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# Learning from migrant education: A case study of the schooling of rural migrant children in Beijing

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## ABSTRACT

This paper focuses on the educational opportunities available to rural migrant children in Beijing. On the basis of fieldwork conducted in migrant communities in 2004–2005, I conclude that administrative and financial barriers, as well as discrimination, prevent migrant children from entering state schools. I discuss the quality of education available in unlicensed private schools, followed by an analysis of the possible reasons for the state's exclusion of migrant children from state schools and its hostility to migrants' self-provision of education.

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## 1. Introduction

This paper focuses on the education of rural migrant children in Beijing, and what can be learnt from it about Chinese government policy towards migration and education more generally. It is based on 5 months of fieldwork carried out in Beijing from November 2004 to April 2005. My aim in undertaking this fieldwork was to discover what educational opportunities were available to the children of rural migrant labourers in the capital and to investigate some of the causes of this situation. I also aimed to discover how migrant families had responded to their situation, and how the state had helped or hindered them in their attempts to provide education for their children.

In this paper, I will first explain the contemporary rural migrant situation in China and its historical background. In Section 2, I will describe the fieldwork I conducted, and set out my findings, as well as providing a brief update on the situation in the run up to the Beijing Olympic Games. In Section 3, I will discuss the results of this work, examining the state's failure to provide education for migrant children, analysing the mechanisms through which migrant children were excluded from the state school system and suggesting why the state might have wished to deny access to these children. I will then look at the state's responses to the migrants' own provision of education and compare this with the situation in other developing countries, suggesting some reasons why China might be considered an unusual case in its apparent wish to deny education to migrant children.

### 1.1. Migration in China and the hukou system

According to Chinese government statistics, in 2003 there were approximately 125 million rural-to-urban migrants in China, accounting for 23.2% of total rural labour and nearly 10% of the total population of China (National Bureau of Statistics of China, 2004). Most of these migrants came, and still come, from poor rural areas in interior provinces and the west of China, moving towards the eastern and coastal regions, where economic development is more advanced.

The current situation of rural migrants has arisen as a direct result of long-term constraints on population mobility in China. During the 1950s, in an attempt to control population movement, the Chinese government classified every Chinese citizen as either "rural" or "urban" through a system of household registration (*hukou*). The effect of this *hukou* system was to create a 'caste-like system of social stratification' between urbanites and rural peasants (Potter and Potter, 1990). One's classification as rural or urban determined not only one's place of residence, but also the benefits one could receive from the state. Urban dwellers had access to state-subsidised benefits such as food, life employment, medical insurance, housing, social security and pensions (Solinger, 1999). Those who were designated rural dwellers were entitled to none of these. *Hukou* status was passed through the maternal line, such that newborn babies would be registered in the area of their mothers' permanent address. The *hukou* system was maintained by two methods. "Neighbourhood committees" (*jumin weiyuanhui*) reported newcomers to the authorities, while a strict rationing system provided basic goods only to those with an urban *hukou*. Any peasant who attempted to move to the city would thus be caught by the authorities or would be unable to obtain food. The

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system proved to be extremely effective in preventing rural–urban migration.

### 1.2. The hukou system since the 1980s

After the mid-1980s, however, large-scale rural-to-urban migration again became possible. A relaxation in the implementation of *hukou* laws and the re-commodification of many basic goods meant that the rapidly growing urban private sector was able to absorb large numbers of low-paid labourers from the countryside. An unprecedented wave of large-scale migration (*da qiyi*) had begun. Increased agricultural productivity caused by the introduction of the household responsibility system in the late 1970s, and a decrease in per capita cultivated land, created a surplus of millions of peasants—by 1984 there were already an estimated 95 million surplus rural workers (Li, 1996). More recent estimates suggest that there will be a pool of more than 500 million surplus rural labourers before the year 2010 (Ministry of Agriculture, 2004). While some of the surplus workers were able to find employment in the rural industries which sprang up after the end of the commune system in the early 1980s, millions moved to cities and towns. The large income gap between cities and countryside, and the increasing availability of work in the construction, manufacturing and service sectors in China's urban areas, combined to encourage surplus rural workers to migrate to seek their fortunes (Rozelle et al., 1999).

Migrants are no longer prevented from entering urban areas, and the system of “custody and repatriation”, which was used extensively in the 1980s and 1990s to transfer rural migrants back to the countryside, ceased to be used after 2003, when the beating to death of a university student in custody provoked national outrage. However, at the time of my fieldwork in 2004–2005 the vast majority of migrants were still unable to convert their rural *hukou* to an urban one and thus had no access to the goods and services restricted to urban *hukou*-holders, which in many cities included state education, healthcare and housing.<sup>1</sup> Although there have been reforms to the *hukou* system, especially in smaller cities and towns, the system was still legally in force at the time of writing (October 2008), and is particularly stringently enforced in the capital, Beijing. Any transfer of *hukou* status from agricultural to non-agricultural remains extremely difficult and must go through official channels. Recruitment by an urban enterprise (*zhao gong*), enrolment in an urban university (*zhao sheng*) or promotion to a senior administrative post (*zhao gan*) are the most common reasons for a transfer to be accepted. However, even within these state-authorised transfers, there can still be difficulties—for example, whether or not the recruiting enterprise is owned by the state might be a major factor for acceptance or rejection of the transfer application.

Although the movement of people is no longer tightly regulated, transfer of *hukou* status is still subject to strict policy and quota controls. The urban–rural hierarchy is thus replicated within the cities themselves, creating what Kam Wing Chan has called a ‘two-class urban society’ (Chan, 1999). Although it seems that, despite their status as second-class citizens in the cities, most adult migrants may benefit from migration, at least in terms of increased income, there has been far less work on the effects of migration on children who move with their parents. The social divisions faced by migrants are of particular significance for these children. This is not only a problem of legal *hukou* status and rights to membership in urban society; as I will explain in Sections 2 and 3, the perceived as well as administrative dichotomy between

peasants and urbanites is fundamental to shaping the lives, and particularly the educational experiences, of migrant children in urban areas.

### 1.3. Migrant children

Official statistics show that there were 25 million migrant children in Chinese cities in the year 2000; unofficial estimates are far higher (UNESCO, 2000). Most of these have come to join parents already working in urban areas. These children are unable, in a majority of cities, to attend state schools without paying several kinds of extra fees not paid by local children. In addition, non-financial barriers, such as the demand for up to nine separate official documents, strict quotas and a supposed shortage of school places act to exclude migrants from city schools. Migrant parents cannot afford to send their children to licensed private schools, most of which charge much higher fees than state schools. A majority of school-age migrant children therefore attend “black” unlicensed migrant-run schools instead, often in very poor conditions.

Despite the fact that local governments were required by law to provide 9 years of education, until 1996 migrant children were refused permission to enrol in city state schools. New regulations passed that year allowed those without an urban *hukou* to enrol in state schools in certain areas on an experimental basis if they could provide the necessary documents, yet it is unclear how widely this standard was adopted. In 1998, a notice of “Provisional Measures for the Education of Migrant Children” was issued by the Ministry of Education, encouraging cities to provide education for migrants, but has remained a policy “guideline” rather than becoming legally binding. In 2003, the State Council circulated a further official notice urging local governments to provide state school education for all children under their jurisdictions (SCPRC, 2003). However, while in some cities the authorities attempted to limit certain of the extra fees charged to migrant families by state schools, in many cases the State Council’s notice may have led to the closure of unlicensed private schools for migrants (on the grounds that the notice specifies children should receive state education) without any actual provision for placing the students in state schools.

It is difficult to gather accurate information about unlicensed private schools in China, and the situation differs widely from city to city. In Chengdu, a 2003 study showed that even the two schools for migrant children which met the criteria for the government licensing of private schools were rejected in their licence applications (Froissart, 2003). While one of the two schools was eventually granted a year’s licence, it was first forced to demolish new canteen and dormitory facilities in order to provide extra room for classrooms, and was then unable to renew its licence because of the lack of canteen and dormitory facilities. At the time of the report, both schools were threatened with closure, as were a further nine unlicensed schools in the city (Froissart, 2003). By contrast, in the Special Economic Zone of Xiamen, where roughly half of the city’s population are migrants, the municipal government published legislation in 2002 allowing the regularisation of 34 unlicensed migrant schools, and creating a special office responsible for their direction (Nanfang Zhoumo, 2003). In Shanghai, authorities have focused on closing unlicensed migrant schools in the city’s central area, and reports suggest that between 10% and 40% of the children have been absorbed into the state school system (French, 2007). Migrant schools on the periphery of the city have apparently remained largely unaffected. Other cities such as Hangzhou have reportedly given technical assistance to migrant schools in an attempt to bring them up to the standards of licensed private schools in the city (Taipei Times, 2007).

<sup>1</sup> Some Chinese cities, including Shanghai, have made it possible for a limited number of wealthy migrants, usually from smaller cities, to purchase household registrations. Beijing, however, still retains the old-fashioned *hukou* system.

The situation in Beijing seems particularly unfavourable for migrant children. Official figures put the number of migrant children in Beijing in 2003 at 240 000 (China Daily, 2004). The *Nanfang Zhoumo* newspaper, known for its investigative journalism, found that by the end of 2000, 87.5% of migrant children in Beijing were not enrolled in state schools (Nanfang Zhoumo, 2000). Although the Beijing Municipal Government has decreed that migrant children “fulfilling the conditions for attending schools on a temporary basis” will be able to enrol in state schools in the neighbourhoods where they reside, provided that they obtain an “approval permit for temporary schooling” (*jiedu pizhun shu*), in practice it seems that the vast majority of migrant children in the capital are still excluded from state schooling through a variety of official and unofficial mechanisms. Furthermore, despite this exclusion from state schooling, both at the time of fieldwork and since, the Beijing authorities have maintained a firm stance against unlicensed migrant schools, closing down at least four during my fieldwork period and, according to reports, more than 50 since (Human Rights Watch, 2006).

In many developing countries the state is willing to support, or at least to tolerate, non-state organisations providing education for migrants or other marginalised groups. For example, in India a large number of not-for-profit non-governmental organisations (NGOs) work to provide education for children from low-income families, both through the running of “drop-in” schools in slum areas, providing low-cost informal education for children unable to attend state schools, and through the teaching of free supplementary classes for migrants and other disadvantaged children within the state system. These supplementary “bridge classes” and remedial education sessions, which aim to improve basic numeracy and literacy, take place after school hours inside state schools, with children identified by state teachers, and the NGOs receive financial support from the central government as well as from other donors.<sup>2</sup> Another NGO, which assists state child development programmes in India, specifically targets the children of rural migrants by establishing crèches and schools on construction sites, where the majority of new migrant workers are employed in manual labour.<sup>3</sup> Furthermore, a wide network of for-profit “private schools for the poor” provide educational opportunities for those excluded from or dissatisfied with the state education system at a price which is affordable even to many low-income families (Tooley and Dixon, 2005). In Bangladesh, where basic health and education are under-provided by the state, non-profit groups provide childcare centres and schools in many factories and workplaces with a high concentration of migrants and other badly-paid workers, whose children would not otherwise attend school (Khan, 2005). In contrast with these countries, China is an unusual case, since the state not only reinforces the exclusion of migrant children from the state education system, but actively prevents societal groups from organising their own education for these children. I will return to the question of why China is exceptional in this regard after setting out my fieldwork findings.

## 2. Fieldwork

From November 2004 to April 2005 I conducted research in three migrant communities in Beijing city. Two of the communities were in Haidian district, in the north-west of Beijing, and one was in Fengtai, in the south-west. Both districts have heavy concentrations of migrant workers, many of whom have been resident for at least 3 years and who have brought their children to the city.

### 2.1. Methodology

I taught English classes in two unlicensed migrant primary schools (in Haidian) and a migrant middle school (in Fengtai) for 4 months. I also observed other classes at these schools and interviewed their teachers and head teachers. After school, I was introduced by the teachers to the migrant parents whose children I was teaching, and I conducted semi-structured interviews with 25 mothers and 7 fathers. In these interviews I focused on their reasons for migration, the education of their children in their home villages, the reasons for bringing their children to Beijing and their experiences of trying to have their children educated in the capital. I also informally interviewed the children aged between 8 and 15 who attended my classes, asking them about their memories of their schools in home villages, their feelings about Beijing schools and about their lives in Beijing more generally. I visited a further eight migrant schools and six state schools across Beijing for observation of lessons and activities, and I conducted interviews with teachers and staff.

In the next three sections, I shall describe what I found to be the three main barriers to the enrolment of migrant children in state schools, before moving on to consider migrants’ responses to the exclusion of their children from state education in Sections 2.5, 2.6 and 2.7.

### 2.2. Administrative barriers to education

From interviews with state school staff, I learned that migrant parents who did not have at least the required identification card, temporary residency permit and work permit, or whose children had been born “out of plan” (unauthorised by state population planning policies), were unable to enrol their children in any state school. All the state schools I visited emphasised the need for the correct documents. Two of the six state schools I visited required a total of eight documents from the parents before a migrant child could be enrolled: identification card, temporary residence permit, employment permit, health certificate of the parent, population planning certificate, social insurance certificate, guardianship certificate or birth certificate and health certificate of the child. None of the migrant parents I interviewed had all of these documents, and only 2 of the 32 had both temporary residence permit and work permit. Given the large proportion of migrants who did not have these documents, many children were thus excluded from education even before the affordability of education is considered (which I shall discuss in Section 2.3).

Although new provisions were put in place in Beijing in July 2004 which forbade state schools from charging “donation fees” (*zanzhu fei*) to registered migrants, in effect the new provisions still barred the most disadvantaged migrant children from city schools on administrative grounds. The requirement that migrant parents obtain an “approval permit for temporary schooling” in order to gain exemption from the “donation fees” prevented most migrant parents from enrolling their children in Beijing schools. In order to obtain this permit, parents needed to present a temporary residence permit and a migrant work permit in addition to both parents’ *hukou*, identity cards and population planning certificate. None of the 32 migrant parents I interviewed had all of these documents. Furthermore, the 2004 provisions stated that “other official documents” could be requested—giving officials a de facto discretionary power to turn down applications. Of the 17 parents I interviewed who had approached local state schools in an attempt to enrol their children, 13 mentioned lacking the correct documents as the main reason for being turned away. One father of a 9-year-old boy explained:

<sup>2</sup> NGOs Doorstep Schools and Pratham undertake these types of project.

<sup>3</sup> This is the work of NGO Mobile Crèches.

“Even if I could pay the school fees, that school wouldn’t teach my son. I don’t have a temporary residence certificate. Temporary residence certificates are really hard to acquire – first you need a work permit, and they are expensive too. Who has the money? If I buy the permits, I can’t buy food for my son. . . Without a temporary residence certificate, in Beijing, I am nothing”.

### 2.3. Financial barriers to education

In addition to these administrative barriers to education, prohibitively high fees prevented many migrant children from attending state school. All but two of the migrant parents I interviewed mentioned fees as a primary factor in their choice of unlicensed migrant schools. Before enrolling in a government school in 2004, any child without a residence permit in Beijing was required to pay two official government sets of fees, an “education compensation fee” (*jiaoyu buchang fei*) of 1000 RMB a semester and a “temporary schooling fee” (*jiedu fei*) of 680 RMB a semester. These were in addition to up to 15 other fees, levied by the individual school. Teachers in two of the six state schools I visited told me that migrant parents would be asked to pay all these fees before the child could begin school. New provisions in Beijing from July 2004 forbade state schools from charging “donation fees” to registered migrants, but in three state schools teachers referred to these fees as though they were still being charged. Whether this was a misunderstanding on the part of the teachers, or whether the schools continued to charge donation fees despite the new regulations, was unclear.

The total fees varied widely in the schools, and ranged from 1200 to more than 8000 RMB per term for primary school education, with junior and senior middle school levels costing more again. Most of Beijing’s migrants are engaged in low-paid jobs, and the migrants I interviewed earned between 700 and 1200 RMB per month. It is not surprising that only 12.5% of migrant children in Beijing could afford to attend state schools in 2002 (Li et al., 2006). Even during the stage of so-called compulsory education from 6 to 15 years, I found that migrant children had to pay five or six times the fees charged to local students. Although many of the fees were unofficial, the central state did not seem to prevent schools from charging miscellaneous uncapped amounts in addition to the two sets of state-levied fees. One teacher in a “black” migrant school told me that “in practice there is no restriction on the fees [charged by the state schools]. In our whole [migrant] district there is not even one person who can afford to pay these fees.”

### 2.4. Discrimination in state schools as a barrier to education

Discrimination in state schools is a third barrier to the state education of migrant children. Migrant communities in Beijing are seen predominantly as sources of crime and disorder, and the children of migrants are not free of these associations. Pun Ngai’s work on migrants in Shenzhen clearly demonstrates urban opinion of migrants’ behaviour as “peasant-like”, “dirty”, “untrustworthy” and “ignorant” (Pun, 1999). Similarly, in Beijing, migrants are believed to be responsible for the majority of street crimes (Beijing Wanbao, 2004b). “Uncivilised” behaviour such as cooking outside, burning rubbish in the street and washing at outdoor taps are all also seen as characteristic of backward rural life and low “quality” (Beijing Wanbao, 2004a). The children of migrant workers were commonly perceived by Beijingers I spoke to as being “out of control”, “not disciplined”, “dirty” and “ignorant”. Those migrant children attending Beijing state schools face discrimination from classmates, teachers and parents of local students. A state school teacher I interviewed confessed that many parents do not want

their children to sit in the same class as migrant children. Some of the state school teachers also seemed to share these attitudes.

The accents, style of dress and different behaviour of many migrant children means that they are easily identifiable as different, and many of the migrant children I interviewed spoke of being disliked by Beijing locals. Only two children said that they had friends who were from Beijing. One 8-year-old girl told me that Beijing children “don’t like us because we are ‘outside’ people”. Her 12-year-old brother confirmed: “sometimes they throw stones. . . some children call us dogs. They say we are dirty and they laugh at our clothes.” These stories were confirmed on a trip I made to a local park with 30 children from one migrant school, where native Beijingers prevented their children from joining games and English-learning activities with the migrant children. Several parents made audible comments about the children’s behaviour and manners, and one mother forcibly dragged her son away. I was warned by a Beijing woman not to associate with such children because they “are dirty, their quality is low and they steal”.

The state education system reinforces discrimination against migrant children within state schools. State school teachers confirmed that in most schools students without a local *hukou* had no right to be selected as “thrice good” (*san hao*) honours students and had no scholarship opportunities. Their school files and grades were often not officially recorded. In effect, the small minority of migrant children who were able to attend state schools seemed not to be counted as “normal” students at all by the urban children, the state school teachers or the education system itself. Eight migrant parents I interviewed cited discrimination from teachers and local students as a reason for not wishing to send their children to state schools even if places were available or affordable. Given the negative attitudes towards migrant children, in addition to administrative and financial obstacles, it is unsurprising that most migrants send their children to “black” unlicensed, migrant-run schools rather than Beijing’s state schools.

### 2.5. Migrant-run schools

Having described the limitations on migrant children’s education in Beijing, I will now examine the way migrants have responded to their situation by establishing their own unlicensed schools. In this section, I will describe the conditions in the unlicensed migrant schools I visited in Beijing, and examine in detail the situations of two such schools. I was told by the head of one primary school that there were over 250 “black” schools for migrant children in Beijing. They were all privately owned, usually by the schools’ principals, and operated for profit. According to migrant teachers I interviewed, there were only two migrant middle schools in the city at that time, so that once migrant children reached the age of 12, many were either sent back to their villages to continue their education or dropped out of school to stay in Beijing.

I found that conditions in unlicensed migrant schools were generally very poor. Although some migrant schools rent space from government schools and thus have access to the facilities of those schools (Woronov, 2004), I visited only one such school (the middle school, which was located in a disused state school building); the other 10 schools where I taught or observed classes were based in much less pleasant surroundings. Three schools were based in former factory buildings in various states of dilapidation; two were in disused shop buildings; two in very basic, purpose-built structures; one in coal storage facilities; and two in the houses of migrant families. Two schools, including the middle school, had more than 1000 students, while the smallest school had fewer than 20. Facilities in all the schools were rudimentary. Although the middle school had comparatively well-equipped classrooms with electricity and heating, desks and chairs



were in short supply and many were broken. There were three rooms for the teachers, but they lacked filing cabinets and the tables were broken. The primary schools were far worse: four had no blackboards or chalk. These schools, which were taught, operated and financed by migrant workers themselves, often with little or no professional training, were mostly extremely short of funding.

The history of the Knowledge Middle School, where I taught English classes from November 2004 to February 2005, provides an insight into the setting up of a migrant school and the obstacles encountered. The school, which now operates in the north of Fengtai District, was established by Principal Li and her husband in 2001.<sup>4</sup> Before coming to Beijing, Li had taught in a primary school in Henan Province, but had left her job, expecting to earn higher wages working with her husband on a market stall in Beijing. As the prospects of migrant employment in the cities improved, more migrant workers brought their children to Beijing. Li was pressed back into service as a teacher, and began educating children in her home before starting a school. Eventually she recruited several other young migrant women from Henan, recent graduates of technical senior middle schools (*zhongzhuan*). Enrolment increased, and by late 2004 the couple had established two more schools, including a middle school, for more than 3500 students from all parts of China.

The ethnic and geographical mix of children in Li's schools was much more varied than that in most state schools in Beijing, and, according to my interviews with the teachers, this helped to prevent discrimination and bullying in the schools, making them much more welcoming than state schools. I found that many migrant schools also waived or reduced fees for students whose parents are too poor to pay. At the Knowledge Middle School, fees were waived for five types of children: orphans; the disabled; children of single parents; children born "out of plan"; and refugee children from natural disasters. In 2004 there were about 30 such children in the school, belonging to seven different ethnic groups. The fees charged by migrant schools in Beijing in 2004–2005 usually ranged from 400 to 600 RMB a term, and, unlike in state schools, extra fees were not usually levied for uniforms, trips, extra tutoring and so on. These factors made sending children to migrant-run schools a far more affordable option for low-paid migrant workers than enrolling them in state schools at a cost of between 1200 and 8000 RMB per term, and required no permits or certificates from the parents.

Li's schools were technically illegal, since, like most migrant schools, they were not registered with local authorities. I was told that some schools paid a regular fee to the police for them to turn a blind eye to their operations. Others would regularly shut down and reopen in a new location to avoid the attention of the authorities. Still other schools relied on their inconspicuous appearance and out-of-the-way locations to evade inspection. Conditions in the Hope Primary School, where I taught and observed classes between January and April 2005, were typical of this type of school. The Hope Primary School taught about 140 students in the north part of Beijing's Haidian District. It was built by the teachers, parents and students themselves, and was situated on a rubbish tip which was still in use by the migrant community. It had never attempted to register with the authorities since, even without government hostility to migrant schools, its facilities were far from adequate. The school consisted of a small walled area, with four dark classrooms and one slightly larger room for the teachers to one side. Liang, her husband and two more teachers lived in this room, which contained two beds, a small coal fire (where lunch for the students and teachers was prepared), a table, a dirty cat and

several boxes of snack food (sold to the students during break times). The rest of the space was open for children to play.

The school had neither water nor electricity: there were no lavatories for the children and the classrooms depended on the open door for light. The classrooms were heated during the coldest part of the winter with coal bricks, while the door was kept open for light and to let out the smoke. The children wore padded coats and hats in class. My year-five class consisted of 23 students aged from 10 to 15 packed into a dirt-floored room of approximately 4 by 5 m. Many had missed at least 1 year of schooling during the upheaval of their parents' migration, and four members of my class had been child labourers in factories before coming to the Hope School. The children sat on low chairs, some two to a seat. Wooden benches served as desks, while a small piece of slate was used as a blackboard. I had to stand outside the doorway in order to observe when another teacher taught, since the room was so full. Periodically, the classes were interrupted by gusts of wind, which swept large amounts of dust and sand in through the open door and tiny glassless window.<sup>5</sup>

## 2.6. Migrant schools' curriculum

The three migrant schools in which I taught in Beijing tried to follow the state curriculum as much as possible, and from observing classes in these and other schools I noticed that many of the same textbooks were used in the migrant and in the state schools. However, many migrant class teachers had an educational standard only slightly above that of their pupils and little or no training as teachers. A teacher in the Hope Primary School admitted that she could not understand the English lessons she read from the textbook to her class. Neither she nor the students were able to copy accurately words from the textbook onto the blackboard. Most schools were unable to offer the full state curriculum: three of the 10 schools I visited taught only Chinese and mathematics, since they did not have any staff capable of teaching other subjects. In all of the primary schools I visited, all subjects were taught to each class by their class teacher, rather than having specialist teachers for each subject as in the Beijing state schools.

In 2004 and 2005 there were many reports in the Beijing media on how local state schools had implemented recent educational reforms, moving away from a focus solely on examinations to a more "lively" curriculum which included non-examination subjects such as physical education, music, art and so on (Beijing *Wanbao*, 2005). The migrant schools lacked the facilities to offer this type of class, yet the debate about educational reform had had an impact in at least one of the primary schools I visited, where the principal had introduced a "Quality Class" consisting mostly of creative activities. Four primary schools had music classes, yet only one had musical instruments of any kind (tambourines) and the others relied on unaccompanied singing or, in one school, playing taped music on a cassette player. In general, the variety of non-examination subjects available in the state schools I visited could not be replicated in the migrant schools, although some head teachers were aware of the changing curriculum and had attempted to follow the trend despite limited resources.

## 2.7. Migrant schools' physical exercise and health

Again, in stark contrast to the state schools I visited, very little was done to promote the health or physical fitness of the students in the Hope School and other migrant schools. In the state

<sup>4</sup> I have changed the names of teachers and schools for the purpose of anonymity.

<sup>5</sup> Similar conditions in another unregistered Beijing migrant school are described by Woronov (2004).

education system, schools provided children not only with physical education, and sports and fitness activities, but also with compulsory health checks, mental health and psychological counselling, vaccination programmes, exercises and other related practices. In the two migrant primary schools in which I taught, no form of physical activity or exercise was organised, programmes of inoculation were nonexistent and there were no school-initiated health assessments. The daily eye exercises, so familiar to students in Beijing state schools, were unknown in the migrant schools I visited. Furthermore, it was noticeable that, in each class of 20–30 students, only one or two children wore glasses, compared with a far higher proportion (at least one-fifth) in Beijing state's schools. Nurses and advisors in most state schools check children's eyesight and hearing, as well as height, weight and other factors, at the beginning of each school year, but there was nothing similar in the migrant schools.

In all of the migrant primary schools I visited, the age and size of students in each class varied widely, since many of the children had missed years of schooling. This meant that competitive sports would have been extremely difficult to organise. Although the Knowledge Middle School, which had slightly more age and size uniformity within classes, did have physical education in the form of twice-weekly basketball matches, these did not compare with the routine of morning exercise, daily sports lessons, frequent sports competitions and military drills I observed in state schools. Even the children's playing outside during break times was not organised: whereas in state schools there were timetabled breaks where children could play together outside and organise informal games, in seven of the ten migrant primary schools I visited break times occurred randomly at "natural" breaks in the lessons. This meant that not all of the children would be playing outside at one time, and games were more difficult to organise.

### 2.8. Closing down migrant schools

It was difficult for the migrant schools I visited to make improvements to their teaching and facilities, not only because of their very limited resources but also because of their vulnerability to closure by the government without warning. Unlicensed schools could be closed down by local government departments at any time. Migrant schools in Beijing were thus constantly under threat of closure, which usually happened with no warning, and with no attempts to ensure that children's schooling was not disrupted. I heard of four such cases during the 5 months of my fieldwork, and, as far as I could find out, in none of these cases were the children absorbed into the state system. The shutting down of 50 schools by the local authorities in Fengtai district in 2001 is a key example of this kind of school closure, and is especially disturbing since Fengtai had twice been chosen (in 1996 and 1998) to operate pilot programmes for national regulations regarding the state schooling of migrant children (Froissart, 2003). I was told by teachers at the Knowledge Middle School that these schools had been ordered to close on health and safety grounds 3 days before the new school year was to begin. No prior warning had been given to the proprietors, and one school had apparently even constructed a new building during the summer vacation. Despite protests by the local migrant communities the schools were closed and the new building lost. While I was told in 2004 that many of the 50 schools had later reopened in different parts of Fengtai (and some had been re-closed in a further "clean up" in February 2003), this had nonetheless created serious disruption to the education of several thousand children.

The uncertainty about the future of schools meant that many operators were unwilling to invest more to improve the quality of their school buildings and facilities. Principal Wang of the Bright Love Primary School told me:

"We would like to put windows in the school. We would like to construct another wall for another classroom. But how can we do this? If we do these things today, and tomorrow the police come to close down our school, we will lose everything."

Principal Liang at Hope School was reluctant to spend a small financial donation to the school on structural improvements, since she worried that the school would be closed down in the "clear up" of Beijing before the 2008 Olympics, the preparations for which were already apparent by the end of 2004.<sup>6</sup> School principals were thus left facing a serious contradiction: they were unable to improve the quality of education and facilities while under constant threat of closure because of their perceived low quality. Not only did a lack of state support or investment make it difficult for migrant schools to provide migrant children with a decent learning environment of the sort that local children enjoy, but the state's efforts to eradicate such schools lowered the quality of migrant education still further.

The prospects for migrant children in Beijing appear to have worsened since my fieldwork was carried out. It was widely rumoured that all migrant workers would be deported from the capital before the 2008 Olympic Games, although this was denied by the Chinese government and does not appear to have happened on any large-scale. However, reports indicate that Beijing municipal authorities closed at least 50 migrant schools during 2006 as part of a campaign to close all unregistered schools for migrants before the Olympic Games. In July 2006 the Beijing Municipality issued a notice "on the Work of Strengthening the Safety of Non-Approved Migrant Population Self-Schools" setting a deadline of the end of September for the "clean up and rectification" of all unregistered schools (Human Rights Watch, 2006). It is not clear whether this happened, or whether some schools may have re-opened after being closed. However, it does seem that accessible state education was not provided for the children who had attended these schools. Although the revised Compulsory Education Law, which came into effect in September 2006, specified explicitly that local governments are responsible for "creating the conditions for internal migrant children to receive free, compulsory education", it is still the case that, under Beijing Education Bureau regulations, only registered migrants with the relevant permits can enrol their children in state schools. Furthermore, according to a 2007 Amnesty International report, attempts to prevent state schools from charging extra fees to migrants have met with little success (Amnesty International, 2007).

### 3. Why are the educational opportunities of migrant children restricted?

In the next sections I shall try to explain why the Chinese state restricts migrant children's education, discuss the national authorities' attempts to improve China's "population quality", and analyse the reasons behind migrant children's exclusion from these policies. I shall attempt to show that some of the reasons commonly given by Chinese officials for the exclusion of migrant children from urban state education are not, in fact, plausible, and propose some alternative reasons why such children might be excluded. I shall also discuss the possibly contradictory aims of local and national governments in China, and examine the responses of each to private migrant-run schools, suggesting some reasons why the Chinese case can be seen as unique, when compared to other developing countries, in its opposition to the provision of education to migrants by non-state sectors.

<sup>6</sup> At the time of writing, it was not clear whether or not this school had in fact been closed down.

### 3.1. Population quality and education

The concept of “population quality” (*renkou suzhi*) has played an important role in Reform-era China. Since the mid-1980s, China’s modernisation strategies have been framed in terms of *renkou suzhi*, and raising “population quality” has been a major aim of state policy. In 1985, the CCP Central Committee announced that raising the “quality” of the Chinese people was “the basic goal of education system reform” (Kipnis, 2006). *Suzhi*, an everyday word in China, is usually rendered as “quality” but is not an easy word to translate, as it can be used to refer to individuals’ physical and psychological characteristics as well as to their skills, aptitudes, education, ideologies and manners. Particular “low quality” groups among the Chinese population are believed by the state to be in need of special attention, and China’s peasants are usually seen as the lowest of these “low quality” groups (Murphy, 2004). Those peasants who migrate to the cities are often viewed by local officials as lowering the “quality” of the city and its services: they are thought to embody China’s weakness and backwardness. However, they are also expected to learn and “improve” from their experience, and are encouraged to take their new “civilisation” back to their home villages after sufficient time spent in the city, thus raising the “quality” of the villagers as well as themselves (Murphy, 2002). Proposals for educating and training migrant workers reflect this conceptualisation of rural migrants as “quality” vectors (in transferring low quality to the city and, on their return, high quality to the countryside). New plans issued by China’s State Council in September 2003 proposed the training in basic skills of approximately 10 million migrant workers, with half of them to receive further professional training in addition. The aim of the project was not only to create “high quality” workers but also to provide training which would be of use to the home village on the migrants’ return. By 2010, according to the plans, work and skills training would have been provided for a total of 200 million migrant workers (China Daily, 2003).

Raising the “quality” of the people is in large part an educational project. In addition to adult education and training programmes and the dissemination of educational information through television, radio and newspapers, there has been an increased focus on the education of China’s children. Since the late 1990s, much educational reform and experimentation has taken place in state schools in the name of “quality-oriented education” (*suzhi jiaoyu*). Quality-oriented education is essentially the reverse of exam-orientated education (*yingshi jiaoyu*), concerned with the all-round development of each student, and emphasising ability, creativity, practical work and analysis. Morality teaching is also an important component, as well as education for the promotion of mental and physical health (Kipnis, 2006). The express purpose of the new style of schooling is to “build up an education system adapted to the needs of the market economy” and to “alter the divorce between education and the economy and modernisation drive” (Xie, 2002).

With this official emphasis on improving the “quality” of migrants, and the focus of the Chinese state on fostering “quality” through education, one might reasonably expect a focus on the education of migrant children. Instead, as Norma Diamond has pointed out in an early work on *suzhi*, the government’s aims of improving population quality “seem improbable”, given the “absence of formal schooling for the hundreds of thousands of children whose parents have joined the floating population seeking work in the towns and cities” (Diamond, 1997). The situation was no clearer in 2004: the obvious contradiction in the state’s efforts to improve the “quality” of children and migrants while failing to provide an education for the more than 300 000 migrant children in Beijing needs explanation.

### 3.2. Possible reasons for exclusion: school space

One of the reasons commonly given by Chinese officials for the lack of state education available for migrant children in the capital is a lack of school places. Two Beijing officials I spoke to suggested that this was the main reason why migrant children could not be enrolled in state schools at a price which their parents could afford. School places are already under pressure, and current funds are insufficient for expanding state schools, I was told. All local children must first be allocated school places, leaving a very small quota for non-local students. However, according to official statistics, birth rates in China fell by 0.2% between 2000 and 2003 (Renmin Ribao, 2004). In urban areas, the rate may be falling even faster, leaving many schools with excess capacity (China Development Brief, 2000). A 2002 report suggested that Beijing state schools had an official maximum capacity of over 1.5 million students, but that the number enrolled at that time was only 1.2 million (Human Rights in China, 2002). Two of the six state schools I visited in 2004 had unused classrooms, suggesting that enrolments had fallen, and teachers confirmed this. None of the state primary schools where I observed classes approached the maximum number of 50 students per class set by the Beijing education authorities; the average number of students per primary class was closer to 35. A lack of space for the migrant children in city state schools therefore does not seem plausible as an explanation for the failure of the Beijing authorities to provide education for migrant children. While it is possible that the current allocation of funds for education may be insufficient for expanding schools as well as financing other educational projects, it is not clear why the education of several hundred thousand migrant children in Beijing alone should be such a low priority for government spending.

### 3.3. Possible reasons for exclusion: “quality” of migrant children and families

It is interesting to note that arguments given for failing to provide an education for migrant children are often framed in terms of the children’s “quality”. For example, instead of discussing how the children’s “quality” could be improved through education, urban officials and teachers are often concerned that accepting such children will affect the overall “quality” of education in the cities. Four state school teachers told me that migrant children are “difficult to teach”, and two explained this in terms of the low “quality” of their parents. One state school principal told me that migrant parents “do not pay attention to education” and thus migrant children “do not develop proper habits...the parents’ quality is low and so the children’s quality is low”. These attitudes are common not only among teachers but also among officials. District authorities thus prefer to spend their education funding on improving “weak schools” and developing small supplementary classes in order to upgrade the overall education quality, instead of accepting large numbers of low “quality” migrant children (Duan and Zhou, 1999).

A 1997 Chinese government report (sponsored by UNESCO) on migrant children stated:

“several factors contributed to the non-attendance at school by part of the school-age children of migrants...first of all, the fees charged were too high...second, the parents of children were busy working and unable to pay attention to the schooling of their children; third, the environment of these families was unfavourable, the school performance of these children was not good and they were weary of studying.” (UNESCO, 2000).

While this does identify some of the key barriers to migrant education, like other reports it places a large proportion of the responsibility on the migrants themselves. Targeting migrants’ low



“quality” as the cause of their children’s poor education obscures the problems faced by migrants in adapting to an unfamiliar cultural environment and the many structural factors preventing migrant children’s access to education in the cities.<sup>7</sup>

Furthermore, based on my fieldwork, the image of most migrant parents as lacking the time or ability to participate actively in their children’s education is unjustified. It is a myth of the low “quality” individual, who is either selfish and unwilling to invest in the long-term future of his/her children, or who, in even the most sympathetic press reports, is shown as a mere passive victim of circumstances rather than an agent capable of forming goals and participating actively in their realisation. Such images, unrooted in reality, survive and are employed by urban teachers, local authorities and even central government officials: through repeated use, they become self-perpetuating and are therefore influential even among those sympathetic to rural migrants. Many reports in the Chinese press show rural parents as reckless or selfish if they bring their children to the cities, and even those concerned about the plight of migrant children tend to depict them as the unfortunate victims of parents too ignorant to appreciate the importance of education (for example, see *Zhongguo Qingnian Bao*, 2003).

In fact, almost all of the migrant parents I encountered in Beijing were concerned about the quality of their children’s education. Migrant parents I encountered were not, as the Beijing media depicted, unable or unwilling to become involved: they not only suffered extra financial hardship in order to send their offspring to school but also actively participated in the direction of their children’s education through identifying suitable schools, negotiating with teachers over the curriculum and, in some cases, organising extra classes for infants or sending their children to school early. This would seem to be “high quality” parenting. In fact, 17 of the 32 migrant parents I interviewed believed their children received a higher quality education in “black” city schools than in their home village, suggesting that bringing their children to the capital was not reckless or selfish but actually intended to benefit the children. Many migrants spoke disparagingly of the quality of rural education, and in particular of the recent reforms which had provided a more vocational style of education in the countryside. All of the parents I interviewed were keen to give their children the opportunity of finding off-farm employment, and so it is unsurprising that they resisted the direction of their children’s education towards farming. For many parents, then, bringing their children to the city and enrolling them in migrant schools seemed the best way to provide their children with a chance to pursue their ideas of a good life. Seven of the 32 parents interviewed expressly mentioned improving the education or prospects of their children as the main factor influencing their own decision to migrate. The state, however, takes no account of this kind of aspiration. Migrants are encouraged to leave children in their home villages to be educated while the parents work in the cities or to return home themselves and “tend the land”.

#### 3.4. Possible reasons for exclusion: limiting migration

Not only the quality of the rural migrants but also their quantity is seen as a problem in the city. A second major reason for the continuing barriers to migrant children enrolling in city schools is undoubtedly local authorities’ fears that relaxing controls will lead to a massive influx of potentially permanent migrants (*Zhang and MacLeod, 2000*). While previous studies have shown that many migrants do retain extensive links to their home villages and plan

to return there eventually, of the 32 migrant parents I interviewed, only 12 intended to return to their native places, and of these only four planned to return within the next 5 years. Limiting educational opportunities for migrant children can therefore be seen as a conscious strategy used by the city authorities to increase the costs of migration so as to deter migrants from settling permanently in the cities. A proposal from the Beijing Branch of the Democratic League (one of China’s eight advisory “democratic parties”) explained that although outsiders are “a necessity for the modernisation of the city”, the city has to “expend a certain amount of social capital” in providing for them. Therefore,

“both the government and city residents hope that they can get the maximum benefit from the labour services provided by outsiders while... minimising social capital expended. The basic method is to increase the costs of migration, in order to control the overall number of outsiders. Education is one of the efficient tactics for increasing the cost of migration” (cited in *Human Rights in China*, 2006, p. 8).

The large numbers of migrants are seen by urban residents and officials to take up resources which more properly belong to city people. The idea that migrants put pressure on Beijing’s transport facilities, security, social welfare, water and the environment was repeatedly expressed to me during fieldwork. Beijingers also felt that increasing competition for jobs was the result of large-scale migration. One official commented that “urban people feel migrants are a threat to their comfortable situation. Actually, in many places, they are right”. However, it is interesting to note that such attitudes were directed mainly at the children of poorer migrants. In order to encourage investment in cities such as Beijing and Shenzhen, local governments implemented policies to reduce temporary schooling fees for the children of people who bring with them funds, management skills, technology, or other professional skills to the cities, or to exempt such parents from the fees altogether (thus discrediting the idea of inadequate educational resources to support newcomers).<sup>8</sup> Failure to provide education can thus be seen as a major strategy on the part of the authorities to reduce the numbers of *poor*, “low quality” migrants settling in the cities.

Official concerns that large numbers of poor migrants bring disorder to China’s cities can be seen to mirror popular concerns in developed countries about an influx of immigrants and the perceived consequences in terms of crime, employment, pressure on resources and general instability. Nor are concerns about internal migrants among developing countries unique to China: a wave of violent attacks in early 2008 in Mumbai targeted poor migrant workers from north India and was actively supported by local political parties such as the Maharashtra Navnirman Sena, which blamed migrants for putting pressure on jobs and resources as well as for “swamping” the Maharashtrian culture of the city. However, in India the national government has condemned localised attacks on migrants, does not seek to restrict internal migration and supports local non-state initiatives to integrate migrant children into the state school system or educate them in alternative centres. In China the state not only takes an active role in excluding migrants from state schooling, but also opposes migrants’ own efforts to provide education for their children. That state developmental policy should be based on what seem to be the fears of a minority of urban dwellers about rural migrants, in contradiction of its own rhetoric about population “quality” and the importance of education, needs further explanation.

<sup>7</sup> This study, like most Chinese government studies on rural migrants, focused solely on the small proportion of migrants registered as temporary residents in the city. Therefore, no mention is made at all of the administrative barriers to state school education faced by the large majority of migrants.

<sup>8</sup> See *Solinger (1999)*, for an argument that even unskilled migrant labourers expand employment opportunities, thus ruling out one potential explanation for favouring wealthy migrants with funds to invest.

### 3.5. Central versus local government

Is it possible that the exclusion of migrants from education is merely a result of the misapplication of state policy by local authorities, rather than a strategy for limiting migration by the central government? Since the state's decentralisation policies of the 1980s, education has been under local jurisdiction. The central government therefore does not dictate education policy to the local authorities, but rather gives "policy recommendations". Since the 1998 "Provisional Measures for the Education of Migrant Children", the central government has encouraged local authorities to admit migrant children into state schools, to build new state schools for migrant children and to support private schools which meet minimum educational, health and safety standards. However, these policy directions have given local government a large amount of freedom in interpreting the state's guidelines. Depending on local conditions, municipal authorities could select the most appropriate strategy, or choose to do nothing.

In Beijing, where there are more rural migrants than in many other Chinese cities, the city's municipal government has been particularly unsympathetic to migrants. Contrary to the spirit of the recommendations to allow migrant children into state schools and to support private schools, the city authorities have allowed state schools to charge uncapped extra fees and have focused on enforcing the closure of private schools which do not meet minimum standards. However, the effects of decentralisation are visible even at the lowest levels of the state hierarchy in Beijing: the city's 10 district governments have chosen to implement the state's directive on migrant education in different ways. As discussed in Section 2.8, Fengtai district has taken a particularly firm stance against unlicensed schools while, at least since 2001, failing to provide state school education for the children affected by school closures. By contrast, Xuanwumen district and Shijingshan district had each, by 2002, set aside two state-funded schools solely for migrant children. In the Shijingshan school, migrant families had to pay the temporary schooling fee, but they were exempted from other fees (Beijing Ribao, 2000). Although high fees in comparison with migrant schools and stringent regulations regarding the documents necessary for admission meant that enrolment was low, these schools did offer a more affordable state education to migrants.

Yet these are the exceptions rather than the norm in Beijing. Furthermore, this situation is not only the responsibility of the city and district governments, since the central government has failed to provide additional resources to those districts with large migrant populations to cope with the extra costs of migrant children's schooling. State funds for education are allocated to district authorities on the basis of number of registered residents, and some districts, such as Fengtai, struggle to provide adequate educational facilities for their own residents let alone the large number of migrant settlers. Furthermore, the state's 1998 "Provisional Measures for the Education of Migrant Children" allow that local school authorities need only consider school applications from migrants once all local children have obtained their places and do not bar state schools from administering an entrance test (which many migrant children fail because of differing standards of rural education and unfamiliarity with the different urban curriculum). They do not prevent local authorities from closing unlicensed migrant schools arbitrarily, without notice and with no attempt to ensure continuity of education for the children affected. Finally, despite the long "trial period" of the "Provisional Measures for the Education of Migrant Children", the central authorities have still not in 2008 passed any permanent law which would hold local governments responsible for the schooling of all children, regardless of *hukou* status. All these factors suggest that the responsibility for the lack of education for migrant

children lies not only with local authorities, but also with the central government which has been reluctant to take action to improve the situation.

### 3.6. Migrant communities, schools and the state

While it is possible, as I have said, that some local governments do not have the resources necessary to provide state education for all of the migrant children in their jurisdiction, the state's failure to provide extra funding implies that a very low priority is given to the task of educating migrant children. As noted above, this failure to fund migrant education seems strongly at odds with the Chinese government's commitment to improving migrants' "quality", and provides a sharp contrast with other developing countries where insufficient funds are available for state provision of important goods. In many other countries, authorities are willing to allow NGOs and/or the private market to deliver these goods; indeed, sometimes such solutions are supported by the state through financial aid, tax incentives and other measures. As I have said in Section 1.3, this seems to be the case in other developing countries such as India and Bangladesh. In China, however, not only does the state not provide education for migrants, but it also takes strong action against the private market in migrant schools. This response seems particularly puzzling in light of the Chinese government's strong support for individual entrepreneurship since the 1990s. An analysis of the state's opposition to private migrant schools may shed further light on the situation.

Although the official reasons for closing down migrant schools are usually reported as health and safety problems, lack of planning permission for purpose-built structures or the requisitioning of the land for other projects, none of these reasons stand up to scrutiny. For instance, although some migrant schools are in very poor physical condition, even the better ones are vulnerable to closure on health and safety grounds since the municipal government in Beijing sets a minimum standard which even many state schools cannot satisfy, including various kinds of sports facilities and a campus of at least 15 000 m<sup>2</sup> (Hu and Li, 2006). Julia Kwong has suggested that the government's opposition to the private schools set up by migrant communities arises from a tension between the state and the emerging civil society in China. According to this argument, the authorities resent popular support for migrant schools, seeing such schools as an encroachment on their monopoly on the provision of education (Kwong, 2004). While this interpretation downplays the importance and acceptance of existing *licensed* private schools in the Chinese education system (typically attended by the children of wealthy non-migrants), it does raise interesting questions about the relations between the state and the migrant communities in China.

Kwong is right to suggest that the authorities' antipathy to migrant schooling might be a response to challenges to the legitimacy of the state system. However, the state's actions may be more than a response to fears over the opinions of an emerging civil society. Poor migrant communities are often seen as existing "outside" the law in China, since most migrants are unregistered to live and work in the cities and their existence there is thus technically illegal. In the Chinese press, there has been a focus on criminal and social problems created by migrant communities. While this is not, of course, an unusual reaction to migrants in both the developing and developed world, in China the press is strictly controlled by the party-state and therefore its views may be seen as a reflection of the central authorities' own attitudes. The Communist Party in China effectively defines itself as the driving force behind China's development, despite its large-scale retreat from welfare provision from the early 1990s until the time of my fieldwork (as exemplified by declining state funding for health and education, especially in rural areas, during this period). The

provision of basic goods by alternative non-state sectors may therefore be seen as a threat to state and Party legitimacy, and this threat may be particularly potent in the case of rural–urban migrants.

When migrant communities come together to provide such basic goods as schooling, their actions may seem less like acts of entrepreneurship within the state framework, and more like attempts to create an alternative system altogether. Owing to the sheer numbers of migrants and their existence broadly outside the state system (very few migrants have state social insurance, use state healthcare or participate in state organisations; many do not follow state family planning regulations and have unregistered “black” children; and, because of their mobility, few are effectively monitored by local state networks), migrants represent a sizeable group existing, to some extent, beyond the reach of the state. The state’s response to “black” schools may, then, reflect a more general fear of the potential challenge to state legitimacy posed by the vast numbers of migrants in the city, rather than a more general antipathy to non-state provision of goods. A fuller analysis of the state’s failure to provide education for migrant children would have to take into account the far broader question of how the state perceives the migrant community. I cannot investigate this large issue in this paper. Rather, I raise these issues to suggest that the state’s failure to provide migrant education cannot be understood solely as a result of lack of resources or unclear jurisdiction, but should be seen in the broader context of the challenge migrant communities pose (or are perceived as posing) to the state more generally.

#### 4. Conclusions

In this paper I have described the serious restrictions imposed on migrant children seeking an education, whether through state or private means, in Beijing in 2004–2005. I have argued that the problems faced by these children are symptomatic of the status of unregistered rural migrants in Chinese urban society. The Chinese state places great emphasis on the importance of education for economic development, and many commentators have argued for a strong relationship between the expansion of education since 1949 and China’s rapid development during the last three decades. However, the state’s policies towards rural migrant children seem to deny basic opportunities for education to a significant portion of the population. It is difficult to predict precisely what the results of these exclusionary policies will be. However, it seems reasonable to suppose that if these problems are not addressed they will have a serious impact on China’s future development. Not only will a large section of the population not have the skills necessary for China’s further economic development, but they will also lack the kind of education needed to develop the capabilities for leading decent, happy and successful lives.

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