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Understanding the Resilience of Educational Disparities for Migrant Children in Urban China, in the Context of *Hukou* Reform

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Abstract

Educational disparities in China are rooted in the country's longstanding rural-urban divide, which the *hukou* system has institutionalized. However, following a comprehensive reform of the hukou system (2014-2020) disparities in access to education remain ubiquitous. This raises questions regarding the reform itself, in terms of its agenda and effectiveness, as well as regarding the real driving factors of educational disparities in urban China. It is a complex issue that requires a multidimensional analysis, which shall consider both the *hukou* and other exclusionary factors as potential causes. These include mechanisms inherent to China's education system, culture, and historical dynamics of social stratification.

Making an in-depth review of the literature through institutionalism lenses, this research takes shape in the theoretical and conceptual frameworks of equality of opportunity and social mobility. Supported by empirical indicators and qualitative data, it provides an in-depth and timely understanding of the *hukou* and underlying factors of educational exclusion that undermine equality of opportunity and hinder upward social mobility among migrant children.

This research finds that *hukou* status is still the biggest determinant of people's equality of opportunities and social mobility in China and argues that the reform had the potential to make a positive difference. Thereby, this research's main explanation for the resilience of educational disparities in this context is that the 2014 *hukou* reform's core intent was to modify migrant spatial distribution in favour of small and midsize cities, as opposed to their current concentration in megacities, and, in doing so, policymakers overlooked many challenges and barriers associated to migrating to lower tier cities and undervalued the importance of education for migrants. This research thus concludes that, rather than a definite lack of political will for solving educational disparities, the reform fell short on schooling issues because economic ambitions have taken precedence over social development and equal access to welfare, including education, among all Chinese citizens.

Résumé

Les disparités en matière d'accès à l'éducation en Chine sont enracinées dans la division rurale-urbaine de longue date du pays, institutionnalisée par le système du *hukou*. Malgré une réforme globale du système du *hukou* (2014-2020), d'importantes disparités dans l'accès à l'éducation subsistent. Cela soulève des questions quant à l'efficacité de la réforme elle-même, mais également par rapport aux véritables facteurs qui contribuent aux disparités éducatives en Chine urbaine. Il s'agit là d'une question complexe qui nécessite une analyse multidimensionnelle, laquelle doit considérer à la fois le *hukou* et d'autres facteurs d'exclusion en tant que causes potentielles. Ceux-ci incluent notamment des mécanismes inhérents au système éducatif chinois, à la culture et aux dynamiques de stratification sociale profondément enracinées.

À travers une revue approfondie de la littérature, sur la base d'une perspective institutionnaliste, cette recherche prend forme dans les cadres théoriques et conceptuels de l'égalité des chances et de la mobilité sociale. Soutenue par des indicateurs empiriques et des données qualitatives, cette recherche apporte une compréhension approfondie et actuelle du *hukou* et des facteurs sous-jacents à l'exclusion scolaire, lesquels compromettent l'égalité des chances et entravent la mobilité sociale ascendante des enfants migrants.

Cette recherche conclut que le statut de *hukou* est toujours le plus grand déterminant de l'égalité des chances et de la mobilité sociale des Chinois, et soutient que la réforme avait le potentiel de faire une différence positive. Sur ce, la recherche suggère que la principale explication à la résilience des disparités éducatives dans ce contexte est que le but principal de la réforme du *hukou* de 2014 était de modifier la répartition spatiale des migrants en faveur des petites et moyennes villes, par opposition à leur concentration actuelle dans les mégapoles. Ainsi, la recherche révèle que les politiques mises en place ont négligé de nombreux défis et obstacles associés à la migration vers des villes de niveau inférieur et ont sous-évalué l'importance de l'éducation des migrants. Cette recherche conclut que, plutôt qu'un manque de volonté politique pour résoudre les disparités éducatives, la réforme a échoué sur cette question parce que les ambitions économiques ont été priorisé au détriment du développement social et à l'égalité d'accès à la protection sociale, y compris à l'éducation, de l'ensemble des citoyens chinois.

Acknowledgements

It is only as I come to the end of this project, that I realize how passionate I still am about this topic, and how attached I have become to this research and the people who have encouraged and inspired me throughout those years. It has been a long time coming, with many hurdles along the way, but I made it, thanks to their support.

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INTRODUCTION

Through decades of sustained and unprecedented economic growth, China's rapid development has lifted millions of people out of poverty and transformed the country's agrarian society into an industrial global powerhouse. Whereas this impressive rise improved the Chinese population's average quality of life overall, it paradoxically turned communist China into one of the most unequal countries in the world. Indeed, parallel to its rapid growth, China's Gini coefficient kept on increasing, reaching nearly 50 points in 2012, making the socialist country one of the worst in terms of equality according to the index (Jain-Chandra et al., 2018). Albeit conflicting with the state's ideology, China's inequalities are largely rooted in its longstanding rural-urban divide, cemented by the nation's *hukou* system and its dual and urban-biased institutions. Especially in the context of China's 'miracle" development, the *hukou*, a household registration policy, played disproportionately against rural citizens. While migrant workers were the pillar of China's industrial growth, their rural registration prevented them from enjoying the benefits of the country's economic development, as in the end most of the economic gains went to improving welfare in cities, thus only profiting urban *hukou* holders. As such, advancements in education were asymmetrical, to the detriment of rural and migrant children.

It is estimated that at least 230 million rural migrants (equivalent to a third of the total urban dwellers, or nearly 85% of all migrants in China) live in urban areas while still holding a rural *hukou* (Chan, 2019). In line with this, the most recent official data available, based on the 2015 1% National Population Sample Survey, put the total number of children

of migrant workers at around 103 million, or about 38 percent of the total number of children in China (NBS, 2015).

The main problem with this floating population is that urban-living people who are rural-registered are thereby systematically denied public social services and welfare that official urban residents are normally entitled to, such as healthcare, employment rights and education (Chan, 2019). While this situation necessarily creates and widens overall socioeconomic inequalities, the differential access to education particularly allows this cycle of exclusion to further perpetuate poverty and disparities through generations by stunting social mobility and thereby contributing to maintaining China's rural-urban divide and the gap between social strata over time. Ultimately, in this context of social segregation, institutionalized by the *hukou* system and reinforced by China's cultural and historical social stratification dynamics, migrant workers and their children are among the most ostracized groups in Chinese cities (Wei & Gong, 2019).

The educational exclusion of rural and migrant children has been drawing increasing attention in recent years and appears to be a growing source of concern for millions of people, as well as for the Chinese state. Substantial literature has confirmed that the current state of inequality in China, partly driven by these educational disparities, is threatening the sustainability of China's development and its rate of economic growth, as well as violating many of its citizen's basic rights to education, thereby also impairing their equality of opportunity and access to social mobility (Jain-Chandra et al., 2018).

I got a close-up view of this reality during my first visit to China in 2012. While working as an Intern in Shenzhen, I met a colleague who was from a small village in Guangdong, at the frontier of Hunan. Like millions in Shenzhen, one of China's biggest

migrant hubs, she had moved to the city as a migrant worker - Albeit still registered as a rural citizen by her *hukou*. After years of hard work, she had made her way into a foreign company, managed to better her situation, and built her family in the city. Over her decade as a migrant, she had overcome many of the obstacles associated with her hukou and her daily life looked relatively like any of her urban counterparts. Thus, at this point, having traded the rights and services she had access to in her village for a better-paying job in the city seemed to have been a worthwhile tradeoff. That was until she had a child, which brought her back to the reality of living as a second-class citizen in a megacity in China. At five-year-old, her son was about to start school and because he did not have a Shenzhen *hukou*, it was virtually impossible to enroll him in a public school in the city. My colleague was then faced with a dilemma shared by millions of migrant workers regarding their child's education: either to register him in an overpriced migrant school in the city, which was in poor condition and unlikely to get him a recognized diploma, or have him enroll in their hometown's primary school - In which case she would have to either move back to the village with him, leaving her job and risk a precarious livelihood in the countryside, or send him alone to live with his elderly grandparents who were poor and struggling with their health. None of these scenarios offered good prospects for her son's education. Regardless of the path he would take, he would be significantly disadvantaged in comparison to his urban counterparts who would attend public urban schools. This was also likely to have long-term repercussions and hinder his chance of attending higher education and ultimately achieving upward social mobility. His fate was decided by his *hukou*, or rather his mom's, and there was nothing that could be done to change that. He would most likely become a migrant worker as well, as even working hard or being smart

would not change his status. Seeing my colleague and her family stuck in this inescapable predicament, for no reason other than her place of birth, within China still, drastically shifted my perception of China being a meritocratic and equalitarian society. I realized that a system like the *hukou*, with an urban biased role in determining citizens' access to education, was creating a society where inequality, or privilege, is inherited and where one's hometown often is the biggest determinant of life opportunities. It was this encounter that first sparked my research interest in the topic that ultimately led to his thesis, which specifically addresses educational disparities, the very same type of inequality I had observed in Shenzhen.

Naturally, these inequalities and the unfair access to welfare, particularly regarding education, are creating increasing dissatisfaction and uprisings across the country. Thus, as much as maintaining stability is a key priority for the Chinese state, Beijing has faced growing pressure to reform the *hukou* system in the last decades (Chan, 2019). On that account, nationwide reform and major policy changes have gathered pace since Xi Jinping acceded to power around 2012, leading up to the National New-type Urbanization Plan (NUP) and the associated *hukou* reform, both launched in 2014 (X. Wang, 2020).

Research Statement

Notwithstanding the CCP's apparent efforts at tackling the problem, substantial disparities remain today, as migrant children continue to be greatly disadvantaged in accessing, attending, and completing basic education. However, whereas the *hukou* system is partly responsible for fostering those educational disparities, other factors deserve analysis to fully grasp the roots of the issue and understand all that contribute to the resilience and expansion of disparities in the context of the *hukou* reform. Besides,

considering that the Chinese government largely capitalizes on education to sustain its growth, and claims to have devoted significant resources and attention to reforming the *hukou* system in favour of education, the resilience of educational disparities among migrant children despite these alleged endeavours raises questions. Thereupon, this research aims to explore parallel factors of educational disparities to provide insights into the immutability of the issue. These factors include structural exclusionary mechanisms within China's education system, shortcomings in reforms and policymaking, ingrained rural-urban social segregation dynamics, deep-rooted migration patterns converging toward the same few megacities, rampant corruption, and fiscal and governance decentralization across multiple sectors. All in all, through addressing those intricate aspects behind educational disparities, this research ultimately aims to answer the question: Why do educational disparities amongst migrant children in urban China persist through the Hukou reform? More specifically, it intends to explain why, despite being a state's priority, are educational disparities, especially differential access to education for migrant children, so resilient through policy reform and remain unimproved despite the government's alleged intentions to attain universal education. On the one hand, this research highlights multiple factors that contribute to perpetuating the widespread and longstanding gap in China's education. On the other hand, with respect to the 2014 reform, the research shows that the limited and localized relaxation of *hukou* policies could not improve migrants' access to urban schooling of migrant children, as the majority of them stayed in megacities and midsized cities' education systems remain substandard. Although the NUP and *hukou* reform pushed lower-tier areas to authorize the enrolment of migrant students, most smaller cities lacked sufficient fiscal capacities to absorb newcomers and

raise funds to upgrade the quality of their schools up to the standards of megacities. Therefore, regardless of being admitted to lower-tier public urban schools, migrant children allowed remained largely disadvantaged in comparison to children born in first-tier cities. Overall, the resilience of educational disparities is a complex issue that requires a multidimensional strategy that does not discriminate between social status or city tiers.

This research seeks to contextualize educational disparities in relation to China's 2014 NUP and *hukou* reform and explore explanations for the mitigated outcomes. With the intent of providing a clear and in-depth analysis of the question, this study presents a detailed contextual review and defines key concepts and aspects that are necessary to understand the complexity and specificities pertaining to this issue in China. Starting from the broader picture, this research proposes a closer look at structural issues of the Chinese educational system, as well as other social and cultural factors contributing to educational disparities at varying degrees. Having established the grounds and underlying roots of the problem, the research turns to question the immobilism of these schooling inequalities and the reasons for the systematic exclusion of migrant children to continue in megacities in the context of *hukou* reform. This leads to investigating the fundamental agenda carried by the NUP and the *hukou* reform, which in the end can arguably be interpreted as yet another attempt by the central government at spreading migrant workers away from megacities to balance growth and distribute population density throughout the country. More specifically, this research reveals that the tier framework and preferential policies adopted in the pursuit of this goal have led to inaction, even setbacks, regarding migrant children's access to education in megacities while falling short in attracting them to smaller cities, where the quality of schooling is still far from that found in first-tier urban centers.

Ultimately, the discrepancy between the government's endeavours at balancing urbanization and the slow, at times adverse, evolution of migration trends, explains the maintenance and widening of educational disparities between migrant children and their urban counterparts. Thereby, if the lack of political will is often invoked by the international community as the reason for China's failure at inclusivity and commitment to treating its rural and migrant citizens fairly, this thesis accounts for this misled impression by arguing that the NUP and *hukou* reform denote political engagement but that its effectiveness is undermined by a top-down approach and an economic growth-driven agenda, rather than a people-oriented leadership. In other words, the relaxation of *hukou* policies is a testament to the CCP's growing consideration for migrant children, just as they are evidence that educational disparities are caused by multiple social and structural factors, more than the *hukou* alone, for which old and current policies are mismatched in addressing the complexity of the issue. That being the case, it is also likely that the reform has yet to reach maturity before it can trigger substantial positive changes.

Purpose and significance of the research

The prevalent literature on the topic has clearly demonstrated the negative role of the *hukou* in perpetuating educational disparities, an issue that the Chinese government has recognized and committed to addressing. Consequently, the CCP implemented a major reform of its household registration system in 2014, aimed at easing the process of *hukou* conversion to reduce the predicament of migrant workers when they settle in cities and grant them fair access to social services in urban areas, including access to public education for their children. However, as the 6-year plan came to term in 2020, educational disparities remained high and concerning, as migrant workers and their children were still largely

excluded from urban welfare. In 2017, midway into the NUP timeline and before the pandemic-related setbacks, nearly 36 million school-aged children were still struggling to access and complete the minimum compulsory education (Ong, 2017). This is a significant problem, and even more so considering the colossal number of people affected.

In addition to contravening the Chinese law that provides a free nine-year compulsory education for all children, the educational exclusion of migrant children translates into a phenomenon of generalized social exclusion as it exacerbates socioeconomic disparities in the long term by perpetuating inequalities between rural and urban citizens through generations. Besides, with inner labour migration increasing, inequalities are rising at unprecedented rates. This translates into more and more children facing educational exclusion, which altogether is starting to take a toll on China's development and threaten social stability. In fact, the educational exclusion of rural children has long-term and far-reaching consequences, likely to hinder China's endeavours and successes in poverty alleviation and educational attainment if not addressed shortly and effectively. For that matter, research into this problem is thus timely and needed.

Indeed, following the end of the NUP and *hukou* reform timeline in 2020, and as educational disparities among migrants remain prevalent, China's education and *hukou* policy apparatuses are at crossroads. The timing for this investigation is therefore very opportune in that enough time has passed for substantial literature to have been produced on the topic, while remainders of the NUP and 2014 reform are still overlapping with the new policies that are being implemented. By focusing on the 2014-2020 timeline, all the while adding solid historical background and insights into the present time, this research situates itself in current literature, with the intention to explore the deeper causes of the

issue and shed light on its ongoing consequences, which still impact an immense population up to this day. On that account, the demographic weight of those affected makes this research even more so needed. In this case specifically, the aim is to enrich the existing substantial body of literature on the *hukou* and migrant children, by addressing the specific problem of educational disparities in the context of *hukou* reform and exploring the different explanations behind its resilience. The overall argument will be built from combining empirical observations with structural and institutional theories, alongside a comparative perspective that contrasts cities', provinces', and changes over time with respect to education disparities and their evolution throughout the 6-year reform period.

CHAPTER 2 - CONTEXTUAL REVIEW

The concept of socialism "with Chinese characteristics", originally used in reference to China's socialist market economy, has become a common expression to describe China's style of governance and development strategies. The wide usage of "with Chinese characteristics" to describe soft power, education, aid, and more, speaks of the unicity and complexity of China, which stem from the country's long history, demographic weight, vast territory, and dominant culture in Asia. With respect to this research topic, the idea of "urbanization with Chinese characteristics" is a good example that underlines the singularity of the *hukou* system in China's urban development and the unparalleled dynamics and paradoxes it has created in society. In this perspective, China's particular context necessarily creates unique variables and requires an adapted and informed methodology to carry research into this country's issue. In other words, to undertake a study that delves into a China-specific topic, as is this research, an in-depth contextualization is paramount to a relevant analysis and pertinent conclusions. Hence, prior to addressing the core research question, this chapter serves to situate the problem in a greater context, by establishing a chronology and defining key concepts and particularities of migration, education and other singular aspects of Chinese society and policy apparatus.

2.1 The hukou system

Though we can trace its origin to the caste system of ancient China, the *hukou* was officially implemented as the "*hukou*" system in 1958 under Mao's rule (J. Wang, 2012). At the time, it was essentially an instrument of the command economy to control mobility and urban development by limiting the mass migration of rural farmers to growing urban

areas (J. Wang, 2012). Whereas power and institutions were highly centralized and the entire population heavily controlled, the social and economic rights tied to the *hukou* varied greatly between rural and urban areas (Tao, 2009). Because urbanites were more educated and had more money, they were also more likely to challenge the system, hence they were granted more rights and benefits to assuage them for the sake of preserving social stability (Murphy, 2009). Among other things, urban dwellers were receiving subsidized food, housing, healthcare, and pensions from the State. Meanwhile, inhabitants of the countryside were granted provisional land rights and given rations of grains and small amounts of cash in exchange for their labour (Tao, 2009). In other words, this policy apparatus fixed and institutionalized China's rural-urban divide, in which rural *hukou* holders were, and still are, systematically discriminated against and treated as second-class citizens (J. Wang, 2012).

The year 2018 marked 60 years since the Great Leap Forward and the proclamation of the *hukou* system *(*originally known as the *dengji tiaoli* (translated as "Household Registration Regulation"), likely one of the most impactful legacies of Mao and Deng Xiaoping on contemporary China. (X. Wang, 2020). Nowadays, the *hukou* system remains a core feature of China's social organization and a key tool of population control, although it has allegedly become a household registration system that simply keeps records of people's official place of residence, as well as their status and other personal information (Murphy, 2009). It essentially works by providing all Chinese natives with a national identity card that categorizes them as "rural" or "urban" citizens (as known as their "*hukou*") (Murphy, 2009). Be as it may, this location-based and hereditary classification is far from insignificant and is pivotal in determining many of the important aspects of

one's life in China. Indeed, people's entitlement to social services, welfare and certain rights is tied to their *hukou* status, meaning they can only be accessed and guaranteed within the person's region of *hukou* registration (Murphy, 2009). Concretely, migrant workers, farmers who leave the countryside to work in a city, are denied access to education, healthcare, propriety, and security of employment in urban areas, even if they live there permanently (Murphy, 2009). In this context, the *hukou* has become so decisive in determining life opportunities that it is often compared to a caste system or a form of apartheid (X. Wang, 2020). Furthermore, since *hukou* assignation is hereditary, children inherit their mother's *hukou* without regard for where they are actually born (Chang et al., 2011). For this reason, children of migrant workers, whether they migrated with their parents or were born in the city, are bound to live with a rural *hukou* and the limitations that come with this status (Chang et al., 2011).

2.23 China's migratory phenomenon

2.2.1Inner migration during Mao's era

Until the opening reform of the 1970s, the *hukou* system, though controversial, mostly succeeded in limiting unsustainable demographic growth in the cities (J. Wang, 2012). In fact, migration from rural to urban areas was practically non-existent before Deng Xiaoping's reform as mobility was merely impossible given the strict regulations in place (J. Wang, 2012). At that time, the *hukou* was determining where a person could work and access social services, but also where that individual could buy food, necessities and major consumer goods (Tao, 2009). Therefore, through the first decades of the system, the strict constraints attached to the *hukou* effectively excluded peasants from the urban labour

market, which resulted in China achieving almost full urban employment during the central planning period (Tao, 2009).

Hence, upon its first years of existence, the *hukou* system arguably served China's development and contributed to the country's successful growth. Indeed, while Chinese cities developed very rapidly, the *hukou* limited mass migration from lands to cities, thereby curbing the emergence of informal settlements (Luard, 2005). Thus, unlike most developing countries such as India, Brazil and the Philippines, China successfully averted the formation of slums in its megalopolis, thanks to the *hukou* system (Luard, 2005). With urban migration rates under control, cities had sufficient time to build suitable infrastructures and better adapt to the flow of newcomers (Tao, 2009). Besides, the absence of slums and large informal settlements prevented potential social unrest and protests, which fostered China's social and structural stability (Luard, 2005).

2.2.2 Inner migration following Deng Xiaoping's Reform

The transition to a market economy turned things around. On one hand, the emergence of factories and labour-intensive industries in the cities created a demand for more workers, and therefore put pressure in favour of migration (J. Wang, 2012). On the other hand, Deng Xiaoping's reforms prompted the transformation of agriculture, hence China went from growing primarily rice and grains to mostly producing cash crops (Ye & Lu, 2011) This new type of agriculture increased productivity, thereby greatly decreasing the need for farming labour (Tao, 2009). Consequently, the surplus of labourers had no other choice than to migrate to the booming coastal cities to seek employment and better sources of income in the manufacturing or services sectors (Tao, 2009). Thereupon, the government progressively relaxed the *hukou*'s policies and started to allow some farmers to enter cities

under certain conditions (Tao, 2009). Later, at the beginning of the 1990s, as the country kept on developing rapidly, the Party took a step further and decided to encourage temporary migration as it considered that the cities and industries would benefit from a flow of cheap migrant workers (Tao, 2009). From that moment on, began a large-scale migration that is still ongoing today. Concretely, following the reduction of state control over labour mobility, internal rural-to-urban migration went up from 30 million to 180 million citizens within thirty years (Chang et al., 2011). In this new context, the *hukou* became a barrier to growth and development, a black cloud hanging over China's internationally praised advancements in education and milestones in poverty alleviation.

As the policy started to permit farmers to migrate to cities, it was still forbidding *hukou* conversion, so that people would leave their rural place of origin without changing their registration for an urban *hukou* (Murphy, 2009). In turn, this created an important "floating population", comprising migrant workers living in cities as unregistered residents (Murphy, 2009). Consequently, individuals and families forming this massive "floating population" were denied equal access to social security benefits, housing subsidies and education, which are normally available to official urban residents (Tao, 2009). Yet, as China's dereliction of small and traditional agriculture in favour of the industrial sector led to the pauperization of the countryside, living conditions for rural residents became so difficult and employment opportunities so scarce that, despite the hardship involved, migrating to cities still appeared like the best, if not only, alternative for rural Chinese to earn an income, even one often insufficient to afford a decent living (Tao, 2009). In other words, facing a dead end in their village, a lot of people had to trade their granted welfare,

government-provided benefits of healthcare, education, and retirement, for the sole opportunity of working in an urban area, in order to survive (Chen, 2016).

2.3 Urbanization and the Go-West Strategy

As discussed above, the root of China's extensive internal migration phenomena is directly linked to the country's impressive export-driven growth, also referred to as the "Chinese miracle". As we have identified the main social repercussions and migration trends that have ensued from China's rise, the following section focuses on the economic and policy aspects that intersect with industrial development, the *hukou* system and social disparities.

China's economic boom gathered momentum after the country finally opened to the world at the end of the 20th Century when the state established a national economic development strategy focused on massively developing labour-intensive industries across the country. For this sector to thrive, China capitalized on its large population, workable at low wages given the high levels of poverty, to make cheap labour its comparative advantage on international markets. Paired with loose safety and environmental regulations, the country became very competitive in the manufacturing sector and its low costs became an important pull factor for foreign investment, which eventually turned China into the "world factory" (Spires, 2017). While this rapidly enriched the country's economy overall, the export-led model maintained domestic purchasing power very low as rural and lower-class urban Chinese worked and fueled the new thriving industries for low wages. Notwithstanding China's success in terms of productivity and investments, this great imbalance between spectacular economic growth rates and rampant poverty levels

eventually had to be alleviated for the country to raise its population's standards and achieve more sustainable development with a higher HDI. As Primer Li Keqiang accounted, "every rural resident who becomes an urban dweller typically increases their annual consumption by more than 10,000 yuan (US$1,587), there remain[ed] a massive untapped labour pool in the villages, leaving great potential for domestic demand as a result of urbanization" (Li, 2013). In this context, the Chinese government doubled down on urban development by investing in infrastructures and opening some industries to the tertiary sector to keep them growing. Meanwhile, the *hukou* system still remained at the forefront of China's development strategy, serving as a tool to limit overcrowding, urban slums, and other migration-related hazards that tend to occur in such fast-developing urban centers (Spires, 2017). Whether this mixed approach succeeded is debatable.

In fact, although extremely rapid and praised for having lifted millions out of poverty, China's urbanization, which reached peak growth rates in the late 1990s and early 2000s, has been an unbalanced process that resulted in widely disparate socioeconomic development outcomes across the country. Spatially, cities of very different sizes and economic levels appeared: most larger cities developed along the East coast and small and medium-sized cities with lower socioeconomic status spread across inland areas and western regions (Wei & Gong, 2019). Consequently, shares of China's gross domestic product (GPD) also grew very unevenly throughout the country, thus leading to an endless loop in which industries kept developing in high concentration within the richest locations at the expense of farmers and rural regions. By the early 2000s, megacities, on the one side, became overwhelmed with their massive populations and pollution-stricken air, while, on the other side, central and Western areas remained impoverished and relatively left out

from the Chinese miracle's gains. After a while, inland cities have become the country's most polluted regions since many heavy industries, such as coal, have moved West amidst the manufacturing and service sectors' boom in Eastern megacities. Albeit less developed and less livable, these overlooked parts of the country were together home to a quarter of China's population at the time, representing an aggregated population of 400 million people (National Bureau of Statistics [NBS], 2000). Nevertheless, their combined GDP accounted for just barely 15 percent of the nation's total, while 15 of all the top 20 cities ranked by GDP with non-agriculture population were found in the eastern coastal regions, aside from Chongqing, Chengdu, and Wuhan, (NBS, 2000). As geographical income disparities within a country are naturally grounds for looming social unrest and rising ethnic tensions, the situation gradually became a threat to China's steady economic growth. Hence, in early 2000, policies' orientation and approaches to urbanization started to shift toward promoting a more balanced economic development with a focus on spreading urbanization and distributing resources and industrial capacities across different cities and regions all over the country (Wei & Gong, 2019).

This shift was primarily marked by the "Go West" strategy, launched in 2000, which aimed to boost economic development in 12 western provincial-level regions: Chongqing, Sichuan, Guizhou, Yunnan, Tibet, Shaanxi, Gansu, Ningxia, Xinjiang, Inner Mongolia, Guangxi and Qinghai (Xinhua, 2016). This strategy came along with the 10th Five-Year Plan and three key programs targeting economic growth for inland regions: The Western Development Program (1999), the Revitalize Northeast China Program (2003), and the Rise of Central China Plan (2004) (Jia et al., 2020). Overall, the Go-West strategy provided western regions with support for infrastructure construction, foreign investment incentives,

environmental protection, education, and talent retention (Lai, 2002). This translated to the Chinese government investing 6.35 trillion yuan ($914 billion) in 300 major projects, mostly in infrastructure and energy in western regions between 2000 to 2016 (Jia et al., 2020, P. 3). In retrospect, the Go-West strategy had mixed results at the end of its decade-long endeavour. On the bright side, the boost of investments for infrastructure and industrial development successfully increased the region's aggregate output, which led to raising the GDP of all western regions (Shiu et al., 2016). However, on the downside, the plan still failed to eliminate the gap, both economic and social, between Eastern and Western China (Shiu et al., 2016).

Part of the reason behind this underwhelming outcome is that the special policies implemented to attract foreign direct investments (FDI), including tax breaks, deregulation, and other incentives, were much less effective than expected. Between 2000 and 2005, yearly FDI received by the targeted Western regions amounted to less than $2 billion, which is far behind the amounts received in first-tier cities (Shiu et al., 2016). In comparison, a decade after the launch of the Go-West strategy, the total FDI received in the 12 targeted provinces combined still amounted to less than half the total that Shanghai alone had attracted in the same period (Hua & Leung, 2007). Likewise, at the term of the policy timeline in 2005, trade from western regions altogether made up barely 5 percent of the nation’s total (NBS, 2005).

Notwithstanding the major investments and progress achieved in infrastructure, these provinces’ geographical situation was, and remains to this day, a big challenge to their economic development and one of the main factors hindering them from catching up with the rest of China. Especially, because the West of China is largely comprised of

mountainous areas, industries and cities built in these areas are naturally disadvantaged with imports and relatively disconnected from the rest of the country. Besides the more evident cases of Xinjiang, Tibet and Sichuan which are thousands of kilometres away from China's coast, more central provinces like Henan or Hubei also face costly and time-consuming processes to reach trade ports (Hua & Leung, 2007).

Accordingly, schools, hospitals and other commodities in these locations are too underdeveloped and lag behind those of first-tier cities, both in quantity and quality. Another reason holding back progress in these social and service sectors particularly is the difficulty to attract qualified teachers and professionals to these remote areas (OECD, 2016). With respect to education specifically, the recruitment of qualified teachers is the first struggle rural schools face worldwide when it comes to providing quality education (OECD, 2016). This is an intricate issue since the lack of resources to incentivize talent makes it difficult to attract and retain talent, which ends up becoming both a cause and consequence of underdevelopment in those provinces (OECD, 2016). In the same manner, this situation further contributes to deterring migrant workers from moving to these regions, thereby slowing down industries' growth, and so on. Overall, western regions' remote geographical locations, lack of services, insufficient fiscal capacities, and talent exodus, are intertwined issues that together create a vicious cycle of poverty and underdevelopment, such as typically seen in developing countries of the global south. In this case, however, while this part of China is stuck in this poverty trap, the other part of the country has become wealthy and highly developed, to such extent that, as a whole, the country ranks as the world's second-largest economy (World Bank, 2021). This paradox well illustrates China's "two-speed economy", a characteristic of the Chinese model that

has been extensively discussed in the literature about China's growth (Spires, 2017). In the context of this research, a good understanding of this dual dynamic allows us to better contextualize the roots and implications of China's current Western development agenda, as carried out by the NUP, and to analyze its impact on the 2014 *hukou* reform. Moreover, China's economic paradox also contributes to explaining how the persistent development challenges of lower-tier cities undermine the government's efforts at balancing the spatial distribution of migrant workers. Ultimately, it shows that longstanding and ongoing migration patterns toward megacities are difficult to alter, even though they lead to glaring educational disparities between migrant children and their urban counterparts.

2.5 Children of migrant workers

Inevitably, migrant workers' children are directly impacted by their parents' migration decision, especially with respect to their education. In a way, rural-to-urban migration is a trade-off between poor rural life with access to welfare and urban job opportunities without any access to social services. Unfortunately, rural registered children find themselves at the very losing end of this imposed compromise. Many activists and scholars have gone as far as saying that these children have been sacrificed in the name of economic growth and are the ones paying the real price of the "Chinese miracle" (Côté, 2015). This sacrifice starts with the first dilemma migrant workers face regarding their children when they decide to move to a city: they can either leave their children in the village to the care of their grandparents or relatives, or they may choose to bring them along and try to offer them better living conditions. On the one hand, the first option implies that the children will grow up without their parents, in rural poverty where education is lacking and good

career prospects are generally hopeless (Côté, 2015). On the other hand, if children are "taken along", they are most likely going to be denied social services in the city, including access to public school, which, in most cases, will ultimately prevent them from receiving a formal education, thereby undermining their chances to get any kind of higher degrees and thus achieve skilled jobs and social mobility (Woronov, 2009). Whereas there exist a few ways for migrant children to get into urban government schools, the steps are laborious, costly, and most often deceptive in the long run (Woronov, 2009).

2.4.1 Left-behind children

A UNICEF report claimed that the number of children under 18 years old living without their parents in China was estimated to be around 69 million, which is 28% of the total number of rural children across the country (UNICEF, 2018). Evidently, it is very common for farmers to migrate to a city without their family, often leaving their children to the care of their grandparents, family members or, in some cases, alone, by themselves, when they are relatively old enough (Chang et al., 2011). Notwithstanding the fact that all scenarios are unique, some of which include families with grandparents who have the means and capabilities to raise their grandchildren, most cases of left-behind children present problematic situations that may put their safety, education and health at risk, likely to impair normal child development (Chang et al., 2011).

In the common instance where grandparents or elderly relatives take on the role of surrogate parents, these default caretakers are generally already struggling to make ends meet while being typically overloaded with their own livelihood maintenance, they are often not in a suitable position to properly support children, nor financially or with their

daily life needs (Jingzhong & Lu, 2011). Besides, elders in villages are often unable to assist with schoolwork since many of them are illiterate, and also tend to underestimate the value of education given their own experience (Woronov, 2009).

Otherwise, children who have no one to take care of them in their village often end up living on their own and becoming self-reliant despite their young age. They survive on monthly remittances sent by their parents, which are just enough to cover the cost of their very basic needs (Côté, 2015). It is also very typical to see the eldest child of a family, may he or she only be 13 years old, be responsible for the younger sibling(s) (Côté, 2015). Unsurprisingly, as they are responsible for all the domestic chores like cooking and washing, topped by farm workload in some cases, kids who live independently usually face major difficulties in school attainment (Ye & Lu, 2011). Considering the burden of their daily life, these children lack time to complete their coursework and they are likely to be too exhausted to focus on school. Besides, without parental guidance or older peers to encourage them and oversee their progress, left-behind children missing out on education often go unnoticed (Ye & Lu, 2011). Meanwhile, they must also give up on playing and socializing like regular kids as they become active 'workload sharers' in the village (Ye & Lu, 2011).

In sum, whether they are with relatives or living on their own, the great majority of left-behind children do not benefit from proper education and tend to drop out early without basic credentials (Huiwen, 2019). On top of their unfavourable home circumstances, these children, when they manage to attend school, see their education being further hindered by the poor quality of instruction in their rural schools: teachers are often unskilled, facilities

and resources second-rate, while the pedagogy and the content taught are far below standards in comparison to the curriculum and rigour of urban schools (Woronov, 2009).

2.4.2 Migrant children

While leaving children behind was the prevailing trend amidst the early rural-to-urban migration boom, a growing number of migrant workers started bringing their families along to the cities in the mid-1990s (Woronov, 2009). While this change has been partially caused by the relative stabilization of urban living conditions, including housing options that have become slightly more accessible for migrants, the fact that nearly 75% of all rural primary schools - over 300 000 in total - were permanently closed between 2000 to 2015, has certainly played a major role in persuading migrant workers to bring their children along (Wu, 2020).

China thus saw the apparition of a new trend of migrant children flowing to the cities, sometimes referred to as the "taken-along" children (Woronov, 2009). Keeping in mind that data about children living in urban areas with a rural *hukou* is rare and not necessarily reliable, the most recent large-scale survey estimated that about 36.4 million school-aged migrant children are living in cities across China (National Bureau of Statistics [NBS], 2018). Among them, an increasing proportion is born in their "host city", although they are still registered under a rural *hukou*, as per the law which stipulates that all children inherit their mother's *hukou*, wherever they may be born and raised. (Woronov, 2009). Therefore, regardless of their background, children of migrant workers, whether they are urban-born or taken along, are de facto denied access to key social services in Chinese cities, including enrollment into urban public schools.

This discriminatory policy constitutes a huge barrier to achieving universal basic education in China, on top of hindering the future of an entire generation, stuck amidst the "floating population".

All in all, as studies have shown, migrant workers have very few, if not any, alternatives to get their children a decent education and pave their way to a better future, whether they leave them behind or take them along. On this account, while this research focuses on educational disparities among migrant children only, because they are more likely to be impacted by *hukou* reform as opposed to left-behind children, it shall nonetheless be considered that educational disparities extend to all children born with a rural *hukou*, wherever they end up living in China.

2.5 Education in China

As the world's most populous country, China has one the largest education system in the world, responsible for about 260 million students and more than 15 million teachers in 514 000 schools, excluding graduate-level institutions (NBS, 2014). This big education apparatus is run by the state for the most part, except for a few private actors such as international schools and joint-venture institutions (OECD, 2016). That said, the system is increasingly decentralized, as primary jurisdiction is now relegated to county-level governments for elementary and secondary schools, and provincial administrations for the higher education sector (OECD, 2016). The whole of the system then falls under the command of the Ministry of Education, a branch of the central government that is essentially responsible for monitoring at the macro-level, overseeing and passing laws, planning reforms, allocating budgets, guiding national policy, etc. (OECD, 2016). As for

funding repartition, urban schools are financed by the state while rural schools depend more heavily on their own financial resources (Rao & Jingzhong, 2016). This burden widens the gap between regions and contributes to significant disparities in education delivery. This will be addressed in section *7* as one of the structural issues that contribute to educational exclusion in parallel with the *hukou*,

In terms of the school system structure, the government ratified the *Compulsory Education Law of the People's Republic of China* in 1986, which established the main constituents of China's contemporary education system. One of the key features of this law is the adoption of nine years of free compulsory education for all Chinese children and adolescents (Article 2; Chinese Ministry of Commerce [MOFCOM], 1986). These nine years comprise six years of primary school, followed by three to four years of junior secondary education (junior middle school) (Article 7; MOFCOM, 1986). The subsequent three years of senior secondary education are optional and dependent on the passing of the *zhongkao*, a public examination, from which students' scores determine which school they will attend. There are five different types of secondary schools, divided into two categories: general senior secondary schools and vocational schools, under which falls technical or specialized secondary, adult secondary, vocational secondary and crafts schools (OECD, 2016). Tertiary education is a distinct structure, and its entrance requires students to take the National College Entrance Examination, known as the *gaokao*. This comprehensive standardized test is notorious for being extremely demanding, requiring gruelling studying, and being ultra-competitive (Zhou & Cheung, 2017). As the sole criterion for admission into a university, the stakes are very high. There are many criticisms of this exam system,

including controversies related to quotas and *hukou* status, which will be further addressed in section *4.4.*

Overall, education is highly valued in Chinese culture and is traditionally considered the key to fostering both societal and individual advancements. Developing the education sector has thus been at the very core of China's national development and modernization agenda throughout the past decades (OECD, 2016). Yet, inequalities between regions and the educational exclusion of migrant children remain major obstacles undermining the Chinese Communist Party (CCP)'s ostentatious efforts to achieve universal access to education in China (UNICEF, 2018).

2.6 Migrant schooling

As established, migrant children with rural *hukou*s are forbidden from enrolling in urban public schools and generally unable to afford onerous fees to get special permissions, in the rare cases that it may be an option, let alone afford private institutions (Froissart, 2003). As a response, deceived to have their children excluded from urban schools, migrant workers have been uniting as communities and opening their own private schools in the cities, as a way to circumvent exclusionary measures and offer basic education to their children (Froissart, 2003). This phenomenon has grown exponentially in the last decades and hundreds of migrant schools can now be found in all major cities in China (Ming, 2014).

Although these schools are possibly the best alternative for migrants to attend primary school given the inaccessibility of the mainstream system, they are far from ideal and generally in very poor conditions. Notably, heavy bureaucracy and costly processes

often prevent these establishments from registering to be officially recognized by authorities (Woronov, 2009). Therefore, most migrant schools are technically illegal and typically rely on bribing the local police to continue their operations informally (Woronov, 2009). In these circumstances, migrant schools are vulnerable to random evictions and frequently forced to change locations (Froissart, 2003). Classes commonly take place in hazardous spaces like car-repair shops, public bath houses, coal storage facilities or in the homes of migrant families (Froissart, 2003). They are usually crowded, without heating in the winter or fresh air in the summer, besides lacking even basic teaching tools such as chalk and blackboards (Woronov, 2009).

Moreover, because migrant schools do not receive public funding and depend on modest fees paid by pupils' families, their teachers earn very low salaries (about 300 Yuan/month, equivalent to ~60 CAD) and live in precarious conditions as well (Woronov, 2009). Consequently, aside from a minority of a few professional and adequately trained teachers, most migrant schools' instructors lack competence and are inexperienced, especially in comparison to their official schools' counterparts (Froissart, 2003). Likewise, because it is just as difficult, if not more, to find higher grades teachers willing to work at low wages, migrant schools are almost exclusively limited to elementary levels (Woronov, 2009). That being said, it is worth mentioning that despite their difficult living conditions, migrant schools' teachers tend to have very high prestige among migrant communities as being intellectual workers and more educated individuals (Woronov, 2009). Besides, albeit challenging and underpaid, the majority of these teachers report that they are ultimately better off working in a city than they are in their village (Woronov, 2009).

Another challenge encountered by migrant schools is the age gap between students. In fact, as a result of being unable to enroll in urban schools or because they had to travel across the country with their parents, many migrant children have missed periods of school at some point, from weeks to even years, and are thus years behind the national curriculum (Woronov, 2009). That being the case, migrant schools have to accommodate pupils of different ages within the same grade level, which necessarily complicates things for teachers while also negatively impacting children's social development (Woronov, 2009).

On top of this, migrant schools face another dilemma regarding the choice of curriculum. Albeit allegedly based on one comprehensive syllabus and designed to systematically teach the content required to pass the *gaokao*, the national standardized exam, China's education curriculum remains fairly decentralized and heterogenous across cities and provinces (Zhou & Zhou, 2019). Given migrant schools cater to students from all over the country, they can decide to teach a particular hometown's curriculum if the majority of their students come from the same region, or else they may use the city's curriculum to enhance their chances of eventually integrating an officially recognized school in the area (Woronov, 2009). On the one hand, the rural curriculum is better if students are to return to their hometown to pursue their post-elementary education, while on the other hand the urban education program puts all students on an equal basis and helps them integrate better in the city (Woronov, 2009). In any case, these disparities in curriculum surely feed into the rural-urban divide and the *hukou*-based educational inequalities.

Nonetheless, whichever curriculum they follow and regardless of their performances or of the quality of teaching they may receive, children with a rural *hukou*

are just as likely to face a dead end once they reach middle school or higher grade levels. Since most migrant schools are unregistered and operate underground, students who complete the curriculum through these establishments cannot officially graduate nor receive a valid diploma to attest to their education (Woronov, 2009). Because China does not have any qualification recognition system to assess migrants' undocumented schooling level, it is nearly impossible for migrant children to be conferred equivalences and educational credentials, even when have acquired the necessary knowledge and developed the same competencies as their urban-registered peers. Basically, because of the impossibility to get their schooling recognized and left without a valid graduation certificate and no urban *hukou*, it is practically impossible for migrant children to take the city-wide standardized test (known as *zhongkao*, translated as "senior high-school exam), which is the only way to enter a senior middle school (Tao, 2009). Consequently, this closes the doors for them to further education in the city, even if they might have acquired the necessary knowledge and developed the same competencies as their urban-registered peers at this point.

Therefore, prevented to advance further in the city educational system, most young migrant teenagers, around 12 years of age, are either sent back to their hometown, the only place they will be able to study, where they live on their own, or they may remain in the city and start working full-time as unskilled labourers (Woronov, 2009). That is the plight of growing as a migrant child: "education is their best path to social mobility, but the only possible way to receive more advanced-level education is to return to the villages, where the education is second-rate and they must live on their own…" (Woronov, 2009). Besides, even for the children who go back to the countryside and manage to complete their studies,

it is nearly impossible for them to take the entrance exams for university given their educational background in a city, where they studied different subjects using different textbooks, therefore putting them at a disadvantage compared with their rural peers at the local exam (Wei, 2019). As a result, even when they get their high school diploma, most children of migrant workers must give up on higher education and eventually turn to manual labour (Wei, 2019). All in all, no matter what path they take and regardless of the sacrifices and hardship they go through, migrant children have very few opportunities to attain university level and be valued in the job market. On that account, it is clear that migrant schools are not suitable or sustainable alternatives to alleviate educational disparities in migrant children. The *hukou* system, and most especially the *hukou*-based dual education system, hampers the capacity of these schools to improve their students' education and career prospects. This is a prime example of migrant children's inequality of opportunity. Ultimately, this situation strongly contributes to perpetuating the cycle of poverty and maintaining the longstanding gap between rural and urban citizens across China.

Notwithstanding the numerous issues and challenges associated with migrant schools, it is worth mentioning that these organizations also offer interesting advantages that could potentially serve as a starting point for future education reforms. Indeed, these schools have a unique structure that is specifically adapted to the circumstances and needs of migrant children. For example, they commonly open earlier, as early as 5:45 am, and can stay open until late in the evening to accommodate migrant parents who have odd working hours, typically in factories, or selling fruits and vegetables at the market (Woronov, 2009). Migrant schools also tend to be less rigid than public ones, having more

flexible policies, less hierarchy and being more inclusive. Likewise, in comparison to regular urban schools where segregation dynamics are commonly observed, migrant schools have more diversity, which encourages children to be more culturally open-minded and accepting than their urban peers (Woronov, 2009). Overall, despite their hardships, children who moved from the countryside and attend migrant schools in a city generally say that they are learning more than they were in their hometown (Woronov, 2009). Although migrant schools cannot currently provide credentials or concretely improve career prospects, they are often the only option for migrants to acquire literacy and elementary math skills, which may at least facilitate their daily life and enable them to navigate in society (Chen & Feng, 2012). Moreover, children who migrate alongside their parents, as opposed to being left-behind, have the advantage of keeping a sense of family life, which fosters better social-emotional development (Woronov, 2009). Simultaneously, when living with their parents, children are more directly benefiting from their parents' increased income, which generally translates into access to a better quality of life and more regular nutrition in comparison to the countryside (Froissart, 2003). Together, despite offering very limited social mobility, these conditions contribute to improving migrant children's health and learning capacities (Froissart, 2003). Hence, leveraging the capacities of already established migrant schools and integrate them into the system as an official option for migrants could be a valuable alternative for cities that justify exclusionary mechanisms by the fact that their public schools have limited capacities, lack funding, and are already overcrowded. All in all, although omnipresent and widely known across the country, migrant schools are unsustainable and far insufficient to close any gap in educational disparities between rural and urban school-aged children due to their

informality and lack of government support and recognition. However, these schools' unique structures could potentially inspire a dedicated official schooling path for migrant children who may have fallen behind academically or be in transit they find themselves in a new city, which could ideally serve as a bridge for them toward the public education system.

2.7 The National Urbanization Plan (NUP) and the hukou Reform (2014-2020)

In March 2014, in face of rising environmental, economic, and social challenges, China's released its first and long-awaited national urbanization blueprint, a comprehensive and ambitious top-down program titled the National New-type Urbanization Plan (NUP) (Government of China, 2014). One of the core priorities of this plan was to promote the citizenization[1] of rural migrants, then considered a key aspect in enhancing the quality of urbanization (Wei & Su, 2014). As the longstanding urban-rural gap linked to the *hukou*-based provision of social services creates an increasing duality between urban residents and rural migrant populations residing together within cities, the disparities have grown to the extent of threatening social harmony and the overall quality of urban life and development. In this context, although it was not formally part of the NUP blueprint, reforming the *hukou* system, by changing and relaxing some of its restrictions, was intrinsically implied in the NUP's overarching goal. Thus, alongside the NUP, the CCP released the "Opinions on Further Promoting the Reform of the *hukou* System", a plan that provided more concrete reforms and changes to the household registration system, which especially focused on the citizenization target. The document expressed the CCP'S

[1] This is the term that the literature uses for *chengshihua*, to differentiate from urbanization of a city, and the shift in an individual's status, from rural to urban.

acknowledgement that China's dual rural–urban social structure had become a major obstacle at this stage of the country's development, and that elements of the *hukou* systems were outdated, hence calling for reform and improving policies toward more inclusive programs for migrants (Chinese Communist Party [CCP], 2013). Seen in this perspective, the reform of the *hukou*, parallel to the NUP, essentially proposed measures meant to ensure migrant workers and their children could have better access to public services in urban areas and ultimately enjoy the same welfare benefits as other local urban residents (Dong & Goodburn, 2019).

However, as will be discussed more extensively in Chapter 5, the relocation of secondary industries to inland regions that were driven by the NUP was not accompanied by a significant shift of population growth in these lower-tier areas (Chu, 2020). However, the plan triggered a sharp increase in land-sale revenue in 2018, suggesting that some landowners and farmers in inland areas sold their land to industries and moved to bigger cities (Chu, 2020). Yet, this exodus was not met by a proportional influx of migrant workers, which is evidence that the new *hukou* policies and incentives did not quite achieve the level of attraction expected (Chu, 2020).

CHAPTER 3 –

RESEARCH METHODS, DESIGN AND CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

3.1 Data sources

This research is based on empirical data and draws its arguments and main findings from qualitative analysis of first and secondary data. The core arguments and analysis are built on an in-depth and extensive literature review of the rich transdisciplinary body of literature that exists on China's migrant workers, migrant children, the *hukou* and educational disparities. Especially, whereas the topics of educational exclusion and the derived phenomenon of migrant schools and left-behind children have long been studied by researchers around the world, the unfolding of the 2014 *hukou* reform has drawn a lot of attention to the resilience of China's educational disparities and brought upon a new wave of scholarly works in the last few years. These more recent publications and data, from 2014 up to 2022, have thus provided updated insights and relatively current perspectives on the research question. In parallel, the older literature, from the previous two decades, has been paramount to contextualizing the problem and grasping the roots of the issue. Overall, there is sufficiently reliable and varied literature to conduct a comprehensive and in-depth analysis to address the research question, as well as relevant databases available to address the research question and build a strong explanation to fill a gap in the literature surrounding this issue.

Moreover, it is worth mentioning that I myself have had various opportunities to see, meet and discuss with migrant workers, and sometimes their children, on several occasions while I was living and visiting China. Although it was not proper field research, these informal encounters, some of which took place during factory tours and migrant

school visits in the context of an internship, often resembled participant observation, and research interviews. While none of it has been used as data to support findings, the information I gathered and the phenomenon I observed through these experiences have greatly inspired the topic and angles of this research. Altogether, what I learnt on the field cannot be treated like proper data given its anecdotal and informal nature, but it adds value to the analysis and interpretation of the data and literature that will be presented.

3.2 Rationale and conceptual framework

This research seeks to understand the reasons behind the evolution of educational disparities, which are also naturally associated with other forms of inequalities. The thesis statement is rooted in the belief that inequalities are problematic and detrimental to society. Thereby, the rationale for researching this topic, and choosing migrant children's education as a specific angle, comes from the idea that disparities in access to education create lasting social exclusion, which thereby tends to trigger a negative feedback loop that fosters long-term inequalities and persisting socioeconomic problems within a population (Room, 1995).

3.3 Theories

The factors examined in this research to explain the resilience of educational disparities primarily relate to institutions, such as the *hukou*, the education system, and the different levels of government, hence institutionalism being the most fitting approach for this thesis. In essence, this entails that the main arguments advanced in this thesis have a

core emphasis on these institutions and their surrounding structures. This same theoretical lens is also conducive to analyzing the more general context that influenced policies' outcomes and assessing their impact on levels of inequalities and educational disparities. Furthermore, because the divide between rural and urban hukou holders, and even more so the marginalization of migrant children in the education system, are institutional forms of social exclusion, institutionalism has grown to be the dominant perspective in this field of research. Choosing this approach thus fits with the objective of enriching the body of literature on the topic of migrant children's education and the hukou. As well, institutional changes are crucial for China to uphold its economic and social development. Thus, considering that the hukou reform and NUP embody the very kind of institutional change that is demanded and needed, it is important and relevant to question their shortcomings from an institutional viewpoint so that we can understand and identify which, where and how institutions continue to foster educational disparities. Besides, with China's guiding vision of a harmonious and prosperous society, the country's institutional environment needs to be structured in ways that improve human capital, social mobility, and equality of opportunities. On that, it is clear from this theoretical posture and conceptual framework that hukou-based institutional barriers to the education system need to be removed so that high school completion rates can rise and allow China to transition from a middle-income to a high-income nation (Rozelle & Hell, 2020). Overall, institutionalism provides an ideal framework to investigate why the reform has not achieved this kind of change and what institutional factors contribute to perpetuating educational disparities.

As mentioned above, two key concepts have been central to this research: equality of opportunity and social mobility. Equality of opportunity refers to the political ideal of

striving for the “fairness of processes through which individuals with different backgrounds or from different social groups reach particular outcomes, such as educational or occupational goals” (Encyclopedia of Sociology, 2022). This is very relevant to this research’s problem as inequalities in access to education and systemic disparities between rural migrant children and their urban counterparts are evident and fundamental representations of unequal opportunities. Considering that the idea of equal opportunity implies that people are all given an equal chance to « compete » in the job market and more generally that societal structures and institutions guarantee a level playing field for people to succeed, the hukou system acts as a mechanism that annihilates this concept for the floating population in China (Froissart, 2013) . Similarly, by dividing Chinese citizen in a rather arbitrary manner that determines their opportunities based on their mother’s place of birth, the hukou system causes serious prejudices for rural migrants and significantly limit their aspirations.

Very closely linked to the idea of equal opportunity is the concept of social mobility, which refers to “change in a person's socio-economic situation, either in relation to their parents (inter-generational mobility) or throughout their lifetime (intra-generational mobility)” (OECD, 2022). Generally, it is used in terms of upward mobility, as in people’s abilities and opportunities to climb the socio-economic ladder and move up social strata. In most cases, education is seen as the main enabler and key driver of social mobility (OECD, 2022). Inversely, inequalities in access to education hinder social mobility and perpetuate poverty and low socioeconomic status across generations. Hence, regarding China and the hukou, if it is said that differences in education lead to a difference in access to high-quality jobs, then when migrant children are excluded from the public urban school

system, they are also excluded from ever accessing better-paid and higher-quality positions in the job market (Rozelle & Hell). In that sense, the hukou system fosters social reproduction, which is the opposite of social mobility. Indeed, the reality is that millions of migrant workers' children grow up to be factory workers just like their parents. Were these rural children given equal access to education, intergenerational mobility would expectedly increase, and it would be way more common to see the daughters or the sons of migrant workers become engineers or doctors for example.

All in all, equality of opportunity and social mobility are two concepts that go hand in hand, while education is a pivotal determinant of the extent of equality of opportunity and intergenerational mobility. For China to concretize its ideal of an equal and harmonious society, it must provide greater opportunities of social mobility to its large population of migrant workers and their children (Rozelle & Hell, 2020, p. 53). To do so, barriers to education, both hukou and non-hukou related, need to be tackled. That being the case, this theoretical and conceptual framework is particularly suited to research on this topic and on China's issues of inequalities in general, as it has been used widely throughout the literature covered in this thesis (Froissart, 2013; Huiwen, 2019; Jain-Chandra et al., 2018; Rozelle & Hell, 2020; Wong, L, 2012; Zhou & Cheung, 2019).

3.4 Measures of inequality and variables

These assumptions and theories are underpinned by a variety of empirical measures and indicators allowing us to evaluate the extent of said inequalities and educational disparities. Importantly, looking at changes and trends in these socioeconomic, education

and migration-related indicators in relation to the reform and NUP helps to understand the relation between *hukou* policy changes and educational disparities.

Various education indicators, from both international organizations and the Chinese government, were used to assess how China compares to other countries as well as how Chinese provinces and cities compare to each other on educational disparities and inequalities. Most indicators selected are ones that draw correlations between quantitative and qualitative variables, thus providing a combination of numerical and categorical data to measure and assess policies' outcomes on inequalities and educational disparities among migrant children.

Among the indicators used to establish the problem statement and the research's core postulates, the Gini Index showed that inequalities in China are high and arguably becoming out of proportion as the country's economy keeps growing and becoming increasingly sophisticated. China's average Gini coefficient for the last 10 years is 0.482, which is 58% higher than the average among EU countries, which was 0.305 (World, Bank, 2021). Similarly, when compared to a social market economy, specifically Germany, China's Gini coefficient is 67% higher (World Bank, 2021). While China has a long way to go before reaching the EU's average level of development and per capita GDP, which is currently still about 3.6 times that of China now, such staggering differences in levels of inequalities are raising concern about China's economic growth trajectory and how inequality may ultimately undermine the country's "common prosperity" ideal (Wu, 2022).

Another indicator that prompted key propositions for this research comes from the World Bank's Human Opportunity Index (HOI), in the way that it was used and interpreted in a quantitative study from Lund University Institute, in combination with complementary

data from the Longitudinal Survey on Rural Urban Migration in China (RUMiC), a dataset from a collaboration project between the Australian National University, Beijing Normal University, and the Institute for the Study of Labor (Forschungsinstitut zur Zukunft der Arbeit, or IZA), in Bonn, Germany. This interpretation of the index indicated that even if opportunities to access basic public education in the cities between rural migrant children and urban non-migrant children, under *hukou*, are seemingly comparable, a disaggregation reveals worrying disparities (Huiwen, 2019). More importantly, this study showed that opportunities for rural migrant children are consistently the lowest and the least equitably allocated in the coastal provinces (Huiwen, 2019). Ultimately, it was found that *hukou* status was the largest significant contributor to these opportunity gaps in the education of migrant children (Huiwen, 2019). These results reaffirmed the importance of conducting further research on this topic, and concurrently constitute the premises for this research's question and associated findings.

Furthermore, the World Bank's rich database of education statistics, which includes detailed data such as literacy rates, number of out-of-school children, gross enrollment rates and completion rates, provided a good quantitative basis to portray the state of education in China. As the indicators' data can be desegregated by regions, genders, times, and more, they helped in identifying shortcomings in the country's education system.

3.5 Scope

This is an exploratory study based on a literature review and document analysis to evaluate the perpetuating factors of educational disparities among children of migrant workers in the context of *hukou* reform. Aside from references to the historical context, the

research focuses on the timeline of the reform, that is the period from 2014 to 2020. In terms of geographical scope, there are some examples from specific cities in China, notably Shanghai, Beijing and Shenzhen, but data and findings extend to the whole country.

3.6 Limitations

Although the articles and studies presented in the literature review are important and their credibility has been validated by peer-review processes, their value and veracity may vary depending on different factors, such as if they have been translated from Chinese to English, financed by international agencies or by China, influenced by an author's bias, etc. While each source has been carefully selected for its relevancy and credibility, it shall be noted that the evidence supporting this thesis are articles and scholarly literature, without field work specifically dedicated to this research, and thus arguments and constituting elements of this thesis should not be taken as pure uncontested facts. Notably, the statistics and quantitative data that measure inequalities and certain aspects of education have been cautiously referred to and should be interpreted with a critical perspective.

For instance, when it comes to highlighting disparities between rural and urban children, a more thorough investigation into the World Bank's database revealed some considerable flaws and omissions in China's education statistical dataset. For one thing, from 2009 and after, the "data for China" regarding literacy, attendance, and completion rates, were solely based on information collected in Beijing, Shanghai, Jiangsu and Guangdong or Zhejiang (World, Bank, 2022). Therefore, it is impossible to know from this data how far the remote and disadvantaged provinces, in which the lower-tier cities are located, compared to these larger provinces. Similarly, misleading scores from the OECD's

Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) sparked controversy when they led Shanghai to be portrayed as having a "high equity" school system, implying that it does not exclude disadvantaged students (Gruijters, 2020). While this presupposes that this school system is inclusive, it disguises the fact that Shanghai's high schools, alongside most major cities, require an urban *hukou*, hence migrant children are automatically excluded from this level of schooling and thus not represented in PISA scores and other picture of equity (Gruijters, 2020). In reality, not only does the *hukou* prevents migrant old enough to attend high school from enrolling in urban public high school, but it also drives a large portion of them out of the city. As their only option to get credentials is to return to their town of registration due to *hukou* restrictions, children of migrant workers who can attend city schools in Shanghai and other Chinese cities can only do so up to the ninth grade, and thereafter they must return to their parents' hometowns if they wish to enroll in high school (Loveless, 2014). Accordingly, Shanghai's population chart shows a steep decline in the number of 15-year-olds living in the city, confirming the OECD's data that 27% of Shanghai's 15-year-olds are fully excluded from the urban public school system, hence left out from testing and performance indicators (CPT, 2021). In a like manner, whereas China ranked first on all three PISA categories (mathematics, science and reading) at the country level, the results were deceptive and controversial since China only reported scores from Shanghai, Hong Kong and Macao, its wealthiest and highest performing regions (Grujiters, 2020). The OECD was largely criticized for allowing China to submit results from cherry-picked provinces, featuring the wealthiest metropolitan areas and the best schools, while most other countries were ranked based on their national average (Gruijiters, 2020). Overall, since the *hukou* substantially alter the composition of the city's

high school students in favour of wealthier local families, and because China carefully selects a few provinces and cities to account for the whole country, some indicators and data may contribute to forging misconceptions and promote an unrealistically enhanced vision of the state of China's education system.

All in all, across all education indicators, the accuracy and implications of China's results ought to be questioned. The country's outstanding scores and rankings often provide a poor reflection of the overall Chinese population, given that data reported by China tend to be disproportionately or exclusively representative of the most prosperous parts of the country (CPT, 2021). These fragmentary data suggest that the perceived quality of education in China and the continuous improvements in access, as supported by education indicators, may be inflated and hiding subpar figures, such as the continuous issues of access to public schools and the poor quality of teaching among the marginalized floating population of migrant children (CPT, 2021).

CHAPTER 4 – STRUCTURAL FACTORS OF DISPARITIES IN EDUCATION

While the *hukou* is evidently a direct cause of educational disparities, schooling inequalities targeted at migrant and rural children, and more broadly the social educational exclusion of migrant children in cities, are complex multifactorial issues. They are deeply rooted in China's political, cultural, social, and hierarchical dynamics and structures, which ergo transcend the *hukou* system as the only cause of continuous education inequality across the country. Hence, although they are not dominant explanations for China's relative immobilism concerning educational inequalities in megacities, several underlying structural factors are worth addressing since they contribute to perpetuating the issue, but also because they are underpinnings of the main argument and enrich the context and explanation surrounding the NUP's and *hukou* reform's shortcomings. This chapter investigates some of the salient features of China's education system and policies that are, to varying degrees, conducive to the educational exclusion of migrant children. Those include systemic issues, such as curriculum decentralization, bureaucratic barriers, and the entrance examination system, as well as cultural and societal factors, including corruption and bribery in schools and private tutoring practices.

4.1 Decentralization of education governance

China's education system is highly decentralized, and most jurisdictions are relegated to provincial and local levels. Even more so, the recent trends in education policy changes and school governance reforms, which happened parallel to the NUP and the 2014 *hukou* reform, have been advancing further decentralization of the school system apparatus. While

this governmental strategy was meant to tackle educational issues and disparities, it was approached in a typical fashion "with Chinese characteristics" through a quite unique model of "decentralized centralism" (Huang et al., 2016, p. 27) The paradoxical concept implies the devolution of power in aspects of fiscality, curriculum design and schools' management, as a mean to reduce the rigid governmental controls over school and meet regions' specific needs. However, this decentralization reform was utterly designed and implemented as a top-down process, with no public or citizen participation (Huang et al., 2016, p. 36). Essentially, the concept of "decentralized centralization" involved transferring tasks and mandates to lower levels, rather than truly distributing the authority or power (Huang et al., 2016, p. 33). Without space for meaningful local initiatives, the plan translated into broad decision-making, falling short of the objective to empower local actors, promote schools' autonomy and strengthen school-based management capacities, and diversify educative resources, (Huang et al., 2016, p. 34-35).

Moreover, while local governments did not get more decision-making powers, they were rather delegated with most financial responsibilities. Local authorities were thus faced with having to find alternative funding and resources to support their schools, which led to increased tuition fees, donations, and related corruption, as well as the emergence of school-run enterprises. Overall, the new public management ideology of decentralization significantly transformed both central and local governments' roles and capacities in education, which led to increasing marketization and privatization of the education sector (Huang et al., 2016, p. 33). Concretely, marketization meant the integration of market principles and mechanisms, such as competition, in school management, while privatization translated into a transfer of public resources and authority to private

institutions. As much of the literature agrees that private schools foster educational inequality, bring about greater inequality of opportunity, hinder social mobility, and perpetuate inequalities in society at large (Verger et al., 2016), the advent of more private schools in China can be seen as detrimental for migrant children's access to education and the schooling disparities they are already experiencing.

Among the set of new "central decentralized" education policies, the decentralization of the school curriculum had a particularly significant impact on migrant children and heightened disparities in learning content and outcomes between localities (Huang et al., 2016, p. 36). More specifically, administrative responsibilities and tasks related to teaching curriculums fell into the hand of local administrators (Wei & Gong, 2019). In this context, due to regional differences in education quality and resources, some provinces decided to take the opportunity to replace the national curriculum and 16 of them adopted local versions of the college entrance examination to reflect the specific education content delivered in their area (Wu, 2020). Rather than optimizing teaching and levelling out learning outcomes, inconsistencies and gaps in curriculums and testing regiments across the country exacerbated the existing disparities between rural and urban children, while putting migrant students at an even greater disadvantage (Huang et al., 2016. P. 37-38). Because migrant children tend to move across the country, the heterogeneity of curriculums between provinces and the variations in testing standards and enrollment regulations has made it harder for them to navigate the system and carry on with their education as they move and study outside their place of *hukou* registration (Huang et al., 2016, p. 36). Besides, since migrants often end up taking exams in a different place from where they

have previously studied, they are likely getting tested on unfamiliar content and are thus significantly disadvantaged (Huang et al., 2016, p. 36).

Overall, under the *hukou* system, the decentralized curriculum combined to the examination system undermines migrant children's equality of opportunities by jeopardizing their chances of succeeding in the standardized tests and entrance examinations, which constitute the only path to higher education and, ultimately, to upward social mobility.

4.2 Bureaucratic barriers, hidden fees, and other limitations for migrants

Whereas the reform was NUP and the 2014 *hukou* brought about education policies that were expected to be more "accommodating" to migrants, they imposed constraining rules, bureaucratic burdens, and hidden fees on migrants, which ultimately prevented most entitled migrants from genuinely benefiting from the changes (Ming, 2014). Similarly, despite the relative opening of enrollments and the relaxation of *hukou-related* admission criteria in some city schools, major barriers persist and continue to create significant difficulty in school enrollment and attendance. The case of Beijing illustrates how burdensome the bureaucracy and substantial ancillary fees create economic barriers to entry and undermine access to public schooling for migrants, thus limiting their opportunities and prospects of social mobility.

A number of Beijing public schools now accept migrant children without a *hukou*, under certain conditions, but the enrollment process is tedious and often enough to deter most candidates, directly or indirectly. For one thing, students must have an RP, which they would automatically get from their parents. Yet, to obtain this RP, migrant workers

must submit a work permit with proof of income and a continuous residence certificate, which they rarely have (Dong & Goodburn, 2019, p. 27). In fact, millions of migrants in megacities like Beijing work in the informal economy sector, which means that they do not dispose of an official work permit or legal proof of income. With that fact alone, many children whose parents fall in this category are thus automatically ineligible for an RP and de facto excluded from public urban schools. Secondly, for those who do have jobs in the formal economy, obtaining official proof of residence is just as challenging. For that, they must provide a property rental contract, a certificate of property ownership, the identity card of the property owner, and proof of tax payments on the rental for a minimum of six months (Beijing Municipal Education Committee [BMEC], 2017). This adds up to about 17 documents in total, at the minimum, just to obtain the required proof of residence. On top of it all, a double authentication process is necessary for all documents to prevent forgeries, which prolongs the process even more (BMEC, 2017). All in all, it is long, expensive, taxing and much more complicated than it sounds to acquire the three mandatory documents, when it is possible at all. Albeit now legal in certain areas, it remains unlikely and exceptional for non-*hukou* children to obtain a coveted spot in one of the few urban public schools that accept migrants (Dong & Goodburn, 2019, p. 26-27).

Unfortunately, there are still hurdles in the way for those who manage to enroll: On top of the bureaucratic burden, the minority of migrant children who manage to find a way to enroll in government schools without an urban *hukou* are then required to pay special fees and face unexpected costs at nearly every level of the system (Ming, 2014). Although school fees have been abolished by the CCP in 2008, supposedly for all students in all city tiers, non-local children are instead requested to pay thousands of RMB covered up as a

"donation to public education resources" (Dong & Goodburn, 2019, p.26). In parallel, those without a Beijing *hukou* face a special "migrant fee" of 600 RMB payable to the city, on top of the substantial school-related fees to cover textbooks, uniforms, and mandatory activities (Wang, 2020). Besides, considering the frequent mobility of migrant families, several schools require them to pay multiple years of tuition in advance, as opposed to yearly payments like regular students (OECD, 2016). Altogether, these financial barriers make formal education out of reach for most school-aged migrants in cities like Beijing, as the necessary amount to register and keep a non-local child in an urban school far exceeds most migrant workers' means (OECD, 2016).

Like Beijing, Shanghai has also introduced mechanisms along its RP policy, which perpetuates and increases migrant-to-local educational inequalities, including the discriminatory city's point system (Dong & Goodburn, 2019, p.30).

What is more, in the few cases where migrant parents can provide all the necessary documentation and pay all the correlate fees, their endeavours are still challenged by the very limited spaces in public schools and the fact that spots are allocated in priority to local kids (Dong & Goodburn, 2019, p.28-30). In such cases, they must resort to enrolling their children in a migrant school, which, as previously discussed, is far from being an equivalent alternative in terms of quality and outcomes. As opposed to public urban schools, migrant ones are generally privatized, in poorer conditions, and greater risk of closures and delocalization, while they often encounter issues related to curriculum disparities, legal status, and difficulties in diploma and credentials recognition (Chen, 2013).

In sum, while children without an urban *hukou* are now not always formally excluded from urban public schooling, bureaucratic and financial barriers are keeping them

excluded from the official education system. In this context, many children have to return to their hometown to pursue their education, or else drop out and start working unskilled jobs, like their parents, at a young age (Dong & Goodburn, 2019, p.19). In retrospect, despite being alleged "more flexible", the reform and its new education policies generally fail to help those in need and are overall ineffective in bettering the educational inclusion of migrant children.

4.3 Bribery, gifts giving and corruption in schools

Corruption is rampant in China, and the education system is unfortunately not immune to it. Whereas devolution in education governance, along with fiscal decentralization, may increase flexibility in education policies and foster more adapted strategies and academic programs, it did not prevent corruption and inequalities from rising (OECD, 2016). In fact, China's decentralized school management, which lacks teaching standards and set expenditure guidelines, incites schools to adopt informal arrangements driven by political interests, which translate into bribery, elitism, and nepotism (Zhou & Zhou, 2019). In turn, these practices influence funding, access, and even academic performance (Zhou & Zhou, 2019).

At the city level, since a sizable portion of cities' education budgets comes from income and property taxes, wealthier areas are necessarily advantaged as they generate more revenues, hence richer families have more leverage when it comes to influencing decision-making (Rao & Ye, 2016). 2016). By contrast, schools near migrant workers' communities, mostly located in impoverished areas, are poorly funded since there are fewer fiscal revenues generated in their area, and their population income and tax contributions

are insignificant to give them any negotiating power in comparison to their more well-off urban *hukou*-registered neighbours (Rao & Jingzhong, 2016). As a result, asymmetrical funding widens inequalities between people and especially accentuates regional inequalities. Likely to persist and grow over time, these gaps in regional capacities result in perpetual educational disparities that have lasting repercussions on intergenerational social mobility (Chen et al., 2017).

At the school level, widespread cronyism in Chinese public schools adds to the already unfair competition between students and exacerbates elitism within the system (Ruan, 2019). Corruption amplifies the exclusion of children of migrant workers since they do not have the financial capacity to pay for extra tutoring and compete with their wealthier urban citizen classmates who can afford private lessons and support to get higher grades. Starting as early as pre-school, gift-giving and bribing, longstanding practices in Chinese culture (the famous custom of red envelopes), are paths to admission, higher grades, and other privileges (Levin, 2012). Whereas these favours and compensations come from parents, they are also sometimes directly or informally requested by teachers themselves seeking ways to supplement their low incomes (Ruan, 2019, p. 122). Many teachers also run cram schools or offer private tutoring outside their class hours to round up their salary, often skipping key parts of the curriculum during the day to pressure students to attend these paying courses (Levin, 2012). Consequently, as more students enroll in those supplementary classes to catch up on the necessary exam material that is being omitted during regular hours, it is seen as the norm and private tutoring becomes essential to compete for admission to higher education (Liu, 2016). Unsurprisingly, this phenomenon is detrimental for migrant children who cannot afford to pay for additional lessons. In the

end, even when they find a way to enroll in a good and recognized public urban school, migrant children and less fortunate students who cannot partake in extra tutoring miss on core components of the curriculum, which impair their chances of succeeding at the entrance exam(s) (Zhou & Zhou, 2019). Since education is extremely valued in China, and more so among migrant families who consider it to be the only way for their children to break from the poverty cycle, many migrant parents will go above and beyond to pay for tutors and cram schools. They might borrow money or accept to live in awful settlements just so their child can have equal opportunities to graduate and the slightest chances at the entrance exam, which is their only take at reaching higher education (Chan, 2019). This phenomenon reflects the social stratification dynamics inherent to China's society and education system, as well as the policies' failure in ensuring equality of opportunity for all children, which go beyond the scope of the *hukou* reform (Chen et al., 2017).

In 2015, shortly after the launch of the *hukou* reform, the central government announced a nationwide ban on teachers accepting gifts and charging for private tutoring, as a response to the rising concerns regarding these illegitimate practices (Xue & Fang, 2018, p. 63). However, despite a lack of empirical data on the issue, testimonies, and indirect evidence, including exam results and enrollment rates, indicate that the situation is still ongoing and that people are finding ways to circumvent the ban, whether through grey areas in the legislation or even more bribery (Feng, 2022). Ultimately, the bigger picture behind these practices suggests that teacher salaries are generally too low, and thus earning side incomes is simply necessary for them to survive (Levin, 2012). In this regard, the interdiction of gifting and tutoring practices seems like a form of coercive politics to please public opinion and address outsiders' concerns, while in reality, the strategy has no

potential to truly improve the integrity of the education system since it does not address the source of the problem. It is indeed generally admitted and demonstrated by the literature that eradicating corruption requires fixing the issue's root causes, such as teachers' working conditions and wages, as well as universal and equal access to public education (Xue & Fan, 2018, p .64-65). That being said, gift-giving and briery are customary in every sphere of Chinese society, where these practices are justified and accepted under principles and cultural norms like *guanxi* and *gănqíng*, which makes it hard to draw the line between nice gestures and corruption (Ruan, 2019, p. 120-127). In that sense, cracking down on private tutoring and regulating gift-giving is a complex and ambitious undertaking, which only targets one aspect of a much bigger and deep-rooted economic and beliefs system that support bribery and corruption. Overall, ethical issues and lack of transparency remain among the biggest hurdles in China's development, hence stopping underground practices in the education system, just as in business in general, remains a top priority for the government (Ruan, 2019; Xue & Fan, 2018).

4.4 The entrance examination system

China is defined by paradoxes, and its examination system is a prime example of conflicting ideologies and cultural practices. In contrast with the culture of bribery and gift-giving in schools, meritocracy, ethics, and virtue, remain core values of today's Chinese culture and guiding principles in modern Chinese education. This is particularly true and observable in China's exam culture, renowned for its high-stake *gaokao* exam (Liu, 2016, P. 85). In fact, the concept of entrance examinations and competitive standardized testing in China dates back over a thousand years, originating from the ancient system of civil service examinations that started with the Imperial examination during the mid-Tang

dynasty (618-907 AC), known as the *keju*, (Liu, 2016, P. 15; 25). Centuries later, the old system was eventually abolished in 1905, and replaced by a new exam system, featuring the *gaokao* as the ultimate entrance exam to access university (Liu, 2016, P. 90). Whereas the *gaokao,* and China's exam culture at large, are heritages of Confucius meritocratic values and based on the rationale that entrance examinations serve to rank and admit individuals based on their capabilities and merits rather than on their family ties, wealth, or status, the *gaokao* has now become so paramount to professional success and social mobility, that it has turned into a highly competitive and corrupted system (Liu, 2016, P. 85-99). While it was meant to foster equality of opportunity and social mobility for deserving people, allowing smart and hardworking students to join the elites regardless of their lineage, it achieved the opposite and catalyzed social stratification based on wealth and origin.

Prior to 2014, students could only take the college entrance examination at their place of *hukou* registration, which, in many cases, meant migrant children had to go back to the countryside, alone, and be tested on a different curriculum (Qin & Buchanan, 2019). Thus, following the partial relaxation of *hukou* policies, some local governments, mostly in mid-sized cities, began to permit children of long-term migrants to sit the college entrance examination in their hosting city (Qin & Buchanan, 2019). While that can be seen as a step in the right direction, it is still far from ensuring equality of opportunity for migrant students. Indeed, as mentioned before, urban registered and wealthier children tend to have private tutoring and attend cram schools to prepare for exams, while they also generally enjoy overall better living conditions and parental support (Qin & Buchanan, 2019). In contrast, migrant children rarely have access to private or extra courses, and often find

themselves living in precarious dwellings, with unreliable access to the internet, limited family support and unstable environments (Qin & Buchanan, 2019). Moreover, in the context of a decentralized curriculum, migrants who have studied outside their current host city are still discriminated against by the exam system, even if they are allowed to enroll.

Despite the reform and education policy changes from the NUP, the current entrance examination remains exclusionary and unfair to rural and migrant children. The entrance examination system epitomizes all the structural issues discussed in previous sections and cements disparities between classes and *hukou* status. Ultimately, the *gaokao* is where the advantages of private tutoring and extra courses are concretized, it is where curriculum disparities matter, and where *hukou* registration and financial means determine one's capacity to attend and take the exam. In a way, by officially closing the doors to further education, the entrance exam formalizes the exclusion of migrant children and anchors them in the floating population with a difficult socioeconomic status.

4.4.1 Provincial jurisdictions and universities' quota system

As the reform did not achieve mass *hukou* conversions, most migrants living in urban areas alongside their children are still registered as rural citizens, sometimes with urban residence permits at best. In parallel, as demonstrated above, only a few places allow migrants to sit the *gaokao* in their cities, while most provinces have maintained the original regulation according to which students must take their exam in the province of their *hukou* (Qin & Buchanan, 2019). Therefore, the majority of migrant children still have to go back to their hometowns to take the test, even if they have been schooled in another city and have spent their entire life elsewhere. In addition to having to study new materials specific

to their province, returning children also face greater competition in their hometowns (Liu, 2016).

In fact, competition to get into the best universities is surprisingly less fierce in megacities, like Beijing and Shanghai, than it is in rural areas (Liu, 2016, P. 172). That is because universities have a quota system designed to allocate more spots to local (*hukou*) students (Qin & Buchanan, 2019). Therefore, the admission score threshold for local students is often lower than the cut-off set for those registered in remote areas (Qin & Buchanan, 2019). Since most top universities are found in megacities, such as *Tsinghua* and *Peking University* in Beijing, it is relatively easier for local urban-*hukou*-registered students to be admitted to one of the country's prestigious institutions (Qin & Buchanan, 2019).

The baffling disparities in quotas between students from different provinces are highly debated in China, especially because the most coveted universities receive a good part of their funding from the central government (Liu, 2016, P. 173-175). Hence, many consider that they should be equally accessible and that the admission system should be revised to provide a level playing field for all candidates, regardless of *hukou* residence registration (Liu, 2016, P. 111; 194). While officials respond that it is justified for these universities to admit more local students since they do receive financial support from their local governments, research has shown that most provincial quotas are largely disproportionate to local funding (Liu, 2016, P. 173-175). Since universities lack transparency surrounding their yearly quota settings and do not disclose their criteria and figures, there are grounds to believe that these quotas may be arbitrary and urban-biased (Liu, 2016, P. 99-100).

The bottom line is that students from rural families are doubly penalized and discriminated against when it comes to accessing university: first by their lack of financial, social, and cultural resources, and then by the quota system that requires them higher, likely unattainable, scores to be considered. Although the *hukou* reform eased some restrictions, such as allowing migrants with RP to sit the *gaokao* outside of their region of *hukou* registration, the quota system remains a fundamental barrier preventing migrants to access higher education, in addition to the countless obstacles on their education path leading up to the *gaokao*. The quota system is thus another layer of the discriminatory structure that stunts social mobility and undermines equality of opportunity for children of migrant workers. If exam culture is sometimes associated with China's meritocratic culture, the disparities in curriculum, the remaining *hukou* restrictions in some places, and the universities' quota system create an unfair competition environment, exclusive on origins, social classes, and connections, rather than on merit and capacities.

CHAPTER 5 – NUP AND *HUKOU* REFORM: AGENDA AND OUTCOMES

As the primary focus of this research is to explain the prevalence of the long-lasting educational exclusion of migrant children in the context of *hukou* reform and NUP's new policies, it is essential to examine and understand the NUP's overall objectives and what the correlated *hukou* reform entailed and aimed for more specifically. Having discussed the different paths and patterns of migrant workers and their children, identified the systematic education predicament that they face, highlighted the overall disequilibrium in China's urbanization, and introduced the generalities of the NUP and *hukou* reform, this chapter further investigates how these policy changes have concretely affected migrant children and impacted their educational opportunities.

After decades of tackling unbalanced urbanization with massive infrastructure development, with little consideration for migration, the newly developed western regions and midsize cities came to a point where they needed people to operate and grow their economies (Wei & Gong, 2019). That is when and why NUP was adopted at this stage, as a plan to attract workers to work and settle in these regions. In that sense, driven by an underlying development agenda that was quite reminiscent of the "Go West" strategy, the 2014 *hukou* reform's overarching goal was to attract migrants in targeted western and inland regions and drive them away from overcrowded megacities. The new policies were thus designed to incentivize rural workers to move to lower-tier cities by relaxing their *hukou* rules and access to residence permits, while in parallel, aimed to deter current migrants from first-tier cities by maintaining and increasing their restrictions on *hukou* and

residence permits (Wang, 2020). Essentially, the idea was to relocate a certain number of migrant workers to better balance population distribution across the country.

Even though the concept of '*hukou* reform' could be interpreted as a step toward abolishing the household registration divide and granting all citizens equal rights and opportunities, the new policies rather held to the *hukou*'s original purpose and used the system as a tool to influence and control population movements (Wang, 2020). More especially, *hukou* regulations were eased only under certain conditions and in specific areas where and when there was potential to reroute migrants from megacities to smaller municipalities. For instance, more accessible *hukou* conversion programs were adopted but circumscribed to a few cherry-picked cities of mid to lower-tier categories, while top-tier centers became even more exclusive and averse to allowing *hukou* transfers (Wu et al., 2019). This scattered reform implementation and the government's decision to maintain the *hukou* system were justified and legitimized by the fact that spatial agglomeration of migrants was peaking and exceeding megacities' capacities, alongside a growing disequilibrium in migrants' distribution throughout the country, resulting in an incapacity to provide citizens with welfare, including education (Wu et al., 2019, p.3). In this perspective,-considering that the fundamental purpose of the *hukou* is to control internal migration and prevent rapid urbanization issues, reforming the existing system to attract migrants in lower-tier regions and match current challenges and priorities sounds like a coherent strategy from the government's viewpoint. Indeed, without the authority from the household registration apparatus, it would be even more complex for the CCP to attempt to influence migration patterns and try to achieve a more balanced urbanization and growth distribution throughout the country. In sum, through the NUP and *hukou* reform, the

government showed its intentions to tackle issues of inequalities and regularize the floating population by using the *hukou* as leverage to attract migrant workers and their children to lower-tier cities.

To this end, the reform essentially turned the nationwide *hukou* policies into tier-base rules, featuring different levels of relaxation and distinct requirements to *hukou* conversion depending on cities' size across the country (Wu et al., 2019, p. 2-3). Had it been effective, this strategy could have been a win-win situation by balancing urban density and fostering productivity in Western and Central regions all the while mitigating issues of overpopulation in Beijing and coastal urban centers. However, inconsistencies in policy applications and substantial local differentiations in household registration's parameters between provinces and cities complexified the reform implementation and misled many migrants into believing that *hukou* restrictions would be eased nationwide, which finally weakened the reform's reach and altered its potential driving force on migration patterns (Wu et al., 2019, p. 6-8). All in all, confronted with existing challenges of fiscal decentralization and inequity in funding for social welfare, alongside the lack of coordination and resources among provinces, the reform failed to generate any significant or positive impact.

The following sections in this chapter address various elements and details of the NUP and *hukou* reform that have challenged the CCP's agenda and jeopardized improvements regarding equality and access to education for migrants. Before all else, the tier system and how it framed the NUP and the *hukou* reform will be explained in greater detail, with highlights on the main policy differences between city tiers. On the one hand, it will consider the ways through which *hukou* policies were eased in lower-tiers areas, such as

though reducing the requirements for *hukou* conversion and residence permits. On the other hand, it will look at how existing barriers to residency and *hukou* conversion were further heightened in megacities, notably through social credits and point systems designed to increase the selectivity of migrants and reinforce cities' capacities to exclude and discourage those already established. The prerogative of megacities, referred to as major-city exceptionalism, exempts them from opening their public services to migrants and allows them to carry on with exclusionary policies through controversial top-down approaches on the grounds of balancing urbanization (Wei & Gong., 2019). Nonetheless, the reform failed to deter migrant workers from moving to or staying in first-tier centers, while it generated very little attraction toward midsize cities (Raimondo, 2019). A comparative analysis of how migration patterns have evolved over the 6-year plan revealed that the fiscal capacities of local governments were weakened by insufficient transfers and asymmetrical resources allocation between city tiers, which ultimately contributed to undermining the NUP's agenda and prevented the reform's from having a concrete impact (Raimondo, 2019, p.146). Thereby, it is commonly accepted across the literature that the overall 2014 agenda and policy design had underwhelming outcomes in the end and hence negatively affected migrant workers' children's educational opportunities in megacities.

5.1 NUP and hukou Reform: the city tier Framework

The tier system is not new nor exclusive to the NUP. In fact, China's central government implements most of its urban policies through the city tier framework, in which cities are categorized based on their population size, ranging from megacities, large cities, medium-sized cities, and small cities (Zhang et al., 2019). Naturally, this was a key

instrument in the 2014 *hukou* reform, which drew upon this model to implement flexible policies according to cities' size and local administrations' capacities. Concretely, it meant that *hukou* rules were eased in lower-tier cities and strengthened in the first tiers (Baijie, 2013). As established, this framework was intended to reshape migration patterns by reducing *hukou* restrictions on social services and easing access to residency in less populated areas, in order to limit the growing density in megacities at saturated capacity (Zhang et al., 2019). More specifically, the reform was designed around the tier framework to encourage migration toward towns and smaller cities of the third tier (with a population of less than 3 million), limit movement to second-tier cities (with a population between 3 and 5 million), and heavily discouraging migration to first tier centers (with a population over 5 million) (Baijie, 2013). Accordingly, the criteria to obtain an urban *hukou* were progressive, from fairly accessible in lower tiers to mostly inaccessible in the first tiers (See Figure 1).

Table 1. Eligibility Criteria for Rural to Urban hukou Conversion

Urban type	Urban scale	Conditions to settle
Small	< 50	Have a legal and stable residence in an urban district, or resident town of a county government, or other designated town
Medium	50–100	Have legal and stable employment as well as a residence in a city, together with participation in urban social insurance for a certain number of years, which is no more than three years according to the national regulation
Large	100–500	Have legal and stable employment for a certain number of years as well as a legal and stable residence in a city, together with participation in urban social insurance for a certain number of years, which is no more than five years according to the national regulation
Megacity	> 500	Having legal and stable employment as well as a residence, participation in urban social insurance and years of continuous residence as main indexes, establishing and perfecting points system for household registration according to the overall carrying capacities of cities and needs of economic and social development

**Urban scale = unit = 10000 inhabitants*

Source : http ://www.gov.cn/zhengce/2015-12/14/content_5023611.htm

To push the urbanization of smaller cities and advance the "citizenization" of rural migrant workers, the plan had an overall target of 100 million new urban *hukou*s to be

granted to rural citizens residing and moving in selected lower-tier cities by 2020 (Chan, 2019). By converting their *hukou*, migrants would theoretically be able to settle permanently in a city with full rights to work and entitlement to welfare benefits, including access to public education for their children (Chan, 2019).

5.2 Major-city exceptionalism

There is a longstanding tradition of major-city exceptionalism in China. In the early days of the Chinese economic boom, the central government granted some special privileges to certain big coastal cities, including Shanghai, Shenzhen, and Guangzhou, so that they could get ahead of the rest of the country and become "rich first" through attracting foreign investment (Jia et al., 2020). Their preferential status thus allowed them to formulate and manage their own policies of taxation, investment, custom and trading, as well as set their distinct land quotas and labour regulations (Jia et al., 2020). While these cities successfully turned into poles of attraction for foreign investment to develop their economies, a wide gap in socioeconomic development arose between coastal megalopolis and other cities and regions (Jia et al., 2020). Consequently, with disproportionately higher urban development levels and thriving industries, these cities became migrant workers' hubs and homes to massive floating populations or unregistered peasants. Major-city exceptionalism is thus partly responsible for unbalanced development and urbanization, but be that as it may, the NUP and *hukou* reform are trying to solve the problem with this same exceptionalist approach that created it, this time by granting megacities preferential rights and special policy-making powers to crackdown on migrant workers.

While the reform relatively eased settlement and migration processes in some midsize cities, it did the opposite in larger cities where local governments got the autonomy to make their own regulations, which they used to reinforce barriers to migration and tighten constraints on rural workers (Wei & Gong, 2019, P. 2). In essence, *hukou* conversion, RPs, and other ways to register as a resident in one of China's megacities became even harder and more exclusive, limited to the very wealthy, well educated, and highly ranked individuals (Wei & Gong, 2019). In other words, the reform design allowed major cities to bypass *hukou* relaxation and get around any responsibility regarding migrant workers, on the ground of population control and the necessity to slow down the overurbanization of first-tier destinations. Likewise, these circumstances legitimized the high selectivity of local governments toward incoming migrants and justified their restrictive quotas for residence permits and *hukou* conversions. In the end, because of their exceptional status, megacities, China's largest migrant hubs, maintained their discriminatory policies and further raised the obstacles for migrants by enforcing social credit and point systems to apply greater selectivity for newcomers (Dong & Goodburn, 2019, P. 662-666).

5.2.1 Social Credit and the Residence Permit Point Systems

In 2014, as part of the same Five-Year Plan of the NUP and *hukou* reform, China issued plans to establish a national social credit system. Aimed at fostering good citizenship and repressing dissidence and subversive behaviours, the "Planning Outline for the Construction of a Social Credit System (2014-2020)" provided a framework for rating and classifying citizens with scores that measure social behaviours, civic integrity, financial credit scores, among others (State Council PRC, 2014). The concept arguably shares some

similarities with the *hukou*, in that it is essentially another tool to register and monitor Chinese citizens. In fact, the plan's target is to eventually have a country-wide government system where all citizens would be registered with a social credit score linked to their identity number and *hukou* registration (State Council PRC, 2014). Although the goal was to implement the system across the country by 2020, the system is yet to be nationally coordinated and remains decentralized (Donnelly, 2022).

Nevertheless, whereas the 2014 *hukou* reform did not go as far as abolishing or opening up *hukou* conversion, it proposed a new nationwide model of residence permits in line with this Social Credit system. Concretely, this residence permit scheme was designed as an alternative way for migrants to temporarily access welfare services, including education, in the city where they work without having an urban *hukou* (Dong & Goodburn, 2019, p.4). Likewise, children of migrant workers with a resident permit would be guaranteed access to urban schools throughout their nine years of compulsory education (Dong & Goodburn, 2019, p.4). However, the exceptionalism of megacities exempted from fully implementing this more permissive system. In their case, they were allowed to tie their residence permit to a "points system" which would allocate points based on individuals' contributions, background, education, and other characteristics (Zhou & Cheung, M., 2017). Thereby, first-tier cities' local governments can put in place their own social record with pointing systems and criteria reflecting their specific needs and context (Donnelly, 2022). On that account, **t**his adaptation of the Social Credit System became a quite flexible mechanism for megacities to use and adjust to fit changing policy priorities and adapt to their circumstances. This means that they can modify its point scale and decide to raise penalties or increase point allocation according to the behaviours they want to forbid or encourage.

For example, a locality could decide to increase point sanctions for illegal street vendors if it finds the underground economy to be a nuisance. Similarly, in respect to inner migration, the point system can be used conjointly with the *hukou* system to influence and reshape migration patterns according to labour needs, urban challenges, and development priorities.

As megacities' governments have become increasingly selective toward incoming migrants and set more restrictive quotas for residence permits and *hukou* conversions, the point system is used to legitimize the selection and prioritization of a certain category of migrants while supporting the exclusion of others. Besides, since scores are based on an individual's degree of education, employment background, family status, property ownership and other factors that could represent potential contributions to the city, most rural citizens and migrant workers are naturally handicapped in comparison to their urban counterparts, regardless of their actions and behaviours (China Daily, 2015). All metropolitan areas have different thresholds and specificities, but the concept is applied in a like manner everywhere: people with good scores can apply for residence permits, those with the highest scores are eligible to apply for a local *hukou*, while low scorers cannot register and thus are disqualified from accessing urban welfare services (Dong & Goodburn, 2019, p.20-21). In this context, the Social Credit system essentially serves as a tool for first-tier cities to cherry-pick candidates eligible for *hukou* conversions who best fulfill their city's needs, such as talents, investors, etc.

Consequently, this trend contributes to the brain drain of rural areas, which in turn weakens the quality of education in these regions and ultimately perpetuate inequalities and further widen the rural-urban gap.

All in all, the social credit system, and the associated point-based attribution of residence permits tend to favour the elite groups and exclude the disadvantaged ones. Especially, children are completely powerless given they cannot earn points themselves as they automatically get their parent's scores (Dong & Goodburn, 2019, p.20). Therefore, for the most part, the social credit system is predicted to negatively impact efforts to reduce educational disparities. In the context of an allegedly progressive *hukou* reform, the adoption of a point system, which supports elitist and exclusionary practices in megacities, is very controversial and its 67nforceement in migrant workers' hubs across China has been heavily criticized by academics and observers from the international community.

5.2.2 Examples of the point system in megacities

Shenzhen, Shanghai, and Beijing are good examples to illustrate how cities can adapt the Social Credit system to fit their needs and use the point system locally to cherry-pick their new residents. The three cities' residence permits and urban *hukou*s schemes for migrant workers and their children are based on different point scales that meet their different priorities. Notably, these examples also show that residence permits perpetuate discrimination between migrants and locals, but also create stratification between different groups of migrants.

Shenzhen

Shenzhen, a much younger city than Shanghai, is more open to immigration. However, being a service-driven economy with 63% of its GDP coming from the tertiary sector, it requires a highly educated workforce to sustain and grow its economy (Upton & Huld, 2022). Similarly, Shenzhen's major manufacturing industries are concentrated in the

electronics, telecommunications, and computer sectors, which also calls for relatively high-skilled workers (Upton & Huld, 2022). Accordingly, the city's priority regarding immigration is to attract educated and skilled people to meet the demand of high-tech and high-end sectors. Thereby, using the social credit framework to assess prospective migrant workers, Shenzhen allocates more points to people who hold advanced diplomas and prioritizes *hukou* conversion for higher degree holders and skilled workers (Zhou & Cheung, 2017). Notably, there are extra points attributed for education level, professional certificates, as well as for honours and awards received (Zhou & Cheung, 2017). More specifically, 120 points or more are required to obtain privileges such as education (Dong & Goodburn, 2019, p.8). Migrant children are thus allocated school places in order of their scores, after local *hukou*-holders. Lower scores face longer waitlists for poor-quality state schools, while higher scorers may access better and more centrally located establishments (Dong & Goodburn, 2019, p.20-21). Those whose parents' scores stand below 120, and thereby cannot obtain residence permits, have no access to the city schooling system at all (Dong & Goodburn, 2019, p.20-21). At best, these children can be channelled into low-quality private migrant schools, where they have to pay fees and deal with all sorts of issues associated with such schools, as discussed in previous sections. Overall, these criteria and the score threshold are unrealistic for most migrant workers, making their access to residence permits and urban *hukou* unattainable in most cases. Thereby, the point system creates unfair competition for becoming an official Shenzhen resident and largely favours elites and even international immigrants. As a result, migrant children's access to schooling is compromised and thus, despite the point system meant to be meritocratic, good

performances and exemplary behaviours do not suffice to ensure these children enjoy equal opportunities and potential upward social mobility (Zhou & Cheung, 2017).

Shanghai

By contrast, Shanghai is an older city, more populous, with a complex economy and a long-established welfare system. Faced with challenges of pollution, traffic congestion and excess demand for public services, including education and healthcare, the city has set a long-term population limit of 25 million (Dong and Goodburn, 2019, p.30). Nonetheless, Shanghai still considers new immigrants as it needs investment to pay off its social insurance deficits and maintain its system afloat (Dong & Goodburn, 2019, p.30). Thus, in line with this priority, Shanghai's point system targets investors and wealthy citizens by allocating more points to individuals with better employment status, professional titles, assets, and good tax payment records (Dong & Goodburn, 2019, p.13-14). In other words, residence permit applicants in Shanghai are assessed primarily on their potential of financial contribution to the city. In terms of *hukou* conversion, obtaining a Shanghai *hukou* is quite difficult and less common since it implies a long and complicated process, which deters most migrant workers almost systematically. For instance, one of the conditions is to have held a Shanghai Residence Permit for seven years prior to applying for *hukou*, which is in itself relatively rare given the high threshold and selective criteria to obtain a residence permit (Dong & Goodburn, 2019, p.26).

Beijing

Beijing deals with severe issues related to its high population density, including hazardous air pollution, and increasing water and energy shortages. Alike Shanghai, the city aims to cap its population at a target of 23 million, to deal with growing environmental, social, and economic pressures (Jia et al., 2020). As a response, the Social Credit system is used to prioritize locals, who are registered with *hukou*s in Beijing, and give them precedence over the limited resources, namely education and healthcare. In this context, residence permits and Beijing *hukou*s are very restricted (Jia et al., 2020). While the points scale varies yearly following demographic changes and the city's needs, it generally favours the elite by giving much higher scores to advanced degree holders and investors (Dong & Goodburn, 2019, p.17). The more educated and the wealthier the higher the scores. For instance, people who pay over 100,000 yuan (US$15,470) a year in taxes are awarded six extra points (Donelly, 2022). Moreover, to be eligible for a Beijing *hukou*, the government not only requires applicants to have held a resident permit for seven years but also to have paid social security premiums continuously throughout this period (Dong & Goodburn, 2019, p.26). Besides, there is also an age limit of 45 years old to ensure that newcomers will be active contributors to the city's economy (Jia et al., 2020). In this context, as most migrants score largely below the point threshold to get a residence permit, and further away from a *hukou*, the majority of children are prevented from entering public local high schools, still years after the 2014 reform, which technically promised to gradually allow migrant children to receive public education in cities (Dong & Goodburn, 2019, p.29). What is more, because the school-aged population exceeds enrollment capacities, Beijing schools are very exclusive and so the rare migrant children who manage

to convert to an urban *hukou* often continue to be discriminated against and are unable to enroll in a local school (Dong & Goodburn, 2019, p.8). Ultimately, migrants have minimal power over their scores and their children are thus subjected to educational exclusion no matter how well they or their parents may behave or perform.

All in all, seeing how these megacities are using the point system and social credit mechanisms to restrict residence permits and *hukou* conversions, it appears that the national-level policy allows and encourages first-tier cities to increase their control over migrant selectivity rather than easing their integration. In fact, as opposed to the reform's alleged goal to equalize migrant services with locals, this system created new forms of educational exclusion and social stratification. Even if cities have distinct priorities and goals, the comparison of these three examples reveals a common pattern, that is urban governments privilege locals first and then favour the very top strata of migrants. As Dong & Goodburn concluded upon their analysis of local policy documents and migrant and official interviews, "the new […] residence permits [policies] discriminate not only between migrants and locals but also between different groups of migrants. This has far-reaching consequences for educational and social inequalities, cohesion and intergenerational mobility" (Dong & Goodburn, 2019, p.33). Their research finally argued that "central and local priorities are more about population control than social equality" (Dong & Goodburn, 2019, p.1).

5.3 Fiscal capacities of local governments: Insufficient transfers and asymmetrical resources allocation

While China's unique model of governance is often qualified as being neo-authoritarian, with the CCP holding the monopoly of power within a unitary state and a one-party system, the Chinese government and economy are in fact very decentralized (Chan, 2019). As such, fiscal decentralization has been at the core of China's economic boom of the last decades, as the Chinese public finance system evolved into a sort of "fiscal federalism" apparatus (Z. Wang, 2014). Similar to the government's structure, the fiscal system is organized into five levels: provincial (province, autonomous region, municipality, and special administrative region), prefecture, county, township, and village (Shen et al., 2014). Within this framework, the majority of public spending and services delivery falls under the responsibility of these sub-national governments, which thus administer and fund most basic social services, including education (Shen et al., 2014). The rationale for increasing devolution is that local governments, being closer to their county or district, are naturally more aware of their constituency's specific needs and are thereby better positioned to determine priorities and deliver the most appropriate services to their community (Shen et al., 2014). In line with this approach, the largest part of educational expenditures, nearly 90%, is also borne by sub-national governments, mainly at the prefectural and county levels (Shen et al., 2014).

Table 2. Share (%) of central and local government in total government revenues and spending.

Indicator	Central government	Local government
(1) Revenue		
Tax income	54.2	45.8
Non-tax income	21.0	79.0
Non-budgetary income	6.9	93.1
(2) Budgetary expenditure (selected items)		
Of which:		
General public services	8.2	91.8
Education	6.1	93.9
Social security and employment aid	4.5	95.5
Health	1.1	98.9
Community service	0.2	99.8
Expenditure on social housing	8.6	91.4
Total expenditure	15.1	84.9
(3) Off-budgetary expenditure	6.7	93.3

(1) Non-tax income includes special program receipts, administrative charges, penalty fees and other non-tax receipts.
(2) The composition of off-budgetary expenditure includes expenses in general public services, education, social security and employment aid, transportation, community service, and others.
(3) Data are for 2011, except for those of non-budgetary income and off-budgetary expenditure, which are for 2010.
Source: National Bureau of Statistics, *The Statistical Yearbook of China 2012*, Tables 8–4 and 8–5.

Source: National Bureau of Statistics, The Statistical Yearbook of China 2012, Tables 8–4 and 8–5.

In this context, the *hukou* reform, through requiring cities to welcome more residents and provide them with services, necessarily imposes a considerable expenditure responsibility. However, most local governments do not have the fiscal capacities to provide equitable public services and sustain increased welfare provision to large and growing migrant populations (Zhang & Li, 2016). In truth, even if expenditure per *hukou* (the cost associated to granting an urban *hukou* to a rural migrant worker) varies across the country, almost all cities lack the budgetary resources to match the related spending responsibilities in numbers that would meet the reform's goals (Zhang & Li, 2016, p. 906). Zhang's and Li's extensive study revealed that in "87% of the sample cities (39 out of 45 cities), expenditure need is over 50% of the government's entire fiscal expenditure (Zhang & Li, 2016, p.903-905). Only six cities require less than 50% of their fiscal expenditures to ensure the delivery of basic public services" (Zhang & Li, 2016, p. 904). Besides, the per capita fiscal revenue generated by new *hukou* holders is far from offsetting the incremental expenditure needs and disposable income per capita (Zhang & Li, 2016, p. 903-904) (See Appendix A). Hence, given their limited resources, local governments have

minimal incentives to provide free or subsidized welfare for migrant workers and their children. Raimondo's research highlighted that "[with limited] financial funding to support the extension of public services to the migrant population cities are reluctant to open their *hukou* system doors indiscriminately and include migrant workers in community-based welfare systems. It remains unclear what enforcement mechanisms will be put in place in order to implement and encourage compliance at the local level" (Raimondo, 2019, p. 148). Especially regarding education funding, city governments lack the resources and incentives to provide high-quality education to rural migrants (Goodburn, 2019, p. 15). Local governments also face opposition and concerns from local *hukou* holders who want to protect their privileged access to public schools and other services (Raimondo, 2019, p.168). Altogether, the fiscal and social burden associated with urbanizing rural workers explains why many cities' governments have been defying governmental guidelines for *hukou* reform (Zhang & Li, 2016, p. 906). On that account, the literature suggests that the extension of urban *hukou* status to a greater population of rural-registered migrants ultimately requires an intergovernmental fiscal transfer system in order to offset disparities in expenditure needs and balance economic capacities across levels of governments (Zhang & Li, 2016, p. 906).

5.4 NUP and hukou Reform: Outcomes and challenges

Because the reform was implemented in a decentralized fashion, with guidelines and goals set at the national level and direct policies issued at local levels, local governments were naturally driven by their own local interests when it came to managing their *hukou* policies. In a way, this led to commodifying the *hukou* through market selectivity using point

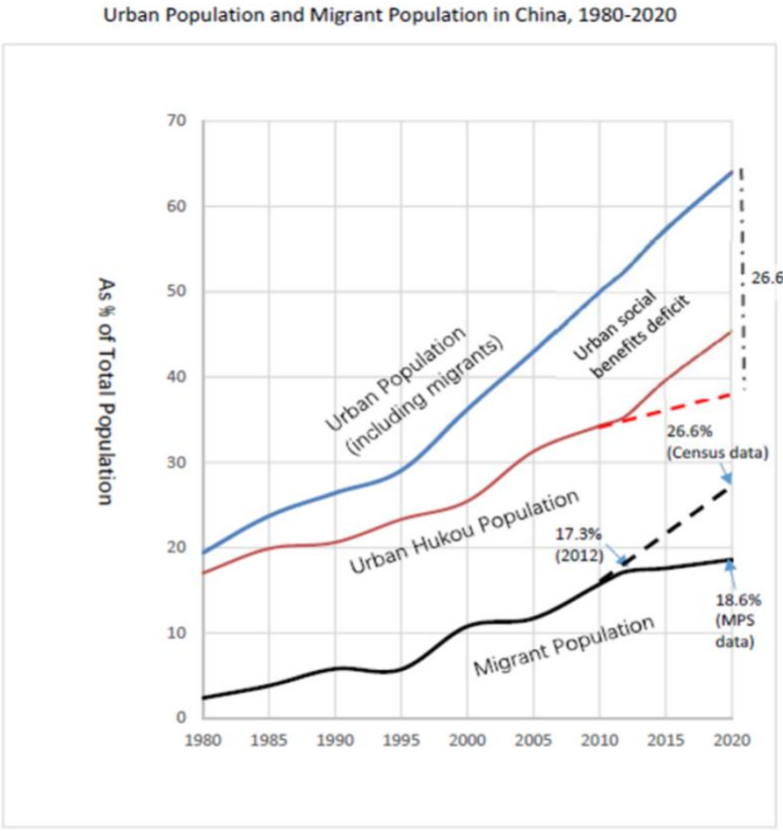
systems, social credits, fees, and other control mechanisms, especially in megacities. Adding to the other factors, this dynamic contributed to further the social exclusion of urban migrants and prevented most of them from obtaining local *hukou*s, thereby forbidding them from access to welfare services, including education.

In parallel, although the biggest issues faced by migrant workers and the largest educational inequalities are predominantly observed in megacities, the reform's key policies emphasized on improving migrants' accessibility and equality in midsize cities (Jia et al., 2020). The rationale for focusing on midsize cities derives from the idea that preferential policies would attract more migrant workers in these areas and draw them away from saturated destinations like Shanghai and Beijing (Jia et al., 2020). This was an effort to balance migrant ratios across the country and limit issues of overcrowding through incentives aimed to attract people toward smaller areas instead of the mainstream coastal cities. However, the new policies of midsize cities fell short to counterbalance the attractiveness of megacities that continued to offer more employment opportunities, higher quality-built environments, and pre-existent organized migrant workers communities (Jia et al., 2020).

In other words, the incentives adopted in targeted smaller areas were yet to compensate for the lack of opportunities and uncertainty associated with moving to these less common migrant destinations. Indeed, the relocations of secondary industries to inland regions and investments in infrastructure have not been accompanied by a substantial shift of population growth in these lower areas. The majority of rural to urban migrants remained in the city they were living in before the reform, while many new migrants continued to choose megacities over midsize cities as their working destination (Wei & Gong, 2019).

This outcome suggests that the leverage of the moderately revised *hukou* policy over internal migration has likely been overestimated. Planned through a top-down approach with a focus on metrics rather than on people's voices, the reform failed to achieve its objective of urbanizing 100 million rural Chinese by 2020 (Chan, 2021a). In fact, the revised *hukou* had an adverse effect on mobility and the steady flows of new rural migrants in megacities continued after 2014, which offset the reform efforts and ultimately resulted in an even larger migrant population living in China's megacities in 2020 than in 2014 (Jaramillo, 2022). Consequently, the gap in access to welfare and social services in first-tier cities is currently wider than it was in 2014 (Chan, 2021a). As such, the NUP's goal to close the urban social benefits gap or deficit by two percentage points by 2020, from 17.3% in 2012 to 15% in 2020 was far from achieved: recent data reveals that the "urban social benefits deficit," has reached 26.6% in 2020, according to the census, or 18.5% based on Ministry of Public Security (Chan, 2021b). Using either data, the percentage in 2020 (26.6% or 18.5%) is higher than the 15% target set in 2014 (Chan, 2021b).

Figure 1 Urban Population and Migrant Population in China, 1980-2020



Notes: Migrant population is defined as the difference between the urban population and urban (local) hukou population. The solid migrant population line is based on Ministry of Public Security data; the dotted line uses census data.

Source: Chan, K.W. (2021b) https://blogs.worldbank.org/peoplemove/chinas-*hukou*-reform-remains-major-challenge-domestic-migrants-cities

In this context, many children of migrants, even more than before, are unable to enroll and attend public schools in the cities where they live (Jaramillo, 2022). As a consequence, there was also a quite significant increase in the number of left-behind children around the same time, going from 70 million in 2010 to 88 million in 2015 in the year (census) following the reform (Chan, 2021b). All in all, these results confirm that the reform did not facilitate the general population redistribution nationwide and, instead of narrowing it, the urban social benefits gap has widened and thus fed educational disparities (Cui & Cho, 2019).

What is more, in the context where megacities raised restrictions on their floating population, most migrants faced increased discrimination. On that, reports have shown that children of migrants in megacities have been facing greater difficulties in school enrollment in recent years (Chan, 2021a). This also explains the increase in left-behind children since schooling and exam policies have become so stringent in megacities that migrant parents chose to leave behind or send back their children to their hometown so that they can pursue basic education.

Since the reform did not convince many migrant families to move to lower-tier cities, most migrants did not actually benefit from any of the supposedly advantageous policies since they were only implemented in lower-tier cities. Meanwhile, however, migrants who responded to incentives and moved to smaller destinations to benefit from the new policies had their expectations of finding better education services deceived. Indeed, efforts and investments toward migrants' education in lower-tier cities were concentrated on infrastructure developments and thus fell short in improving the quality of educational services, including the quality of teaching, technologies, and materials (Wei & Gong, 2019). In most cases, funds were primarily channelled into building facilities rather than enhancing teaching capacities (Chan, 2021a). Notably, attracting and retaining trained teachers in midsize cities remains a big challenge due to competitive salaries and better opportunities in megacities (Chan, 2021a). In this context, as midsize cities remain largely underserved in comparison to megacities, migrant children moving to these areas are still likely to receive second-rate education (Xiang et al., 2020).

Overall, rural-urban educational disparities continue to be observed countrywide across all city tiers, including midsize cities, years after the implementation of the *hukou* reform. On that, as Chan's research and comparative analysis of census data concluded, "China's *hukou* reforms have not succeeded. A litmus test of the *hukou* reform progress is whether or not ordinary migrants—not just the highly educated "talents" or wealthy that benefit from residence permits—have greater access to urban social benefits" (Chan, 2021b).

CHAPTER 6 – RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Overview

The purpose of this research was to examine the evolution of Chinese migrants' access to education and identify the main factors that perpetuate their exclusion and inequalities in the context of *hukou* reform. More specifically, the aim was to elucidate why educational disparities between children of migrant workers and urban children remain significant, even on the rise in megacities, despite the relaxation of *hukou* policies as part of the 2014-2020 New-Type Urbanization Plan (NUP) and 2014 *hukou* reform.

For that purpose, this research first investigated the greater context surrounding rural and migrant children's education and examined structural and systemic causes of disparities, which are not directly linked to *hukou* and are outside the reform's scope. Whereas the *hukou* is often pointed out as the central cause of inequalities and educational disparities in China, the idea of this research was to start by considering alternative elements that could have explained why reforming the *hukou* has not improved the issue. The main underlying causes that stood out as contributing factors were decentralization in education governance, bureaucratic barriers, such as hidden fees and limited registration for migrants, bribery, gifts giving and corruption in schools, the entrance examination system, as well as the provincial jurisdictions and universities' quota system. After reviewing the literature on these factors and assessing their impact on schooling inequalities, it is clear that China's education system is designed as a dual structure with inherent divisions between rural and urban children. Almost every aspect of education carries discriminatory elements, from access to quality of teaching, up to the entrance examination. In addition, the review of the literature highlighted that migrants' exclusion

is also rooted in their socioeconomic circumstances and living conditions in the cities (Wei & Su, 2014). Regardless of registration status, there still needs to be improvements in working conditions and income levels in order to narrow the gap between migrant and urban residents. Even though this would not solve institutional barriers to migrant schooling, it would still increase children's chance of completing their elementary education and thereby their potential for social mobility. Moreover, social acceptance toward migrant workers needs to be further promoted in cities, so that they can be part of society and their children can better integrate into schools when and if they get to go. In other terms, properly tackling educational disparities will require more than changing rural children's registration status, but also working on societal acceptance so that migrants are not outcasts in urban schools and are equally treated academically and socially.

All that being said, even though China's education system, culture and social stratification dynamics all contribute to educational disparities, this research finds that *hukou* status remains a constant and indirectly intertwines with all these factors. Observations and results suggest that registration status still has the biggest influence on people's equality of opportunities and social mobility. On this account, the resilience of educational disparities among migrant children in the context of *hukou* reform, which original purpose was the adoption of a nondiscriminatory *hukou* system, raised arguments about the reform's real agenda, the political will regarding migrant children, cities' capacities, as well as the overall effectiveness of the policy design and implementation.

Analysis of key findings

With respect to its policy objectives, the *hukou* reform purportedly aspired to facilitate the process of citizenization of the floating population and abate the rural-urban divide. To this end, the plan was to relax *hukou* restrictions and ease access to welfare services for rural migrants. However, as it happened, these measures were adopted only by lower-tier cities, while megacities went in the complete opposite direction. On that account, the research findings indicate that the 2014 *hukou* reform's fundamental objective was really to balance urbanization by spreading population distribution across the country. This entailed steering migrants toward western and inland regions and driving unregistered rural workers away from overcrowded megacities. In other words, the new policies were designed to incentivize rural workers to move to lower tiers by relaxing their *hukou* rules and access to residence permits, while deterring current migrants from first-tier cities by maintaining and increasing restrictions for non-*hukou* dwellers and tightening access to residence permits with point systems (Wang, 2020). This reform of the *hukou* policy was thus not meant to eliminate barriers to rural-to-urban migration, but rather to use the *hukou* system as it is, that is a tool to control population imbalance and manage urbanization rates, to deal with current issues related to the country's imbalanced growth. In the end, the government's intentions to "citizenize" migrant workers and improve their access to education were not entirely misleading, but the concretization of these goals was fully dependent on migrants responding to incentives by moving to lower-tier cities. Otherwise, the reform provided no measures to facilitate the integration of migrants in megacities, including access to welfare services. On the contrary, new policies in megacities were intended to discourage migrant workers from settling. On this account, access to urban

education continued to be hindered and even degraded for migrant children staying in first-tier centers.

The government's approach to the reform was a top-down strategy aimed at balancing migration. For that purpose, it was designed and implemented within the city-tier framework, across which different policies would be implemented depending on the cities' size. Thereby, as established, changes to the *hukou* and efforts toward improving migrants' education were to be limited to lower-tier cities, while megacities were parallelly allowed to raise barriers and imposed stricter restrictions on migrants to deal with overpopulation. On the whole, this dual approach, between smaller and bigger cities, created more imbalances in urban education by generating more inequalities in megacities and falling short of improving access and quality of education in lower-tier areas. The reality is that lower-tier cities did not catch up on megacities, or at least not within the reform plan's timeframe, in terms of educational resources and services. This appears to be one of the factors that hindered enticement for migrants to move to lower-tier cities. One of the main reasons behind the midsize cities' incapacity to level up their welfare and schooling provision, is the lack of funding which they require to meet the considerable expenditure responsibilities that come with accepting and integrating new migrants. Therefore, since most local governments lacked the fiscal capacities and budgetary resources to provide public services and sustain a large and growing population, they could not substantially invest in the education sector as much as the reform recommended (Zhang & Li, 2016). In the end, while the relaxation of *hukou* policies and eased access to residence permits in midsize cities would have allowed rural children to attend urban schools, and thereby attract migrants there, the scheme was impeded by the poor quality and

underdevelopment of schools. As a result, as the state of educational services in midsize cities came to be well-known among the floating population, many migrants preferred to stay in megacities as they saw no real advantages, particularly regarding education, that would make moving West with their family worthwhile.

Through analyzing the changes, or lack thereof, in migration trends post-reform, results indicate that relaxed *hukou* policies alone do not constitute a worthy enough incentive for migrants to change their destination and move to midsize cities. Perhaps the *hukou* factor's weight in migrants' decisions has been overestimated, while other elements have likely been overlooked. Among other things, to draw workers away from megacities and spur the appeal of lower-tier cities, calls for similar or better job opportunities, infrastructures, and quality schools for migrant children. Without offering or guaranteeing these key determinants of one's quality of life, the prospect of *hukou* conversion alone is not enough to turn lower-tier areas into coveted destinations and outcompete major cities with long-established migrant communities such as Shanghai and Beijing. This conclusion is partly confirmed by the fact the floating population has stayed and continued to grow in megacities after the reform, reaching 376 million in 2020 (NBS, 2020). Considering that this increase happened while megacities reinforced their restraints on migrants and reinforced their *hukou* policies, it may be inferred that communities and job opportunities are still significantly better in megacities and thus there is a long way to go before migration and urbanization rates reach equilibrium throughout the country. Moreover, for all that matter, balancing migration might not even be realistic as experts reiterate that there will always be a higher demand for lower-skilled jobs and services in China's megacities, given their strategic location, key role in global supply chains and prime significance in China's

economy (Wu, 2022). In the same vein, the literature agrees that pushing migrant workers away from these cities tends to create more problems and inflate disparities (Cui & Cho, 2020). China's endeavours to control population movement and manage overpopulation thus risk to eventually backfire. This would not be the first time as, alike the reform, the one-child policy was implemented to control population and demographics, but it ultimately resulted in a shrinking and ageing population with an unbalanced sex ratio (Chan, 2019). Besides, the selection of elite migrants enabled by the point systems fosters urban gentrification, which generates more inequalities and socioeconomic issues over time (Wu, 2022). Without more impactful policy-making to narrow educational disparities, migrant children's social mobility is compromised, which, in the long term, may jeopardize China's social stability and the CCP's project of a "socialist harmonious society".

Finally, another potential reason that could explain the government's relative immobilism regarding migrant education, in the sense that it is not putting more pressure and resources in the education system to further open up to migrants, especially in midsize cities, has to do with China's reliance on cheap labour to sustain and grow its factory-based economy. As China is developing new manufacturing hubs and industries across the country, it needs a docile workforce willing to accept low wages and willing to take on unskilled jobs. Migrant workers have traditionally fulfilled this demand for labour and still account for the largest share of China's blue-collar labour pool. On that account, in the same manner as migrant workers powered China's rise in the last few decades ago, the objectives and outcomes of the reform and NUP suggest that the marginalized floating population might be targeted to fuel the next phase of China's economic development in western and inner regions. Since today's migrant children are tomorrow's migrant workers,

it only makes sense that there is some reluctance to support them in accessing higher education. This hypothesis is particularly relevant as the country is experiencing increasing labour shortages in factories, with part of the population being more educated and more migrants opting for new types of jobs such as delivery. Hence securing a future generation of employable migrant labour could fit with the country's development projects. In any case, although there has been an increasing literature advancing hypothesis and theories along those lines (i.e. Wu, 2022), this scenario remains hypothetical and cannot be supported by enough empirical evidence to constitute a conclusive answer to this research's interrogation. Alternatively, other scholars have counterargued by pointing out considerable evidence supporting that China's economy is transitioning through offshoring and automation, which thus suggests that he country's low-skilled jobs might in fact be on the verge of disappearance (Rozelle & Hell, 2020, p. 47). If this is true, then it would confirm the initial argument that the government genuinely care about expanding high school education or higher to its migrant population.

CONCLUSION

This research questioned the reason for the resilience of educational disparities in China, in the context of *hukou* reform. It investigated different potential contributing factors, including exclusionary mechanisms inherent to China's education system, culture, and social stratification dynamics. After comparing these elements to *hukou*-related factors of inequalities, it appears that *hukou* status is still the biggest determinant of people's inequality of opportunities and social mobility. Thus, concerning educational disparities, the *hukou* reform could have made a positive difference. However, the results lead to the conclusion that the 2014 *hukou* reform and NUP policies overlooked many challenges and barriers associated with migrating to lower-tier cities and undervalued the importance of education for migrants. Investments in education missed the mark while other contributing factors to educational disparities were ignored, such as the issues related to the decentralized curriculum, entrance examination system quotas, and practices of bribery in schools. This research does not necessarily find a lack of political will for solving these issues, but rather advances that economic ambitions seem to have taken precedence over social development and equal access to welfare, including education, among all Chinese citizens. In the end, only time will tell how China will deal with its mass unskilled people and whether it will tap into it to better its human capital. Whether the country's economy is going to stagnate or keep growing will largely depend on this. One thing to expect for sure is that education policies and further reforms of the hukou system will be at the centerstage and determinant of China's foreseeable future.

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Appendix A

Table 3. Magnitude of expenditure need per *hukou*, by subgroup of population and by city.

City	Ranking of per capita annual expenditure need		Annual expenditure need (the minimum limit–the maximum limit) (*yuan* per *hukou*)	Total expenditure need (the minimum limit–the maximum limit) (*yuan* per *hukou*)			Ranking of the city's entry barrier index
	Based on the maximum limit	Based on the minimum limit		Unemployed adult	Dependent population: Minor (< age 18)	Dependent population: Elderly (> age 60)	
	A	B	C	D	E	F	G
Beijing	1	1	22,769–34,769	72,030–132,030	150,051–210,051	72,030–132,030	3
Shenzhen	2	4	14,300–16,814	46,800–60,270	91,350–103,470	46,800–60,270	2
Shanghai	3	2	11,940–23,325	55,400–112,375	69,500–121,600	55,400–112,375	1
Tianjin	4	6	11,330–13,160	52,850–62,200	59,780–69,040	52,850–62,200	11
Hangzhou	5	8	11,256–12,306	54,030–58,780	58,230–64,030	54,030–58,780	7
Suzhou	6	12	10,055–10,560	48,750–51,450	52,095–54,780	48,750–51,450	8
Ningbo	7	5	10,050–13,266	48,100–65,580	52,150–67,830	48,100–65,580	13
Harbin	8	9	9,980–11,360	47,000–53,700	52,310–59,430	47,000–53,700	35
Nanjing	9	7	9,616–12,346	47,240–59,640	49,400–64,050	47,240–59,640	15
Dalian	10	14	9,180–9,740	42,450–45,150	48,750–51,900	42,450–45,150	9
Qingdao	11	13	9,150–10,170	42,550–46,650	48,400–54,300	42,550–46,650	5
Xiamen	12	10	8,065–11,310	37,125–51,900	43,020–60,540	37,125–51,900	6
Shenyang	13	19	7,888–8,088	36,690	41,730–43,530	36,690	24
Jinan	14	18	7,770–8,500	35,650–38,800	41,500–45,700	35,650–38,800	14
Fuzhou	15	15	7,487–9,337	34,485–44,435	39,885–48,785	34,485–44,435	18
Guangzhou	16	11	7,474–10,995	35,018–64,625	39,968–51,575	35,018–64,625	4
Changsha	17	21	7,450–7,560	35,050–36,300	39,100–39,300	35,050–36,300	33
Zhengzhou	18	17	7,290–9,145	35,900–45,450	37,070–46,425	35,900–45,450	40
Chengdu	19	22	7,050–7,490	32,050–33,250	37,900–40,900	32,050–33,250	19
Jilin	20	27	7,032–7,214	32,460–34,070	37,410–37,970	32,460–34,070	31
Changchun	21	28	6,935–7,105	31,974–33,524	36,924–37,424	31,974–33,524	21
Jiayuguan	22	23	6,800–7,460	32,800–39,100	35,300–37,450	32,800–39,100	45
Hohhot	23	24	6,750–7,404	30,690–35,200	36,750–39,400	30,690–35,200	38
Haikou	24	31	6,690–7,000	31,750–33,300	34,900–36,750	31,750–33,300	17
Wuhan	25	29	6,541–7,098	29,755–32,540	35,155–37,940	29,755–32,540	20
Shijiazhuang	26	35	6,388–6,689	28,088–30,103	35,108–36,358	28,088–30,103	26
Hefei	27	25	6,290–7,320	30,610–35,770	37,900–43,060	30,610–35,770	23
Qinhuangdao	28	33	6,215–6,825	28,600–31,550	33,145–36,545	28,600–31,550	12
Nanning	29	37	6,150–6,565	28,900–30,925	32,320–34,570	28,900–30,925	16
Wuhu	30	32	6,085–6,865	29,600–32,500	31,625–36,325	29,600–32,500	34
Jiujiang	31	36	6,090–6,585	28,750–30,675	31,900–34,950	28,750–30,675	36
Chongqing	32	3	6,010–17,160	26,850–32,700	32,700–38,700	26,850–32,700	28
Kunming	33	34	5,908–6,810	28,690–34,000	30,280–34,390	28,690–34,000	27
Zunyi	34	30	5,890–7,030	25,010–27,170	30,500–36,650	25,010–27,170	44
Xi'an	35	39	5,670–6,390	27,350–32,950	29,330–31,930	27,350–32,950	10
Xiangtan	36	20	5,282–7,576	24,210–35,580	28,260–40,080	24,210–35,580	42
Guiyang	37	40	5,171–5,590	24,655–30,050	26,905–33,050	24,655–30,050	41
Yinchuan	38	43	4,835–5,101	22,550–25,580	25,565–26,045	22,550–25,580	39
Nanchang	39	16	4,677–9,167	19,850–43,000	26,299–48,399	19,850–43,000	30
Urumqi	40	44	4,617–4,882	19,885–21,910	25,735–26,710	19,885–21,910	37
Mianyang	41	45	4,600–4,860	20,050–22,050	25,450–26,400	20,050–22,050	43
Luoyang	42	41	4,540–5,325	21,850–26,050	23,470–27,475	21,850–26,050	25
Taiyuan	43	38	4,349–6,548	20,665–32,460	22,669–33,264	20,665–32,460	29
Lanzhou	44	42	3,825–5,293	18,340–31,680	20,113–24,453	18,340–31,680	32
Xining	45	26	3,555–7,271	15,074–34,105	20,024–38,380	15,074–34,105	22

[1]The values of CEB index derived from Zhang and Tao, 'Barriers to the acquisition of urban *hukou* in Chinese cities', p.2891.

Source: Zhang, L., & Li, M. (2016). Local Fiscal Capability and Liberalization of Urban hukou. The Journal of Contemporary China, 25(102), 893–907.