

UC Santa Barbara

UC Santa Barbara Electronic Theses and Dissertations

Title

How Migrant Parents in Beijing Care for Their Children: A Comparison Study on Parenting Strategies Between Poor and Not-so-poor Migrant Parents

Permalink

<https://escholarship.org/uc/item/98w4259h>

Author

Li, Qiao

Publication Date

2015

Peer reviewed|Thesis/dissertation

UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA

Santa Barbara

How Migrant Parents in Beijing Care for Their Children:
A Comparison Study on Parenting Strategies Between Poor and Not-so-poor Migrant
Parents

A Thesis submitted in partial satisfaction of the
requirements for the degree Master of Arts
in Global and International Studies

by

Qiao Li

Committee in charge:

Professor Richard P. Appelbaum, Chair

Professor Mayfair Yang

Professor Nadège T. Clitandre

Professor Mark Juergensmeyer

June 2015

The thesis of Qiao Li is approved.

Nadège T. Clitandre

Mark Juergensmeyer

Mayfair Yang

Richard P. Appelbaum, Committee Chair

May 2015

How Migrant Parents in Beijing Care for Their Children:
A Comparison Study on Parenting Strategies Between Poor and Not-so-poor Migrant
Parents

Copyright © 2015

by
Qiao Li

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

In the past two years, my thesis has been both a personal and academic journey. I am deeply grateful for the unwavering support from Professor Richard Appelbaum, both at University of California – Santa Barbara, and in China. Professor Mayfair Yang, who grounded me in the historical and literary background for my thesis; Professor Nadège T. Clitandre, who inspired me to critically examine my purpose behind studying this topic, and Professor Mark Juergensmeyer, who enriched my China-study experience by prompting thought-provoking questions.

I am also grateful for the familial support in Beijing. My cousin Wang Xiaoning, who graciously hosted me in her home during my stay, and her daughter Zhuzhu, for being a source of family joys. I am also thankful for the valuable internship experience with Migrant Children's Foundation in Beijing. The enthusiastic and bright migrant children I taught instilled in me hope for China's future.

This thesis would not have been completed without the love and friendship of Deborah Rogow, and my fiancé Josh Wiensch, whose love and unyielding support served as a constant source of encouragement and constructive comments to my writing.

I dedicate this thesis to my beloved mother, Laura Wenhui Quinn, whose remarkable journey from Tianjin to Los Angeles 19 years ago inspired me to pursue this research topic. Her fearless fortitude and astute wisdom is the source of my strength.

ABSTRACT

How Migrant Parents in Beijing Care for Their Children:
A Comparison Study on Parenting Strategies Between Poor and Not-so-poor Migrant
Parents

by

Qiao Li

This paper seeks to contribute to the understanding of how internal migration in globalizing China shapes migrant parents' decision to raise their children. The case study focuses on how do poor and not-so-poor migrant parents care for their children both from afar and close by. The findings on which it is based come from three main sources. The first consisted of twenty semi-structured interviews with migrant parents and their now-adult children from different social-economic backgrounds in Beijing, China. The second source comes from participant observation at a migrant children's school in Beijing. The third source comes from archival research in California, where I gather the push-pull factors for migration within China, as well as the institutional barriers that prevents rural migrant parents and their children from utilizing social services in urban cities. Drawing from existing scholarship on China's globalizing economy, *hukou* reform, feminization of migration, and children of migration, I attempt to examine what does migrant family structures reveal about China's institutional discrimination? How do poor and not-so-poor migrant parents in Beijing care for their children? And how does migration effect now-adult children's outlook on life and work? By studying this topic, I hope to deepen the

understanding of the social cost of migration on family relationships and children behind China's aggressive economic development. Moreover, this study aims to elevate the discussion of migrant families from the margins of scholarly research to a position of greater centrality.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

I. Overview	2
II. Background	10
A. Economic Globalization	10
B. Push-Pull Factors in China.....	12
C. <i>Hukou</i> Reform.....	14
D. On <i>Hukou</i> as Preventing the Reunification of Migrant Families.....	16
E. On the Feminization of Migration.....	18
F. On Family and Children	19
G. Towards a Working Hypothesis	21
III. Research Design and Methodology	22
A. Migrant Population: Selection of Respondents	22
B. Data Collection Methodologies	26
IV. Findings and Discussion.....	29
A. Who Are the Migrant Parents?	30
1. Data Discussion	30
2. Faces of Poor Migrant Parents.....	34
3. Faces of Not-so-poor Migrant Parents.....	35
B. How Do Migrant Parents Care for Their Children?.....	37
1. Data Discussion	37
2. How Do Poor Migrant Parents Care for Their Children?.....	42
3. How Do Not-so-poor Migrant Parents Care for Their Children?..	43

C. How Does Migration Affect Family Relationships and Children?.....	45
1. Data Discussion	45
2. Stories of Poor Migrant Children	46
3. Stories of Not-so-poor Migrant Parents and Children.....	47
V. Conclusion	51
VI. Policy Recommendations	56
References.....	60
Appendix.....	66
Glossary Terms	66
Interviewees' Demographic Information.....	67
Sample Semi-structured Questionnaires.....	68

LIST OF FIGURES

Figure 1. Map of People’s Republic of China	1
Figure 2. Migrant women preparing grapes for sale.....	10
Figure 3. Regional average income	13
Figure 4. Migrant workers waiting to catch the Beijing subway.....	22
Figure 5. Migrant fruit shop vendor in a typical Beijing street market	29
Figure 6. Age, years in Beijing, and number of children interviewed.....	30
Figure 7. Percentage of migrant parents and their children’s marital status	31
Figure 8. Percentage of reasons behind moving to Beijing interviewed	33
Figure 9. Migrant students learning in classroom	37
Figure 10. Percentage of children living/not living in Beijing with their parents	39
Figure 11. Migrant father and son working together	45
Figure 12. Groups celebrating the October 1 National Holiday	56

I. Overview

June 2014 – In the northeastern city of Qinhuangdao, a migrant father who recently lost his job as a construction worker, attempted to rob a woman and her six-year-old daughter. When the little girl offered 2 *yuan* (\$0.35 cents) from her own pocket and said, “uncle, here’s 2 *yuan*, please don’t hurt my mother. Take my money, and you can go home.” The robber dropped his knife, and tears began to streak down his cheeks. He later confessed to the police that the little girl had reminded him of his own daughter back home (Gong, 2014).

The stress of living apart from their children combined with the pressure to provide for the family, as experienced by this migrant father, exemplifies similar issues faced by many migrant parents in urban China. This example also highlights the on-going systemic problems that Chinese policymakers have failed to address.

Since China pursued economic liberalization in 1978 under Chairman Deng Xiaoping’s leadership, it has experienced an unprecedented growth. In just thirty-two years, China transformed itself from one of the poorest countries to holding the world’s second largest economy. Although China pursued a different path than what Chairman Mao Zedong had envisioned, his slogan “man can conquer nature” (*ren ding sheng tian*) has certainly manifested itself through the dramatic reconstruction of the country’s economy. The booming manufacturing, construction, and domestic service industries demanded endless low-wage labor to fulfill the need of export productions and urbanization projects.

As rural peasants come to the city to search for job opportunities, they face institutional and social barriers that prevent them from getting equal access to resources. Migrant

workers face discrimination, loneliness, and isolation in their new environment, and migrant parents struggle to care for their children from afar.

While research has shown migrant children in general face more obstacles in education and health care issues, it is less clear how does migration affects parent-children relationships. This paper seeks to contribute to the understanding of social cost in China's aggressive economic development by examining the following questions about migration: 1. What does the structure of a typical migrant family in Beijing tell us about institutional discrimination? 2. Base on different social-economic statuses, how do migrant families in Beijing care for their children, what obstacles do they face, and how do these obstacles reveal about the growing social-economic divide amid China's developing economy? 3. How does migration affect family relationships and children?

Policy makers are at a critical position to address the issues faced by migrant families, because current policies in China are aimed to manage migration, not to uproot the problems faced by many migrant families. Therefore, seeing the diversity of their experience and the specific issues they face will be instrumental in formulating thoughtful and effective policies that can improve the livelihood of migrant families through strengthening social services. Specifically, policy makers should focus on how to minimize hukou barriers so it can be easier for migrants to move, work, and attend school in a different city; strengthen social services in both urban and suburban China; and prioritize on building strong family values over materialism and consumption.

China's rapid urbanization since post reform era has created countless job opportunities for migrant workers who were once rural peasants in the countryside. Migrant workers who live and work in a place other than where their household registration (hukou) resides, are

referred to as the “floating population” in their new environment. Hukou is a household record system that officially identifies a person as a resident of an area. Along with their residency, the location of hukou also determines one’s access to social services, education and work options. Hukou is often regarded as a caste system that bars rural population from obtaining urban residency and social services, including medical care and education for rural children in urban cities.

According to the National Statistic Bureau of China (2014), there are currently 245 million floating workers in China, including children. Migrant workers are attracted to developing megacities because they can offer more economic opportunities, and once they are settled in their new environment, they tend to expand their local network by bringing more family members and village kin to work alongside them in the city. The top receiving cities for migrant workers in China are Shanghai, Beijing, Shengzhen, and Dongguan (Value line, 2014). In 2014, China announced its latest plan to integrate more rural population into urban living by populating second or third-tier cities, those are, smaller cities located primarily in central China, which have been boosted by the Chinese stimulus package to build better highways and faster trains to increase access to these areas. Experts estimate that by 2020, 100 million more people will move to these cities (Johnson, 2014).

This unprecedented migration has created numerous challenges for migrant families to care for their children. Because rural migrants lack urban hukou, many migrant parents choose to leave their children behind in the care of grandparents or older siblings. China Labour Bulletin (2013), a labor advocacy group based in Hong Kong, reports that as of 2013, 61 million children were left behind by parents who have migrated to work in China’s globalizing economy.

Migrant families face tremendous challenges in balancing a work life while caring for their family from afar, yet existing scholarship has dedicated very little attention to discuss how to care for a generation of left behind children. Much scholarly research has focused on unmarried migrant workers, and their agencies to break free from the past in order to create a better future in the new China (Pun, 2005; Jacka, 2005). Married migrant women, on the other hand, are often depicted as backward and easy to become victims of domestic abuse. Unlike young, single migrant girls who are adventurous and eager to fit in, married migrants are seen as possessing very little will to improve their living and working conditions (Jacka, 2005).

For most, if not all migrant parents, they can never break free from their past, because parts of them remain back home with their children. Even for those who have brought their children along and settled in the city, they never cease to worry about their children's future. Migrant parents work under heavy pressure to support their children; they worry about their children's health, studying progress, and their risk of being bullied; they also long for the time to see them again.

Not having an outlet to express their bitterness, migrant parents often find themselves unable to integrate, and do not desire to venture out of their enclaves in the city, thus further distancing themselves from the lives and culture of urbanites. On a crowded street in Beijing, where a luxury car can be waiting at a traffic light alongside a tricycle, the lives of the haves and have-nots are deeply intertwined spatially, yet invisible borders divide them institutionally, economically, and culturally. Migrant workers, especially migrant parents, are selectively subjugated to bear the burden of China's economic development.

Migrant parents' oppression has encompassed three interdependent dimensions. First, the exploitation migrant parents' labor is essential to China's economic growth. Migrant parents work at low wages and have little to none workforce protection in China's megacities to generate profit for factories and local government (Whyte, 2010). Second, the hukou system acts as a political oppression, which denies migrant parents' rights to utilize social services in their new environment, including medical care for themselves, and affordable public education system for their children (Hunnum, Wang, Adams, 2008; Yip, 2010: 152; Wu, 2010: 74; Jacka, Kipnis, Sargeson, 2013). Third, the cultural stereotype portraying migrant parents as uneducated, weak, and backward, combined with the cultural expectation for migrant mothers to care for their left behind family and children, further contributed to migrant parents' oppression and China's growing social-economic divide (Pun, 2005).

If policy makers ignore the plight of migrant families and a generation of left-behind children, China will find itself in the peril of social turmoil in the next few decades to come. Given the growing interdependence between China and the world, it is definitely in the country's best interest to address these issues now.

Looking beyond China's border – in our globalizing world – transnational families are fueling the growth of global economic development: Filipinas in Dubai, Hong Kong; Mexicana in Los Angeles; Turkish migrants in Frankfurt; Polish families in Ireland. Many scholars have written on the harsh conditions migrant families face, and the feminization of migration, but very few have focused on the growing social-economic divide within migrant population, and how social policies shape their children's life chances.

By looking beyond institutional constraints like the inflexibility of hukou, this paper intends to examine how do poor and not-so-poor migrant families manage to care for their children. By looking at the issues that concern different migrant families, this paper aims to shed light on the growing social-economic divide between the haves and have-nots in globalizing China. Finally, through learning migrants' agency in reshaping their family's destiny, discussion can be drawn on how migrant families are contributing to the manufacturing of desires to support domestic consumption. A cornerstone of China's 12th Five-Year Plan – a set of national economic and social development strategies for years from 2011 to 2015 – is the goal to increase domestic consumption. According to the Plan's Policy Direction, it aims to:

“...establish long term mechanism of expanding domestic demand. Create positive consumption environment by actively yet steadily accelerating urbanization, implementing the strategy of employment as priority, deepening the distribution reform and improving social security system, gradually make the overall size of our domestic market ranks among the largest internationally” (Confederation of British Industries, 2011)

By buying into the national campaign to build a strong domestic consumption market, migrant parents are once again being used to fulfill political and economic agendas. In the pursuit of “buying one's way to happiness,” migrant parents are losing out on forging a strong emotional connection with their children.

This thesis will include four chapters. Chapter 1 provides the literature and historical review of migration since the founding of the People's Republic of China. Chapter 2 states the research design. Chapter 3 states the findings, and Chapter 4 recommends policies that would emphasize social development as a form of economic development.

Findings in my study derive from participant observation, archival research, and in depth interviews with twenty migrant parents and their adult children during my fieldwork in

Beijing from September to December 2014. The results show that poorer migrants have fewer opportunities to change their working and living situation, and as a result they tend to endure longer years of separation with their children than not-so-poor migrants. It is also much harder for children of poorer migrants to achieve upward social mobility than children of wealthier migrants, thus further widening the social-economic gap within society. The third finding reveals the deep emotional distress expressed by both groups of migrants and their children. Migrant mothers across the board bear tremendous guilt for leaving their children behind. Children, either left-behind or have reunited with their parents, feel a strong emotional disconnection with their parents.

In light of my findings, migrant mothers had to leave their children behind to work in a different city in order to lift their family out of poverty. However, because traditional gender roles confined a woman's space to only occupy the domestic sphere, migrant mothers' decision to work away harbored social stigmatizations, which have brought them shame and guilt for being bad mothers.

The ability of migrant parents to care for their children in their new environment is directly affected by access to social services. By honing in on the stories of twenty migrant families, this paper aims to examine how migrant families are integrated in Beijing, as well as some of the issues they face in their everyday life.

Understanding how migrant parents in Beijing care for their children will not only enable us to see how gendered expectations have not changed amid women's growing responsibility to provide for the family, it will also allow us to learn about issues faced by migrant families base on different social-economic statuses. Furthermore, this study attempts to shed light on what is the social cost behind China's aggressive economic

development, and concludes with a few policy recommendations for legislators in China as well as China scholars at large.

II. Background

Figure 2: Migrant women preparing grapes for sale. Source: Qiao Li, 2014



A. Economic Globalization

Mass migration across the globe is historically generated by push and pull factors. The pushing mechanism comes out of domestic pressure, such as poor economic conditions force people to seek better job opportunities elsewhere. The pulling factors come from a growing demand for a large and cheap labor in the receiving countries. Starting in the second half of the 20th century, both of these forces have been accelerated by globalization.

Globalization has unleashed unprecedented forces to integrate market capital. Ease of communication and transportation allows goods to be made and shipped all around the world within moments of decision-making. The rise of transnational corporations like Wal-Mart reshapes the characteristics of 21st century business model (Lichtenstein, 2005). Unlike the 20th century business model employed by General Motors, who owned its production in

the U.S., claimed full liability, and engaged in labor negotiations, the 21st century business model capitalizes on outsourcing production worldwide, to bidders with the lowest price; they claim limited liabilities, ignore externalities such as environmental damage,

Economic globalization has fostered a new environment for transnational corporations to grow, and the influence of Chinese corporations have increased on the global stage in recent years. In 2014, Sinopec Petroleum Group ranked number 3 on Fortune Global Top 500 corporations, the highest of any Chinese company on the list, with annual operating revenue of \$457 billion, followed by China National Petroleum, with a 2014 operating revenue of \$432 billion (Fortune). The revenues of these two corporations in 2014 are higher than the GDP of Austria at \$428 billion and Denmark at \$336 billion; if these two corporations were countries, their revenues would rank them at 27th and 28th places out of 196 countries worldwide (World Bank, 2014). Transnational corporations have become increasingly important in forging the political and economic directions in the world, at the same time, they are also demanding a new kind of political protection from their home countries. Saskia Sassen (1996) argued that globalization has formed a new kind of citizenship. Building from the traditional electoral process, where citizens hold their government accountable, there is a growing accumulation of economic rights that constitutes a form of economic citizenship. This new citizenship does not belong to the people – it belongs to firms and market. Since China pursued economic liberalization in 1978, China encouraged privatization of assets previously held in common. China also created a social system where capitalist enterprises can both form and function freely. It eviscerated social protections, and shattered the “iron rice bowl” (Harvey, 2005). While China avoided the “shock therapy” recipe for economic development imposed by the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank, China embraced a new form of neoliberalism that allowed Communist Party elites to claim the

ownership of massive corporate profit, while leaving social protections in austerity (Pun, 2005).

Economic globalization has occurred unevenly across the world. One of the major consequences of this new economic citizenship is the burgeoning demand for a large, easily exploited, and relatively powerless labor force across the globe. Workers in the developing world often find it necessary to migrate both internally and internationally to fulfill the growing demand of jobs.

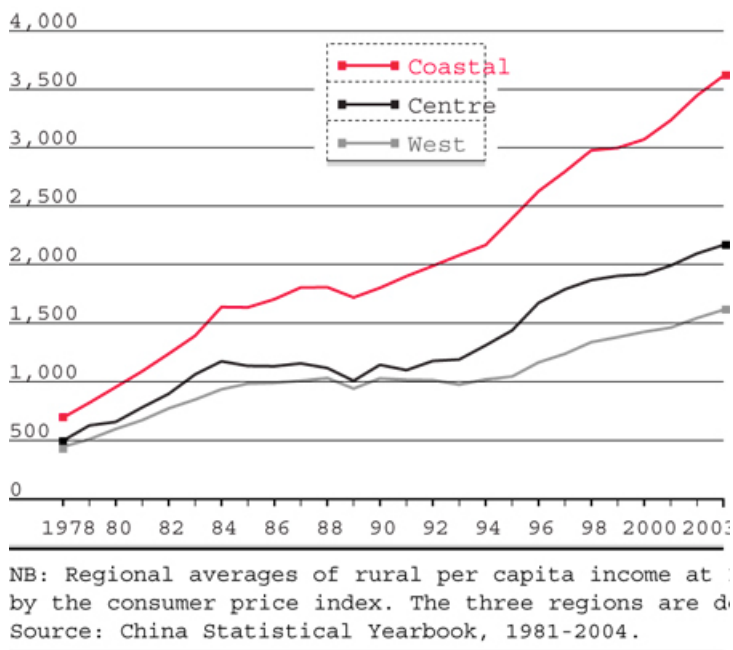
B. Push-Pull Factors in China

In China, growing migration is propelled both by the early stages of economic globalization, and a state-led effort to relax the domestic labor market. The Shenzhen *Special Economic Zone* (SEZ), in the Pearl River Delta region north of Hong Kong, was opened to Western and Asian capital investments in 1980 under Deng Xiaoping's leadership. Local officials provided overseas investors with a wide array of preferential policies including tax exemptions, cheap land, and streamlined procedures for export (Pun & Chan, 386). Employers also pushed the state for access to cheap, flexible, and unskilled labor to fulfill these factory jobs.

While the growing economic opportunities are concentrated in the cities, the quality of village life has declined. After the founding the People's Republic of China (PRC) in 1949, the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) introduced *hukou* to exploit the rural population in much the way of their Russian counterparts, siphoning resources out of agriculture to invest in heavy industries and subsidize the urban population's living standards (Jacka, Kipnis, Sargeson, 2013). Between 1978 and 1984, following the introduction of the family responsibility system in the agricultural sector, rural incomes rose by the exceptionally high rate of 14.2% per year, before slowing to just over 1.9% in the second half of the 1980s

because of the obstacles to the reforms after 1986. During the period of the setback to the reforms from 1989 to 1991, the growth in rural incomes stagnated at 0.6%, and 1989 even showed a decline of 7.4% in relation to the previous year (Yang, 2006). Throughout reform period, the coastal region has enjoyed the highest income, as depicted on Figure 3, while rural-urban disparities grew (Yang, 2006).

Figure 3: Regional average income.



Wang (223) used survey data to show from 1991 to 2004, the urban-rural household income gap enlarged to more than three to one. State priorities heavily favor urban and industrial development over agriculture. Whyte (18) documented that most of the government-directed bank loans go to large state-owned enterprises, rather than private business and farm investment. Moreover, villages and townships are forced to take on public work projects while receiving little state funding, to pursue those ambitious mandates, local governments levied a large amount of taxes and fees on its residents. Shortage of arable land, lack of local employment opportunities, and falling prices for agricultural products, not to mention the ineffective or even corrupted village cadres, pushed rural people out of their

village. For women, specifically, a desire to see the world, now made more visible through television and increased flows of people across areas, and a wish to improve their material life, in addition to, in some cases, the need to escape oppression or familial conflict, further propelled rural people toward towns and cities (Jacka, 2005).

Demand for labor in the city combined with poor living conditions in the countryside formed the push-pull factors for a perfect mass migration climate in China. As a result, the influx of migrants dramatically shifted the demography of cities. A report released in 2014 shows Shanghai took the lead in absorbing 9.5 million migrants in their city of 24 million residents, Beijing took in 7.7 million migrants in the city of 21 million residents, followed by Shenzhen, which has 7.5 million migrants out of 10 million residents (value line).

Migrant workers in urban China possess unique characteristics. A survey conducted by the National Bureau of Statistics (2013) found that, 64.8 percent of all rural migrant workers were to be found in China's eastern region, including the Pearl River Delta in Guangdong and the Yangzi River Delta near Shanghai. The majority of migrant workers worked in manufacturing, construction, services, and retail. The average migrant is just over 21 years old, and most of them only received education up to middle school. Their median monthly income is 2,609 *yuan*, or about \$417; within that, migrant workers send nearly half of their earnings home, at roughly 1,067 *yuan*, or at \$171 per month. Even though rural migrant workers now spend more money in the city they work and live, they still carry on the cultural tradition of caring for family members who remain at home.

C. Hukou Reform

From the state's point of view, the consequences of market reform have undermined the effectiveness of *hukou*. On the one hand, cheap rural migrant laborers were wanted to support the economic growth, but on the other, urban officials and citizens expressed grave

concerns with these uncouth “intruders” (Solinger, 1999). Migrant enclaves in the city are deemed as dirty, messy, and chaotic.

Some early *hukou* reforms aim to blur the rural-urban divide. Nevertheless, these reforms continue to perpetuate social and economic stratification. In the late 1990s, *hukou* became increasingly localized as cities experimented with “blue stamp *hukou*,” which offered transitional local status to affluent migrants who are buying apartments in the city. In reality, this measure benefitted very few migrants, because the price tag was so high, that among Beijing’s 2.37 million temporary *hukou* holders in 1999, only 715 families acquired local urban *hukou* through housing purchases (Wang, 2010). From 2008-2010, similar “investment for *hukou*” schemes were introduced in various cities, but for the vast majority of poorer migrant parents who hold unstable jobs, and have to send most of the earnings back home, getting an urban *hukou* or even a temporary working permit in big cities become simply impossible.

To circumvent the limited *hukou* reform, the government announced a sweeping plan in 2014 to incorporate more farmers into small- to medium-sized cities (Johnson, 2014). This would encourage more migrants to first work in a larger urban city far away from home, make as much money as they can, as quickly as possible, then use their savings to buy an apartment in a smaller sized township that is much closer to home, so they can settle “under one roof” with their families. This proves to be an effective campaign so far, as many of my interviewees have expressed that they plan to settle in a smaller township near their home village after a few more years of hard laboring in Beijing.

Many scholars on China focus on the *hukou* as the primary barrier to explain the struggles migrant workers face in the cities. Some research has shown that migrant parents decide to leave their children behind because they lack urban *hukou*, and as a result, their

children are unable to complete the nine-year compulsory education in the city. Existing literature has also emphasized on the feminization of migration in post-reform China. The next section will attempt to summarize this literature, and explain why additional research is needed in order to better understand migration and its consequences on Chinese migrant parents and their children.

D. On Hukou as Preventing the Reunification of Migrant Families

Much literature points to hukou as the primary divide between residents in cities and the countryside. Even though rural migrant workers can physically leave their home village, their rural *hukou* prevents them from escaping the unequal social structure. Studies of migrants who hold rural *hukou* in urban China have consistently portrayed a picture of migrant laborers working in a segmented labor market, earning less pay and fewer benefits compared with urban residents, and living in substandard housing with little social protection. Since migrant workers cannot afford to buy an apartment in the city, and their housing arrangement is not backed by their work unit (*danwei*), migrant workers are vulnerable to predatory renting, and they have very little resources in the fight against abusive landlords. In addition, the separation or segregation extends far beyond work and income and well into health, social networks, children's education, and, ultimately, citizenship rights (Hunnum, Wang, Adams, 2008; Yip, 2010: 152; Wu, 2010: 74).

Migrant workers' unfair treatment in the city force them to overwork and receive underpay. According to a survey done by the Center for Child Rights – Corporate Social Responsibility in Beijing, 53 percent of migrant parents decide to leave their children behind because they are struggling to cover the basic cost of living in their new working environment, while 68 percent of the parents expressed concerns over long working hours, which lead to the lack of time to look after their own children if they were brought along to

the city (Kardaszewicz, 2013). As a result, the number of “left-behind children” (*liushou ertong*) has also increased dramatically. Chan (2007) reports that there were about 58 million children below 18 years of age left behind by parents in the countryside. Out of that, 52 percent of the children are living with relatives other than their parents, while more than 70 percent of the children left behind are under age 14. Since the report was published, the total number of left-behind children has also grown to 61 million in 2014.

When it comes to family separation, much research has also associated *hukou* with the decision to leave children behind. The Center for Child Rights and Corporate Social Responsibility (2014) conducted surveys and found out three main reasons for migrant parents being unable to live with their children in cities where they worked are insufficient time, high living cost, and *hukou* restrictions. Because the education budget for the nine-year compulsory education in China is allocated through local governments and is not transferable, urban schools with a limited education budget are reluctant to accept rural migrant children unless their parents compensate for the additional cost. Since many of rural migrant parents cannot afford to pay the extra fees, they often leave their children behind to attend schools in local village or the township. Kong and Meng (2010) find that children of migrants, either left behind or in cities, are less likely to have good education and health outcomes compared with rural non-migrant children and urban children. Other research has focused on migrant parents’ decision to return given the *hukou* barrier cannot be overcome. Démurger and Xu (2011) analyzed archival data to show that women and migrant families with school-age children, especially sons, are more likely to return.

Although many research focuses on various *hukou* reforms, they do not explore a couple of important question. Is it possible for migrant parents to employ strategic methods other

than obtaining an urban *hukou* in order to reunite with their children? What other strategies do migrant parents use to raise their children either from afar or close by?

E. On the Feminization of Migration

Existing scholarship on Chinese migrant women often focus on the voices of young, childless, single women. In Ngai Pun's (2005) ethnographic experience as a factory girl, or *dagongmei* in Shenzhen, she documents how women *dagongmei* resist the triple oppression forced upon them from the state, capital, and the local employer. Pun reports that *dagongmei* use a cartography of transgressing resistant behaviors such as dream, scream, fainting, menstrual pain, inner splitting of self, workplace defiance, slowdowns, fighting, running away, even petition and strike as a form of rightful resistance that focus on more minor and multisited journey of a *dagongmei*.

Migrant women are fetishized as easy to manage and quick to exploit because of their docile, disciplined, and productive traits. Jacka (2005) conducted fieldwork in Beijing and reports that the marginality and discrimination migrant women suffer are compounded by their inferior gender status. Migrant women not only make less than urbanites, they also make less than migrant men, and they are subject to invasive regulation and surveillance of their reproductive activities, and sexual harassment and violence, as well as to the other forms of regulation and violence suffered by migrant men.

Scholarly research on married migrant women has been scanty focused on their inability to venture out their enclaves. Jacka's fieldwork (2005) shows that married migrant women join their husbands in the city out of sense of duty to unite, and to keep an eye on their husbands' behaviors. Jacka's fieldwork also revealed that migrant married women are vulnerable to domestic abuse. Unlike single migrant girls, married women live in enclaves, and generally do not associate with local Beijingers.

Although existing scholarship on feminization of migration focuses on the agencies of migrant women, few scholars have examined how migrant children are raised, particularly, on the differences between poor and not-so-poor migrant families. To do so we must build on existing literature, and explore how migrant workers' experience shaped their decision of parenting, and how their children internalize their childhood experiences. This study focuses on the central question of whether migrant parents living in Beijing without the urban *hukou* have explored alternative parenting resources, and how that affects their relationship with their children.

F: On Family and Children

Prior studies have focused on how *hukou* barrier and economic exploitation impact the everyday experiences of parenting. However, they do not explore how different social-economic statuses affect migrants' ability to care for their children. Drawing on interview and fieldwork with more than 140 members of Mexican families in both New Jersey and south-central Mexico, Dreby (2010) finds that although the U.S. legal system makes it extremely difficult for parents to devise plans for reuniting their family, parents do make considerable amount of effort to reunite with their left behind children. On average, mothers spend less time away from their children than do fathers. Parents also actively try to keep up with the changes in their children's lives, and use phone calls, gifts, and remittances to manage separation.

Even though the deciding factor for Mexican parents to return home is determined by their documentation status, whereas cost, time, and *hukou* are the primary factors that limit Chinese migrant parents from permanent reunification with their children, both set of families wrestle with similar consequences of leaving their children behind. Since *hukou* prevents rural migrant children from utilizing public resources in urban areas, in many ways,

the ramifications of the *hukou* system resemble the difficulties undocumented immigrants face in the U.S. Even though migrant parents in China do not face fears of deportation, they lack equal status, protection, and much of their struggles remain invisible to policymakers and urbanites. Seeing how Mexican parents in America care for their children is not only a good case study for scholars who are interested on China, it also offers Chinese policymakers an insight to the broader problems migrant families face worldwide.

Although a small amount of literature does focus on left behind children, most analysis has emphasized on how gender construction affects children's experience and their interpretation of migration. Parreñas' fieldwork in the Philippines (2005) finds that as a result of enforced gender ideology, children who grew up in transnational families are more likely to accept their migrant fathers' absence, while migrant mothers do not receive the same understanding. When asked, many children believe mothers move more for themselves, and fathers more for the family (Parreñas, 2005: 64). Gender construction influences the ways children understand the migration of their parents, which in turn shape their relationships with their parents. Moreover, the gender division of labor is not changed even when mothers break through traditional gender roles and go on to become the breadwinner in the family. For example, most children with migrant mothers describe their fathers as "physically present, but emotionally absent" (Parreñas, 2005: 99). Parreñas points out that while men reject nurturing the family from up close, migrant women struggle to nurture their children from a distance. This study suggests that gender construction not only affects the relationship between parents and children, it also can further damage the life chances of children who are left behind. Further research is needed to examine how these parenting decisions and gender-based responsibilities can potentially affect left-behind children, particularly daughters' decision, to form a family once they enter adulthood.

G: Towards a Working Hypothesis

This thesis contributes to the existing literature on gender and migration in comparing how poor and not-so-poor migrant parents without urban *hukou* care for their left behind children, and how that experience affects children's outlook on life, work, and future parenting. This study challenges the prior studies that have used the *hukou* as a primary measure of inequality, and challenges the notion that migrant mothers are merely passive victims of discrimination. Rather I will show, these women have agency: their migration may include the decision to escape an unhappy marriage, or the desire to make more money for the family. This study also suggests that regardless of the migrant family's social-economic statuses, many wealthy migrant parents buy into the culture of consumption and materialism; they tend to use economic success to justify their time of absence. The following section will explain the framework of the study and the results in greater detail.

III. Research Design and Methodology

Figure 4: Migrant workers waiting to catch the Beijing subway. Source: English.Caixin.com



A. Migrant Population: Selection of Respondents

Beijing is the capital of China, and the second largest city by urban population of over 11 million residents, after Shanghai – China’s most populous city – which carries a population of over 22 million (World Population Review, 2015). Beijing controls the nation's political artery, cultural dissemination, and it is the hub for some of the most prestigious universities in the county. Beijing is an ideal place to study migrant families, not only because it is the second largest city in absorbing migrant workers nationwide, but also because it is the political center where most policies on migration are made.

This study examines the target population of migrant parents who are working in Beijing without a Beijing *hukou*, and have left their children behind or have reunited with them after an extended period of separation. The target population is separated into two groups by their income level to those who make less than 5,793 *yuan* (about \$927) and those who make more than 5,793 *yuan* per month. Since 5,793 *yuan* was the 2014 average income for residents in Beijing (Liu, 2014), this number was chosen to represent the cut off line between Beijing's poor and not-so-poor migrant parents. However, given the average income is for Beijing residents, this real monthly average income could very well be lower for migrant parents in Beijing, since most migrants do not have Beijing *hukou*. Thus readers should take into considerations that most migrant parents in Beijing make less than 5,793 *yuan*, but they are expected to pay for the cost of living calculated base on what an average Beijing resident makes.

These criteria are helpful to study the experience of migrant parents and their children because most migrant parents without Beijing *hukou* cannot easily bring their children along and send them to local schools, living under the shadow as illegal residents poses particular challenges to migrant families in caring for their children, both from present and afar. Moreover, by looking at migrant parents across the income level spectrum, this study will highlight the particular challenges faced by migrant parents from different income levels.

I conducted fieldwork in Beijing from September to December 2014. Migrant parents are easy to identify as they tend to be older, and one of the common conversation topics in China is on one's family. Migrant parents are fairly easy to communicate with because they have few relatives near by, and they long for an outlet to "speak their bitterness" to someone who is interested in their stories. Speaking bitterness was a campaign first initiated by the Chinese Communist Party, in which Party officials mobilized farmers to speak in anti-

landlord trials denouncing exploitation and injustice. At speak bitterness sessions, witnesses were encouraged to expose past sufferings (*ku*) – and many did so in an emotional and dramatic fashion (Schwarcz, 1996). During my interviews, several migrant parents used the phrase “speaking bitterness”, and lamented that no one cared to listen. When the Chinese Communist Party choreographed “speaking bitterness” during Maoist era, the Party aimed to bring justice to farmers against the economic exploitation by capitalistic landlords. Today as the Party reshapes its policies to favor economic growth, economic exploitation and injustice are downplayed. Lisa Rofel (1994) documented that Hangzhou silk workers used speaking bitterness in a nostalgic register. Workers feel nostalgic about the past because the state no longer listens and supports farmers’ and migrant workers’ rights – the very same population that was the backbone to the success of the Communist revolution. By speaking bitterness, workers are talking back to the government who once protected them but now oppresses them.

I met with some of the migrant parents several times to get follow up on the development of family crisis they are facing. In sum, I conducted 20 semi-structured interviews with migrant parents and some of their adult children from a wide range of income backgrounds in Beijing. Since most of the poor migrant parents left their children home, I did not have the opportunity to meet and speak with the children themselves. Instead, most of my interactions with the adult children are those from not-so-poor migrant families, whose children lived with them in Beijing.

Though I did not interview poor migrant children, I was able to document, through participant observation, the resilient and optimistic attitudes of migrant elementary students in Beijing. During my time in Beijing, I also held an internship at the Migrant Children’s Foundation, The Foundation was founded in 2009, by a dedicated British educator, who

became involved with migrant children's advocacy through a Rotary Club meeting. Since then, this non-governmental organization has been working with migrant communities in Beijing, offering volunteer teaching placements at under-resourced migrant schools. During the three months, I was a student mentor teaching English and Math to Beijing's migrant children. From the experience, I learned that behind the school's overcrowding and under-equipped classrooms, migrant children's schools in Beijing operate on a tight budget, and have difficult times to attract and retain good teachers. Despite these obstacles, migrant children's enthusiasm and ability to learn were not dampened one bit. They are smart, disciplined, and eager to participate. If policymakers can make more investment into China's migrant children, so much more talents can be cultivated to power China's next generation.

In structuring the interviews, I divided our conversations into three parts. First, I aim to gather the basic demographic information about each respondent, such as age, gender, educational level, number of children they have, and the years they have separated from their children. Second, I asked how do they care for their children, the obstacles they face, and how do they try to overcome them. Third, I asked how do they perceive migration affected their family relations, what are some of the concerns they have for their children's future?

In formulating these questions, I try to cover several major discussion points. For migrant parents with left behind children, the questions are focused on:

- What made them move to Beijing? What do they do?
- Who is caring for their children while they are away?
- Are caretakers supportive of their decision to move?
- Is it difficult to communicate with their children from afar?

- How do they exercise parent supervision from a distance?
- What kind of troubles their children are facing, and how are migrant parents helping to resolve them?
- What are migrant parents' plans or end-goals after working in Beijing?

For migrant parents whose children are in Beijing, I asked:

- How many years were they apart before reuniting?
- How are their children doing in school?
- Was it difficult to reconnect at first after many years of separation?
- How is their relationship now with their children? Were they appreciated?
- What are some of their hopes for their children?

For now-adult children, my questions were revolved around:

- How did they cope with being away from and reunite with their parents?
- Do they feel understood by their parents?
- Where do they see themselves after graduation or in the next few years?
- Do they want to be a migrant worker, perhaps more skilled?
- How do they plan to raise their children someday?

B. Data Collection Methodologies

The findings of this study come from 20 informal interviews, and these interviews aim to answer how do migrant parents care for their children, what challenges they face, and how do they overcome them. Some of my interviewees are housekeepers and nannies who work for friends of my relatives. At children's playground where my niece played, I would sit in the nannies' circle, and chat up with nannies from all walks of life. One not-so-poor migrant parent was introduced by my extended relatives, through whom I met a couple of more not-

so-poor migrant parents who were in similar social circles. A couple of my interviews come from hour-long conversations with migrant parents whom I met on subways, which I then followed up with phone calls. Yet other interviews were conducted by initiating conversations at local Beijing shop owners' migrant enclaves.

Such data collection methods obviously do not provide a representative view of migrant parents in Beijing. Since some migrant parents might currently be unemployed, by only talking to working migrant parents, my conversations might paint a rosier picture of migrant lives than the majority actually experience.

In approaching my interviewees, I explained to them the purpose of my study, and told them that I would write notes based on our conversation after it had been completed. (I took no notes during the conversation, since I felt that would interrupt the flow and discourage an open interaction.) I also assured them that they would have complete anonymity. Some of the migrant parents I approached were suspicious of my intent, and did not want to be interviewed, but they asked many questions about my academic background. A couple of times during my conversation with street vendors, "street management representatives" – community-based vigilantes whose job is to keep an eye out for street disorders – came by and questioned me about where I came from, why do I pursue this study, and what I hope to achieve. In many ways these questions resemble the inquiries of my graduate committee during the development of my thesis, but in the case of community vigilantes, they were there to make sure that I was not going to stir up any troubles, and my interviewees were not going to bad-mouth or blame their misfortunes on the government.

I used semi-structure interviews instead of surveys for two reasons. First, I am interested in studying the lived experience of migrant parents, and want to construct narratives of their lives that otherwise could be missed in surveys or questionnaires. In-depth conversations

show that migrant parents are not merely passive recipients, they use the discourse of “speaking bitterness” to talk back to the regime that once protected farmers, but now favors urban growth that was built on the back of migrant workers. Even though I only have 20 interviews to work with, which is far off from being representative of migrant parents in Beijing, these 20 interviews give scholars and policymakers a reason to further examine the effects of migration on family and children through reading about their hope and struggles. Second, since family relations are fairly sensitive topics, I did not want to approach my target population with formalities that would characterize them as merely “study subjects.” Instead, I want to have candid conversations and wrote down the full transcript immediately afterwards. The challenge of recollecting from memory after conversation is my inability to record all of each conversation into my notebook. It would be impossible to record each sentence from my interviewee, thus many original quotes would be lost, and I can only work with what I remembered to record on the paper.

To qualitatively analyze the informal interviews, I first translated our conversations from Mandarin to English, then inputted their basic demographic information into an Excel sheet, and grouped them by income levels and general themes.

IV. Findings and Discussion

Figure 5: Migrant fruit shop vendor in a typical Beijing street market. Source: Qiao Li, 2014



I organize this chapter with the subtitle of my three questions. For each question, I start with “Data Discussion” to compare and characterize my overall findings, followed by brief sections on the stories of poor and not-so-poor migrant parents and their children. In the first two sections, the stories of poor migrant parents are represented by the experience of Auntie Li, and the not-so-poor migrant parents are represented by the stories of Mr. Chu and Ms. Chen. The third question was partially answered by the now-adult children of no-so-poor migrant parents, partially responded through the stories of poor migrant parents, and through my participant observation while volunteering for the Migrant Children’s Foundation.

A. Who Are the Migrant Parents?

1. Data Discussion:

The average age of migrant parents I interviewed are in their mid-forties, as shown in Figure 1. There are only two migrant parents over age 60, and only one under age 30; half of all interviewees are between ages 40-49. On average, a migrant parent spends 9 years in Beijing; however, eight migrant parents have been in Beijing 10 years and above. In terms of number of children they have, aside from three cases who have 3 children, all other migrant parents have 1-2 children, which would satisfy the limit of “one-child policy” and its “plus-one extension” for village farmers.

Figure 6: Age, years in Beijing, and number of children of migrant parents interviewed.

	Minimum	Maximum	Mean
Age	29	70	~44
Years in Beijing	1	24	~8
Number of Children	1	3	1.5

The interview also finds that despite the long years away from home, 75% of migrant parents remain married to their first spouse, see Figure 2. 15% have remarried, interestingly enough, two out of three remarried migrant mothers left their home to escape an unhappy, abusive marriage. Only two migrant parents are divorced, and they remain single fathers for over 5 years raising their children in Beijing.

Even though it is very difficult to leave family and children behind, millions of migrant parents in China consider migration as a strategy to provide for the family, because the traditional understanding of a Chinese family, or *jia*, allows individuals to relate to each other by blood or marriage more so than physical proximity. Woon (1991) conducted three years of fieldwork in Kaiping, and found that even though family members may live in different households, or even in separate places, their budgets, properties, and interests are interconnected.

Moreover, migrant parents commonly utilize split-household strategies to divide responsibilities and work together to maintain their family structure (Wang, 2010: 102). That is, the mother and father in the family would rotate their time to work in a different place, while leaving their children back home under the care of the other spouse and relatives.

Figure 7: Percentage of migrant parents and their children’s marital status.

Marital Status	Percentage
Married	70%
Remarried	15%
Divorced	10%
Single (now-adult child)	5%

Like the reason that propelled Auntie Li to work in Beijing, more than half of migrant parents in the interviews also left home to escape poverty. Poverty comes in different shapes and forms, and the roots of many are gender-based. One migrant mother, Ms. Wang, came to Beijing after her husband had gambled and lost 50,000 *yuan* (about \$8,054) in the hope to

pay for their debt; as a result, now in addition to their original debt, she had to work to pay for his gambling losses, plus interest. The two migrant mothers – Ms. Liu and Ms. Duan – who left because of unhappy marriage, reported that because their husband was the primary breadwinner in the family, when they found out that their husband was cheating on them repeatedly, which subsequently led to both divorces, they received no financial help. As a result, both mothers had to find other means to provide for their children. They also felt humiliated and did not want to remain in the village to become the talk of the town. When men commit infidelity, women are left to take the punishment.

Three out of twenty migrant parents moved because of work relocation. These parents were marginally better off financially than those who moved to escape poverty. Currently, all of their children have reunited with them after an initial period of separation.

In China, the pressure for the groom's family to provide housing support for the newly wed is deeply rooted in the tradition, along with financial support, parents often had the power to pick spouses for their sons. In *new* China, parents are still expected to provide housing for their son, but now their children have the right to choose their own spouse, and their children are demanding separate and private apartment to form a nuclear family. Traditionally, Anthropologists have described that the dominant Chinese family as patrilineal and patrilocal, meaning that descent is traced through the male line, and when women marry, they leave their natal family to join their husband's father's home (Jacka, Kipnis, and Sargeson, 2013). Even though women now have more opportunities to be financially independent, the Chinese tradition for an ideal marriage, as expressed by one of the interviewees, is a marriage where the groom's family can provide an apartment, and the bride's family can buy a car.

As the interviews indicated, four out of twenty migrant parents moved to Beijing from the nearby province Hebei just to save up some extra cash for their son’s future apartment. When I asked, “you son has a job, isn’t his responsibility to chart his own future?” two of the mothers told me on different occasions, “no one will marry your son if you don’t provide an apartment.” One mother, Ms. Ji, complained about her son’s girlfriend, “she works in a different city, and she is very short. My son is an engineer graduated from a top university; he makes a good earning. He deserves better.” Ms. Ji’s complaint shows that even though as a parent, she is expected to contribute to her son’s wedding cost, she is frustrated by her eroding influence as a matchmaker for her son. Migrant parents in China find themselves in situations where they must continue to work after retirement, even when their son has entered the workplace, to save money for a pricey marriage. At the same time, parents are struggling to cope with the changing characteristics of traditional family structure. In the process, they are losing out on building a lasting emotional connection with their children.

Figure 8: Percentage of migrant parents and their children’s reason behind moving to Beijing interviewed.

Reasons Moving to Beijing	Percentage
Escaping Poverty	50%
Escaping Unhappy Marriage	10%
Work relocation/business opportunities	10%
Saving money for son’s marriage	20%
Joining their parents	10%

2. Faces of Poor Migrant Parents:

While the experiences of migrant parents are varied, there are some experiences are common to most of them. One of my interviews, with Auntie Li, seems to encapsulate the experience of all migrant workers. I will start with a brief anecdote from Auntie Li, and I will return to her periodically throughout.

Auntie Li

Originally from Henan Province, Ms. Li, commonly referred to as Auntie Li by her employer, is one of thousands of nannies and housekeepers who live and work in Beijing. Like many domestic workers in the city, Li lives with her employer, and works 14 hours a day, 6 days a week, while making 4,000 *yuan* (about \$650) a month. On an average workday, her day starts at 7am when she gets up to prepare breakfast for the family, she then takes the 3-year-old baby to preschool, cleans the apartment, cooks dinner, and end the day after she tucks the baby in for bed by 9 or 10pm.

Auntie Li has 3 children at home. When she left home to work in Beijing 8 years ago, her youngest son was only 2 years old. When she went home after the first year of being away, her youngest son did not recognize her and refuse to call her mother. “Life is hard for farmers in the village,” she said, as she wept her tears with dry, chapped hand. In the past summer, her village suffered a draught, for 2 months there was not a single drop of rain. As a result, most of their beans died. In years like this, Auntie Li said, “I have no choice but to come out and work.” Even though her husband remains at home, their children did not grow up with him because he has to work in the field all day. The three children grew up with their paternal grandparents, and when they are a little older, Auntie Li says, “my husband also plans to come out to work as a construction worker.”

When I asked Auntie Li how did she cope with exceeding the birth limit, which is 2, for rural *hukou* holders, Auntie Li spoke of pride and happiness as she shared her extraordinary story. Back in 2002, when she found out she was pregnant with her third child, she knew that her sterilization procedure two week earlier had failed. Her husband just left to work in Xinjiang province, which is over 1,880 miles away. To avoid the hefty fine, she decided to have an abortion. After a couple of months, she felt something was moving inside of her. The doctor confirmed that the procedure worked, but she did not realize she had twins! Initially, she was worried that the abortion procedure left some permanent disability on the other fetus, but after numerous hospital visits and 5 CAT scans, she was confident the baby was alive and healthy. When Li was ready to give birth, her local hospital closed down because of SARS (severe acute respiratory syndrome) epidemic, an atypical pneumonia that had infected thousands in Mainland China and Hong Kong. Li had to take a 4-hour bus ride to a hospital in the neighboring county, and had to pay 10,000 *yuan* (about \$1,605) in fine to purchase a *hukou* for her third born. Auntie Li said during those years her husband was not home, she had to care for the children, work on the farm, and help her in-laws with housework. When her son turned 3, her husband came home from Xinjiang, their meager earnings from farming became impossible to feed their family, and that was when Auntie Li decided to go work in Beijing.

3. Faces of Not-so-poor Migrant Parents:

Mr. Chu came to Beijing fourteen years ago from Hubei Province. He was the youngest in the family, and did not finish high school. When Mr. Chu was a child, he said he has never dreamed of escaping poverty from his village. They grew up as farmers, and were very isolated from city life.

When Mr. Chu left the village, he was a father of three, with his youngest son being only two years old. Legally, Mr. Chu was only able to have two children because of his rural *hukou* status (a plus-one exemption to the one-child policy if the first-born is a girl), but his first two born are both girls, and they wanted another chance for a boy. Mr. Chu did not specify how he bypassed the *hukou* restriction for his third son, it is possible that he paid a fine like Auntie Li did, it is also commonly practiced to hold off on the *hukou* registration for the third-born while the family makes and saves money for the fine until the child is ready for school. Mr. Chu was able to focus on work because the mother of their children, his then-wife, was home to care for the elderly and the young. That has alleviated much stress, and allowed him to focus on just making money for the family.

Mr. Chu worked at different places as a menial labor when he first came to the city. After he saved up some money, he invested some in small business ventures, and was quite successful. After years of being apart, his then-wife joined him in Beijing with their children, only to find out that he has been unfaithful. Mr. Chu complained that his children now do not have a mother who can look after them, so I asked, “why did you get a divorce?” He chuckled, “in China, when men make money, they start to get restless with their wealth. Men make mistake, but the society also makes young girls to think it is okay to be attracted to older, wealthier men. That’s just the way how society works.”

Mr. Chu is 42 years old, and he is now a busy and accomplished businessman living in Beijing’s business central district with his three children, who are now late teenagers. He complains that his children do not appreciate him, as he always has to leave them, often in the evening, to work extra hours. “I have to make money, and I’m making money for them,” Mr. Chu says.

B. How Do Migrant Parents Care for Their Children?

Figure 9: Migrant students learning in classroom. Source: Qiao Li, 2014.



1. Data Discussion:

Poor migrant parents, especially mothers, who leave their children behind, face many obstacles in caring for their family from afar. From making money, to taking care of themselves, to keeping up with their children's physical and emotional needs, poor migrant parents find themselves unable to juggle the mounting responsibilities with little to no support from their family. Not-so-poor migrants, who can afford to send their children to better schools, can be less anxious about their children's academic performance. Spousal support, as illustrated by the case of Ms. Chen, is also critical in building a strong family and fostering a healthy environment for children to grow.

Figure 9 shows that roughly half of the parents have reunited with their children in my interview, and most of these parents were able to do so only after they become financially stable in Beijing. All except one parent brought their children to Beijing after they have saved some money, or have bought *hukou* for their children from a nearby city, like Tianjin, so their children can participate in the high school exit exam without grade penalty. The not-so-poor migrant parents, as illustrated in my findings, find ways to bypass the *hukou* restriction by either planning to send their children abroad for college, or buying an urban *hukou*, sometimes through illegal means, from a nearby large-sized city. Wang (2010:102) found that, a Beijing or Tianjin resident, for example, can get into college with a high school exit exam score significantly (a quarter or more) lower than a resident of nearby Shandong Province.

Ms. Tian was one of the interviewees who obtained *hukou* for her son through illegal purchase. Ms. Tian brought her son to Beijing from Heilongjiang Province after five years of separation. Both her and her husband came to Beijing as migrant workers in the hope to provide a better livelihood for the family. Initially, they did not want to permanently settle in Beijing, but their son's grandmother, who was looking after him, complained that the boy started to act rebellious after years of living without direct parental supervision. Without having a long-term plan, Ms. Tian and her husband decided to bring their son to Beijing. "Even though we had to bite our teeth to get by financially after our son came, I am glad we can raise him nearby, and prevented him from doing bad things." After getting her son here, Ms. Tian sent him to a local technical college to learn coding. I asked her if he can go to college in Beijing, she said as a matter of fact, "yes, I spent 10,000 *yuan* (roughly \$1,600) to buy a Tianjin *Hukou* for my son, so he does not have to score higher than his Beijing counterpart for the same university."

Figure 10: Percentage of migrant children living/not living in Beijing with their parents.

Children in Beijing?	Percentage
Yes	55%
No	45%

The one parent who brought her son to Beijing neither had any savings nor the money to buy an urban *hukou* did so out of sheer desperation. Ms. Liu came to Beijing from Shandong Province after her husband abandoned their family 11 years ago. Initially, Ms. Liu left her son in the care of her older brother’s family, but a year later when she came back to visit, her 14-year-old son has already dropped out from school, and has been helping out his uncle’s family by working on the farm. “He says, ‘mama, this is uncle’s house, I can’t live and eat for free here.’” Ms. Liu continued, “he was very skinny when I saw him. He looks toasted from working in the sun all day, and his hands were cracked.” It broke a mother’s heart to see her son live in such harsh condition; Ms. Liu also blames herself for leaving him behind. “At that moment I decided,” Ms. Liu says, “I’d rather beg with my son on the street than leaving him behind.”

Ms. Liu’s son never went back to school again, and he has been working in different factories alongside her ever since they left together. “I live for my son,” Ms. Liu says, “my biggest wish is for him to get married soon. I am working very hard to save money for him to buy an apartment someday, someday soon.”

For migrant parents whose children are physically left behind, they often rely on phone calls and WeChat – a Chinese texting and messaging app – to keep daily contact. During one

of my follow up conversations with Ms. Wang, a migrant mother from the mountainous region of Shaanxi Province, I asked how are her children doing lately. She said her son's teacher sent her a WeChat message informing her that her son skipped school, and was caught smoking with a few other teenagers. Ms. Wang confronted her son right away, to which he denied. Ms. Wang said her son is a good kid, but she is very concerned that he will be corrupted by friends with bad influences, and with both her and her husband out working, she worries that her son will not test into any high schools. "I might have to take a year off from work and go home to make sure he doesn't slack off. It all depends on how much money we make this year."

Migrant parents also rely on remittances and gifts to bridge the emotional void with their children. Ms. Wang works as a nanny in Beijing caring for a three-year-old boy. She works from 7am to 10pm, six days a week, and makes 4,000 *yuan* (about \$644.35) a month. Out of that, she sends 3,000 *yuan* (about \$483.26) home for her children. I asked if the cost of living is high in her village, she said that because her village is situated in a remote mountainous region, the product selection range is poor, but the cost of living is very high. I asked how often she sees her husband, and if he is also sending money home, Ms. Wang cried, and said she has not seen her husband for a year, as he is working at a mining site in Inner Mongolia. Working in the coal mine is a lucrative job, but he paid a dangerous price. Just two weeks after her husband arrived at the mine, part of the mine collapsed, and her husband's back was badly hit. He is now still recovering from the back injury while working at the same time.

When Ms. Wang left her village, her younger daughter had just turned three. She has not seen them for two years, but she often sends them gifts to make up for the time she is away. She says, "We don't make much money, but when I buy gifts for my children, I always give

them the best. I buy them brand name clothes to wear so they don't lose face among their peers. Since we are not around, they cannot be looked down by others.”

The not-so-poor migrants in the interview seemed to have taken this culture of materialism to a different level after they have reunited with their adult children, almost to the point that they ignore the importance of children's ability to be self-reliant. One migrant father boasted, “I have two apartments in Beijing, when my son gets married, he will have one, and when I die, he will have both. The only problem is, he is lazy and does not want to work hard, or at all. He quit his job and now spends all day on his computer in his room. I stopped giving him monthly allowances to see how will he survive.”

Migrant parents who have reunited with their teenage children tend to focus more on their children's academic progress. Ms. Tian, who bought her son a Tianjin *Hukou*, says, “I don't want my son to repeat the same work choices as I did. I want him to learn some real skills from a technical college, and go on to find a white-collar job. I am paying for his tutoring classes in computer engineering. My son shows me his work in a lump of coding, I hope I am not spending money in vain, but I do not understand a thing that he tells me.”

Ms. Tang takes academic discipline into a new level. “My daughters have done very well for themselves. I always teach them to never be complacent with their life. I came from nothing. I grew up in a very poor family, but my father always stressed on the importance of learning. I never stopped learning, and I encourage my daughters do the same.”

Ms. Tang grew up in the shadow of Chinese Cultural Revolution in late 1960s. Cultural Revolution started in China by Chairman Mao Zedong after he was convinced that the Chinese Communist Party has grown complacent and lost its revolutionary spirit, to fight the so-called corrupted “revisionist,” the Party waged a fierce and violent “anti-rightist campaign” against intellectuals, landlords, and others judged as favoring capitalistic growth

(Gao, 1987). Because Ms. Tang's father owned a small business, her family was unfairly targeted and prosecuted by Chairman Mao's red guards during Cultural Revolution. Albeit her "revisionist" family background label, Ms. Tang worked through the ranks, and recently retired as an executive from a state-owned enterprise. She came to Beijing over twenty years ago through work transfer, and left both of her daughters at home in Hebei Province under the care of their grandmother until she settled down in Beijing, and brought them over years after. Ms. Tang pushes her daughters to work hard, sometimes too much, she admits, "I know I'm getting old, and young people nowadays have their ways on work and life, but they cannot be lazy as long as I'm around."

Yet to many other migrant parents, emotional connection was difficult to rekindle for both the parents and the children when they first reunited. For Ms. Tian, the migrant mother who owns a mini-mart, said her son did not talk much after he was brought along to Beijing. He was much closer to his grandmother, who raised him. To cope with the change, Ms. Tian also brought her mother to Beijing. She said during the first few years, when her son began to warm up to her, he would tell her each detail about his school day, asked or unasked. Even though Ms. Tian was exhausted from her workday, she listened attentively, and was always interested to learn more. "That's the only way (to bridge the communication gap)," Ms. Tian says, "the child has so much to say, and as a mother, I must listen."

2. How Do Poor Migrant Parents Care for Their Children?

The story of Auntie Li continues:

Eight years passed by like the blink of an eye. Auntie Li's mother recently had a stroke, and was paralyzed from waist down. Auntie Li's extended families often criticize her for not fulfilling filial piety to her mother, even though she sends money home every month, both for her children and her mother. Her sister-in-law once told her "what good do you do if you

only send money? We are the ones stuck here feeding and cleaning your mother.” A year ago, when Auntie Li went back to visit her mother during Chinese New Year, she overheard her teenage niece and nephew say, “why won’t grandmother die? She is full of problems in this house.” Tears ran down her cheeks as Auntie Li talks about her mother. “I cannot atone my sins for abandoning my mother, but I also have 3 children to feed.”

I asked Auntie Li if she has plans to stop working in Beijing and go home permanently, she said “my village is very poor, we cannot feed our family with the farm anymore. I hope to work and buy an apartment someday for my son’s marriage.”

I asked how are her children doing in school, she said “my oldest just turned 17, and she is not doing well in school; she wants to come out and work like me. I am worried about her safely if she goes to Southern China alone, and I would feel more comfortable if she joins me in Beijing.”

“It is hard to be a mother away from home,” Auntie Li says. “Yesterday I called home to check on the children, none of them is interested in talking to me. My second daughter in particular, does not like me, and refuses to talk to me.” Auntie Li said that none of her children are emotionally close to her. Auntie Li feels like she missed out on most of her children’s childhood, she feels inadequate as a mother and daughter. She said to me, “Life is too hard. Next life, I do not want to be a human again.”

3. How Do Not-so-poor Migrant Parents Care for Their Children?

Ms. Chen is a senior sales executive, who has been working and living in Beijing for over eighteen years. She came to Beijing before she had her son, but due to work pressure, after she gave birth, she sent her son back to Hebei province under the care of her husband and his parents.

For most of her son's childhood, Ms. Chen was only home a couple times a year to spend major holidays with the family. She sent money home every month, until she reunited with her son before he started high school. Ms. Chen's husband also has to travel a lot for business, but according to Ms. Chen, he is a supportive husband and father who closely monitors their son's academic progress. Ms. Chen's son attends a private high school in Beijing, which cost upward 30,000 *yuan* (roughly \$4,833) per year. The school prepares Chinese students to apply for international universities overseas, with a curriculum emphasizing not only on students' academic achievement, but also extracurricular activities. Even though Ms. Chen's job requires her to travel quite a bit, she tries to not miss her son's basketball game when they are in season.

In our follow up meetings, Ms. Chen was particularly curious about the college admission process in the U.S., Ms. Chen learned that American universities put much emphasis on personal statement, so she enrolled her son into a personal statement tutoring class that prepares him to write.

When I asked Ms. Chen if she will miss her son when he goes off to college, Ms. Chen said, "my son has always been very independent since he was a child, I will definitely miss him, but universities in China are too competitive, and his personality does not fit well with the environment here. He is not good with memorization, I think he will grow and thrive going abroad for college."

C. How Does Migration Affect Family Relationships and Children?

Figure 11: Migrant father and son working together. Source: Qiao Li, 2014



1. Data Discussion:

Poor migrant parents, especially mothers, bear a tremendous guilt for leaving their children behind, and they feel very inadequate in coping with their children's emotional needs. Even though technologies allow families to communicate remotely, poor migrant parents are constantly challenged by their inability to directly supervise their children's life. As left behind children grow into adulthood, they are very likely to repeat their parent's step and become migrant workers themselves.

Fathers in my interview have consistently expressed that their responsibility as a parent is to provide for the family. Migrant fathers bear less emotional burden for leaving their children behind, and this is deeply rooted in traditional Chinese culture. Even before the

founding of the People's Republic of China, the ideal for a man to leave private life behind for a greater public cause was highly encouraged. As praised in classical literature by Mencius, one of the most influential Confucius philosophers, *Yu the Great (dayu)* was regarded as a deity after he successfully tamed the floods in north China plain, even though *Yu* left his wife and son behind for thirteen years. During *Yu's* time away, he passed by his house three times, but never once did he step into the house to visit his family.

The founding of the PRC further compounded to the ideal that private lives matter less in pursuit of common goods. During Maoist China, the Communist Party attempted to remove the family from the center of Chinese life. Mao championed for families to live and work in communes, children were raised in daycare instead of being looked after by parents. During the Cultural Revolution, the Party encouraged children to report, fight against, and even punish their parents who were deemed as anti-revolutionary. Later in post-reform era, Chairman Deng Xiaoping famously said that “economic development is the only form of development” – a slogan that still rings in many parts of the country – to encourage able-bodied men and women to work hard and make money, even if it means to leave their family behind.

2. Stories of Poor Migrant Children:

Although I was not able to follow migrant parents home to talk to their children, I observed and documented the school environment at the Migrant Children's Foundation elementary school where I worked, where most children are from low-income migrant families without a Beijing *hukou*, an average class size is over sixty students. I taught two classes per day, one-hour per class, and a ten-minute recess in between. Most of the classrooms do not have much electronic equipment to work with. There is no computer

monitor, DVD player, or screen projector for presentation, and it made it quite difficult when I try to show them a picture, video, or song to illustrate learning materials.

Despite these challenges, migrant students' enthusiasms were not dampened one bit when it comes to learning English. Students politely greeted the teachers every time before class started, and they are eager to participate when questions are posed. Because the class size is too big, most times it is impossible to work with everyone individually, but the hardworking ethics shown by these migrant students serve as an inspiration to show if more resources are made available to them, what incredible wealth of talents China could harvest in this next generation.

3. Stories of Not-so-poor Migrant Parents and Children:

For not-so-poor migrant parents, their ability to provide financial support for their children eases the emotional burden of being apart. One of the fathers I interviewed complained about his son who lives with him but rarely speaks to him. I asked if he thinks this problem has anything to do with them living apart for years, the father said sternly, "no. I fulfilled my duty as a father by providing for him. I sent home money regularly, and sent him to a boarding school, but he did not value anything I did for him."

For left behind children, they have a different story growing up without their parents. "I used to hide my mother's motorcycle keys and cry every time before she left," Nina says, "I didn't want her to leave without me." Nina's mother worked far from the city before coming to Beijing, leaving Nina under the care of her maternal grandmother. She said, "I grew up with my grandmother, and she is the only one I will remain filial to." When I asked what she thinks about her mother, she said bluntly, "my mother is very selfish." Nina grew up to be a rebellious teenager; she dropped out of middle school, and started to work at age 16. With hard work, family connections, and a charismatic skill to cultivate the art of networking –

guanxi – Nina founded her own online company that markets sport-fishing packages to wealthy clientele.

Now Nina is married and has a son, she spoils her son like a little emperor. Without Beijing *hukou*, Nina plans to send her son to international a bi-lingual school that prepares students to study overseas, and do not require Beijing *hukou* to register. International schools in Beijing cost around 200,000 *yuan* (about \$32,275) per year on average (Beijing City International School, 2015). “I have to work very hard to make money for my son,” Nina says, “I will give my son everything I did not have as a child. I will not let him feel a bit of sadness.” Among the frequent gifts Nina buys for her son, she entertains him with an iPad when she goes to work, and he is quite addicted to the device. When Nina told me that her son recently had eye problems from using too much iPad, I asked her if she has considered to spend more time with him instead of work, she was a bit offended by the question, perhaps she took it as a criticism. She said in a lecturing tone, “a few years of separation can bring lifelong financial comfort for the family. I work hard to raise the social status platform for my son. Someday we will move to an even richer neighborhood, and he will grow up with friends in high places. To be successful, it is all about personal network (*renmai*).”

The art of networking – or *Guangxixue* – as described by Mayfair Yang (1994), is a facet of Chinese life that uses gift giving, favors, and banquets to establish mutual interests. Once personal network is established between two people, each can ask favor of the other with the expectation that the debt incurred will be repaid in the future. *Guanxi* is built to foster interdependence, obligation, and indebtedness. In the case of Nina, she believes in making more valuable contacts for her son as a key to his successful future, and she is willing to work for it, even at the expense of their family time, or her son’s eyesight.

Ironically, Nina is repeating what her mother did when she was young. Even though her mother's absence left her an unhappy childhood, she nonetheless follows the footsteps of her parent believing that the financial gain will justify the time lost with her child.

For Weiwei, a 23-year-old college sophomore in Beijing, her mother's departure when Weiwei was in sixth grade left different meanings in her life. "Initially, I was very angry at both of my parents. I didn't understand why they are divorced, and why my mom had to leave us." Weiwei had to learn how to cook and clean as she took care of her younger brother almost on her own. In her teens, Weiwei ran away from home to protest her broken family, but years later she realized that her action was juvenile, and it had caused lots of grief for the family. Weiwei now understands that her mom escaped an abusive marriage and worked very hard to support Weiwei and her brother. All of her tuition and living expenses are paid for by her mother, Weiwei said that would not have been possible if her mother did not leave for work. Weiwei is now very close to her mother, and she strives to be a woman just like her mom, hardworking and selfless. When I asked Weiwei if she considers having a family someday. She said marriage maybe, but children, she does not want to have them ever. "Children are too energy consuming. I already raised my younger brother. Now I want to spend time and energy on my study and career, because girls must work hard and be independent."

Even though Weiwei and Nina have different visions for how to raise their own family, they both are deeply affected by the decisions made by their mother, and they tend to model their life, consciously or unconsciously, after their mother's path. According to Margery Wolf (1972), because girls are traditionally marginalized in society, as they do not have the same rights as sons, girls have a different understanding of family than do boys.

Girls tend to associate family centering on her mother, forming a uterine family with her mother and her mother's children.

V. Conclusion

This thesis examines the effect of China's internal migration on both migrant parents and their children, some of whom are left-behind and some have reunited after a period of separation. The results discuss how migrant parents take care of their children from afar and close by, what are the challenges they face, and how do they combat them. Moreover, the findings also discuss how do migration affect left-behind children, as well as their decisions on parenting.

Instead of accepting their role as passive recipients of discrimination, migrant parents, mostly mothers in the interview, are capable of charting a new future for themselves and their children. Migrant parents use creative ways to care for their children from afar: they use phone calls and WeChat to build emotional bonding with their children, and rely on remittances and gifts to make up the time apart. At the very least, this study also policy makers to recognize that migrant families are not a weak and disenfranchised population, but a strong and creative workforce that supports China's globalizing economy.

However, even if they keep regular contacts with their left-behind children, migrant mothers across all income levels bear tremendous guilt for leaving their children behind. Although all of the migrant parents and children in the interview lack Beijing *hukou*, they come up with innovative solutions to bypass with this institutional barrier. For poor migrant parents, since they lack the skills or capital to find well-paid jobs or start their own business, they do simply do not make enough money to bring their children along. Many poor migrants use split-household strategy to work in Beijing alone for a few years, while leaving their children in the care of family relatives, in the hope to make some money and buy an apartment in smaller towns nearby their village. For that purpose, some migrant parents come to Beijing just to work and save money for their son's wedding. For the not-so-poor

migrants, they either purchase a *hukou* from a different city that has comparable privilege as Beijing, or send their children straight to international schools to avoid the *hukou* restriction altogether. However, there are some migrant parents who brought their children along to Beijing, and do not have the money to raise them in Beijing. For those parents, they have no choice but to let their children work in low-skill factory jobs in order to make the ends meet.

For poor migrant children, their sense of sharing family's financial burden is strong. Some of them even volunteer to drop off from school to work alongside their parent when they have younger siblings. For the not-so-poor children, especially those who have reunited with their parent(s), some have very weak sense of financial responsibilities. Migrant daughters are particularly close to their mothers, and tend to follow the path of their mother's even if it is unconsciously done. Regardless of migrant children's wealth level, they have expressed that they felt emotionally left-behind, and sometimes that morph into a slight resentment, even after they reunite with their parents.

A close examination on how migration affects family relationships offers insight into parents and children's struggle to better their lives and achieve upward mobility. In achieving their goals, a common theme throughout my findings is that both poor and not-so-poor migrant parents bought into the culture of materialism and consumption, which is promoted by the state. Migrant parents use remittances and gifts to cope with separation and justify their time apart from the family: poor migrant parents buy brand name clothes and gadgets for their children to keep them happy, while not-so-poor migrant parents work extra hours to build a higher social platform for them to thrive. In the process, it has caused trauma, family tensions, and deep psychological stress to themselves and their children. The price for material comfort is way too high to pay for broken families and children who are alienated from parents.

Although this study focuses on Chinese migrant family relationships in Beijing, the findings have broader implications on the social cost behind China's rapid economic development. In just over thirty years, China has grown to hold the world's second largest GDP after the U.S., but despite China's effort to build a "harmonious society" – a philosophical concept rooted in Confucianism, and a political campaign launched by former president Hu Jintao during China's 11th Five-Year Plan from 2006 to 2010 (Chan, 2010) – China ranks in the least equal 25% of countries worldwide. According to the Gini coefficient, the quantitative measure of inequality within a country – with 0 being perfectly equal, and 1 being completely unequal – wealth inequality in China rose from about 0.3 in the early 1980s to more than 0.45 in the early 2000s. After 2000, the Gini coefficient rose further to a high of 0.49 in 2008 (Li, Sato, Sicular, 2013). Since then it has declined slightly; in 2013, the Gini coefficient was measured at 0.42 (World Bank, 2013).

When President Xi Jinping took over the leadership in 2012, China embarked on a new path to reinvigorate the Party's rules. Modeling after Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.'s "I have a Dream" speech, President Xi Jinping projected his "Chinese Dream" at the Asia Annual Conference in 2013:

"In November last year, the Communist Party of China held its 18th National Congress, which drew the blueprint for China's development in the years to come. The main goals we set for China are as follows: By 2020, China's GDP and per capita incomes for urban and rural residents will double the 2010 figures, and the building of a moderately prosperous society in all respects will be completed. By the mid-21st century, China will be turned into a modern socialist country that is prosperous, strong, democratic, culturally advanced and harmonious; and the Chinese dream, namely, the great renewal of the Chinese nation, will be realized. Looking ahead, we are full of confidence in China's future." (Boao Forum, 2013)

To achieve the "great renewal of the Chinese nation," President Xi began with reestablishing the Party's legitimacy by cracking down on dissidents and corrupt party officials. Since 2012, China has intensified its oppression on freedom of expression, access to information,

as well as political and civil dissidents. These include jailing intellectuals; restricting the rights of ethnic minorities, such as Uighurs and the Tibetans; subjecting NGOs to intrusive inspection; blocking the coverage of sensitive issues, such as Occupy Hong Kong movement; blocking foreign news sources and social media, such as the New York Times, Bloomsburg, and Facebook; illegally detain party officials and civil rights activists, such as officials on suspicion of corruption charges, lawyers, and human rights activists.

Moreover, President Xi's anti-corruption slogan famously stated that both "tigers and flies" will be targeted for corruption charges, and he has made some anti-corruption progress by purging his political rivals. Many people see President Xi's anti-corruption campaign as a scheme to consolidate powers rather than making any meaningful changes to address inequalities. Rural lands continue to be grabbed without adequate compensation. Farmers continue to be intimidated when they petition for a fair settlement. Migrant workers are systemically discriminated in cities, and left-behind children are forced to pay the price for China's rapid economic development.

To shrink the economic inequality gap, policy makers need to branch out from the traditional narratives of economic development, measured by the Gross Domestic Product (GDP), technological advancement, military building, or social modernization, to include different forms of social development, such as investing in education, affordable healthcare, as well as raising minimum wage, and increase workforce protection.

The challenges faced by Chinese migrant families in many ways mirror the obstacles immigrant families face worldwide: migrants' mobility is limited due to the lack of legal status; as a result, their rights are striped away because neither the sending nor the receiving cities or countries are responsible for their well-beings; long separation from their children tears family bonding apart; neglect, poverty, and lack of parental guidance make migrant

children vulnerable to abuse, violence, and crime exposure. At the same time, Chinese government, like many other countries whose economy is built largely on the back of immigrant workers, continue to profit off of their toil, and fail to recognize the contribution of immigrant workers.

As powerfully reasoned by Amartya Sen in *Development as Freedom* (1999), economic development is only one of the *means* in achieving the freedom enjoyed by members of society. The ultimate goal of development is to expand the freedom that human enjoy, and the means to achieve it, require the eradication of poverty, eliminating poor economic opportunities, and systemic deprivation of public services. The following section will list a few policy recommendations that aim to alleviate China's growing inequalities.

VI. Policy Recommendations

Figure 12: Groups celebrating the October 1 National Holiday. Source: Qiao Li, 2014



China's rural-urban and intra-urban inequalities reflect the long-term consequences of past and current institutional discriminations that have long favored the growth of cities and urbanites, at the expense of rural peasants and migrant workers. Such discrimination has led to unequal access to education, employment, and social welfare benefits for rural migrant families who work and live in urban cities. To address these rural-urban disparities, China has tried to implement policies in its 11th and 12th Five-Year Plans. In China's upcoming 13th Five-Year Plan, which will be launched in 2016, focus will also be placed on improving quality of lives (Shen, 2014).

China's 11th Five-Year Plan for 2006-2010 focused primarily on fostering economic growth, reducing energy consumption and carbon emission, and building a "harmonious

society” through strengthening public service. However, very little was focused on improving the lives of migrant workers and their families.

In terms of strengthening public service, some examples from the 11th Five-Year Plan include raising the years of education per capital up from 8.5 years to nine years; increasing pension coverage for retirees with urban *hukou*; working to raise medical coverage from 23.5 percent to over 80 percent in rural China (Yan, 2006).

When it comes to addressing rural-urban migration, the 11th Five-Year Plan also advocated for a rational (*heli*) but stratified (*fenli*) model of urbanization. Specifically, the Plan encouraged individuals to engage in “both industries and farming, circular flows between city and countryside” (*yigoing yinong, chengxiang shuangxiang liudong*) (Fan, 2006). Such strategy would encourage more rural migrants to permanently settle in second and third-tiered cities rather than crowding megacities like Beijing or Shanghai.

In the 12th Five-Year Plan, policies were aimed to promote the equalization of basic public service, minimize the gaps between rural and urban living standards, and accelerate the growth the rural and urban income (Confederation of British Industries, 2011).

Though existing policies focus on both rural and urban growth, they do not directly address rural migrants’ needs in urban cities. Policies aim to manage migrant population in urban cities rather than improving their living conditions and supporting family cohesion. To mediate inequality and promote healthier family growth, Chinese national government must address the following issues:

Issue 1: Incentives to draw talents to smaller cities, townships, and countryside.

Recommendation: National government should give more incentives, such as higher pay, housing offer, or better retirement benefits to encourage aspired and talented individuals to take jobs in smaller cities, particularly for healthcare and teaching jobs. Many

Beijing residents complain about their hospital being overcrowded with rich villagers, because healthcare services are so poor in smaller towns. Chinese national government should stop favoring its global cities, and focus on building the rest of the country.

Issue 2: Equalizing *hukou* privilege

Recommendation: Migrant workers and parents in Beijing should be able to afford medical care if they are sick. Should migrant parents decide to bring their children to the city, either short-term or long-term, their children need to have affordable education. In addition, equal college admission standard must be guaranteed. Students who do not hold urban *hukou* should not be punished with higher testing score requirement. Some urban residents may worry such leniency will bring flocks of migrants into cities, but their concerns will be mitigated if smaller towns and villages are growing with well-equipped social services, as it will increase the likelihood for migrant families to return.

Issue 3: NGO's involvement in urban migrant schools

Recommendation: National government should encourage NGO's involvement with migrant children's education in urban cities. NGOs offer many opportunities to enrich migrant children's learning experience. They often provide supplementary teaching and after-school tutoring services for migrant schools that have limited money and resources. NGOs also serve as the community liaison that link aspired individuals with projects that promote positive changes. NGOs can help to build stronger communities by cultivating shared responsibilities and compassion.

Issue 4: Upholding the rule of law

Recommendation: National, provincial, and local governments must respect, and obey the rule of law. The New Marriage Law of 1950, superseded by the Second Marriage Law of 1980, set out guidelines to protect women's right to choose her partner, and the right to divorce. In practice, women continue to be pressured into marriages, their interests are unprotected in the event of a divorce, and they continue to be looked down upon when they get a divorce. Government must provide guidelines to implement laws in order to eliminate unfair and abusive practices.

The legacies of China's unfair social policies compounded with its relentless pursuit for economic development, left President Xi Jinping and Premier Li Keqiang with continually evolving social and political challenges. As China emerges onto the world stage, President Xi Jinping will have to guide his inflexible and opaque government with creative solutions, to prevent any potential social, economic, and political instability.

References

"2013 nian quanguo nongmingong jiance diaocha baogao (a report of survey on rural migrant workers in 2013)." *National Bureau Of Statistics (NBS)*. 12 May 2014. Web. 10 Feb. 2015. <<http://wenku.baidu.com/view/065bc38a6529647d27285255.html>>.

"BCIS – Fee Policy for 2015/2016." *Beijing City International School*. Web. 1 Apr. 2015. <<http://www.bcis.cn/en/admissions/school-fees>>.

"Citizens United V. Federal Election Commission." *SCOTUSblog*. Web. 7 Feb. 2015. <<http://www.scotusblog.com/case-files/cases/citizens-united-v-federal-election-commission/>>.

"Full Text of Xi Jinping's Speech at the Opening Ceremony of the Boao Forum for Asia AC 2013." *Boao Forum For Asia*. 7 Apr. 2013. Web. 3 Apr. 2015. <<http://english.boaoforum.org/mtzxxwz xen/7379.jhtml>>.

"Full Translation of China's 12th Five-Year Plan." *Confederation Of British Industry*. 11 May 2011. Web. 18 May 2015. <http://www.google.com/url?sa=t&rct=j&q=&esrc=s&source=web&cd=3&ved=0CCwQFjAC&url=http%3A%2F%2Fwww.kpmg.com%2FCN%2Fen%2FIssuesAndInsights%2FArticlesPublications%2FDocuments%2FChina-12th-Five-Year-Plan-Consumer-Markets-201104.pdf&ei=_xVaVfGnF8m6ggTppIHQCQ&usg=AFQjCNFpumOdXAHs7Y3XvmuovUqhqhXkCA&sig2=-KnkigYIHTWsY38-oA8dRg&bvm=bv.93564037,d.eXY>.

"GDP (current US\$)." The World Bank. Web. 14 May 2015. <<http://data.worldbank.org/indicator/NY.GDP.MKTP.CD>>.

"Global 500 2014." *Fortune*. 7 July 2014. Web. 14 May 2015. <<http://fortune.com/global500/china-national-petroleum-4/>>.

"Major Cities in China Population 2015." *World Population Review*. Web. 18 May 2015.
<<http://worldpopulationreview.com/countries/china-population/major-cities-in-china/>>.

"Mencius: Chapter 8: Lilouxia." Web. 11 Feb. 2015.
<http://www.quanxue.cn/ct_rujia/MengZi/MengZi22.html>.

"Migrant Workers and Their Children." *China Labour Bulletin*. N.p., 27 June 2013.
Web. 10 Feb. 2015. <<http://www.clb.org.hk/en/content/migrant-workers-and-their-children>>.

"Statistical Communiqué of the People's Republic of China on the 2013 National Economic and Social Development." *National Bureau Of Statistics*." 24 Feb. 2014. Web. 10 Feb. 2015.
<http://www.stats.gov.cn/english/PressRelease/201402/t20140224_515103.html>.

"World Development Indicators 2013." *World Bank*. Web. 1 Apr. 2015.
<<http://data.worldbank.org/data-catalog/world-development-indicators>>.

"Zhongguo Caili 50qiang Chengshi Renkou Xiyinli Paihangbang. (Ranking of top 50 Chinese cities in attracting migrant workers)" *Value Line*. 12 May 2014. Web. 10 Feb. 2015.
<<http://www.valueline.com.cn/Detail.aspx?id=1001>>.

Chan, Aris. *Paying the price for economic development: The children of migrant workers in China*. Ed. Geoffrey Crothall. China Labour Bulletin, 2009.

Chan, Kin-Man. "Harmonious society." *International encyclopedia of civil society*. Springer US, 2010. 821-825.

Démurger, Sylvie, and Hui Xu. "Left-behind children and return decisions of rural migrants in China." (2011).

Dreby, Joanna. *Divided by borders: Mexican migrants and their children*. Univ of California Press, 2010.

Fan, Cindy C. *China on the Move: Migration, the State and the Household*. New York: Routledge, 2008.

Fan, Cindy C. "China's eleventh five-year plan (2006-2010): from " getting rich first" to " common prosperity"." *Eurasian Geography and Economics* 47.6 (2006): 708-723.

Gao, Yuan. *Born red: A chronicle of the Cultural Revolution*. Stanford University Press, 1987.

Gong, Zhenglong. "Qinhuangdao Yiju "kuaihuijiaba" Quantui Daitu. (In Qinhuangdao, a 6-year-old talked a perpetrator out of his robbery attempt)" *World Viewing*. 8 Oct. 2014. Web. 10 Feb. 2015. <<http://www.vistastory.com/a/201410/9616.html>>.

Hannum, Emily C., Meiyan Wang, and Jennifer H. Adams. "Urban-rural disparities in access to primary and secondary education under market reform." (2008).

Harvey, David. *A brief history of neoliberalism*. Oxford University Press, 2005.

Jacka, Tamara, Andrew B. Kipnis, and Sally Sargeson. "Citizenship, Household Registration, and Migration." *Contemporary China: Society and Social Change*. Cambridge University Press (2013):65-81.

Jacka, Tamara. *Rural Women in Urban China: Gender, migration, and social change*. ME Sharpe, 2005.

Johnson, Ian. "China Releases Plan to Incorporate Farmers into Cities." *The New York Times*. 17 Mar. 2014. Web. 10 Feb. 2015. <<http://www.nytimes.com/2014/03/18/world/asia/china-releases-plan-to-integrate-farmers-in-cities.html>>.

Johnson, Ian. "China Releases Plan to Incorporate Farmers into Cities." *New York Times*, 17 Mar. 2014. Web. 11 Feb. 2015. <<http://www.nytimes.com/2014/03/18/world/asia/china-releases-plan-to-integrate-farmers-in-cities.html>>.

Kardaszewicz, Kris. "They Are Also Parents." *Center For Child Rights - Corporate Social Responsibility*. 11 June 2013. Web. 18 May 2015. <<http://ccrcsr.com/resource/225>>.

Kong, Tao, and Xin Meng. "The educational and health outcomes of the children of migrants." *The great migration: rural-urban migration in China and Indonesia*. United Kingdom: Edward Elgar Publishing (2010).

Li, Shi, Hiroshi Sato, and Terry Sicular, eds. *Rising inequality in China: Challenges to a harmonious Society*. Cambridge University Press, 2013.

Lichtenstein, Nelson. "Wal-Mart: Template for 21st century capitalism." *New Labor Forum*. Vol. 14. No. 1. 2005.

Liu. "Average Annual Salary in Beijing: 69,000 Yuan." *CRI English*. N.p., 08 June 2014. Web. 18 May 2015. <<http://english.cri.cn/12394/2014/06/08/2821s830467.htm>>.

Parreñas, Rhacel S. 2005. *Children of Global Migration: Transnational Families and Gendered Woes*. Stanford University Press.

Pun, Ngai and Jenny Chan. "Global capital, the state, and Chinese workers the Foxconn experience." *Modern China* 38.4 (2012): 383-410.

Pun, Ngai. *Made in China: Women factory workers in a global workplace*. Duke University Press, 2005.

Rofel, Lisa B. "Yearnings: Televisual love and melodramatic politics in contemporary China." *American Ethnologist* 21.4 (1994): 700-722.

Sassen, Saskia. *Losing control? Sovereignty in an age of globalization*. Columbia University Press, 1996.

Schwarcz, Vera. "The pane of sorrow: Public uses of personal grief in Modern China." *Daedalus* (1996): 119-148.

Sen, Amartya. *Development as freedom*. Oxford University Press, 1999.

Shen, Qing. "China's Five-Year Plan to Boost Environment Protection." *Xinhua*. 23 Apr. 2014. Web. 4 June 2015. <http://news.xinhuanet.com/english/china/2014-04/23/c_133284406.htm>.

Wang, Fei-Ling. "Conflict, resistance and the transformation of the *hukou* system." *Chinese Society: Change, Conflict and Resistance* (2010): 80.

Whyte, Martin King, ed. *One country, two societies: rural-urban inequality in contemporary China*. Vol. 16. Harvard University Press, 2010.

Wolf, Margery. "Uterine Families and the Women's Community." *Women and the Family in Rural Taiwan* (1972): 166-169.

Woon, Yuen-Fong. "Family Strategies of Prosperous Peasants in an Emigrant Community in South China: A Three Year Perspective (1988–1991)." *Canadian Journal of Development Studies/Revue canadienne d'études du développement* 15.1 (1994): 9-33.

Wu, Jieh-min. "Rural migrant workers and China's differential citizenship: A comparative institutional analysis'." *One country, two societies: rural-urban inequality in contemporary China* (2010): 55-81.

Yan, Yangtze. "Facts and Figures: China's Main Targets for 2006-2010." *NPC & CPPCC National Committee Annual Sessions 2006*. Xinhua News, 26 Mar. 2006. Web. 2 June 2015.

Yang, Mayfair Mei-hui. *Gifts, favors, and banquets: The art of social relationships in China*. Cornell University Press, 1994.

Yang, Weiyong. "Reforms, Structural Adjustments, and Rural Income in China." *China Perspectives* 63 (2006).

Yip, Winnie. "Disparities in health care and health status: the rural-urban gap and beyond." *One country, two societies: Rural-urban inequality in contemporary China* (2010):

147-165.

Appendix

Glossary Terms

Dagongmei (打工妹) – factory girls

Dayu (大禹) – Yu the Great in ancient mythology

Guanxi (关系) – people-to-people relationships

Guanxixue (关系学) – the art and study of people-to-people relationships

Guojia Tongjiju (国家统计局) – National Bureau of Statistics (NBS)

Hukou (户口) – Household Registration System (Hukou)

Rendingshengtian (人定胜天) – Man can conquer nature

Renmai (人脉) – personal connection

Zhongguo (中国) – People's Republic of China (PRC)

Zhongguo Gongchandang (中国共产党) – Chinese Communist Party (CCP)

Interviewees' Demographic Information

Prefix	Name	Age	Yr. in BJ	# of Children	Reason	Marital Status	Children in BJ?
Poor Migrant Parents							
Ms.	Wang, Wei	35	1	2	Poverty	M	N
Ms.	Auntie Li	46	8	3	Poverty	M	N
Ms.	Liu (fruit-seller)	60	1	1	Son's marriage	M	Y
Ms.	Tian (mini-mart)	43	7	1	Son's marriage	M	N
Ms.	Liu (housekeeper)	48	11	1	Unhappy m	RM	N
Ms.	Ji, Lan (subway)	55	3	1	Son's marriage	M	N
Mr.	Guo (subway)	47	15	2	Opportunities	D	N
Ms.	Duan (mom)	46	2	1	Poverty	RM	N
Ms.	Lan (nannies)	46	7	3	Poverty	M	N
Ms.	Lu (housekeeper)	40	9	3	Poverty	M	Y
Not-so-poor Migrant Parents and adult Children							
Ms.	Tang (executive)	70	24	2	Work transfer	M	Y
Ms.	Chen (sales)	36	18	1	Poverty	M	Y
Mr.	Chu (business)	42	14	2	Poverty	D	Y
Ms.	Li, Yan (shop)	50	6	1	Work transfer	M	Y
Ms.	Song (farm)	53	1	1	Son's marriage	M	Y
Ms.	Nina	30	12	1	Now-adult Ch.	M	Y
Ms.	Dai (business)	47	8	2	Unhappy m	RM	Y
Ms.	HY (cloth shop)	29	3	1	Opportunities	M	Y
Mr.	Rui (subway)	42	10	1	Opportunities	M	N
Ms.	Weiwei	23	7	0	Now-adult Ch.	M	Y

Sample Semi-structured Questionnaires

Questions for Migrant Parents with Left-behind Children

Name:

Age:

How many years have you been in Beijing? What do you do?

How is your job? What are some of the things you like about your job? What aspects make it hard?

How many days do you work? How much do you make a month? How are you treated at work?

Are you married? Is your spouse in Beijing too?

Do you have children? Are they in Beijing?

When was the last time you saw your children? How long have you been a migrant worker? Where else did you work before coming to Beijing?

Who's taking care of your children? Are they okay and supportive of your decision to leave your children behind?

Are your parents healthy and well? How many siblings do you have? What were the economic conditions you grew up in? What was the highest educational degree you received? What was the reason for you to leave school?

Are your children in school? How are they doing in school?

Are your children rebellious? How did you find out? What did you do or do you plan to do address this?

Do you have difficulties communicating with your children from a distance? How do you exercise parental supervision from afar?

When you miss your children, what do you do? How do you cope with this separation?

What are some of your goals and plans after working in Beijing? Going home? Bring children and spouse along to Beijing? Move to a smaller city with family closer to home?

Questions for Migrant Parents Who Have Brought their Children to Beijing:

Name:

Age:

How many years have you been in Beijing? What do you do?

How is your job? What are some of the things you like about your job? What aspects make it hard?

How many days do you work? How much do you make a month? How are you treated at work?

Are you married? Is your spouse in Beijing too?

Do you have children? Are they in Beijing?

Were you separated from your children for a period of time? How many years ago was that? How old are your children now?

Are your children in school? How are they doing in class?

What did you do to help your children do well/improve in class? Was it difficult to communicate with your children after reunification? How is your relationship now with your children?

Do you feel appreciated by your family and children for what you have done for them? Did you come to Beijing to create a better future for them? Was it worth it? Now that your children are here with you, what do you work for now?

What are some of your hopes for your children?

Questions for Now-Adult Children:

Name:

Age:

What do you study in Beijing? Where do you work?

Your mom/dad spoke proudly of you. Do you feel they understand you? Why or why not?

Was it difficult to communicate with your parent(s) while they were away? How did you cope with that?

Were you rebellious during their time away? Did you make trouble? How did it go down?

Was it difficult to communicate with your parent(s) after reuniting? How did you cope with that?

What do you want to do after graduation or in the next five years?

Would you ever consider being a migrant worker like your parent? Perhaps more skilled and work in a place where you can make more than your parents. How would you raise your children? Would you leave them behind for a while?