's burden on spending. (Lu and Zhang 2004, 65-70)

Even if migrant children are able to attend public schools, discrimination exists. Because the test results of migrant students do not affect the teachers' records and benefits, teachers are likely to pay less attention to migrant students. Migrant children are also unable to participate in extracurricular activities or become Young Pioneers. Neither do migrant children get rewarded for their academic achievements. They are not able to be nominated as the honorable "three-good students (good academic work, character, and physical ability)" and they have to participate in competitions under the name of other local students as they are not a formal member of the

school. When migrant children graduate they receive a Rental Education Graduation Diploma instead of a high school diploma. (Kwong 2006, 170)

China's history of lacking 'educational equality' also had an impact on the discrimination against migrant children. Traditionally, bureaucratic or rich families received education while the poor faced many restrictions in China. This was reversed after the communist party took power as children from landlord and capitalist classes were looked down upon and the education of the peasant and worker classes was prioritized. Though the object of discrimination may have changed, discrimination itself persisted. (Xia 2006, 42-43)

Also, the lack of private schools has worsened the situation of migrant children's education. All private schools in China were converted to either public schools or have been strictly controlled by the state since the early 1950s. While the government restored private schooling as it recognized its inability to meet all the needs through public schools, private schools were never given the same opportunity as public schools to develop. (Xia 2006, 43-44)

Another option for migrant children's education is schools set up by migrants specifically for migrant children. The number of these migrant schools has spurred recently due to the massive demand of education not met by local public schools. Kwong (2004) views the emergence of migrant schools as a result of the state's reluctance to take on the new responsibility to educate migrant children as well as the growing capability of civil society to provide for this need.

However, these schools are not without problems, especially when increasing number of migrant schools is built to make profits. With the possibility of being shut down by the government as they are illegal, migrant schools are unlikely to make investment in items that require a long-period to break even the cost. As their revenue comes almost exclusively from

tuition, such schools are driven to keep their costs low. As a result, they suffer from poor facilities, faculty and management. Often teachers are unqualified and because of the low pay and large classroom sizes their turnover rate is high. Other problems stem from the migratory nature of the students. With students coming from different parts of the country, there is a lack of uniformity in their age and academic standings. Some students find it difficult to adjust to different teaching materials and the new environment. Ultimately, because migrant schools are not recognized by the government they are unable to provide students with certificates of graduation.

Nevertheless, increasing number of migrants that are unable to afford local public schools or normal private schools send their children to such migrant schools. The competitiveness of migrant schools comes from their simple admission requirements, lower tuition, and its location near migrant communities. Migrant schools also provide services not available in public schools, such as transportation and after-school care. Accommodating to the highly mobile parents, most schools will refund tuition if students move away. Furthermore due to the existing educational disparity between rural and urban areas, many migrant children and their parents view migrant school education superior to the education back in their hometowns.

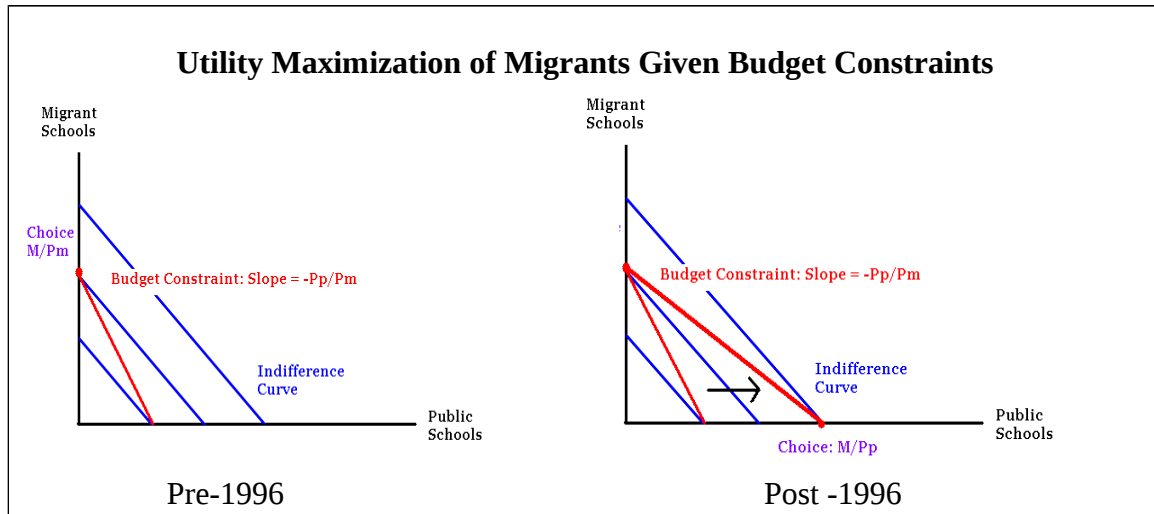
Meanwhile with increasing number of migrants and the attention drawn from domestic and foreign scholars, media and civil society, the Chinese government has recognized the significance of the issue and introduced limited provisions and regulations. In 1996, the government stipulated the Trial Measures for the Schooling of Children and Youth among the Floating Population in Cities and Town. The Measures stated that the government would provide compulsory education for all school-age migrant children. However, local schools were to enroll

migrant children only when all local children with hukou were to receive education and additional fees became legitimate. (China National Education Committee 1996)

Nevertheless the 1996 measure has led to further developments. Two years later Provisional Measures for the Schooling of Migrant Children and Young People was promulgated. (China Ministry of Education 1998) In 2002, Beijing municipal government also introduced the Provisional Measures on the Implementation of Compulsory Education for Children and Young People of Appropriate Age among the Migrant Population. (Beijing Municipality Bureau of Education 2002)

While the legal measures adopted by the Chinese government represent an important change in its policy towards migrant children's education, even after a decade, there has not been a systemic study on their impacts. Instead increasing number of studies continues to reveal the problems of migrant children's education. Hence, in order to understand whether further measures by the government is necessary, I attempt to evaluate the effectiveness of the current policies by questioning whether the 1996 Trial measure increased public school enrollment of migrant children in China.

2. Model



In 2002, Beijing public elementary school costs maximum 267 yuan per semester and junior high schools cost maximum 355 yuan per semester for city residents. (Jin 2004)

However, for migrant children, there was an average of 5826 yuan of additional fees in public key schools and 1344 yuan in general public schools for each academic year. (NWCCW and NCC 2003, 103) Migrant schools who cannot afford public schools in the cities also have the option to send their children to private migrant schools which cost about 50 yuan per semester. (Jin 2004) Due to the arbitrariness of the additional fees imposed to migrant children, the cost of attending school varies across Chinese cities. Nonetheless, from the example of Beijing, we can estimate the budget constraint of migrants. From comparing the cost of general public elementary schools and migrant schools:

$$P_{\text{public}} \times Q_{\text{public}} + P_{\text{migrant}} \times Q_{\text{migrant}} = M$$

$$(267 \times 2 + 1344) \times Q_{\text{public}} + 50 \times Q_{\text{migrant}} = M$$

$$Q_{\text{migrant}} = M/50 - (1878/50) \times Q_{\text{public}}$$

The slope of the budget line will be $1878/50 = 37.56$. Because the cost of attending public school is higher than the cost of attending migrant schools, especially after taking the additional fees into account, the slope will be steep.

The 1996 Trial Measures for Schooling of Children and Youth among the Floating Population in Cities and Towns stipulated that it is the government's responsibility to provide compulsory education to migrant children. However, instead of outlawing the additional fees, schools were legally allowed to charge them. Nonetheless, by delineating the qualification for migrant children to attend public schools in urban areas, the enrollment of migrant children in Beijing public schools was expected to increase. This change is reflecting in the shift of the budget line in the figure.

Because public schools and migrant schools are perfect substitutes, the indifference curve will have a straight line. Given the budget constraint, migrant parents will maximize their utility by sending their children to migrant schools that cost less. With the 1996 Trial Measure, however, increasing number of migrants children are expected to attend public schools over time.

In order to assess if the policy changes since 1996 increased enrollment, a panel data across time and regions on the total number of migrant children, number of migrant children attending public schools (or percentage of migrant children attending public schools), number of migrant children attending migrant schools (or percentage of migrant children attending migrant schools), official cost for migrant children to attend public schools and migrant schools, and additional fees required for migrant children to attend public schools is needed. In addition, data on other factors that may influence the enrollment of migrant children, such as income and education level of migrant workers will be useful.

3. Empirical Results

Data prior to 1996 was unavailable. Nonetheless, it is important to consider the changes that occurred afterwards, as a number of provisional measures have been issued based on the 1996 Trial Measure. The first data set comes from a survey that was sponsored by the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) and conducted by the National Working Committee on Children and Women (NWCCW) under the State Council and the National Children's Center (NCC) in November-December 2002. Titled *Let's Share the Sunshine: Survey Report on the Temporary Migrant Children in Nine Cities of China*, it uses a sample of 6,343 temporary migrant households with children from 0-18 years old. The stratified sampling includes three different geographical locations—east, middle, and west. It then selects three cities to represent the size of the cities. The sample size were 1200, 800 and 300 households for big, medium and small cities respectively. When selecting the nine cities per capita GDP and per capita disposable income was taken into account.

Map of the Nine Cities in *Let's Share the Sunshine*



*big cities are indicated red; mid-sized cities are indicated blue; and small cities are indicated green

The survey results show that 90.7 percent of the total migrant children were enrolled in school while 6.85 percent have never been to school and 2.45 percent dropped out. The enrollment rate decreases as the children get older; 15.4 percent of the children were not attending school at the age of 14. In addition, the enrollment rate of migrant children in big cities, 97.5 percent, is higher than that of small cities, 94.3%.

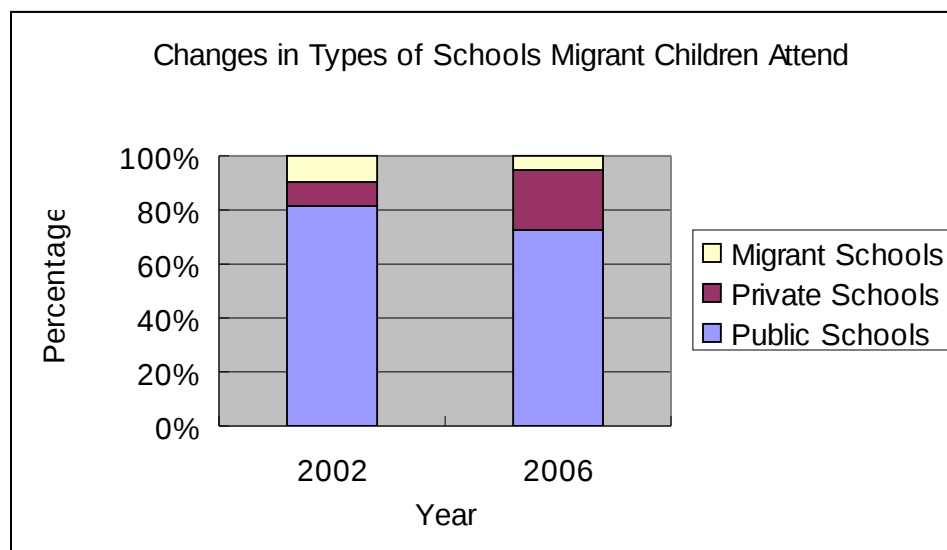
For those children who have access to schooling, 81.4 percent of them attend local public schools while 9.8 percent attend migrant schools. The rest attend private schools. There were also geographical discrepancies in the type of schools migrant children enroll in. While an average of 9.6 percent of the migrant children attends migrant schools in the east, the figure is

only 0.9 percent for the west. In the survey, children who attend public schools showed higher satisfaction; 83.6 percent liked their current school as opposed to 61.1 percent of the migrant school children. (NWCCW and NCC 2003)

The second source of data comes from National Bureau of Statistics of China. In August 2006, the organization conducted the *Survey on the Living Standards of Migrant Workers* using a sample of 29,425 people. Of those who answered the survey 81.16 percent had stable jobs while the remaining 18.84 percent were ‘floating workers.’ The survey also took geography into account by taking more samples from highly populated provinces in the east. It also selected cities of different sizes, though the survey does not report the results according to the different geographical location.

In the section on the education of migrant children, survey results showed that 17.21 percent of the migrant workers bring their children to the cities with them and the percentage is higher among less-educated and young parents. Of the school-aged children 71.92 percent of the children attended public schools, 22.03 percent attended private schools, 5 percent attended migrant schools and 1.05 percent had no schooling at all. The survey further recognizes that the current hukou system does not meet the demand for migrant children’s education and has resulted in high educational rental fee and donations. (China National Bureau of Statistics 2006)

The comparison of the two surveys shows that from late-2002 to mid-2006 the enrollment rate of migrant children in public schools decreased, but so did the enrollment rate in migrant schools. A higher percentage of migrant children chose to attend private schools.



Geography may explain the higher percentage of migrant children attending private schools in 2006. The latest statistics on private schools show that private schools are more available in urban areas than in counties and towns or rural areas. For example, in 2005, private schools accounted for 10.42 percent of the total number of primary schools and 9.08 percent of the enrollment in urban areas. However, only 1.02 percent of the total primary schools were private with 1.94 percent of the total enrollment in rural areas during the same year. Hence if the second data set on migrant children's education from 2006 had a higher proportion of samples from big cities, this may have skewed the results. In fact, while 2002 survey was designed to study the differences across cities and regions, the 2006 survey aimed to proportionately represent migration at the national level, weighing the east and big cities more. (China National Bureau of Statistics 2006 and 2007)

Private schools were virtually non-existent during the Cultural Revolution. However, they reappeared in the 1980s and the number grew rapidly after 1992. The same statistics show that from 2004 to 2005, the number of private primary schools increased from 6047 to 6242 nationwide while the number of private secondary schools increased from 4219 to 4608. In 2004,

2.92 percent of primary school students and 4.8 percent of secondary students were enrolled in private schools. These figures rose to 3.58 percent and 6.03 percent respectively in the following year. (China National Bureau of Statistics 2006 and 2007)

While some private schools, also known as “elite” or “aristocratic” schools, have outstanding facilities and charge high tuition, there are also a number of general private schools that cater to salaried workers, officials, and rural peasants. In 1999, approximately 80% of private schools were estimated to serve the needs of the general public. Unlike the private “elite” schools, the fees charged are closely related to the affordability by the general public. (Lin 1999, 69 and 73) Private schools tend to have greater flexibility in admission regarding problems with the hukou. If the cost of attending these private schools is not necessarily higher than that of public schools, increasing number of migrant parents will choose to send their children to private schools.

4. Conclusion

From the two data sets, however, the effectiveness of the 1996 Trial Measure and other related provisions cannot be adequately assessed. First, there is no data on the public and migrant school enrollment rates prior to 1996 for comparison. Second, the sample sizes are too small. Third, information on other factors that could affect the enrollment rates need to be controlled.

The ideal data set would be panel data prior to 1996 to present, across different cities and provinces in China. In addition to migrant children’s enrollment rate in public and migrant schools, data on other factors are necessary. For example, the income of migrant parents could influence the choice of school. In the survey by NWCCC and NCC, 56.9 percent answered that the main reason why migrant children do not attend school or dropout is because the families are

unable to afford it. In contrast, 15.5 percent answered they thought education is useless.

(NWCCW and NCC 2003, 70) Hence, it is expected more migrants will choose to send their children to public schools with better quality as their income increases. The level of migrant parents' education level in turn will influence both the income level and school choice as well.

While the impact of policy changes cannot be evaluated through this study by utilizing public and migrant school enrollment, the current state of migrant children's education shows that the further improvements are necessary. Over the next two decades, more than 200 million people are estimated to migrate from rural areas to cities in China. With the current trend of increasing family migration, the number of migrant children in Chinese cities is likely to grow at a faster pace. If the Chinese government continues to rely on the existing institutions of the hukou system and Segmented Governmental Management of Education, millions of more migrant children will be denied of proper education. This is not only unjust to the migrant children themselves, but the cost for the Chinese economy and society is large as well. While the current economic growth of China is heavily dependent on massive inexpensive migratory labor in coastal regions, sustainable development will only be possible when investment in the future generation has been made.

REFERENCES

Beijing Municipality Bureau of Education. Provisional Measures on the Implementation of Compulsory Education for Children and Young People of Appropriate Age among the Migrant Population. Beijing Municipality Bureau of Education.
<http://www.bjedu.gov.cn/2007bjedu/2378470193224482816/20070927/55030.shtml> (accessed October 18, 2007)

Chan, Merry Jean. 1995. Floating Populations. *Harvard International Review* 17, no. 2 (Fall): 62-65.

China Ministry of Education. Provisional Measures for the Schooling of Migrant Children and Young People. China Ministry of Education.

<http://www.moe.edu.cn/edoas/website18/level3.jsp?tablename=1118300832763033&infoid=5952> (accessed October 18, 2007).

China National Education Committee. Trial Measures for the Schooling of Children and Youth among the Floating Population in Cities and Town. Hubei Province Bureau of Education.

http://www.hbe.gov.cn/e21web/jyt/policy_show.php?policy_id=878 (accessed October 18, 2007).

China National Working Committee on Children and Women (NWCCW) and the National Children's Center (NCC). 2003. *Let's Share the Sunshine: Survey Report on the Temporary Migrant Children in Nine Cities of China*. Beijing.

China National Bureau of Statistics. Survey on the Living Standards of Migrant Workers. China National Bureau of Statistics. http://www.stats.gov.cn/tjfx/fxbg/t20061011_402358719.htm (accessed November 5, 2007).

China National Bureau of Statistics. Yearly Data. China National Bureau of Statistics. <http://www.stats.gov.cn/english/statisticaldata/yearlydata/> (accessed November 12, 2007).

Han, Jialing. 2004. Survey Report on the State of Compulsory Education among Migrant Children in Beijing. *Chinese Education and Society* 37, no. 5 (September/October): 29-55.

Hu, Xiaobo, Gabe T. Wang, Yimin Zou. 2002. Political Economy of the Floating Chinese Population. *Journal of Contemporary Asia* 32, no. 3, 536-552.

Jin, Deng. 2004. Migrant Children Stay Bottom of Class. *China Daily*. November 4, 2004, http://www.chinadaily.com.cn/english/doc/2004-11/04/content_388505.htm (accessed October 17, 2007).

Kwong, Julia. 2006. The Integration of Migrant Children in Beijing Schools. In *Education and Social Change in China: Inequality in a Market Economy*, ed. Gerard A. Postiglione, 163-78. New York: M. E. Sharpe.

-----, 2004. Educating Migrant Children: Negotiations between the State and Civil Society. *China Quarterly* 180 (December): 1073-88.

Lin, Jing. 1999. *Social Transformation and Private Education in China*. Westport: Greenwood.

Lu, Shaoqing and Shouli Zhang. 2004. Urban/Rural Disparity and Migrant Children's Education: An investigation into Schools for Children of Transient Workers in Beijing. *Chinese Education and Society* 37, no. 5 (September/October): 56-83.

Wang, Feng and Xuejin Zuo. 1999. Inside China's Cities: Institutional Barriers and Opportunities for Urban Migrants. *American Economic Review* 89, no. 2 Papers and Proceedings of the One Hundred Eleventh Annual Meeting of the American Economic Association. (May): 276-280.

Xia, Chunli. 2006. Migrant Children and the Right to Compulsory Education in China. *Asia-Pacific Journal on Human Rights and the Law* 7, no. 2, 29-74.

Yan, Fei. 2005. Education Problems with Urban Migratory Children in China. *Journal of Sociology and Social Welfare* 32, no. 3 (September): 3-10.