

DEFYING GRAVITY

—Migrant Children Education System in Beijing, China
policies, NGOs, and market as factors



Photo from Natsumi Hayashi

INTRODUCTION: Due to the continuum impact of the hukou system, children who follow their parents from rural areas to urban areas to work are considered 'migrant children'. Most migrant children lack appropriate access to educational resources. The purpose of this project is to identify some of the influential factors that contribute to migrant children's current educational needs, to frame the institutionalization of the internal migrant schools (dagong zidi xuexiao), and to analyze the implementation of related policy dynamics in Beijing, China.

KEY RESEARCH QUESTIONS:

"What is the current stage of migrant school development?"

"What is the formation process of the internal migrant schools?"

"How do policies impact migrant children's education rights and operation of the migrant schools?"

"How do NGOs impact these changes/processes?"

METHODOLOGY :

This is an exploratory research project that aims to better understand the current educational sphere of migrant children in Beijing. Literature review is essential before and after site visits. The project began with snow balling information collecting. Principals, school owners, teachers and NGO workers are interviewed.

LEARNING OBJECTIVES:

- Practice culture competence
- Conduct independent research
- Develop theoretical and analytical skills

CHALLENGES: (Data collection)

- May have no specific address or direct route for visiting targeted NGO or migrant schools.
- May encounter different dialects when interviewing
- May require multiple attempts to collect accurate information



KEY FINDINGS:

-Chinese law stipulates the right to education, including nine years of free, public, education without discrimination. However, in practice, migrants were left largely to fend for themselves when it came to their children's education.

-Internal migrants have responded by setting up their own privately-run, and privately-funded, schools especially for their own children. Migrant schools have served the needs of a community of children effectively but are generally poorly resourced.

- Many have struggled to get their operations going in the face of hostility from local school and municipal authorities, or at best, experienced neglect. Many continue to face the risk of sudden, forcible, closure by local authorities.

FURTHER QUESTIONS:

Every interviewee mentioned "maintaining social stability" as the government's stated primary responsibility. Most of the NGOs, migrant children schools and their communities have been affected by efforts to 'maintain social stability' somehow—both positively and negatively. Questions such as "what does 'maintaining social stability mean?" "How does that affect the policy and development of migrant children's education?" are suggested for future inquiry.

Chih-Chieh Hsu,
MSW Candidate 2013
Global Special Study 2012
University of Michigan
School of Social Work



WHAT IS THE HUKOU SYSTEM?

The hukou system is the household registration system which performs a pervasive mechanism of control in China. People are born registered under their province of origin and have been categorized to either an urban household or a rural household. The purpose of the hukou system is to control inner migration, especially from rural areas to urban areas, in order to control the pace of urbanization. It is also used to maintain social control, and to allocate resources across the country. Peoples' well-being has been closely tied with the hukou system since it regulates peoples' job and educational opportunities, health care, social welfare, and residential rights. Currently, urban residents are much more privileged than rural residents in all of the above areas due to disproportionate development strategies.



ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS :

Office of Global Activities, School of Social Work, University of Michigan, Professor Lawrence Root, Ran Hu, Yu Liu, Lu Gong, Hsing-Hsiang Huang, Ally Zhou, Lan Ma, Kiddy Huang, Cheng-Lang Hsu, Zhi-Qiang, Chuan-Che Huang ... and all of the interviewees in China.