

**Beijing Migrant Education:  
Challenges and Prospects in Light of the Five Certificate Policy**

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December 5, 2014

## **Acknowledgements**

I would like to thank my thesis advisor Professor Helen Ladd, who juggled multiple commitments to make time for my research and who was always willing to lend a critical eye to the tiniest of details. An equally big thanks also goes out to Professor Christina Gibson-Davis, who provided valuable advice on methodology during my initial research and providing detailed and extremely helpful edits during the writing process. Thank you to William Ventres for reading through my thesis and providing feedback as well.

Thank you to the Asian Studies Pacific Institute and the Sanford School of Public Policy for providing me with the funding to pursue this research on two separate trips to Beijing.

Many thanks also go to my wonderful parents, who rarely complained that their child was going back to a country they had left. They fronted me money for plane tickets, tolerated my impulses and absences, and put up with my late nights at the kitchen table. I am forever grateful for their unconditional love and support.

The New Citizen's Project, a non-governmental research organization based in Beijing which also runs a migrant school, were of enormous assistance during the research for this thesis. Wei Jiayu in particular helped immensely and served as a patient and ever kind fellow researcher during my time in Beijing in May-June 2014. The majority of my research could not have been done without the New Citizen's Project's networks and support. My colleagues at the New Citizens' Project were all unfailingly friendly and welcoming to the American college student who had suddenly landed in their midst.

Finally, I would like to thank all those who I interviewed as part of this thesis. They took time from their busy schedules and important job of educating children to talk to me. Among the principals and teachers I met to were truly altruistic teachers who had dedicated their lives helping those less fortunate and who were rewarded with very little personal gain. Teacher Cao and the principal at Beijing East Wind deserve special mention for the warmth and generosity they showed me. Their narratives and insights opened up a world I would never have seen otherwise and with which I have since been swept up in, personally, intellectually, and academically.

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## Executive Summary

Today, approximately 23 million migrant children live in China's cities. However, China's anachronistic household registration system (*hukou* system) prevents migrant workers and their children from accessing public benefits like public education. In response, private entrepreneurs began opening private, illegal schools for migrant children in cities like Beijing and Shanghai in the early 1990s. In January 2014, the Beijing government began implementation of the "Five Certificate Policy," which provides a pathway for migrant students to obtain a public school enrollment number but only after they have secured a set of five "certificates," or items of paperwork, to qualify.

In this study, I interviewed migrants and researchers to determine the greatest challenges presently faced by migrant schools and how those challenges are translated to their students in Beijing. I also interviewed migrant parents and teachers on the consequences of the Five Certificate Policy and collected further information about student enrollment and policy provisions. The great challenges faced by migrant educators and students stemmed from the resource scarcity and precarity of the migrant schools. Furthermore, an analysis of the Five Certificate Policy reveals that its implementation differs from district to district within Beijing itself. The policy's opaqueness and difficulty in meeting all of its provisions has increased the exclusion of migrants from the public education system and further disrupted educational pathways. Moreover, it has contributed to the precarity faced by migrant schools, exacerbating preexisting resource scarcity problems.

Going forward, the Beijing government should standardize the Five Certificate Policy system, provide resources for migrant students who wish to apply to school enrollment in their home provinces, and look to incrementally incorporate migrant schools into the public education system. In the long term, as China continues to urbanize and develop smaller, inland cities, the national government should invest in the economic development of these cities and the education systems within them so as to create more even distributions of opportunity for all of China's citizens.

## Chapter 1: Background

### Chapter Summary

This chapter lays out this thesis' research question and provides the necessary background information to understand the scope of migrant education in China. It summarizes the economic, political, and social trends since 1978 that have given rise to the hundreds of millions of Chinese migrant workers. These migrant workers often bring their children with them as they look for work, and hundreds of “migrant schools” have popped up in Beijing to serve these children who cannot attend public school. However, the introduction of the Five Certificate Policy in Beijing has made it significantly more difficult for migrant students to access education.

### Research Questions

What challenges do migrant schools in Beijing face while providing education to the city's migrant children? Relatedly, how has Beijing's Five Certificate Policy ameliorated or exacerbated these challenges?

### Born Unequal: the *hukou* system

First, what is a “migrant”? The term “migrants” refers to the Chinese citizens who have moved domestically, usually from China's poorer, more rural inland provinces to its developed east coast cities. Beijing's migrant education situation is shaped by a sociopolitical and historical context decades in the making. In Chinese policy, “migrant children” refers to children aged 6–14 years who have temporarily lived as migrants for more than half a year with their parents or guardians (Yuan, Fang, Liu et. al. 2013). These children are the sons and daughters of internal migrants who have moved to cities looking for work. Yet despite having lived and worked in cities, often for years, these migrants are denied access to basic social services, including public education for their children.

Their status as migrants is due to China's *hukou* (户口) household registration system, which has existed in various forms since 1951. Under the first *hukou* system, each Chinese citizen was officially registered as either "agricultural" or "nonagricultural," and their *hukou* designations were then linked to their mother's place of birth. Having "nonagricultural" *hukou* entitled the holder to accessing social services provided by the local city government, such as food rations, housing, medical care, state-provided childcare, pensions, and most importantly for the sake of this study, primary school education (Démurger et. al. 2009, Wang 2013).<sup>1</sup> Today, unless migrant parents can transfer their *hukou* or meet certain requirements, which vary from city to city, their children are often shut out of the public education system in whatever city they have migrated to for work.

### **The Emergence of a "Floating Population"**

Beijing's millions of migrant workers are the result of drastic reforms in China's economic policy which unleashed a massive rural-urban migration. China's World Trade Organization membership compelled China to make itself more economically competitive in global markets (Eckholm 1999). Consequently, China began the gargantuan task of shrinking the size of its state-owned enterprises (SOEs), which previously provided millions with jobs and pensions (Ma & Adams 2013). Migration surged as the newly unemployed went to cities for work. Beginning in the 1980s, national policies concentrated resources on developing urban areas at the expense of rural regions (Lai 2002). The rural-urban disparity has only been exacerbated by China's export-heavy growth from the 1990s onward (China Labor Bulletin

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<sup>1</sup> The *hukou* system was meant as a tool for controlling population movement and implementing state developmental policies (Cheng & Seldon 1990, Liu 2004). Rapid acceleration of rural-urban migration in the 1950s quickly overwhelmed urban governments, which were not equipped to absorb such population increases. Thus, in 1955, the Chinese government expanded the *hukou* system to rural areas in addition to cities and limiting rural-to-urban migration (Chan & Li 1999). From 1955 to the 1980s, migration was strictly regulated.

Since the dismantling of village communes in 1982, *hukou* regulation has been relaxed (Kwong 2004). The central government issued a series of documents explicitly requiring local governments to enforce equal opportunities in employment and rights for rural migrants (Li and Shi, 2007). Furthermore, rural migrants are not explicitly banned from entering cities anymore; the system of "custody and repatriation," used to deport rural migrants from cities ceased after 2003 (Goodburn 2009). Still, any transfer of *hukou* status from rural to urban remains extremely difficult, requiring a hefty fee in more attractive cities, extensive paperwork migrants often lack, and most commonly, sponsorship by an urban enterprise or university, perpetuating within the urban fabric a 'two-class urban society' of rural and urban residents (Amnesty International 2007, Chan 1999).

2009, Chan 2009). Higher urban wages and resources attract millions of migrants and displace farmers to cities (Miller 2013).

In 2004, China's State Council Research Office Task estimated there were 120 million migrant workers employed in cities (Xinghua & Kun 2007). Today, that number has only increased, to 262 million total migrant workers, with 170 million of them traveling to east coast cities (Baijie 2013). These migrants have brought with them approximately 23 million children, aged between 6 and 14, who are guaranteed compulsory primary education (Chen & Feng 2013, National Census 2010).<sup>2</sup>

### **The *Xueji* system and the Five Certificate Policy**

This thesis focuses particularly on Beijing's Five Certificate Policy and its effects on the challenges migrant population face in accessing education. In August 2013, the Chinese Ministry of Education unveiled a new national education reform that was implemented on September 1, 2013 in time for the 2013-2014 school year.<sup>3</sup> Under this reform, students can now register for school and access their educational history by signing up for an electronic school enrollment number (*xueji*, or 学籍). This policy (hereby the *xueji* policy) aims to “establish a unified standard student information management system” with a close eye on the implementation

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<sup>2</sup> Migrant workers have quietly fueled China's economic and industrial rise since 1978's Opening and Reform. The successive waves of migrant workers have contributed an estimated 16% to GDP growth annually for the last two decades (UNESCO Report 2006). However, these workers remain politically, economically, and socially marginalized from the growing Chinese middle class. For example, migrants and their children are a marginalized population in urban spaces. Migrants work long hours (11 hours per day on average, 26 days a month) and are paid half as much: 780 *yuan* a month as compared to 1350 *yuan* among urban residents (CLB 2009, Tan 2010). The majority of migrant workers are self-employed in the informal sector. They suffer higher rates of job mobility, workplace abuse, injury, and seldom have sign official employment contracts (Amnesty International 2007, Démurger et. al. 2009). Migrants and their children also suffer widespread discrimination; urban residents regard them as lazy, ignorant, dirty, and contributors to crime (Goodburn 2009).

Migrants remain geographically marginal as well; they usually occupy semi-permanent “urban villages” on the periphery of large cities like Beijing, Shenzhen, and Shanghai (Wang & Wu 2009). However, since the first wave of internal immigration in the early 1980s, migrants are becoming younger, more well-educated, and urban (Liang & Chen 2007, CLB). Since 2000, “second generation migrants,” the children of migrant workers, have been entering the workforce as well. The children of first generation migrants, these new workers have higher aspirations and grew up in an urban setting, but are still excluded from the urban fabric (Jialing 2012).

<sup>3</sup> 韩基韬. "中小學生9月將實行統一學籍管理 終身"一人一號" (Middle School to Elementary School Students Begin Implementation of Student Management, “one person one number” system in September) Cri.cn, 22 Aug. 2013. Web. <<http://gb.cri.cn/42071/2013/08/22/5311s4227313.htm>>.

details," effectively develop educational training," and effect the "establishment of long-term mechanism to strengthen school management." However, Beijing has supplemented this national policy with the addition of its own, city-specific policy to accommodate its large migrant populations. In January 2014, Beijing began the Five Certificate Policy (my translation) for migrants. The policy allows migrant students to obtain a school enrollment number under the national policy but only after they have secured a set of five "certificates," or items of paperwork, to qualify. What these five certificates cover and their specific requirements will be covered later on. The Five Certificate Policy is thus a policy applicable to Beijing only and was implemented as a mechanism for complying with the national *xueji* policy.

### **The Legal Framework for Education**

Despite the marginalized status of migrant workers and their children, China nominally possesses an explicit international and domestic legal framework that clearly guarantees the provision of education for children 6 and 14, regardless of place of birth and *hukou* status. However, this legal framework is hobbled by a decentralized education system, resulting in a sharp gap between law and reality.

China's current constitution, adopted in 1982, universalizes compulsory primary education under articles Articles 19 and 46.<sup>4</sup> Moreover, the 1986 Compulsory Education Law mandated compulsory, "socialist education" to be provided for children ages 6-14 regardless of regardless of their ethnicity, race, occupation and financial status (Article 5). The law also banned charging tuition fees, mandated a subsidy system for financially disadvantaged students (Article 37), entrusted public schools with protecting the right of all children's access to education (Article 29), and gave students equal rights in enrollment and continuation (Article 36).

However, the 1986 Law also gave the responsibility for the implementation of compulsory education to local authorities (Chunli 2006). Villages now administer primary schools, township

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<sup>4</sup> "Citizens of the People's Republic of China have the duty as well as the right to receive education." This language was echoed in the 1991 Law on the Protection of Minors, in Article 9, which lists a minor's right to education.



governments administer junior high schools, and counties administer secondary schools (Zhao 2009). With their newly invested authority, local authorities then interpreted the ambiguous language of the law to mean they were obligated to provide education only to the children of residents with local *hukou*. In the interim period after the 1986 Compulsory Law, the central government passed several non-binding edicts strengthening guidelines towards migrant children, but none had measurable impacts (Jialing 2004). In 2001 and 2003, the Education Ministry set out two initiatives that mandated local authorities were not only responsible but legally obligated to provide education to migrant children (UNESCO 2006). In response, most municipalities issued their own regulations, creating prohibitively high transaction costs for entry into public schools.<sup>5</sup>

Most recently in 2006, the National People's Congress, under pressure from migrants, NGOs, and domestic media, revised the 1986 Compulsory Education Law to read under Article 12:

“For school-age children and adolescents whose parents or other statutory guardians work or reside in places other than the places of their registered residence and who have to receive compulsory education in the places where their parents or other statutory guardians work or reside, the local people's governments shall provide equal conditions for them to receive compulsory education.”

However, the wording is vague about implementation, and consequently, public schools interpreted the legislation to mean they could use prohibitively difficult exams to prevent migrant enrollment. Some continued to charge illegal temporary schooling fees despite exhortations from the State Council in 2008 demanding compliance with the 2006 Compulsory Law (Chunli 2006). Lan 2014).

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<sup>5</sup> For example, a 2004 Shanghai communiqué requires migrants to have an extensive range of documentation from the government of their place of origin as well as documentation from “relevant” (not specified) departments and units in the Shanghai municipal government certifying they came to the city only for work and a certificate demonstrating that s/he has a legal, fixed, place of abode in the city and has been living there for a “certain” amount of time (again, not specified) (Amnesty International 2007).

## Education Options for Migrant Children

Despite these legal provisions that promise them primary school education, migrant children for the most part remain effectively excluded from the public education system. Consequently, they have to pay high fees to enroll at public schools, return to the countryside to attend school where they have *hukou*, or enroll at migrant schools in the city. Each option has its own advantages and disadvantages.

In order to discourage migrant enrollment and boost funds, public schools will charge prohibitively high school fees for non-urban residents.<sup>6</sup> Still, the majority of migrant parents (about 70%) bring their children with them to cities to attend migrant schools (National Family Planning Commission 2010). In reaction, migrant schools appeared in migrant-heavy cities in the 1990s, largely as self-started projects. The first opened in Beijing in 1993 and in Shanghai in 1992 (Jialing 2004, Zhu 2001). The schools developed rapidly after 1998 due to more welcoming policies towards migrant education. Today, there are about 100 to 200 migrant schools in Beijing. There are no official statistics for the current number of Beijing migrant schools because of their high mobility.<sup>7</sup> Estimates for Shanghai migrant schools before 2008 vary widely, from about 250 serving about 40,000 children to more than 500 serving 120,000 students (Nielson et. al 2006). The majority of these migrant schools have been shut down since 2008.

Ensuring quality in migrant schools continues to be a problem due to a lack of regulatory framework and political attention. Because of the difficulty of meeting health and educational requirements to obtain official recognition, migrant schools voluntarily elect to remain

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<sup>6</sup> From 1996 to 2008/2009, any migrant child in a big city like Beijing had to pay two government fees to enroll in a public school: an “education compensation fee” (教育补偿费) of 1000 RMB per semester and a “temporary schooling fee” (借读费) of 680 RMB per semester. There were an additional 15 other miscellaneous fees. More prestigious public schools can charge between 10,000-30,000RMB in “sponsorship fees” (Tan 2010). Given that the average income of a migrant worker was 780 yuan per month in 2009, these school tuition fees represent an enormous financial burden (CLB 2009). Non-financial barriers also exist, like requiring official residence and employment documentation migrant parents often lack. As a result, 20% of all migrant children have no access to public schools and 46.9% of six year old migrant children weren’t enrolled in school (Amnesty International 2007).

<sup>7</sup> Workers at Project BEAM and New Worker NGO in Beijing tell me it is around 300 now, given the many that were closed to prepare for the 2008 Beijing Olympics (Notes 2013). The New Citizen’s Plan NGO estimates there to be approximately 150 schools in 2014.

unlicensed and therefore illegal. Their legal precariousness prevents administrators from investing in long-term infrastructural improvements. Bad lighting, ventilation, overcrowding, and poor facilities detract from migrants' educational experiences (Jialing 2004). Almost all migrant schools are for-profit and are run like businesses by administrators who have little experience in education (Notes 2013, Goodburn 2009, Jialing 2004). In a survey of Shanghai public and migrant elementary schools, researchers found children attending migrant schools performed significantly worse in Chinese and Mathematics than their public school counterparts (Chen & Feng 2013). Migrant children gain a better primary school education in migrant schools than in rural schools but quickly fall behind in comparison to students in public schools (Lai et al. 2012). A lack of standardization pervades their curriculum and student composition; students of all ages and educational backgrounds may be put in the same class (Zhao 2009, Goodburn 2009, Jialing 2004). Furthermore, most existing migrant schools have been pushed to the geographic fringe of urban spaces, making them sometimes hard to reach (Li 2011, Shanghai Statistics Bureau 2011).<sup>8</sup>

Worryingly, the transition between primary to secondary schools continues to be a problem. While approximately 90% of migrant children go to primary school, only 20% go on to junior middle schools. There is no supervision or regulatory system for enrollment, dropout, graduation, and quality education for migrant children under the age of 16—the age at which they enter the workforce. Those who wish to take the college entrance examination (高考, gaokao) must still,

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<sup>8</sup> Schools like Beijing's Xingzhi School serve to illustrate the conditions of migrant schools. Despite its name recognition, conditions at Xingzhi were far worse than those at public schools. Only 25% of the teachers had official education certificates (national regulations mandate all teachers must be certified). In general, teachers at migrant schools are poorly paid; a survey of 59 Shanghai migrant schools showed that 78.3% of teachers made income of 700RMB or less in 2002, whereas average of local office worker was 2,815RMB. According to Project BEAM, a Beijing education nonprofit, a "high" migrant teacher salary in 2013 was 2000RMB (Notes 2013). Only 66% had high school or secondary school education (Tan 2010). Turnover is high, even among the best migrant schools (Notes 2013).

In 2004, Xingzhi had three separate locations, one of which was a middle school, with 3,500 students enrolled (Kwong 2004, Xing). Named after Tao Xingzhi, a 20th century educator, the school was started in 1994 by Li Shumei and her husband Yi Benyao, who had moved from Henan to Beijing to work as street vendors. Li, a former teacher, began teaching nine students in sheds on a former vegetable plot, charging 40 yuan per person. Li's students quickly grew in number and after moving locations several times, settled down in a former paint factory with the donation of 10,000USD from an overseas Chinese American. Other entrepreneurial businesspeople followed Li's example; by 1999, Li was one of over 100 unlicensed migrant schools in Beijing. Xingzhi also garnered the support of a cadre in the State Council who lived close to the original school and various social organizations in China, which may have contributed to its longevity. For more information on Xingzhi, see Jialing 2010 and Kwong 2004.

generally speaking, travel back to the countryside to complete high school at a significant disadvantage because 11 out of 22 provinces use specialized textbooks and curriculum. Consequently, migrant students must learn the provincial curriculum before taking the college entrance exam. The overall result is a perpetuation of class inequalities from migrant generation to generation (Wu & Qi 2013).

### **Efforts at Reform**

The dilemma of migrant education attracted more public attention and official resources during the 2008 Beijing Olympics. Historically, Chinese cities have a record of half-hearted, patchwork attempts to address *hukou* and migrant education problems. Reform efforts can be traced back to 1993, where reform plan called for the gradual abolition of urban and rural *hukou*<sup>9</sup> (Amnesty International 2007). In 1996, China's State Education Commission released the Trial Measures for the Schooling of Children and Youth Among the Floating Population in Cities and Towns, an experimental reform effort and limited to only certain areas in particular cities. Beijing has tried a number of limited experiments in migrant education, though the autonomy of its districts makes it difficult to enact widespread change (Kwong 2004, HRIC 2002). In 2009, the governments of Wuhan, Nanjing, Beijing, Chongqing, and Haikou officially abolished temporary schooling and miscellaneous other fees for migrant children, though it is unclear how successfully this was implemented (Jialing 2010).

As of 2012, some Beijing, Guangzhou, and Shanghai migrants will be eligible to take the *gaokao* in the city rather than having to return back to the countryside. The *gaokao* changes will start in 2014 in Shanghai (China Daily 2013). Still, only a few thousand students actually qualify to take the *gaokao* under these new regulations

Shanghai has undertaken the most drastic reform efforts. After several years of pilot research programs in three of its districts, Shanghai announced in its Eleventh Five-Year plan to

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<sup>9</sup> The 1993 reform plan would have replaced the distinction instead with the categories of permanent *hukou*, temporary *hukou*, and guest *hukou*. It also proposed diverting migration to smaller cities and towns, while giving authority for determining the requirements to obtain permanent *hukou* to local authorities. *Hukou* reform plans that followed have been largely based on this 1993 plan.

extend free and compulsory for all children (HRIC 2002). Thus, in 2008 the city declared the beginning of its "three-year action plan." The plan aimed to enroll 70% of Shanghai's migrant children in public primary schools by 2010 and 100% of migrant students in junior high schools. Starting in 2007, of the 258 unlicensed migrant schools, all were closed save for 23. Approximately 150-160 new schools were created in their place. Migrant schools that met city standards for facility and curriculum quality received government funding and became public schools, particularly in peripheral regions. Other migrant schools were bought out by the Shanghai government, which replaced all the management with their own hires. The rest were started from scratch (Lan 2014, Li 2011).<sup>10</sup> However, no public follow-up investigation of Shanghai's reform has been conducted as of yet. Nationally, Chinese migrant education remains a salient problem yet unresolved by national or local policy.

### **Migrant Schools in Beijing Today**

Despite the prevalence of Beijing migrant schools and previous pushes for reform, very little literature exists about Beijing migrant schools after 2011, perhaps because attention shifted away from migrant education after the end of the Beijing Olympics in 2008. Beginning in 2006, Beijing authorities began closing down more than 50 migrant schools in preparation for the Olympics (Human Rights Watch 2006). Since the Olympics, beginning in 2011, the Beijing government began another round of migrant school closures (*Sohu* 2014). Often, Beijing authorities cited poor safety standards and illegal residence as excuses to close down schools, with no prior notification (*China Gate* "我有话说"). Beijing migrant schools have responded accordingly to these pressures. While previously there were about 240 migrant schools of varying sizes in Beijing in 2011, today there remain only approximately 150 (Notes 2013, Yan 2012). The numbers of migrant children in Beijing are growing at approximately 40,000 a year, however (Cheung 2012). This mirrors Beijing's most recent population statistics, which shows

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<sup>10</sup> Under these reforms, students no longer need to pay schooling fees of any sort, though they do have to pay for uniforms, class materials, and field trips. Schools receiving migrant children are eligible to receive public subsidies of 4500RMB per pupil to cover tuition costs (Chen & Feng 2013). By 2009, 69% of migrant children were enrolled in public schools (up from 49% in 2005), only 3% of migrant children attended unlicensed migrant schools, and the remaining 28% went to the newly state-sponsored private schools. The Three Year Action Plan was lauded as a widespread success though it is unclear whether such figures match reality (Shanghai Migrant Children's Bluebook).

that the city's citizenry has steadily grown to exceed 21 million at the end of 2013; 38% of those living in Beijing, however, do not have Beijing urban *hukou* but have registered with the Beijing government (*Sina* 2014). Another estimated 10 million workers are unregistered but reside in the larger Beijing metropolitan area (Crothall 2009).

Because Beijing remains a top receiver of government attention and economic resources and is the home of the country's best universities, it remains one of the most popular destinations for China's internal migrants. Thus, migrant education in Beijing remains the most developed among China's largest cities, the best studied, but also the most vulnerable to governmental interference. A study of migrant school closures by province from 2001-2012 records the long history Beijing has with migrant school closures (253 closures total) as compared to other major Chinese cities, though such closures are spreading to more western provinces like Xinjiang (Wallace 2014).

Moreover, as part of a new push for massive urbanization, the Chinese government announced after the 2013 Third Plenum official moves towards relaxing *hukou* policy in medium to small-sized cities (Baijie 2013). Developing cities such as Chengdu and Chongqing have already been experimenting with more inclusive *hukou* policies (*The Economist*, Sheng 2011). Relaxations in *hukou* policy could allow migrant children easier access to public education in the future (Chan 2010). However, it is unclear how these current and future *hukou* reforms will affect the migrant education situation in populous cities such as Beijing.

In the face of so much uncertainty, understanding the effects of the "Five Certificate Policy" in Beijing will be crucial for understanding the future of migrant education in China. This thesis attempts to fill the gap in literature on migrant education in Beijing on the current state of migrant education in Beijing, specifically with regards to the city's new "Five Certificate" policy implemented early 2014. Again, what challenges do migrant schools in Beijing face while providing education to the city's migrant children? Relatedly, how has Beijing's Five Certificate Policy ameliorated or exacerbated these challenges?

## Chapter 2: Methodology

Research consisted of four parts: outreach, interviews with migrant actors, data collection of policy and demographic information, and finally, data analysis.

1. **Outreach** was completed in during my two research trips to Beijing. In December and January, I spent four weeks meeting with organizations, researchers, and teachers involved in migrant education. Through contacts made during this trip, in May I was able to spend four weeks working in conjunction with the New Citizens' Group, a nonprofit migrant education organization headquartered in Beijing. Through the New Citizen's Group, I was able to contact migrant school principals and coordinate site visits. Migrant schools were selected based on their location (a wide variety of locations in migrant-heavy districts were chosen) and the receptiveness of the migrant school principals. I conducted additional interviews with relevant researchers, academics, nonprofits, and artists who I identified through media and the academic literature.

2. **Interviewing** with approximately 40 migrant schoolteachers, administrators, parents, and researchers took place in December/January 2013 and May 2014. Interviews were supplemented by classroom observations and school visits at migrant schools. Interviews always took place at the individual's work place. Teachers and principals were interviewed at their respective schools; parents were interviewed where they worked (often a workshop or social work center); researchers and academics were interviewed in their offices. The interviews lasted approximately 30 - 45 minutes each. Interviews with teachers and principals were followed by classroom observations and a tour of the school. Generally, I stayed at least an entire school day at each migrant school. Interviews with all subjects were semi-structured; a set of questions was prepared but answers were open-ended, and follow-up questions were spontaneous. Interviews were not recorded, though I took detailed notes and quotations during the interviews.

The school visit survey and questionnaire I used for each migrant school visit can be found in **Appendix 1**. Interview questions were designed to glean basic information about the school's financial, political, and operational conditions (how many students, whether or not the school had a license, the principal's background, the school's relationship with local officials). More open-ended questions were designed to allow interviewees to offer opinions on recent developments regarding migrant schools (Has the Five Certificate System affected your school and students negatively or positively? How?). Interviews were less to gather factual information, though that certainly was a motivation for conducting them. Rather, interviews provided valuable access to the migrant experience and the subjective perception of policies. See **Appendix 2** for a table with descriptions of each of the schools visited in the course of this research and a list of all interview subjects.

3. **Data collection** of school enrollment information and Five Certificate Policy information took place after interviews. In conjunction with the New Citizen's Group, I collected statistics about migrant and public schools and graduation and enrollment rates in various Chinese cities including Beijing with the New Citizens' Group. Furthermore, I took pictures of various "Five Certificate" announcement posters that had been posted in migrant communities around Beijing. I compiled demographic information on migrant and urban school enrollment numbers and number of schools by going through census reports on Beijing district websites. I supplemented migrant school information with data from New Citizens' Groups' annual migrant school map project, where every Beijing migrant school's location, contact information, and basic enrollment and school fee information are aggregated. This visual and quantitative data provided a framework for the policies at the heart of this study. Altogether, the interviews and collected data furnished a more complete picture of the challenges facing migrant students in Beijing and how these challenges are affected by Beijing's Five Certificate Policy.

### **The Schools Visited**

In the course of this thesis, I visited eight migrant schools. Table 1 describes the schools visited and the migrant populations of each district in Beijing.



**Table 1. Migrant Population and Schools By District**

| District                  | Schools | Urban  | Migrant | Ratio | Schools Visited  | Interviews Done |
|---------------------------|---------|--------|---------|-------|--|-----------------|
| Chaoyang                  | 134     | 46000  | 72780   | 0.63  | 3 (Tongxin Elementary School, Chaoyang Migrant School, Future Bilingual Elementary School) | 6               |
| Haidian                   | 108     | 87792  | 53637   | 1.64  | 1 (Beijing East Wind Elementary School)  | 2               |
| Fengtai                   | 84      | 24239  | 44601   | 0.54  | 1 (Blue Skies Elementary School)   | 3               |
| Fangshan                  | 211     | 51596  | 34793   | 1.48  | 0  |                 |
| Tongzhou                  | 82      | 12077  | 34618   | 0.35  | 0  |                 |
| Changping                 | 100     | 9670   | 33828   | 0.29  | 2 (Little Swan Elementary School, Bai Miao Experimental Middle School)                     | 5               |
| Daxin                     | 96      | 11423  | 32315   | 0.35  | 1 (Dandelion Middle School)  | 5               |
| Xicheng                   | 72      | 43310  | 17375   | 2.49  | 0  |                 |
| Shunyi                    | 42      | 10300  | 16777   | 0.61  | 0  |                 |
| Dongcheng                 | 64      | 35758  | 13333   | 2.68  | 0  |                 |
| Shijingshang              | 31      | 9934   | 12969   | 0.77  | 0  |                 |
| Huairou                   | 25      | 5038   | 5665    | 0.89  | 0  |                 |
| Miyun                     | 40      | 7809   | 4278    | 1.83  | 0  |                 |
| Mentougou                 | 29      | 3493   | 3933    | 0.89  | 0  |                 |
| Pingrou                   | 43      | 6211   | 3184    | 1.95  | 0  |                 |
| Yangqing                  | 34      | 4559   | 2379    | 1.92  | 0  |                 |
| <b>Total/<br/>Average</b> | 1195    | 369209 | 386465  | 1.21  | 8 migrant schools  |                 |

The migrant schools I visited fell within the most migrant-heavy districts on the outskirts of urban Beijing. From the table, we can see that Chaoyang District, as Beijing’s largest and most populous district, has the most migrant students, and I accordingly visited three schools in Chaoyang. Two other districts I visited - Changping and Daxing - are overwhelmingly migrant

districts; their ratio of urban to migrant students falls well below 1. Unsurprisingly, the districts with the lowest proportion of migrant students are in the central urban areas of Beijing and the districts with the highest proportion of migrant students are farther out along Beijing's urban edges. This trend breaks down when we reach the districts that comprise rural Beijing, most likely because the kinds of jobs that normally sustain migrant workers - construction, cleaning, operating street side small shops - do not exist in rural areas.

4. **Data analysis** of the interviews first involved thematic analysis. I treated interviews as a literary text subject to close reading and interpretation. During reading, I coded for reoccurring themes and relevance to preexisting literature on migrant education. I compared these themes with themes already noted and themes identified in the academic literature to see if they were new or corresponding to themes I had already identified. I discarded segments that did not fit, and new themes often emerged upon second reading. I went through this iterative process - close reading, thematic analysis, and close rereading - several times. Separately, I analyzed the numerical data with questions of migrant school location and enrollment in mind. Finally, I analyzed the quantitative and qualitative data in conjunction with one another and examined similarities and contradictions between the two sets of data.

### **Limitations**

The migrant schools visited in this thesis were not representative of the location and quality of migrant schools in Beijing. Rather, they were selected based on the receptiveness of their principals and thus the feasibility of my research there. It is possible that willingness to participate in my research acted as a selecting mechanism for certain traits, such as higher curriculum quality or more affluent conditions. However, the sample of migrant schools included here included a variety of districts, sizes, and school background. Moreover, given the transient and unpredictable nature of migrant schools, choosing a representative sample was nearly impossible.

## Chapter 3: Current Challenges

### Chapter Summary

In this chapter, I discuss the longstanding challenges faced by migrant schools in their daily operations and how these challenges translate into the educational experience of migrant children.

### The Biggest Challenges

In the course of visiting eight migrant schools and one vocational high school which accepted migrants, I saw reoccurring problems in each school. The biggest challenges facing the schools I visited largely stemmed from the environment of resource scarcity in which migrant schools operate. Below are other, major challenges I found in the visit migrant schools I visited.

1. Migrant school principals cited the **inability to retain quality teachers** their biggest problem. Similarly, **principal background and experience in education varied greatly** and served as a predictor of school quality and retaining teachers.
2. Relatedly, the **struggle to keep their school financially viable** without charging high school fees was a continual challenge.
3. **Ensuring the safety of their students** was a surprising challenge principals cited as a constant concern of theirs. Surprisingly, student mobility was not cited as a major challenge by migrant principals.
4. Migrant schoolteachers and administrators often **act as more than just teachers**, but as friends, pseudo-parents, and social workers for the students they teach. However, they struggled to fill these roles with limited resources.
5. **Educational continuity for migrant students is an obstacle.** Many migrant students find it difficult to complete an educational pathway leading to university study because of obstacles at each step in the educational system.

### 1. Retaining Teachers

Because of the limited financial resources of migrant schools and the lack of public funding, migrant schools pay their teachers about half of what a public school pays. Consequently, teachers often work at a migrant school for a short period of time before moving on to another school posting. Teachers are often young and inexperienced and use teaching at a migrant school to boost their future chances of employment at another school. Moreover, teachers without proper credentials often find employment at migrant schools, which do not always enforce high teacher standards.

Table 2 below lists each school's teachers, qualifications, salary, and retention rate. In public schools, teachers must have at least an undergraduate degree if not a master degree or even a doctorate. In every migrant school I visited (and which was willing to talk about their teachers' qualifications) however, teachers had for the most part earned their *zhuanke* (专科), a vocational degree that certifies one to teach but lacked an undergraduate bachelor's degree. On the whole, migrant schools get second pick with hiring teachers due to the schools' lower salaries, lack of social benefits, and poor living conditions.

Interestingly, I found the majority migrant schoolteachers were migrant themselves, even more so than school principals. The vast majority were “外地人,” or “foreigners” to Beijing. Those that did have urban Beijing *hukou* had invariably married a Beijing citizen and thus gained Beijing residence status. At Bai Miao Experimental Middle School, for example, all 30 teachers were “foreigners” to Beijing. Of the eight migrant schools I visited, about 80% of the teachers were migrants to Beijing. Foreigners at a disadvantage when seeking employment in Beijing were drawn to migrant schools, where employment requirements may not be as stringent.

Table 2 below documenting the teacher salary and teacher mobility at each of the migrant schools that I visited. The most common salary I found at migrant schools was 2,000 RMB (a little more than \$300) a month for entry-level teachers. A salary of 3,000 RMB a month would be considered “high” in migrant schools. Dandelion, by far the most well-funded and well-

connected migrant school, was able to pay teachers on a sliding scale that maxed out at 6,000 RMB based on experience, degree level, and hours worked. Almost all the migrant principals I talked to said that if they had extra revenue, their first act would be to increase teacher salary to reflect rising living costs in Beijing. In comparison, a teacher at a Chinese public school makes at least 6,000 RMB a month. In general, schools with a higher monthly salary had slightly higher teacher retention rates.

**Table 2: Teacher Salary and Retention Rate by School**

| School   | Salary                 | % who leave each semester        | Teacher qualifications   |
|--|------------------------|----------------------------------|--|
| Tongxin Elementary School (同心小学)                 | 2000 RMB/semester      | Unclear                          |  |
| Dandelion Middle School (蒲公英中学)                  | 2000-6000 RMB/semester | 2-5% (1-2 out of 48)             | 80% have zhuanke, 20% have undergraduate degree  |
| Little Swan (小天鹅小学) Elementary School            | 3000 a month           | Unclear                          |  |
| Blue Skies (蓝天凤元) Elementary School              | 2,200 a month          | Unclear                          | 50% undergraduate degree<br>12% have graduate degree<br>8% have zhuanke<br>30% unlicensed                                  |
| Future Bilingual School (未来双语学校)                 | 3000 a month           | 5-10% a semester (1-2 out of 23) | 25% have undergraduate degree<br>75% have zhuanke  |
| Migrant school in Chaoyang district              | 2000 a month           | 5-10% (1-2 out of 21)            | 30% have undergraduate degree<br>70% have zhuanke  |
| Bai Miao (白庙实验学校) Experimental Elementary School | 2000 a month           | 30% (10 out of 30 a semester)    | 20% have undergraduate degree<br>30% have zhuanke<br>50% unlicensed, but have experience teaching in other migrant schools |

| School   | Salary       | % who leave each semester    | Teacher qualifications |
|--|--------------|------------------------------|------------------------|
| Beijing East Wind Love and Hope Elementary School (北京风华爱心希望小学) | 2000 a month | Less than 10% (1 a semester) | 100% zhuanke           |

Relatedly, the quality of school principals and school administration were influential in determining school quality. In other words, the educational background and personal commitment of the principal almost always correlated with a more successful migrant school, measured by longevity of the school, lower student fees, higher teacher retention rates, and quality of school resources. A surprising number of migrant schools had principals who were also the school's founder. Tongxin, East Wind, Blue Skies, Dandelion, and Future Bilingual School were all founded or co-founded by their current principals, all of whom (with the exception of Tongxin) had previous teaching experience. In the case of Little Swan Elementary School, the principal had a background in aerospace engineering but had had a long volunteer history of the school and developed a close relationship with the previous principal. These schools tended to be the more well run schools with lower school fees, happier teachers, and more well maintained classrooms. A possible explanation between this observed relationship is that principals who founded the school and stayed for many years would have more a personal investment in running the school.

From interviews, I found the ability of a migrant school principal to be the best predictor of migrant school quality. Teachers always mentioned the (positive and negative) influence their principals had on their work experience and school administration. This reflects the personality-driven nature of these private migrant schools. In some ways, this is an advantage, because successful migrant schools are more quickly adaptive. Yet this also leaves schools vulnerable to sudden changes related to leadership switches. Furthermore, without support from other teachers and the public education system, embattled school principals often find themselves overwhelmed with the exigencies of running a migrant school.

The following story with a teacher I met at Xiao Tian'E Elementary School is emblematic of the influence a principal has on his/her migrant school. Teacher Wu, a middle-aged English teacher who taught at a nearby migrant school, was dissatisfied with his current employer and was seeking employment at Xiao Tian'E, having heard good things about its principal:

“At the school where I teach, the principal doesn't know what he is doing. He runs it completely from a financial perspective and doesn't listen to the teachers' input. I'm here looking for a new job because I heard this school is well run. The principal [where I work] is very young and just graduated from a nearby Beijing university. The reason why he is successful is that he is good at promotion and publicity; that's how he got so many kids [to attend his school]. Here's an example of his lack of background in education; he bought the set of books for the English curriculum. In the cities, English starts in Grade 1, whereas in rural schools, it starts in Grade 3. Well, he bought the city texts for Grades 1-2 and the texts for rural schools for Grade 3 and onwards, which means kids are repeating two years of English. He didn't know to buy the complete set for cities because he has no background in education whatsoever. He doesn't know many things at all.”<sup>11</sup>

Feeling that his perspective and experience was being disregarded by shoddy administration, Teacher Wu was secretly looking for another job. Because of the private, for-profit nature of many of Beijing's migrant schools, the principal in his story had inordinate influence in determining aspects of the curriculum, teacher training and compensation, and enrollment. Such poor administration exacerbates the already poor teacher retention of migrant schools.

Several additional themes emerge from Teacher Wu's narrative that are indicative of the disproportionate impact a principal has on the future success and quality of a migrant school. The principal at his school is “very young and just graduated from a nearby Beijing university.” Teacher Wu was unclear about his boss' area of study but knew it was not education. The principal's young age speaks to his inexperience, unlike some migrant school principals and founders who have worked previously as public or private school teachers before retiring.

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<sup>11</sup> "Interview with Teacher Wu." Personal interview. 21 May 2014.

Moreover, it suggests the possibility that Teacher Wu's principal, as a young, recent college graduate, viewed running a migrant school as more of a start up business than an institution of education.

Teacher Wu's comments about the specific textbooks used at his migrant school is also consistent with observations in the literature about the generally poorer quality of the curriculum provided at migrant schools (Zhang 2014). All nine of the school principals I interviewed assured me that the curriculum they used was no different than the national curriculum designed by the Chinese Ministry of Education and on par with all national standards of education. However, Professor Zhang of Renmin University noted in her own fieldwork, there exist different levels of difficulty for each set of textbooks, and migrant schools often choose to purchase the easiest, and cheapest, versions. This allows schools to provide a less rigorous education, while still remaining consistent with national education standards.<sup>12</sup> In contrast, in elite Beijing high schools, teachers even go as far as to develop their own supplementary curriculum and course materials, which are jealously guarded by school administration from other elite high schools.<sup>13</sup>

Finally, Teacher Wu's story suggests that involving teachers in school administration decisions and giving them a stake in the running of the school are important for retaining teachers by partially offsetting the economic disadvantages of working at a migrant school. One of the migrant schools I visited in Haidian district - Beijing East Wind - was notable for its smoothly run day to day operations and their array of extracurricular activities for both students and parents. This programming was especially impressive given the small staff the principal was working with (12 full time teachers for 500 students; the other academic obligations were picked up by part time and volunteer teachers). As the principal told me:

“One thing I have done very well has been to build teacher relations and a feeling of unity. Even though I can't pay them much, I put in a lot of effort to establish a friendly environment where people feel like they can be heard, their opinion valued, and their

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<sup>12</sup> "Interview with Zhang Donghui." Personal interview. 5 June 2014.

<sup>13</sup> "Interview with Wang Rui." Personal interview. 1 May 2014.



efforts noticed. I also have very good relationships with parents as well. I don't look down upon parents or students because of their backgrounds, because they are poor, they are badly dressed, or have no education. I think that every child is lovable and has the ability to be successful."

As a result of the care this principal took to accommodate her teachers' perspectives and work, the teachers in turn were willing to work overtime without extra pay to help the principal put on the extracurricular and educational activities planned after the normal school day. These observations are reflected in the short story of Teacher Wang, a grammar teacher at Little Swan Elementary School, as well:

"I come from Hebei province. Technically, where I live is still part of Beijing; it's just one of the very far flung districts. I taught there at a private school for ten years, where some of the students were migrants. I came to this school in 2013. I work four hours away from where I live now [in Beijing]. I used to work at another school in the southeast corner of city, but I found it too repressive there. No one listened to me, and teachers were not appreciated for any extra work they put in. Even if pay there was higher, it wasn't enjoyable. My impression of this school [Little Swan] is that it is very good. Before, I had friends here who said the principal was very good and good to the students. I was very moved by his dedication; he only ate leftovers in the cafeteria and put everything into the school."

Little Swan Elementary School - a four hour bus ride away from her family home - was farther away than where she had worked previously, though she was still able to visit her family every weekend. Teacher Wang did have her teaching certificate and had taught previously at another private school but was willing to forgo a higher salary and proximity to her family to work at a school where she respected the principal and felt that she had the license to make a contribution.

The influence of principals on migrant schools is a two-way street and a challenge which migrant schools continue to balance. Ambitious, experienced, and highly committed principals can successfully shape a migrant school but this approach leaves the school susceptible to changes in leadership and problems which require the efforts of more than one person to solve.

## 2. Keeping Financially Afloat

Because migrant schools are usually excluded from the public finance system, they must raise all their revenue independently. Exceptions do exist; as will be described in Chapter 4, Blue Skies Elementary School in Fengtai District, for example, receives annual public grants, and Dandelion Middle School receives numerous philanthropic donations from corporations and wealthy individuals. However, for the most part, migrant schools largely rely on the school fees, which students pay per semester. Six of the eight migrant schools I visited relied on this fee-driven model of financing. Below in Table 3 are the fees for each of the schools visited. To give some context, the average Beijing migrant worker earned 2,300 yuan in 2012 (*Reuters* 2013).

**Table 3: Per Semester School Fee by School**

| School   | Fee  |
|--|--|
| Tongxin Elementary School (同心小学),                              | 1,000/semester   |
| Dandelion Middle School (蒲公英中学)                                | 680/semester (for everything)                                  |
| Little Swan (小天鹅小学) Elementary School                          | 980/semester for everything including social insurance         |
| Blue Skies Elementary School (蓝天凤元)                            | 750/semester   |
| Future Bilingual School (未来双语学校)                               | 1,500/month which covers everything                            |
| Migrant school in Chaoyang district                            | 2000/semester, including books                                 |
| Bai Miao Experimental Elementary School (白庙实验学校)               | 1,300 a month for just school (no food, uniform, textbook)     |
| Beijing East Wind Love and Hope Elementary School (北京风华爱心希望小学) | 1,300/semester, includes everything including social insurance |

School fees varied widely. The highest was 2000 RMB a semester for all expenses (nearly the average of a 2012 Beijing migrant worker's monthly salary). Dandelion had the lowest fee at 680 RMB a semester which covered all school expenses including room and board.

It was unclear why some migrant schools were far more expensive than others. In the case of Dandelion Middle School, their significant fundraising efforts and philanthropic gifts allow them to heavily subsidize their students' education, and the school fees are concomitantly much lower. "When we first opened, people didn't believe us that our school fees were so low," Liu Kun, a graduate coordinator at Dandelion told me. "They thought we were a bad school or that we were tricking them." Blue Skies, a unique mixture of public and private school, is also able to offer its students a reduced school fee. However, why the migrant school in Chaoyang District required a 2,000 per semester school fee was not apparent and very well could have either been due to an ulterior profit motive or a higher cost of school upkeep (though their teacher salary, at 2,000 a month, was not high either).

The principal at Beijing East Wind Love and Hope Elementary School detailed her financial challenges and balancing the often-opposing goals of paying her teachers well and keeping school fees low:

"My biggest challenge is attracting good teachers. Teacher mobility is not that high, and sometimes one will leave each semester. Most of the teachers are now younger. Their pay is 2000 RMB a month. I'm working to get it higher, but costs are high because I have to pay rent for the courtyard, and that's 100,000 RMB a year."

The courtyard in question was an area of dirt and tile, surrounded by one-story concrete houses that had been brightly painted in the fashion of many migrant schools with motivational slogans and cartoon animals and flowers. It was located off of the main thoroughfare of a migrant settlement, in some of the worst residential conditions I witnessed during my fieldwork: unpaved roads bordered on either side by crumbling concrete, huts of brick and sheet metal. Reflecting Beijing's escalating property prices, despite its far-flung geographical location, the school's rental costs still came out to the amount of 100,000 RMB a year (about \$16,000). Balancing rising operating costs and costs of living, while depending on an ever-changing stream of income from transitory migrants impeded principals from investing in long-term school improvements and maintaining a high quality of education.

### *3. Ensuring Student Safety*

Migrant schools not only operate outside of the public finance system, but those that do not have official permission to teach operate largely outside of the public regulatory system as well. Local officials will still cite zoning violations or potential dangers to students' safety as an excuse to shut migrant schools down. Moreover, due to the much higher student mobility at migrant schools and the diversity of student backgrounds, principals felt that they had a more difficult time enforcing disciplinary and safety rules. Principal Yan at Bai Miao Middle School described the constant worry he has over student safety:

“The foremost problem is student safety. Because the school is private, if small accidents happen, that is permissible. But if there is a big incident, the authorities might shut down the school. I fear constantly that the students running around will fight each other, run around, trip, and hurt themselves.”

These unsafe educational conditions are exacerbated by an often fractious home life that students return to after school. Dandelion Middle School has gone as far as to require that all students live in on-campus dormitories to avoid this problem. At Little Swan Elementary School, Teacher Wang saw the tumultuous home lives of her students as proof of the need for migrant schools:

“I feel that the school does society a lot of help. Most families' situation here are very bad; they rent a tiny apartment and don't have a good job. There are lots of problems. The local government knows about them, but they only regulate when needed, like if a family wants to sue, but they do not offer them any support. I teach first grade grammar and math. Most students are good learners, but there are some problems. Often there is no parental involvement and the students have too many siblings, too little money (living costs are high), and their parents have an unstable salary. For example, there's one sixth grade boy whose parents are almost always absent. He takes care of his second grade sister (both are at this school). He's a very good student as well.”

Teacher Wang's narrative reveals an important theme: for migrant students who lack a nurturing home environment, migrant schools provide a range of functions that extend beyond a basic education.

#### *4. Acting as Parents, Not Just Teachers*

Precisely because of the unstable backgrounds of many migrant students just described, migrant schoolteachers often act as pseudo-parents to their students. Teacher Wang's narrative is just one of many that I encountered while visiting migrant schools. While migrant school administrators stressed to me the potential of every student, regardless of background, they did provide evidence for a higher rate of behavioral problems among migrant students. The reasons behind this are many, and some - such as unstable family circumstances due to migration and precarious finances - have been discussed in previous sections. Principal Zhang at Bai Miao Middle School identified another objective of migrant schools that brought with it unique challenges:

“The second problem [the first being school safety] is maintaining or increasing education quality. How do you make the kids behave, love learning, become good people, and encourage the truly talented students to get ahead? The students don't work that hard, and many don't like learning but like playing instead. The teachers have to work to teach them to pay attention, focus, and have good habits. It's a numbers problem (数据问题).

The students have high mobility as well; parents often have the lowest level of employment, and if pay is bad or unstable, they will move and take their children with them.”

Principal Zhang's statement exemplifies the broad, all-encompassing mission I witnessed at many of the migrant schools I visited. Migrant teachers saw their prerogative as not just to impart a basic education to their students but to cultivate their habits and intellect, an outlook that draws certain comparisons to the American idea of citizenship through a (liberal arts) education. Principal Zhang wanted his students to “love learning, become good people” in addition to meeting their educational requirements. To compensate for unstable home environments and frequent student mobility, migrant schools have adopted appropriate measures, such as school dormitories and teachers with expanded duties to not only teach but also to mentor and discipline.

Table 4 below lists the self-reported student mobility of each migrant school. Mobility for students among the schools varies from low (3% of students moving each semester) to relatively

high (up to 25% of students). High levels of mobility disrupt the education of migrant students and adds to the challenges already faced by migrant schools.

**Table 4: Student Mobility by School**

| School   | % that leave each year                |
|--|---------------------------------------|
| Tongxin Elementary School (同心小学),                              | Unclear                               |
| Dandelion Middle School (蒲公英中学)                                | Unclear, most leave 9th grade         |
| Little Swan (小天鹅小学) Elementary School                          | 40/600 a semester (about 7%)          |
| Blue Skies (蓝天凤元) Elementary School                            | 30-40/1200 each semester (about 3-4%) |
| Future Bilingual School (未来双语学校)                               | 100-200/800 each semester (12.5-25%)  |
| Migrant school in Chaoyang district                            | 70/80 out of 500 a semester (16%)     |
| Bai Miao (白庙实验学校) Experimental Elementary School               | 100/900 a semester (11%)              |
| Beijing East Wind Love and Hope Elementary School (北京风华爱心希望小学) | 70/80 out of 500 a semester (16%)     |

Richard Cao, who was a volunteer at Dandelion Middle School during the summer of 2012-2013, described his students thusly:

“They really need an authority figure at home, especially in middle school. For the male students, when they don’t have an authority figure they tend to become troublemakers: smoking, drinking. You’ll see the ninth graders smoking when they leave school. I had two students buy a beer while I was with them. The kids were like, “Oh whatever.”

I think bullying and domestic violence is also an issue and much more serious, because they experience that at home. Their dads might be abusive. So if you experience domestic violence, you tend to do the same to your children. That really applies here.”

Bochen Han also volunteered for the summer of 2014 at Dandelion Middle School as an English and homeroom teacher. She told me:

“Dandelion is more of a family than a school. They really take care of every aspect of their kids’ lives. The teachers go on home visits for every single student each year.

When we were at the school in summer camp the rules were more relaxed for us, but for [the students] it was very restricted. They couldn’t eat any snacks. One graduate volunteer brought a watermelon, and the principal scolded her. I don’t know why. But us U.S. volunteers were freer. But the Dandelion graduate volunteers couldn’t get popsicles. One guy threw his away. They’re still very respectful of the school, and they listen to the school because of all the support and care the school gives them after graduation.”

Dandelion is an exceptional example of the significant, almost familial, presence a migrant school can have within their students’ lives. However, similar actions and attitudes prevailed in lesser degrees at the other schools I visited. At Tongxin Elementary School in Picun, teachers and administrators organized regular performance and art sessions for students at the affiliated New Workers’ Art Troupe Theater, where the school’s cofounders used their rock music background to encourage self-expression and artistic sensibilities. At Beijing East Wind Elementary School, the principal invested 20,000 RMB of her own money to refurbish the school’s new, larger location. Meanwhile, teachers worked after school without pay to give enrichment seminars to parents while offering babysitting for younger students. At the migrant school in Chaoyang, volunteer teachers provided the majority of the physical education and extracurricular programming.

Schools often struggled to fulfill expansive education objectives with their students and serve as teachers, administrators, friends, and mentors with limited physical, financial, and human resources. Migrant schools have stepped into the void but are often unable to fully satisfy their students’ needs.

### 5. Educational continuity.

Due to the fact that each step of China's educational system is a prerequisite for the next, exclusion from one stage makes pursuing higher education and later, higher-paying white-collar employment opportunities nearly impossible. For example, students who attend an accredited elementary school can enter a publicly licensed middle school more easily. Only those who have graduated from public, accredited middle schools may attend public high schools that offer the national curriculum which prepares students for the college entrance examination (高考). Moreover, only residents with local *hukou* can take the *gaokao* in Beijing which confers advantages; China's best universities are in Beijing, and Beijing students receive preferential admission.

Beijing education regulation also makes it so that pursuing middle school education in the city is much more difficult than finding elementary schooling. Elementary schooling requires compliance with far fewer building, health, and safety regulations as well as curriculum expectations.<sup>14</sup> Dandelion Middle School is one of a handful of migrant schools that offer a middle school education in Beijing. "Because there are very few middle schools for migrants here, we decided grades 7-9 were the most needed," a graduate coordinator at Dandelion told me.<sup>15</sup>

Meanwhile, migrant students who cannot attend public high school but wish to attend college must travel back to their hometowns and take the entrance exams there. As described in the Introduction, each province has its own college entrance examination curriculum and migrant students usually return back home before high school to begin mastering that province's *gaokao* content. Furthermore, a migrant student's grades may not transfer between schools if they move, as migrants often do, meaning that they may have to repeat grades and may be left without a

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<sup>14</sup> "Interview with Liu Kun." Personal interview. 24 December 2013.

<sup>15</sup> *ibid.*



physical academic record. Even if students do have a transcript, most high schools in Beijing do not recognize diplomas awarded by migrant schools, and migrant school principles are constantly looking for Beijing and Hebei (a province bordering Beijing) high schools which will accept their graduating students for the next year. Most migrant students thus stop attending school as they get older, preferring to either return to their home province, work, or, in the best case scenario, attend a vocational school in Beijing or Hebei, some of which do accept migrant school degrees. There are, of course, exceptions to this pathway, though the odds are stacked against the migrant student at each step of the way.

Even vocational high schools may not be viable options for migrant children. As of this year, only a handful of vocational high schools in Beijing and Hebei accept students with a diploma from a migrant school. Dandelion Middle School, one of the most successful and well-established migrant schools in Beijing and the only licensed migrant middle school in Beijing, currently has an arrangement with a for profit, private (“民办”) high school in Beijing which will accept Dandelion graduates for a discounted tuition of 6,000 RMB a year. However, this one high school cannot absorb all Dandelion graduates, and Dandelion administrators are in annual negotiations with two other relatively well-ranked public high schools in Hebei who may accept migrant school diplomas and offer a tuition discount.<sup>16</sup> Approximately 30-40 of Dandelion graduates will graduate ninth grade and test into the two Hebei high schools. One to two top students attend Guo Hua, one of the top public schools in Guangzhou province each year; Guangzhou, a southern province in China’s manufacturing hub, has historically been the most popular destination for migrant workers. A further one to two elite students have been able to attend United World Colleges (UWC) high schools each year<sup>17</sup> (UWC is a consortium of 14 international schools with a commitment to diversity, social action, and peace). It must be emphasized, however, that Dandelion is the exception, rather than the norm, for migrant students in Beijing.

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<sup>16</sup> "Interview with Marcus." Personal interview. 24 December 2013.

<sup>17</sup> "Interview with Bochen Han." Personal interview. 14 September 2014.

By middle school, “you can just go back home to attend school at that point. When you’re young, you have to follow your parents, and so elementary schools are more needed,” according to Principal Liu at Blue Skies Elementary School in Fengtai District. This presents a conflicting policy model to the mission of Dandelion Middle School. Because most academically-minded migrant students often choose to return to their home province by high school-age, where they can prepare for college entrance examination,<sup>18</sup> some school principals do not believe in allowing students beyond middle school age to stay in Beijing migrant schools (Wu & Qi 2013). In their eyes, Beijing migrant schools serve as a temporary, stop gap measure for migrant parents and young children who face the tough decision between leaving their children behind or seeking out unlicensed private schools. However, the fact remains that very few educational options remain for migrant students beyond elementary school.

*6. Heterogeneity within Districts:* Local district officials had very different approaches in dealing with migrant education. This kind of variation in how Beijing’s district governments approach migrant education creates a politically unstable environment in which migrant schools must eke out survival. Below are profiles of three separate schools that represent the spectrum of responses migrant schools have received from government officials and the innovative but diverse modes of survival migrant schools have developed in reaction to this variation.

*Lan Tian (Blue Sky) Elementary School in Fengtai District*

Lan Tian (Blue Sky) Elementary School exemplifies the handful of Beijing migrant schools that receive government approval and financial support. It is somewhere in between a private (“民办”) and public (“公办”) school. It is neither completely public because it must generate part of its own revenue by charging school fees (on the low end at RMB 750 per semester) from its students, but it also receives significant financial help from the Fengtai government. The school received its first large public grant in 2005, when the Fengtai district government sponsored a competition, which Blue Skies School won, for which it received RMB 1.5 million. Since then, the Fengtai district government has waived the school’s monthly rent for

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<sup>18</sup> See the Introduction’s section “Educational Options for Migrant Children.”

the large single-story courtyard property it uses. Last year, the district government also paid to have the principal's office outfitted with new furniture and a computer. Blue Skies is one of the only migrant schools in Fengtai district that has an approval from the Beijing Ministry of Education to operate. In the last few years, it has become impossible for other migrant schools to receive an education permit in Fengtai district. As the principal of Blue Skies elementary school admitted to me, "we have a permit; it's very easy to get because we have government support. Now there are only three other migrant schools in Fengtai that I know of. It's very hard to get a permit without support now."<sup>19</sup>

As the example of Blue Skies Elementary School demonstrates, securing government support is crucial for running a successful migrant school. Without government support, migrant schools face constant fear of closure and regular financial shortfalls. However, it was unclear why Principal Liu at Blue Skies had been targeted and selected for special government treatment while many other migrant schools in Fengtai district had been closed since the 2000s. It is quite possible that factors unrelated to the school's educational quality were instrumental in securing its longevity; these factors could include any special political connections or relationships the principal might have with local officials, personal wealth, or political incentives on the part of district officials themselves. However, this information was impossible to verify through interviews.

Blue Skies is particularly exceptional given the relatively harsh migrant education policies of Fengtai district. As early as 2001, Fengtai government officials began their first wave of school closures; 50 schools within the district were closed that year, leaving 10,000 migrant students suddenly school-less (Bequelin 2002). To this day, despite having a larger migrant population than districts like Daxin, Changping, and Tongzhou districts, Fengtai has fewer migrant schools open than each of said districts and is home to a mere 3% of Beijing's migrant schools despite having 11.5% of Beijing's migrant population.

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<sup>19</sup> "Interview with Principal Liu." Personal interview. 22 May 2014.

Dandelion Middle School also has a unique relationship that borders on Lan Tian's close relationship with Fengtai district officials. Dandelion is "an extreme exception," as Danna Liu, an employee of Project BEAM, a nonprofit that sponsors extracurricular activities for migrant children, said.<sup>20</sup> Echoing Danna's sentiment, Linxiu Zhang of REAP told me, "Dandelion is not replicable."<sup>21</sup> Its principal, Zheng Hong, has a murky background. As several volunteers and teachers told me, Principal Zheng had many political and personal connections, though the exact nature of these connections were never made clear because everyone was told not to talk about it at the very beginning of their time at Dandelion.<sup>22</sup> Before opening Dandelion, Principal Hong was originally a professor in Beijing after which she studied in the United States and received her degree from the Harvard Kennedy School. Today, Dandelion Middle School is the most well-known Beijing migrant school, has numerous volunteer partnerships with universities (including Duke) and high schools around the world, and largely funded by private social donations from individuals and corporations.

Dandelion is moving in the 2014-2015 year, and the process by which is moving is indicative of the special relationship it was able to cultivate with local officials in Daxing district. Dandelion was notified several years in advance, which is unusual in cases of demolition and renovation. With the extra time, the school was able to find another plot of land nearby in Daxing District and make plans to move their entire school there by 2015. The expenses for building the new campus - around \$10 million - will be entirely paid for by China Minsheng Investment Company (Fan 2014). Dandelion's exceptional circumstances can be explained by a combination of factors: Principal Zheng Hong's personal connections, the school's tireless fundraising and networking efforts, and the continual high educational quality of its curriculum. As Henry, a math, English, and computer teacher at Dandelion explained:

"The government is working with out school because they recognize that after nine years, it's pretty good. At very beginning, they didn't believe that the school was not for-profit.

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<sup>20</sup> "Interview with Danna Liu." Personal interview. 18 December 2013.

<sup>21</sup> "Interview with Linxiu Zhang." Personal interview. 14 December 2013.

<sup>22</sup> "Interview with Bochen Han." Personal interview. 13 September 2014.

Officials recognize now that it's a good school, so the school has more freedom and creative opportunity."<sup>23</sup>

As the examples of Blue Skies Elementary School and Dandelion Middle School demonstrate, personal relationships and rare cases of luck and good fortune often determine how successfully schools are able to navigate the capricious policy landscape of Beijing's education system. Unfortunately, no generalizable methods for securing stability and protection from government policies exist. In operating outside the public legal and financial framework of the education system, migrant schools must rely on their own wits to survive and flourish.

*Xiao Tian'E Elementary School, Changping District*

Xiao Tian'E (Little Swan) Elementary School in Changping District occupies a legal and political space one step down from Blue Skies Elementary School. Little Swan is run by Principal Yan, a crusty and forthright man well respected by his colleagues. Like Dandelion Middle School though to a lesser degree, Little Swan has achieved local recognition and supplemented its course offerings by hosting a stream of Chinese volunteers from local universities and multinational corporations with branches in Beijing, such as Goldman Sachs. However, Little Swan receives no support from the local government outside of safety inspections, and its facilities remain dustier, smaller, and more run-down than Dandelion's. All my interviews were done in the outside courtyard because there was no spare space in the classrooms. Upon arriving at school, which was hidden away off a dirt road next to a large scientific-industrial park, my taxi driver remarked dismissively, "What a shabby looking private school!"

Unlike Blue Skies Elementary School, Little Swan Elementary School has encountered government hostility towards his school. Despite a previous attempt to do so, Principal Yan has not received official permission to run his school, and the migrant children who attend are not required to present *xueji*, though they also remain outside of the legal education system by attending an unlicensed school. As Principal Yan stated:

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<sup>23</sup> "Interview with Henry Yao." Personal interview. 24 December 2013.

“This particular school has no permit. I looked into the process and decided not to do it and to focus more on education. I’m not too sure what the details of the process is like, but it was too difficult, even from some basic investigation. It was one permit followed after by another (每证接每证)”

Little Swan received no monetary or political support from local officials. Moreover, because of his school’s unlicensed status, Principal Yan was wary of discussing his school’s legal status and the *xueji* status of his students. Unlicensed schools are technically illegal, and remaining open requires sensitivity and prudence when dealing with local officials. Principal Yan’s response to my questions about his students’ *xueji* status and how the school had dealt with this problem is recorded below:

“There are some things that just shouldn’t be discussed. There are no permits needed to attend this school, and there are very few other schools nearby. I don’t pay attention to the others [other migrant schools]. The government has never bothered me; the government doesn’t really care about my school. I don’t have an explanation for why. Perhaps it’s because we both have shared interests, which is educating these kids...I won’t participate in this report<sup>24</sup> because it has too much policy aspects, and I just don’t talk about policy. We do what we can do. Other than teaching, we don’t do anything else.”

His evasive nature and obvious discomfort with talking about politics in relation to his migrant school were striking; no other principal I encountered vehemently refused to discuss their political situation. Despite further questioning, the principal did not yield more information about his school’s situation and why he was hesitant to broach the subject. Such denial and feigned ignorance of local politics may be a survival strategy. By intentionally disengaging in politics and emphasizing the “shared interests” both migrant schools and the local government have in providing a good education for migrant children, migrant school principals like Principal Yan may be able to avoid controversy and keep their schools open.

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<sup>24</sup> I had arranged a school visit at Little Swan with the stated intent of researching my own thesis and gathering information for an additional research report that Xingongmin Jihua (New Citizens’ Project) was writing at the time on migrant education in China. The report which Principal Yan refers to is the New Citizens’ Project report, which you can download here in Mandarin: <http://pan.baidu.com/s/1pJ4Ynof> I have made this comment before, but omit “you”, and just say, can be downloaded here in Mandarin.

Such an approach and distrustful attitude is a stark contrast with the open and welcoming attitude of migrant schools like Blue Skies and Dandelion Middle School. The latter two continue to actively court government bodies and in turn receive monetary and political support from officials who have secured schools tangible benefits (new furniture, basketball hoops) to intangible benefits (political protection).

*Tongxin Elementary School, Chaoyang District*

Tongxin (“With One Heart”) Elementary School in Picun (“Skin Village”) is a rare example of perseverance in the midst of the increasingly common occurrence of school closures. Whereas Little Swan Elementary School has kept its head down and avoided attracting the public eye for its educational activities, Tongxin is notable for its ability to marshal social media and social interest groups to maintain school operations.

Like Little Swan, Tongxin does not have a government education license to operate and its students thus do not need to receive, nor can they receive, a *xueji* in the Beijing public school system. The school sits in the middle of the well-established migrant settlement of Picun, which houses many of the workers who work in the nearby furniture manufacturers and carpentry warehouses. Picun also happens to be the headquarters for the New Workers’ Art Troupe (hereby ‘the Troupe’), a nonprofit and social enterprise founded and run by a rock band of the same moniker (新工人艺术团). The Troupe founded and help run the Tongxin Elementary School, as well as provide music and theater lessons and performance opportunities for Picun migrant workers and students. The Troupe has been able to create a platform for migrant workers in the arts and in advocating for great labor rights. Uniquely, Tongxin Elementary School is thus not only an educational venture but instead is a rare example of civil society formation through community organizing.

After seven years of operation, Tongxin was told in June 2011 by the local authorities of Jinzhan Township (where Tongxin is located) that the school would have to be closed. The notice cited safety violations, noting that the school had not secured the proper licenses to operate, a

common reason local governments use in closures of migrant schools. Tongxin's experienced mirrored what other migrant school administrators told me. As Principal Tian of the Future Bilingual School narrated:

“Beijing treats these schools [migrant schools] with a very defeatist, accepting policy. They tolerate their presence and let them exist because they recognize people need to go to school and will examine [migrant schools] on basic codes of safety, health, education, but will give no financial assistance. The schools also would not pass the permit process... Before it was easy to establish a private school, especially in the 1990s. From 2000-2004 they would let you [start a private school]. Now people are not allowed to start a new one. Only those remaining are tolerated but are being squeezed out. Other schools in our area have been closed.”

Two months later, bulldozers moved in and cut the water lines in front of the school, triggering angry reactions from parents. Over the course of the next few weeks, petitions were signed by hundreds of protesting parents and were shared by members of the Beijing artists and music communities. News coverage of the school abounded in Chinese and English-language media. Water access was quickly restored. After negotiations with Jinzhan officials, officials agreed to let the school remain open, and Tongxin opened just in time for that fall semester. Three other schools in Jinzhan in township were not able to muster the kind of resistance that Jinzhan was able to and were closed in summer of 2011.<sup>25</sup>

Unlike Dandelion and Blue Skies, Tongxin has regularly confronted hostility from local officials and has been unable to receive an educational license despite multiple attempts. Yet rather than keep a low profile to detract political attention, Tongxin's rock musician founders directly engaged the public eye to keep their school open. Tongxin's novel position as an emblem of not only education equality but also of labor rights and the promotion of an alternative arts scene allowed it to draw on diverse interest groups to lobby on its behalf. In Tongxin's case, it was not the proof of educational excellence or the shared goal of migrant education that ameliorated relationships between the school and local township officials, but rather the threat that Tongxin had become too publicly visible to be shut down.

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<sup>25</sup> "Interview with Xu Duo." Personal interview. 31 December 2013.



## Demolition, Relocation, and Urbanization

Although not cited explicitly by migrant school principals, the constant threat of demolition and relocation (“拆迁”) in the context of urbanization emerged as a significant challenge. Local governments, incentivized by the profits gained by appropriating rural land and selling to real estate developers at a much higher price, have been developing rural and old areas rapidly, often marking old properties destined for bulldozing with a large, red “拆” (demolish) character. A combination of economic incentives, policy goals, and a political system that still relies on centrally planned policy has fueled the widespread demolition of entire villages to make way for urban skyscrapers and high rises.<sup>26</sup> Former residents are relocated to new, urban apartments or left to wait for new complexes to be built.

Migrant schools have long been a target for urbanization and demolition campaigns. They serve as physical reminders of the Chinese government’s failure to comply with their own constitutional guarantee of free “compulsory education.” Local residents often complain that migrant schools provide shoddy education, are unsafe, and attract more migrants. Moreover, migrant schools occupy valuable real estate within Beijing and thus have been pushed farther and farther out to the edges of suburban Beijing. The majority of active migrant schools in Beijing today are outside of the Fifth Ring Road, which marks the edge of urban Beijing.

No official, written out policy exists regarding demolition of migrant villages and schools and no authoritative history of migrant settlement demolition exists. Rather, according to the interviews gathered for this study, officials seem to act in a policy black box, with no discernible

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<sup>26</sup> For more information, please read:

Miller (2012) *China's Urban Billion: The Story behind the Biggest Migration in Human History*. London: Zed, 2012. Print.

Silk, Richard. "Chinese Push for Urban Growth Carries Social Costs." *The Wall Street Journal*. N.p., 30 Oct. 2013. Web. <<http://online.wsj.com/news/articles/SB1000142405270230384310457916742223721620>>. ditto.

Johnson, Ian. "Picking Death Over Eviction." *The New York Times*. N.p., 8 Sept. 2013. Web. <[http://www.nytimes.com/2013/09/09/world/asia/as-chinese-farmers-fight-for-homes-suicide-is-ultimate-protest.html?pagewanted=all&\\_r=0](http://www.nytimes.com/2013/09/09/world/asia/as-chinese-farmers-fight-for-homes-suicide-is-ultimate-protest.html?pagewanted=all&_r=0)>.

patterns or trends. Each of the migrant school principals I spoke to expressed a lack of knowledge about demolition and an acceptance of the ubiquitous uncertainty they all faced.

For example, Chaoyang Migrant School has managed to stay open in their current location since 2005, even while neighboring migrant schools have been closed. When asked about how he had stayed open while his peers had been closed down, the principal shrugged his shoulders: “There have been lots of schools demolished in the last few years. I don’t know why this one has survived. It’s not clear to me.”<sup>27</sup>

Yet a common form of resistance to the seemingly arbitrary spate of migrant school closures also emerged in interviews with migrant school administrators and teachers. By cultivating relationships with government officials and leveraging media publicity, select migrant schools have successfully warded off closure attempts. As Zhang Donghui, a professor at Beijing’s Renmin University, observed, “Sometimes if the school has connections with officials or someone famous, they are supported or get donations from the. The school gets a reputation from the publicity and it can survive because the government would feel bad if they shut it down.”<sup>28</sup> Dandelion Middle School and Tongxin Middle School are notable examples of this strategy among the school sample in this thesis. However, the scarcity of these occurrences suggests that these success stories are the exception and not the norm.

### **No Longer A Hot Topic**

Despite the challenges they face, migrant schools no longer command the media and academic attention they once did. Migrant education - and the issue of migrant workers as a whole - continues to operate at the subaltern level on a massive scale; nearly 1 in 2 students in Beijing is a migrant student. Yet many academics and policymakers regard migrant education as a social problem that has been dealt with effectively or will soon disappear of its own accord.

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<sup>27</sup> "Interview with Principal." Personal interview. 4 June 2014.

<sup>28</sup> "Interview with Zhang Donghui." Personal interview. 4 June 2014.

Professor Zhang Donghui has done research on public and private schools in China in the past and has more recently focused her research on migrant education experiences in Beijing. When I talked with her, she had just finished a one yearlong observational study of a migrant school. She described her experience researching migrant children:

“The topic of migrant education has been around for a while. When migrant children couldn’t get into any public schools, there was a lot of debate about the topic. The general consensus now is that the government has done what it could, which is to allow them to attend public school [under certain procedures]. In 2003, there was a policy allowing migrant children in public schools with proper paperwork. The policy was not really implemented until 2006 because the schools could still charge school fees, which were banned in 2006.<sup>29</sup> Now they have begun the “five certificate” policy. The topic is no longer ‘hot’” (“热, 红”).<sup>30</sup>

This, in combination with efforts among Beijing’s peer cities around the country, has diminished the public perception that migrant education is a pressing social issue in need of immediate attention.

It is unclear going forward what attention the question of migrant education will garner in the Chinese government. Beijing’s population continues to grow. At the end of 2013, as many as 38% of those living in Beijing did not have Beijing urban *hukou* but had registered with the Beijing government (“Beijing’s Population Exceeds 21 million”). Another estimated 10 million workers remain unregistered but reside in the larger Beijing metropolitan area (Crothall 2014). Thus, the immense social cost of urban exclusion will not disappear of its own accord but rather, will appear in many guises in the upcoming decade irrespective of how Beijing decides to approach migrant education.

For the most part, migrant education educators and parents are ambivalent about their prospects. Rather than react with anger or sadness to the prospect of losing students to the “five

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<sup>29</sup> See introduction for more information on these reforms.

<sup>30</sup> "Interview with Zhang Donghui." Personal interview. 5 June 2014.

certificate” policy, the threat of closure, or worse, sudden demolition, the administrators and teachers had learned a weary resignation to take things “step by step,” or, “a step is a step.” (走一步就算一步”) Many had previously taught at schools that no longer existed due to demolition. Principal Tian, of the Bai Miao Middle School exemplified this fatalist acceptance of precariousness: “What are you going to do? It’s hard to predict whether my own school will survive. It’s probably good for the next five years at least. If the government demolishes it, I don’t know when they will tell you in advance anyways.”<sup>31 32</sup>

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<sup>31</sup> "Interview with Principal Tian." Personal interview. 4 June 2014.

<sup>32</sup> While interviewing the principals of several migrant schools, I was taken aback at the unexpected variation in how they perceived the operations of their respective schools and the state of migrant education. On one hand were the principals who operated their schools at great personal expense and believed in the institution. On the other hand were the principals who felt that migrant education was a mediocre and temporary solution to the *hukou* problem. In their eyes, due to safety, health, and teacher regulations which prevented them from receiving an official permit to operate and the common dearth of financial and political resources, migrant schools were low in quality and should not persist as a longterm bandaid for migrant students in search of an education. The remarks of the principal at Hong Qi Elementary School are indicative of the latter view:

“This issue will pass. You don’t need to study this. In big cities, [migrant education] won’t exist anymore. It’s not a thing that will stay. Migrants don’t want to go to cities, to come here, where the educational quality is this bad. These schools shouldn’t exist. Students should not go to migrant schools but should go to better schools like public schools. I predict that the government will continue to pay more attention to migrant schools and cities and cities will provide more investment and resources into this topic. Our school is very bad, and we hope [the students] will go to better schools. Now, there are not that many migrant schools, but that is a good thing. If they all go to these schools, where will they end up in life?”

The principal at The One Hundred Years (百年) Vocational School (BNVS) in Beijing shared similar views with the principal of Hong Qi:

“I don’t think migrant education is a problem anymore; rather, it is just a transition problem as China transitions to a more modern society. Since 2008, [migrant education] hasn’t been in the news as much, and and there hasn’t been any real new news on migrant education, because it’s not a problem anymore. The government should raze the migrant schools because the government should be taking responsibility for education. Anyways, migrants can go to a public school for free now. The only way I see a problem is if they would not go if the school was too far and there was no bus to take them.”<sup>15</sup>

These viewpoints reflect an ongoing debate in the literature and Chinese policymaking circles about how to approach the topic of education for migrant students. Should they continue to close them down in the name of safety and upholding educational standards, or should cities legalize migrant schools and improve them? Relatedly, will such methods stabilize or further increase the numbers of migrant workers who move to Beijing? It was quite shocking to hear the principal of a migrant school himself baldly state that “these schools shouldn’t exist.”

This theme of demystifying the seemingly altruistic, do-good reputation that migrant schools emerged in the course of my research. Migrant schools are portrayed in English and sympathetic Chinese media (when they are featured at all) as victims of an insensitive and heavy-handed Chinese government. Migrant schools attract many Western and Chinese volunteers who are drawn by their social entrepreneurial quality. Migrants themselves are shown as helpless and uniformly destitute. Moreover, no migrant school is an altruistic social enterprise, but they are instead governed by a matrix of interests and incentives ranging from the economic to the personal. Still, the problem remains: tens of thousands of migrant students in Beijing have been left outside the public education system. What is the future of migrant education in China, and given the local effects of the “Five Certificate Policy” in Beijing, what can China do to address this national problem?

## Chapter 4: The Five Certificate Policy

### Chapter Summary

This chapter introduces the Five Certificate Policy and describes the system's requirements. I reveal that the Policy is heterogeneously and inconsistently implemented within Beijing, mirroring the similarly heterogeneous attitudes local government officials have towards migrant schools. Using a mixture of visual data and qualitative data from interviews with migrant parents and migrant school administrators, I assess the intentional and unintentional consequences of the Five Certificate Policy on the migrant education system and its current challenges in Beijing.

### The “Five Certificate” System and the Xueji policy

In 2013, in an effort to standardize the school enrollment and permit (学籍) process between China's many provinces and cities and improve educational management, the Chinese government created an electronic educational *xueji* (学籍) system (“Migrant Schools Appeal on Beijing”). This policy change was intended to create a universal system for registering all students of compulsory education age and would be updated annually so as to provide a census for more efficiently allocating educational resources (“Beijing Migrant Schools Cannot Obtain School Permits”). The electronic system is called “一人一生一号” (“one person, one life, one number”) but contrary to its title, the system has been reinterpreted in Beijing to effectively shut out students who wish to attend school in cities and provinces other than where their *hukou* is registered. Because the *hukou* still serves as the basic unit of Chinese documentation and certification, students are encouraged to apply for a *xueji* number linked to a local school where they have *hukou*.

For migrant students who do not have local, urban *hukou*, completing a complex set of five certificates is necessary to receive a Beijing *xueji* school enrollment number and attend a public school. This set of five certificates was mandated by a September 2013 Beijing policy called the Five Certificate Policy. One migrant school principal estimated that to obtain the five

certificates, one needed to meet an additional 17 requirements.<sup>33</sup> No other Chinese city had requirements similar to Beijing's Five Certificate Policy in the course of this research. Unfortunately, the Five Certificate System is reflective of the inefficiency of Chinese bureaucracy. On the whole, China's government remains overwhelmingly paperwork-driven, and Chinese citizens must obtain an average of 103 crucial pieces of official documentation in their lifetime (Wee 2014). The five certificates migrant students must obtain to enter a public school are listed in Table 5 below.

**Table 5: Five Certificate Requirements**

| Certificate Name            | How to obtain the permit   |
|-----------------------------|--|
| Proof of Housing            | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. The migrant must present their housing ownership certificates or purchase contract and a copy of the original housing construction sector registered (if they own property).</li> <li>2. If they rent, the migrant must present proof rental housing, a standardized and effective house has a lease contract, the original owner real estate license, their ID card and a copy of the property owner's ID.</li> <li>3. Those living in public housing rental units should provide proof of housing authority approval. Renting an office space or a basement do not count.</li> </ol> |
| Proof of Employment (务工就业证) | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. The migrant should provide original labor contract and a copy and their employment status with employer may be audited.</li> <li>2. The migrant must provide the original business permit where they are working and a copy.</li> <li>3. If they have a legal representative, the applicant's legal representative should provide an original and copy of firm's legal permit.</li> <li>4. If they are a shareholder, they must provide their or their partners' industrial or commercial permits and records.</li> </ol>  |

<sup>33</sup> "Interview with Principal Liu." Personal interview. 22 May 2014.

| Certificate Name                                      | How to obtain the permit  |
|---|---|
| Family hukou (全家户口簿)                                  | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. The ages of children and adolescents in the hukou booklet and birth certificate booklet on age should be consistent.</li> <li>2. If the child is over age and not in school, they should go to their local subdistrict office to prove their area of domicile or township people's government or county government department of education, and explain the reasons for failure to admission to a school.</li> <li>3. When at the office, provide the "non-city residence-age children Fact Sheet," while providing relevant evidence, such as hospital records or kindergarten proof.</li> <li>4. Children should provide proof of domicile issued by the health department or social compensation fee proof.</li> </ol> |
| Temporary living permit in Beijing (在京暂住证)            | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Both parents must hold temporary residence issued by the local police station and the temporary residence permit.</li> <li>2. The temporary residence permit in Beijing and the actual residence address and proof of residence must be consistent.</li> <li>3. A temporary residence permit information must be printed; any altered renders it invalid.</li> </ol>  |
| Hukou in the absence of guardianship (户籍所在地没有监护条件的证明) | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1, residing street, township government issued proof of the original (with official seal).</li> <li>2, this proves the use of standardized text printed by our region.</li> <li>3, parents' names, the names and other information-age children and booklet consistent. "</li> </ol>   |

As this table shows, there are many individual pieces of paperwork a migrant worker must compile to apply for each of the Five Certificates. For example, just to receive the first Proof of Housing certificate, a migrant worker must qualify for five supporting pieces of paperwork.

Table 6 records the eight migrant schools I visited and their experience with the electronic *xueji* system instituted winter 2013-2014. Overwhelmingly, the vast majority of the schools I visited reported having severe problems coping with the new electronic *xueji* system and virtually none had students who had obtained a *xueji* in the national system, either in their home province or in Beijing.

**Table 6: School License and Xueji status by School**

| School   | Licensed? | Students with Xueji     | Incoming Students with Xueji |
|--|-----------|-------------------------|------------------------------|
| Hong Qi Elementary School                          | No        | None                    | None                         |
| Bai Miao Experimental Elementary and Middle School | No        | Unclear                 | None                         |
| Future Bilingual Elementary School                 | No        | A handful; only “a few” | None                         |
| Lan Tian (Blue Sky) Elementary School              | Yes       | 160                     | Unclear                      |
| Dandelion Middle School                            | Yes       | Unclear                 | Unclear                      |
| Xiao Tian'E Elementary School                      | No        | Refused to answer       | Refused to answer            |
| Haidian School                                     | No        | None                    | None                         |
| Tongxin Elementary School                          | No        | None                    | None                         |

As can be seen in the table, none of the schools had their circumstances regarding *xueji* for the upcoming 2014-2015 school year sorted out or refused to answer.

Regardless of the underlying motivations for such a change, 2013-2014 marked a turning point in the development of migrant education in Beijing. The events of the last year have further destabilized the informal institutions of migrant education, leading one longstanding migrant schoolteacher to dourly conclude, “this is the most chaotic (“亂”) year so far.”<sup>34</sup>

### **Heterogeneity in Policy Implementation**

During research in Beijing from December 2013 - January 2014 and May 2014 - June 2014, I found a splintering in policy implementation among Beijing’s 14 districts. Although all

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<sup>34</sup> "Interview with Teacher Cao." Personal interview. 16 May 2014.



districts had policies that were overall unfavorable for migrant education, the degree to which such policies were implemented varied by district and even sometimes by local official.

A picture of “five certificate” application instructions in Daxing district.

Since Beijing has begun cracking down on migrant education, regulation towards migrant schools has splintered at the district level, so that support and openness towards migrant schools varies from district to district. Examining the Five Certificate Policy process for obtaining a school enrollment number under the new electronic *xueji* system reveals the opaqueness and heterogeneous implementation of a system that purports to introduce a measure of standardization. Moreover, because no other city other than Beijing has chosen to implement the national electronic *xueji* system as such, I surmise that Beijing has used the Five Certificate Policy as a tool to turn migrants away from Beijing and keep migrant students out of their education system.

Often, hairsplitting distinctions in paperwork requirements differentiated the districts’ interpretation of the national *xueji* system. Each “certificate” requires a corresponding set of paper trail of proof before being awarded. While the five certificates themselves remain consistent from district to district, it is these more specific items needed to obtain each certificate that experience significant variation. Below is a critical examination of the variation in the requirements of just one of the certificates, the Proof of Employment. For a detailed analysis of the remaining certificates, please see **Appendix 3**.

### *Proof of Employment*

The certificate for Proof of Employment requires the following additional paperwork:

1. The migrant should provide their original labor contract and a copy. Their employment status with their employer may be audited in the application process.
2. The migrant must provide the original business permit where they are working and a copy.

3. If they have a legal representative, the applicant's legal representative should provide the original copy and a printed copy of firm's legal permit.
4. If they are a shareholder, they must provide their or their partners' industrial or commercial permits and records.

On top of these basic requirements, each district has added its own specific requirements. In Dongcheng and Chaoyang Districts, both the migrant mother and father must each provide a separate set of all the required paperwork. Normally, only the father would need to apply for proof of employment to complete this step for qualifying for their child's *xueji*.

Other districts have stipulations about how long the migrant worker must have been working under contract. In Changping district, a migrant-heavy district, the start date on the labor contract must have begun at least six months ago at the time of application. In the spirit of Yizhuang Town, Daxing requires that migrants must have worked for at least three years in Daxing district to apply for Proof of Employment, just as they require three years residency to apply for Proof of Residency.

Some districts offer migrants an option when providing their original labor contract. In Haidian and Xicheng, migrants working for a *danwei*, or official work unit (单位) can provide a proof of employment issued by their work unit in lieu of a work contract. Dongcheng district, which houses very few migrant workers, requires the original labor contract and a copy as well as a proof of employment statement from any migrant worker employed by a *danwei*. In Xicheng and Haidian districts, migrant workers employed by a *danwei* must also provide, in addition to their labor contract or proof of employment issued by their *danwei*, an officially copy of said *danwei*'s legal code or business license with an official stamp.

Several districts also require continuous contribution to the city-wide social insurance scheme to qualify as an officially registered employee. In Xicheng, Tongzhou, Daxing, and Changping districts, migrant workers must set aside a portion of their monthly income for a

public social insurance fund (社保) and provide documentation of their contribution to receive the Proof of Employment certificate. However, as described in Chapter 1, many migrant parents



do not know that they must set aside part of their monthly income for the social insurance scheme to obtain an employment certificate and instead pocket the money with each paycheck. Moreover, the duration of contribution to a social insurance fund varies from district to district. Xicheng and Daxin only require three months of continuous contribution, Changping requires four years, and Tongzhou requires a full year of continuous contribution.

Recognizing that a good number of migrant workers are engaged in small business and informal sectors such as food vending, street side stores, repair stalls, and vegetable markets, a handful of districts require migrant employed in such professions to give proof that their street stall is officially registered. Dongcheng, Xicheng, and Haidian districts all require migrant workers that earn income from street stalls to provide the original copy and a printed copy of their stall license or permission for the market they work at authorizing their stall's presence. In reality, virtually all of these stalls and vendors are unregistered; instances of food vendors hurriedly fleeing the premises when local security officers show up and relatedly, bribing

security officers are common. In Daxing district, self-employed migrants must show proof of a business license that has been valid for at least three years measured from April 2011.

Finally, three districts require documents specific to that district. In other words, a migrant worker cannot move from district to district within Beijing, but must live and work in the same district continuously for a certain period of time to receive certificates from that district. In Fengtai district, where in 2001 officials forcibly closed down 50 migrant schools, migrants must provide need residency and employment permits specific to Fengtai. Migrants can only receive certificates from Fengtai if they have worked and rented continuously for one year in Fengtai district. Daxin has a three-year minimum for business certificates specific to Daxin. Similarly, Tongzhou requires migrants to be able to prove their employment in Tongzhou beginning in December 2013 or before. This effectively requires migrants to have worked in Tongzhou for at least a year in jobs that have paper documentation before they can apply for a Proof of Employment certificate.

### **“Stopped Up” in the Permit Process**

As the description to just one of the requirements of Five Certificate shows, Beijing’s districts have considerable influence in the regulation of migrant education in Beijing. They have some autonomy in determining who is able to enter Beijing’s public schools through the Five Certificate system. The Five Certificate requirements are complex and thus daunting.

Because the paperwork and permits are often similar for each of the Five Certificates between districts, an inability to secure one certificate often means that migrant parents will not be able to secure other certificates. This is what Zhen, the migrant mother from Bai Miao Middle School from Chapter 1, meant when she described how her attempts to register her son at a local public school had been “stopped up,” because, as she explained, “if you can’t get a temporary resident permit, then you can’t get the other permits.”<sup>35</sup>

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<sup>35</sup> "Interview with Zhen." Personal interview. 15 May 2014.

## **Exacerbating Challenges**

I argue that Beijing's Five Certificate Policy has only exacerbated the challenges that migrant schools already faced in their daily operations. Of the challenges I identified in the first part of my research, the Five Certificate Policy has magnified the problems of educational continuity and resource scarcity. On balance, the Five Certificate Policy has made it more difficult for migrants to access education in Beijing and further legitimized the exclusion of migrant students from the public education system.

### *A Lack of Continuity in Educational Pathways*

Educational continuity reflects structural inequalities within the education system that disadvantage migrant students. The *xueji* and Five Certificate Policy has only worsened the problem of educational continuity by raising an additional obstacle for accessing education in Beijing. As a result of the electronic *xueji* and Five Certificate Policies, approximately 50,000 - 70,000 migrant students attend school outside of the public educational system and are effectively shut out of the rigidly linked Chinese educational pathways.<sup>36</sup> Nearly 50,000- 70,000 migrant students have not been able to attain the Five Certificates since the policy's implementation but still remain in Beijing. These students are thus excluded from pursuing and are effectively invisible within the electronic public education system. Without a *xueji*, these students have no academic record and cannot take the national high school and college entrance examinations, thus cutting off any opportunity for higher education.

### *Legitimizing marginalization*

Most of all, the Five Certificate Policy further edifies the social, political, and now legal marginalization of migrant schools. Previous to the Five Certificate Policy, migrant schools without an educational license operated in a legal grey space; they could not give out degrees recognized by public education institutions, but for the most part, as long as they complied with health and safety codes and cultivated relationships with local officials, they were allowed to remain. Now, without being able comply with both the national *xueji* policy or the Beijing Five

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<sup>36</sup> "Interview with Wei Jiayu." Personal interview. 20 May 2014.

Certificate Policy, migrant schools are further excluded from the public education system and this exclusion legally demarcated by citywide policy.

Unable to provide an electronic *xueji* for their students, migrant schools are even more unattractive places for migrant parents to send their children. Already struggling financially and fighting to retain teachers, migrant schools thus face an additional challenge with the Five



The entrance to Dandelion Middle School in Daxing District

Certificate Policy. The future consequences of such a policy are hard to predict. Parents may elect to keep their children in their hometowns while they migrate in search of work, or they may choose not to migrate to Beijing altogether; more migrant parents might even choose to send their children to Beijing migrant schools, despite their disadvantages.

## Chapter 5: The Migrant Experience

### Chapter Summary

This chapter reflects on how the challenges faced by migrant schools and exacerbated by the Five Certificate and *xueji* policies have affected the individual experience of migrants in Beijing and what these narratives can tell us about the policies' intentions.

### Zhen's Story

Theoretically, Beijing migrant students can obtain the five certificates and receive a Beijing *xueji* school enrollment number even if they do not possess Beijing *hukou*. However, the process suffers from misinformation among migrant communities and inconsistent implementation at the ground level. The story of a migrant mother, Zhen, who works part time as a social worker at a women's rural organization in the Baimiao (白描) village in Beijing is a good example of the uncertainty migrants face in securing education for their children.

“My son went to Bai Miao Experimental School [the nearby migrant school] without problems, with no expectations for what would happen after graduation, academically. School fees are 1500 RMB a semester, with additional fees for food and material expenses. This is cheap, as far as school fees go. My son started there at age 5, a year ago. He went to preschool in Hubei province [where Zhen and her husband are from]. However, teacher mobility was high there, and the children (students) thought it wasn't well managed (“乱”). I tried to find another school and went to a public school to register, but the line was incredibly long, and I waited all afternoon, only to be told that I didn't have the right paperwork and permits. Apparently I needed to find a housing contact and work contract to register to the school.

However, I kept trying, though I wouldn't go to other [public] schools to try because once you register your name [at one school] you cannot register at the other schools. The impression I got was that the schools are just leading you on.

Finally, I gave up hope (“每希望了”) and sent him home again. The principal [at the Beijing public school] straight out told me to send the son home because the nearby private (“民办”) school<sup>37</sup> already had too many people.

It was here that my permits were all stopped up, because if you can't get a temporary resident permit, then you can't get the other permits. And you have to keep going back every so often, the office is far from where we live, and we don't enough time with our jobs.

Another problem is that I don't know if I can get my son's grades transferred from his Hubei school back to Beijing schools, or vice versa. I also doesn't know whether to register now [for a school enrollment number (学籍)], because it's the middle of the semester, so I can't enroll [in a Beijing school], but perhaps if I wait the Hubei school will fill up too. I don't have any connections or know any people in the school, so there is no possibility of entering a public school.”<sup>38</sup>

Several themes emerge in the story of Zhen's attempts to register her young son in a Beijing school. The first is the extraordinarily extensive efforts she underwent in her attempts, without success, to register her son for school. The “five certificates” that migrants can, in theory, apply for to obtain a Beijing school enrollment number require a host of supporting documents and a deep investment of time and perseverance. Second, most migrants lack complete information about the certificate requirements and annual policy changes; Zhen, for example, waited all day in line before being told didn't have the correct documents, leading her to conclude pessimistically that Beijing school officials were only “leading [her] on.” Other items needed for acquiring the correct documentation are beyond the average migrant worker's scope of knowledge. For example, as an employee at Dandelion Middle School in Beijing's southern Daxing district told me: “To show proof of three years resident for attending college or high school, you can pay monthly into a public social insurance scheme, but parents often won't do that to save the money instead. They don't know that their *danwei* [their work unit] will give them 100 RMB back and save the other RMB they would have put into social security. Our

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<sup>37</sup> “Private” or “民办” schools can refer to more upscale schools catering towards wealthy migrants or urban residents, but it also is the name given to quasi-illegal migrant schools. It was implied in Zhen's story that the private school she was referred to by the Beijing principal was a migrant school.

<sup>38</sup> "Interview with Zhen." Personal interview. 15 May 2014.



school has been encouraging [the parents] to do otherwise.”<sup>39</sup> Of course, having a *danwei* and having access to social security schemes are applicable only to those with jobs in the formal sector, whereas the majority of migrant workers in Beijing work in the informal sector (Démurger 2009).

Moreover, Zhen’s story also touches upon the provincial ambiguities and inconsistencies in implementing the policy. She is unsure about whether to apply for school enrollment in her native Hubei province because doing so would automatically exclude her from using her son’s school enrollment number in Beijing. Yet despite having her *hukou* in Hubei province, it was not yet school enrollment time in May when I interviewed Zhen, and she was not sure whether she could succeed in putting her son in school in Hubei either. Finally, Zhen hints that those with material or personal connections and resources can talk their way or bribe their way into the system. Because she doesn’t “have any connections or know any people in the school...there is no possibility of entering a public school.” The rules are only strictly applied to those who have nothing to give.

Zhen’s precariousness is consistent with other claims I heard about the unevenness of the electronic *xueji* implementation. Some local officials claim that a child who has not been living and going to school in their native location for the last few years cannot apply for a *xueji* because they have spent too much time away. Principal Tian of the Future Bilingual Elementary School described several students of hers who had gone back to their home provinces to obtain a *xueji* and then attempt to have it transferred to Beijing; the students were denied their *xueji* because they had been living outside of their home province since the first grade.<sup>40</sup> Teacher Li, an employee and migrant parent from Shandong province who had enrolled her daughter in the Future Bilingual Elementary School, ran into the same problem. She described her dilemma to me in a state of great agitation while wringing her hands:

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<sup>39</sup> "Interview with Wang Yiyan." Personal interview. 24 December 2013.

<sup>40</sup> "Interview with Principal Tian." Personal interview. 4 June 2014.

“Shandong *xueji* is still very difficult to get, especially when I’m all the way in Beijing. The problem is I can only get a first grade *xueji* for my daughter, but she is already in the third grade. So [if we went back to Shandong] she would be repeating all those years. Her dad is home [in Shandong] right now, and so he will ask in person soon, but the whole system is very unclear. It is a great source of stress for me.”<sup>41</sup>

This particular teacher had not even tried applying for a Beijing *xueji*, deeming it impossible from the very start. Teacher Li’s unresolved concerns reflect the lack of clarity about the *xueji* system and the inefficiency of such a massive national bureaucracy. In Teacher Li’s case, not enough third grade level spots were open in her hometown, and so the best she could receive was a first grade level *xueji* for her daughter in Shandong. In the name of improving management efficiency and resource allocation in China’s vast public education system, the *xueji* system has excluded students from the system itself.

Wei Jiayu, a researcher with the Beijing nongovernmental organization New Citizens’ Project told me, “they’re not supposed to, but some local officials are just stupid. They say you can’t apply for a local school enrollment number even if you have local *hukou*, but they haven’t read the actual policy notices (“政策通知”). They’re wrong.” Again, Wei Jiayu’s statements reflect the fact that implementation is more muddled and heterogeneous than the original intent of the electronic standardization of the policy. The result is that migrant school administrators are unclear about their next steps but must continue enrolling students for the next year to remain financially afloat.

“We’re not even clear what is going on,” said Principal Tian of the Hong Qi Elementary School. “With the *xueji*, it is a six permit system. We [Hong Qi Elementary School] do not have a permit meaning that no students can get *xueji*.<sup>42</sup> It’s not clear why they just began becoming this strict, but what will happen to the kids?”<sup>43</sup>

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<sup>41</sup> "Interview with Teacher Li." Personal interview. 4 June 2014.

<sup>42</sup> *Xueji*, or school enrollment numbers, are only applicable if you are attending a licensed, public school.

<sup>43</sup> "Interview with Principal Tian." Personal interview. 4 June 2014.

Understanding the electronic school enrollment *xueji* system and ensuring that all migrant students are included in some way in school records has been and will continue to be a top source of instability and stress for migrant students. Indeed, Lan Tian Elementary School hired a full time employee to help parents navigate the online *xueji* system in Beijing and back in their hometowns so as to ensure each student had a school to attend from year to year. Longterm planning is nearly impossible given the ambiguity surrounding the electronic system, and migrant children are haphazardly shuttled back and forth between where their parents work and their hometown, depending on the education policies are for that year. For migrant school administrators and teachers, for whom uncertainty about the future hinders much of their efforts to spearhead longterm plans, the electronic *xueji* system has significantly added to the ambiguity they navigate each day.

Principal Zhang of Bai Miao Experimental Elementary and Middle School had a more cynical take on the national standardization of the school enrollment number. Rather than trying to more uniformly assess and administer the compulsory education system, he surmised that “the policy’s purpose is to control the migrant population. Beijing has a big part in controlling migrant school policy and migrant numbers.”<sup>44</sup> The vast majority of the students currently attending his school do not have a *xueji* school enrollment number, and none of the students who began school last fall were successful in obtaining a *xueji*.

Reactions seem mixed among the migrant school administrators and migrant parents I talked to. Many were understandably and predictably upset, angered, and worried over the inconsistencies in the system. Principal Tian of the Future Bilingual Elementary School described the high barriers of entry as “a kind discrimination against outsiders of Beijing, like the kind of discrimination they have against outsiders in the U.S. and China. How can they treat us this way? These are just children.” She added, “the *xueji* issue is one of our biggest problems.”<sup>45</sup>

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<sup>44</sup> "Interview with Principal Zhang." Personal interview. 4 June 2014.

<sup>45</sup> Interview with Principal Tian." Personal interview. 26 May 2014.

Under the current standardized *xueji* system, parents can send their children back to their hometown to register for a *xueji* number and attend school in their hometown. However, many parents understandably fear that their children will join the ranks of China's millions of "left behind children." These children are left to live in rural villages with grandparents or older relatives while their parents migrate for work, and they suffer high academic drop-out rates and rates of mental illness, injury, and crime (Crothall 2009).

Perhaps because of the unattractiveness of sending their elementary-age children back to workers' hometowns, I could find no indication that more migrant parents were opting to send their children back home rather than have them continue without *xueji* and official recognition at unlicensed migrant schools in Beijing. Teacher Cao, a Haidian migrant teacher, blamed not only the lack of transparency with the *xueji* system, but also the migrant parents themselves for not trying harder and asking better questions: "The problem is how many parents know [all of the information?] Most don't. Not even half know what is going on. They never ask about the whole system, only what is going on right in front of them."<sup>46</sup> During an encounter with two parents at Chaoyang Migrant School, I witnessed their inquiries about open spots for the coming fall semester. The principal listed the school fees and asks for their ID card ("身份证"), *hukou* booklet, living address, and telephone number, and very explicitly told the parents they should take into account that the school was unlicensed and that therefore, their child would not receive a *xueji*. "We know, that's fine," the parents replied simply, before taking down the principal's contact information and leaving. Whether because they have no other options, have no knowledge about the education system, or lack a stake in their children's education, parents continue to enroll their children in migrant schools.

### **A Question of Scarcity or of Politics**

Why has Beijing decided to use the *xueji* system to exclude migrants from the public education system? According to Linxiu Zhang, the director of Stanford University's Rural

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<sup>46</sup> Interview with Teacher Cao." Personal interview. 16 May 2014.

Education Action Project (REAP)<sup>47</sup> center based at Renmin University, the deciding factor is one of scarcity rather than politics. She described the efforts of several other provinces and cities, notably Shanghai, in improving the educational services offered to migrants:

“There is a lot of heterogeneity in how governments handle migrant education. Beijing is not the slowest nor is the worst, but the process is often very slow. I guess it has a lot to do with the size of the migrant community in Beijing. It’s a mega city with a lot of people outside. So far there are some places where there are a lot of public school that have abundant resources. The factories that manufacture steel relocated there from Beijing, so public schools have a lot of vacancies and accept lots of migrant children.

In Shanghai, most of them have been accommodated in public school though segmented reform. Sometimes, migrant children will enter the [public] schools however, and the urban children retreat and go to other places. However, in Jiangsu Province, especially in [the city of] Suzhou, most migrant schools are still privately run. Again, there is a lot of heterogeneity.

In [the city of] Hangzhou [in Zhejiang province], there are some public schools but still mostly private schools open to migrant students. In some prefectures that are enrolling migrant students, there is a balance between urban and migrant and local resources are available. For example, in Fujian province, the government spend a lot of money building schools to specifically accommodate migrant children, as there is an industrial shift towards moving inland, so there are more resources available on the coastal areas now.”<sup>48</sup>

Professor Zhang of Renmin University highlights some of the policy reforms<sup>49</sup> that have mollified critics of migrant education and turned the spotlight away from the topic. However, as

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<sup>47</sup> REAP is a research institute headquartered at both Stanford University and Renmin University and is dedicated to implementing research that has a measurable impact. They focus on topics of rural development, child nutrition and education, and the rural-urban divide.

<sup>48</sup> The global recession of 2008-2009 hurt China’s economy, which is heavily dependent on export-driven growth. Factories who had their orders cancelled by overseas companies laid off millions of workers, who returned to their home villages in the central and west of China. Moreover, stronger union activity and labor activism, more effective labor laws, have increased the cost of labor on China’s coastal cities, causing several large corporations to build factories inland. For more information on this migratory and manufacturing pattern, see “The End of Cheap China

<sup>49</sup> The problem of migrant education has attracted more public attention and official resources since the 2008 Beijing Olympics. First tier cities with large migrant populations have taken a number of reform measures, with Shanghai emerging as a leader with the scope and ambition of its initiatives. How effective and penetrating Shanghai’s reforms have been is questionable and in need of more research.

Linxiu Zhang's remarks demonstrate, that reform is often haphazard and - to use her term - heterogeneous. It suggests that reforms are driven not by political opinion or will, but are pushed forward (and alternately held back) by the availability of resources. In provinces that have experienced the declines in migrant inflows, educational resources have been freed up and there are more spots available in public schools for students without local *hukou*.

What is absent in the discussions I had were mentions of social, economic, and political discrimination against migrants. Professor Zhang was told by a high level Beijing district official that the city "had enough resources to put every migrant child in school, but they were afraid [that by doing so], the city would attract even more migrants." Such off-the-record comments imply reasons outside of resource scarcity are responsible for the under-provision of education for migrant children in Beijing.

## Chapter 6: Conclusions

Given the consequences of the Five Certificate policy in Beijing, how might we begin to address the shortcomings and challenges of migrant education in Beijing? Who should address these issues: the Beijing government, the central government, or educators? How will migrant education continue to change in the midst of ongoing urbanization efforts and talk of *hukou* reform? This chapter presents policy recommendations and predictions based on the observations presented in previous chapters. As China urbanizes, small and mid-size cities have begun liberalize their *hukou* regulations. Consequently, the Chinese government should make a concerted effort to improve migrant education resources and policies in urbanizing cities.

### The Precarity of Migrant Schools

Because of significant variation in the Five Certificate Policy between Beijing's districts, I also discovered an additional element of heterogeneity within districts between migrant schools and their local officials. In my journeys to the far reaches of Beijing's suburbs, I encountered a wide spectrum of self-described relationships migrant school principals had with their local, district officials. On one end of the spectrum were the schools that had close, working relationships with officials who were sympathetic and supportive of the services migrant schools provided in the absence of public institutions. On the other end were schools that had been previously demolished and relocated and remained fearful of talking to outsiders about their local political circumstances.

Precarity emerged as a dominant theme in the course of my research. Precarity as a term is increasingly used to critique capitalism in a globalizing world economy and way corporations shift risk and instability onto their workers. The rise of the "temp worker" and globally increasing numbers of migrant workers has led academics to call this group of replaceable workers and their uncertain, day-to-day existence "the precariat" (Standing 2011) Other academics have extended the scope of the term "precarity" to describe a general social zeitgeist

of uncertainty and cynicism with economic causes (Allison 2013). In general, “precarity” refers to a mode of existence that is predicated on the disposability of the individual and long-term insecurity, even while the parties in question productively contribute to society.

I argue that migrant schools are subject to the precarity that affects China’s migrant workers. The district-level variation in policy implementation underscores the precarity of migrant education and the constant negotiation and guessing that comes with migrant education. At some schools, principals operated in a vacuum of knowledge and a constant state of precarity; they had no predictive power about the prospects for the next year. Other schools had won the support of local officials and were receiving direct financial support from district governments to continue operating. This lack of information and the political opaqueness of Beijing policy towards migrant schools render the migrant experience a highly unstable and fractious one, dependent on the whims of district officials and annual policy changes. Like migrants, migrant schools are marginalized politically and economically, despite their function in providing education to migrant students who fall between the cracks of the public education system. Moreover, despite the highly diverse circumstances of each school, migrant schools are viewed homogeneously as similar to one another, illegal enterprises that offer identical services. Yet as my research demonstrates, migrant schools differ widely in administration, quality, and the kinds of social services they offer the greater migrant community.

### **Resource Scarcity**

Many of the challenges I identified in migrant schools stemmed from resource scarcity: a scarcity of financial resources, political capital, and human resources. Moreover, facing constant precarity, migrant schools have not been able to make longterm investments in improving the hardware and software of their schools in order to address these challenges. Excluded from the public education system, migrant schools suffer shaky often tight finances, which directly affected the quality and scope of the curriculum offered to migrant students. Unable to pay high salaries and competitive working conditions, migrant schools also have a difficult time attracting and retaining high quality teachers. Moreover, the teachers that do stay must work with these



limited resources to become not just teachers, but a surrogate family to their migrant students. Meanwhile, heterogeneous political treatment and more recently, the inconsistent implementation of the Five Certificate Policy exacerbates these existing challenges by legally marginalizing migrant students. The Five Certificate Policy is just one of many factors that influence the implementation and quality of migrant education; addressing fundamental issues of *hukou* reform and financial inequality at the root of the challenges listed here will be necessary to truly ameliorate the migrant problem.

### **Policy Recommendations**

First, the Five Certificate Policy should be standardized and implemented uniformly across all Beijing districts. Moreover, there should be a unified and easily accessible information source for any applicants on both the web and in the form of a smartphone application. For migrants who decide that they would rather apply for their children's *xueji* in their home provinces, Beijing should also establish an office that will help with the inter-provincial paperwork and communication required to apply from afar.

To truly address the problem of scarcity within migrant schools, the Beijing school system should look to the Shanghai model of gradually incorporating migrant schools into the public education system (see the section "Efforts at Reform" in Chapter 1 for more information). Like Shanghai, Beijing should gradually phase into its public education system the best performing migrant schools and open up new schools for migrant students to address the present 50,000 - 70,000 migrant students who fall outside of the *xueji* system. By incorporating the best quality migrant schools into the public system, Beijing would be able to better regulate migrant education and provide a more stable environment for their operation. Challenges related to resource scarcity - safety, teacher quality and retention, financial limitations - would be slowly ameliorated with this gradual absorption of select migrant schools.

However, the problem of migrant education is due to structural inequalities which will take concerted reform efforts which target the roots of such inequalities. In the long term, the

central Chinese government should take advantage of the opportunities and flexibilities being presently created by the ongoing process of urbanization to better educational systems and opportunities among its inland and less developed cities. Unless China develops a more well-distributed landscape of educational and employment opportunity around the country - rather than being concentrated among the big, east coast cities - then migrant issues will continue to be social challenges China faces in the coming decade.

However, I surmise that the Five Certificate Policy in particular is not, in fact, a policy designed to accommodate Beijing's large migrant population but instead a policy designed to actively discourage migrants from coming to or further residing in Beijing. Commonly, urban public schools are unwilling to take in migrant children because public education is largely funded by local government revenue (Zhao 2009). Thus, public schools are reluctant to take on migrant students because they impose extra costs, and their parents do not pay urban taxes. While other cities have had static or even decreasing school enrollment numbers, Beijing has remained inundated with incoming migrants and their children each year. The Beijing government has consequently undertaken numerous measures since the early 2000s to discourage migrants from moving to Beijing and to close existing migrant schools, and the Five Certificate Policy is an extension of such anti-migrant policies. Thus, it is unlikely that Beijing will make any significant amendments to its education policy in the fear that doing so would attract even more migrants to the city.

Yet migrant education will endure, in some shape or form, as China continues to urbanize in the next few decades. How Beijing and the rest of the country decides to address this education gap will determine how China incorporates its migrant populations into the fabric of society and immediately affect the fate of millions of migrant children.

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## **Appendix 1: Survey instruments**

### **Interview topics**

Below are issues I raised with every migrant school I visited; the remainder of our semi-structured interview I left open to spontaneous responses and follow-up questions.

1. School history and operation (fees, operational costs, curriculum, extracurricular activities)
2. Licensed status of the school
3. Demographic information about their students and community
4. Interviewees own background and experience in education
5. Relationship with local politicians, any threats of closure or support
6. School enrollment number
7. Effects of the Five Certificate Policy
8. Their biggest challenges their schools face

9.

## Migrant School form

### Part 1: School description

1、 School has \_\_\_\_\_ people, with \_\_\_ grades, with \_\_\_\_\_ classes。

School was started in \_\_\_\_\_

2、 School is \_\_\_\_\_ meters (平方米), with \_\_\_\_\_ teachers。

It's facilities can be best described as (example: former factory):

3、 Each grade has \_\_\_\_\_ classes (班). Each grade has:

4. School fees are \_\_\_\_\_ per semester. This fee includes:

Permits needed to attend this school:

Permits to attend local public school (name of school):

Number of other migrant schools nearby: \_\_\_\_\_

5. School's financial resources are from:

6、 学校学生生源 (source of students)

name of community

population

occupations:

7. Mobility of students is high/medium/low:

### Part 2: School facilities

1、 School facilities

|                  | Complete | Satisfactory | Lacking | N/A | Number |
|------------------|----------|--------------|---------|-----|--------|
| School buildings |          |              |         |     |        |
| Teacher dorms    |          |              |         |     |        |
| Student dorms    |          |              |         |     |        |

|                      |  |  |  |  |  |
|----------------------|--|--|--|--|--|
| Playground           |  |  |  |  |  |
| Multimedia equipment |  |  |  |  |  |
| Sports equipment     |  |  |  |  |  |
| Music equipment      |  |  |  |  |  |

2、 School teachers

|                         |              |               |             |                  |           |
|-------------------------|--------------|---------------|-------------|------------------|-----------|
| Education circumstances | Masters      | Undergraduate | Specialist  | HS/Middle School | Other     |
| Number                  |              |               |             |                  |           |
| Teacher Age             | 20 and under | 20-30 years   | 30-40 years | 40-50 years      | 50 and up |
| Number                  |              |               |             |                  |           |
| # years teaching        | 1            | 2-3           | 4-5         | 5+               | Other     |
| Number                  |              |               |             |                  |           |

Student to teacher ratio : teacher/student =    /   。

3、 Extra courses (music, art, recreational)

|         | Yes/no | Taught by who? | Meetings per week |
|---------|--------|----------------|-------------------|
| Music   |        |                |                   |
| Fitness |        |                |                   |
| Art     |        |                |                   |

4. Core courses:

Part 3: Contact

1. Principal : \_\_\_\_\_ Contact : \_\_\_\_\_

2、 该学校负责与社工对接的老师是 : \_\_\_\_\_,

Contact : \_\_\_\_\_

3、 Background of principal:

## Appendix 2: Interview data

Organizations, researchers, and academics interviewed

| Organization  | Description  | Person Interviewed                        |
|---|--|---|
| Rural Action Education Program (REAP)                           | REAP is a research institute between Stanford University and several Chinese universities, focused on research on child development in China.  | Linxiu Zhang, Director                    |
| Project BEAM (Bridging Educational and Mobility)                | Project BEAM is a nonprofit founded to disperse small educational grants to migrant teachers in Beijing.   | Danna Liu, site coordinator               |
|   |  | Emily He, afterschool program coordinator |
| New Workers Project (新公民计划)                                     | New Workers is a Beijing-based nongovernmental organization that runs the Xingzhi New Citizens migrant school and supports a wide range of research and programming initiatives on migrant schools.  | Wang Hui, communications coordinator      |
|   |  | Wei Jiayu, head researcher                |
| Chuanzhixing Social and Economic Research Institute(传知行社会经济研究所) | The research institute is the brainchild and singularly run operation of a company analyst who produces reports on left-behind children each year.   | Ren Xinghui, founder and director         |
| Cui Zi'en   | Cui Zi'en is well-known filmmaker and gay rights activist in Beijing. While his oeuvre is characterized by films about the homosexual community, he has also spent a significant amount of time on migrant issues, culminating in a documentary called We are the...of Communism about a large migrant school that closed in the early 2000s. He also teaches at the Beijing Film Academy. | Cui Zi'en                                 |

| Organization                                | Description  | Person Interviewed |
|---|--|--------------------|
| Rural Women's Organization (农家女)            | Rural Women's Organization (农家女) is a local social organization that provides after school programming and study spaces to local elementary school children, as well as support services to young mothers in the Bai Miao community in Changping District. |                    |
|   |  |                    |
|   |  |                    |
|   |  |                    |
| Professor Zhang, Renmin University, Beijing | Professor Zhang studies elementary education and issues of social identity formation and assimilation  |                    |

### Schools visited

| School                            | Description   | Person Interviewed  |
|-----------------------------------|---|---|
| Tongxin Elementary School (同心小学), | Tongxin Elementary School (同心小学) is an elementary school started and managed by the migrant workers' organization, New Workers Art Troupe (新工人艺术团). New Workers Art Troupe also runs a worker advocacy branch, a community arts center, several consignment shops, and a workers' history museum. The school is located outside the Fifth Ring, in Chaoyang District. | Xu Duo, musician, teacher, founder of Tongxin Elementary School |
| Dandelion Middle School (蒲公英中学)   | Dandelion Middle School (蒲公英中学) was founded in 2005 by Zheng Hong, a former Beijing professor. It is still managed by Principal Hong. Approximately 500 7-9 graders attend Dandelion, located on the southern outskirts of Beijing in Daxin district, a district known for its garment factories.   | Wang Yiyan, Graduate and alumni affairs coordinator             |
|                                   |   | Han Yu Henry, math teacher                                      |
|                                   |   | Michelle Zhang, English teacher                                 |
|                                   |   | English teacher   |
|                                   |   | Liu Kun, external relations                                     |
|                                   |   | Bochen Han, volunteer   |

|                                      |  |                            |
|--------------------------------------|--|----------------------------|
|                                      |  | Richard Cao, volunteer     |
| BN Vocational School in Beijing      | BN Vocational School (百年职校) is a vocational school funded by the China Youth Foundation and the Ford Foundation. It has nine branches all over China, including one in Beijing that provides for approximately 90 students per year. Education is focused on technical, repair, and service skills.  | Diao Wen, Principal        |
|                                      |  | May Zhang, English teacher |
| Small Swan (小天鹅小学) Elementary School | Small Swan (小天鹅小学) Elementary School was started in 2010 in Changping District and has grown to 600 students. Its principal, a former volunteer teacher at a nearby migrant school, has a background in aerospace but was tapped by the school's principal after the school was closed by local authorities.   | Principal, founder         |
| Blue Skies (蓝天凤元) Elementary School  | Blue Skies (蓝天凤元) Elementary School has approximately 1,200 students in grades 1-6. Its principal, a former Hebei public school principal and teacher at Nan Yuan public middle school for decades before retiring and starting Blue Skies in 2005 in Fengtai District. Blue Skies is one of three migrant schools in Fengtai and is the only one that receives significant local government support, making it one of the rare "gongli ming | Principal, founder         |
| Future Bilingual School (未来双语学校)     | Begun by a former school principal from Mongolia in 2004, the school is located in the Chaoyang district. The school's nearby community is overwhelmingly all migrants.  | Principal                  |
|                                      |  | Teacher                    |
|                                      |  | Teacher                    |
| Migrant school in Chaoyang district  | Founded in 2005, this school is located in northernmost Chaoyang district in Beijing. The principal requested that his identity and that of the school's remain undisclosed in any published materials.  | Principal                  |

|  |   |                          |
|--|---|--------------------------|
| Bai Miao (白庙实验学校)Experimental Elementary School                | Located in Changping district, this school is one of the few migrant schools which offers some middle school education for its students.  | Principal Zhang          |
| Beijing East Wind Love and Hope Elementary School (北京风华爱心希望小学) | Begun in Haidian by a migrant herself 17 years ago, this school is was located in the poorest migrant community by far. The principal's personal dedication to the school and the amount of after school programming was notable relative to other migrant schools. | Teacher Cao<br>Principal |



## Appendix 3: Analysis of Certificate Requirements

### Proving Residency

To receive the first “certificate,” the Proof of Residency, a migrant worker would have to provide at least the following documents:<sup>50</sup>

1. If they own property, their housing ownership certificates or purchase contract and a copy of the original housing construction sector registered.
2. If they rent (most likely), the migrant must present proof of rental housing, a “standardized and effective” (规范有效的房屋租赁合同) housing lease contract.
3. In addition as well as the original owner real estate license, the migrant must also provide the property owner’s original ID card (身份证) and a copy of the property owner’s ID card. The rental property must be up to safety code to protect the safety of children and adolescents, and the migrant must be ready to provide the “safety responsibility booklet” if asked.
4. Those living in public housing rental units should provide proof of housing authority approval. Renting an office space or a basement does not count as public housing.

Already, the migrant worker must provide at least four items of paperwork, including original copies and scanned copies of each. Moreover, the ID card (身份证), which is akin to an American Social Security card, is an extremely valuable and important all-purpose form of identification. It would be nearly impossible for a migrant worker to bring his/her landlord’s original ID card to the Public Security Bureau. Moreover, almost all migrants rent due to Beijing’s infamously high property prices (the 11th highest in the world) (Frank 2014). The poorest migrants tend to rent on the outskirts of the city in one-story brick or metal apartments for which obtaining the owner’s real estate license and safety codes is impossible because many of the dwellings have been built illegally.

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<sup>50</sup> For the original Mandarin for all districts’ five certificate requirements, please see the Appendix

On top of these items, in Dongcheng district, migrant parents must also provide the original copy and a printed copy of their mobile population registration certificate and a residence certificate issued by community committees (流动人口登记证明 and 社区居委会开具的居住证明). Given the fact that these two certificates are only required in Dongcheng district, they are most likely specific to Dongcheng district and have their own particular process for application.

Daxing District, where many migrants live, has modeled their district-wide policies after a particular town, Yizhuang, in the district. In Yizhuang Town (and now all of Daxin), migrant workers must be able to prove that they have lived in Daxin for at least three years (measured as beginning April 2011 at the time of the policy declaration) before applying for any of the five certificates. Thus, any migrant worker who moved to Beijing after April 2011 or cannot provide a paperwork trail of their official residence in Daxin will not be able to receive any of the five certificates in Daxin district.

### **Proof of Family Hukou**

The Beijing city requirements for obtaining the proof of Family hukou (全家户口簿) are below.

1. The ages of children and adolescents in the hukou booklet and birth certificate booklet on age should be consistent.
2. If the child is over age and not in school, they should go to their local subdistrict office to prove their area of domicile or township people's government or county government department of education, and explain the reasons for failure to admission to a school.
3. When at the office, provide the "non-city residence-age children Fact Sheet," while providing relevant evidence, such as hospital records or kindergarten proof.
4. Children should provide proof of domicile issued by the health department or social compensation fee proof.

Like the preceding two certificates, the certificate of family hukou also exhibits variation between Beijing's various districts. While the variations are not as significant as for Proof of

Employment or Residence, they nonetheless present additional challenges for migrants attempting to secure a xueji for their child(ren).

Dongcheng and Daxin districts require that children for whom parents are applying for a xueji must be within a certain age, defined as those born between September 1, 2007 and August 31, 2008 at the time of the policy announcement, which would make them six years old. Unfortunately, migrant children and their parents enter and leave Beijing at various ages. Migrant children often enter school at older ages and migrant schools struggle with how to deal with classrooms that are composed of students with different ages and education backgrounds. Consequently, migrant children who do not fall within this narrow age band presumably would not qualify for the Family hukou certificate. The rest of Beijing's districts for which "five certificate" information could be obtained required that children applying for xueji had to be of age "in line with the admission requirements of that year," but do not explain how that age is defined. This is consistent with parents I talked to, who described inconsistent and opaque guidelines for applying for xueji even in their home provinces. and could not receive the appropriate grade-level xueji for their children.<sup>51</sup>

For the Family hukou, parents do not need to present their marriage certificates, with the exception of, again, Dongcheng district, where migrant parents must provide their marriage certificate and official documentation to prove any cases of divorce for single-parent applicants.

While the Beijing city-wide guidelines list the option to use documentation that they have paid a "social compensation fee" in lieu of an official birth certificate, the former is not clearly defined. The social compensation fee ("缴纳社会抚养费证明") is ostensibly the monthly social insurance payments ("社保") required in many districts to secure the Proof of Employment certificate. Yet the Chinese characters for each social program are different and it is unclear whether they refer to the same insurance program. In Dongcheng, Xicheng, Chaoyang, Fengtai, Shijingshan, Tongzhou, Changping, and Daxin districts, documentation that parents have paid

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<sup>51</sup> "Interview with Teacher Li." Personal interview. 4 June 2014.

into this “social compensation fee” is required to secure this certificate. As discussed in Chapter 1 and described in the process of applying for Proof of Employment, migrant parents often do not know they need to be paying into such social insurance schemes and render themselves ineligible to apply for later certificates.

Oddly, Fengtai district is the only district that requires a “proof of vaccination” for migrant children, but Fengtai district does not specify which vaccinations must be secured nor the dates for which the vaccinations must be valid.

### **Temporary living permit in Beijing**

For the most part, the process for securing a temporary living permit in Beijing is the most standard and straightforward:

1. Both parents must hold temporary residence issued by the local police station and the temporary residence permit.
2. The temporary residence permit in Beijing and the actual residence address and proof of residence must be consistent.
3. A temporary residence permit information must be printed; any altered renders it invalid.

Xicheng is the only district that has added an amendment to these guidelines, which is that migrant parents must have lived at the same address in Beijing for at least half a year and must have entered Beijing before March 1, 2014. It is unclear what parents with young children who entered Beijing after this date should do to enroll their children in the coming fall semester.