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China Labour Bulletin



Paying the Price for Economic Development

The Children of Migrant Workers in China

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Special Report

**Paying the Price for Economic
Development:
The Children of Migrant Workers in China**

**By Aris Chan
Edited by Geoffrey Crothall**

November 2009

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A Stark Choice

My parents left home when I was very young. Their faces are fading away.

~ *A middle school student left behind in rural Hubei*¹

I come from a rural area. Now I am living in a city, but I am not living a city life. What am I – a half city-dweller and a half peasant? My parents are busy working and they do not pay much attention to me. Many times, I feel very lonely.

~ *A migrant child in Hangzhou*²

The mass movement of more than 200 million rural labourers to China's cities has been described as the greatest internal migration in history. Migrant workers have built the gleaming skyscrapers, super-highways and shopping malls that have transformed China over the last three decades. They have worked for hours on end in stifling factories to produce the cheap electronics, clothes and shoes demanded by Western consumers, and all the time they have endured the contempt and abuse of city dwellers, and the exploitation and mistreatment of their employers.

They do this because they want to build a better life for themselves and their families. They want to escape the poverty, austerity and rigidity of life in the Chinese countryside and sample at least some of the benefits that city dwellers take for granted. Even as recently as in late 2006, more than one half of rural households did not have tap water, 87 percent did not have flush toilets and 60 percent were still using wood-burning stoves.

There is a massive over supply of labour in the countryside, employment opportunities are few and far between, and income levels are roughly one sixth of those in the city.³ Moreover, there is little sign that rural and urban disparity in China will be reduced in the near future. Indeed there has been a steady increase in disparity from 1990 to 2008.⁴ Most rural residents of working age have little option but to leave home and look for work in the cities.

The vast majority of migrant workers are aged between 16 and 40, and at some point nearly all of them will start a family of their own. But when their first child is born they will face a stark choice; either take that child with them to the city and subject them to institutionalized discrimination, or leave them behind in the countryside in the uncertain care of relatives. There are already an estimated 58 million children left behind in the countryside, and another 19 million living with their migrant worker parents in the cities. Together,

¹ Yang, Qin (2006), 农村留守儿童教育问题探讨 (Educational problems of left-behind children in rural areas), Masters thesis, Central China Normal University.

² “蒲公英”想要一个家 走近杭州流动儿童” (Dandelion wants a home. The story of a migrant child in Hangzhou), *钱江晚报* (*Qianjiang Evening News*), 19 April 2007.

³ Zhu, Qingfang 朱庆芳 (2008), “改革开放三十年社会经济

建设成就和问题” (Thirty years of reforms: Achievements and problems in the social and economic development), *2009年中国社会形势分析与预测* (Society of China Analysis and Forecast 2009), China: Social Sciences Academic Press, p.242.

⁴ “Rural and urban disparity in China”, *China Labour Bulletin*, 9 May 2009.

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these two groups account for about one quarter of all children in China.

This report examines the plight of both groups of children as well as the attempts of the Chinese government to address the increasingly serious problems they face. Compared with other children, left-behind children are more likely to be victims of crime, and a significantly higher proportion suffers from psychological and behavioural problems caused by long-term separation from their parents. These problems are now so commonplace that the Chinese media has coined the phrase “left-behind children syndrome.” In the cities too, the children of migrant workers usually attend sub-standard schools and unlicensed health clinics because of their “inferior” status and low household income. As their parents have to work excessively long hours in arduous jobs leaving little or no time for their families, migrant children in cities consequently develop psychological problems disturbingly similar to those of the children left behind.

Over the last decade, the Chinese government has introduced a raft of policies, laws and regulations to provide better care for children left behind in the countryside, and to make education, healthcare and social services more accessible to migrant children in cities. However, the government’s rural policies have lacked the human and financial resources needed to effectively implement them, while migrant children in the cities still face institutional discrimination based on the country’s increasingly anachronistic household registration (*hukou* 戶口) system.

In its conclusion, CLB argues that the only long-term solution to the problems facing the children of migrant workers is wide-ranging and systemic reform of the social welfare system and abolition of the *hukou* system. This of course will not happen overnight or, realistically, within the next decade. As such, CLB argues that in the interim, the link between *hukou* and social services for children should be eliminated and urban governments should be made wholly responsible for the provision of social welfare to migrant children.

Those Left Behind

I don't want to leave. I want to stay, be with you every spring, summer, autumn and winter. Please believe me, not for long, I will be reunited with you for the rest of our life.

~ From a Chinese pop song dedicated to migrant workers⁵

When rural workers decide to move in search of better prospects elsewhere, most choose to leave their children in their hometowns. Until recently, it was estimated by the Chinese government that there were around 20 million children left behind in the countryside.⁶ However, there were no reliable statistics and left-behind children were defined in various ways: The upper age limit ranged from 14 years in some studies⁷ to 16⁸ or 18 years in others.⁹

It was only in 2007, after an All-China Women's Federation team did a study based on the 2005 by-census (or mid-decade count) of one percent of the population that a better picture emerged. The research team estimated there were about 58 million children below 18 years of age left behind by parents in the countryside, accounting for 21 percent of all children in China, and 28 percent of all rural children.¹⁰

The survey showed more than 40 million left-behind children were under 15 years of age,¹¹ and that more than 30 million were aged between six and 15. Provinces such as Henan, Hunan, Guangdong and Shandong, had a higher concentration of younger children. A majority of children left behind were boys (53.7 percent), reflecting the overall gender ratio in rural China of 118:100 in favour of boys. There was a higher proportion of girls in Beijing, Shanghai, Inner Mongolia, Ningxia and Xinjiang.¹²

Left-behind children were not only found in the traditional migrant worker exporting provinces of western and central China, but also along the prosperous east coast. Six provinces – Sichuan, Anhui, Henan, Guangdong, Hunan, and Jiangxi – accounted for 52 percent of all China's left-behind children. In some counties from where large numbers of

⁵ “关注留守儿童：转型路上的衍生问题” (Left-behind children: problems of a transitional society), (*Sina.com*), 28 March 2008.

⁶ “Wen: Give 'left-behind' kids more love”, *China Daily*, 29 May 2007.

⁷ Duan, Chengyong & Zhou, Fulin (2006), “我国留守儿童状况研究” (A study of left-behind children in China), *人口研究* (Population Research), 28(1):29-36.

⁸ Huang, Xiaona, et al. (2005), “农村”留守儿童—社会不可忽视的弱势群体” (“Rural left-behind children” – a marginal group that cannot be neglected), *医学与社会* (Medicine and Society) 2(18); Chen, Xuzhong & Wang, Liping (2005), “留守中学生”健康人格的教育探索” (A study of the personality development of left-behind middle school students from the educational perspective), *沈阳教育学院学报* (Journal of Shenyang College of Education) 1(7); Zhao, Xiaoman & Xian, Zhangxing (2003), “‘民工潮’下农

村家庭教育问题分析’ (An analysis of family education in rural areas in the context of the exodus of migrant workers”, *遵义师范学院学报* (Journal of Zunyi College of Education), 4(5): 50-51.

⁹ Ye, Jingzhong, et al. (eds.) (2005), *关注留守儿童：中国中西部农村地区劳动力外出务工对留守儿童的影响* (Left-behind children in rural China: the impact of labour outflow on left-behind children in rural west-central China), 社会科学文献出版社, 2005,9

¹⁰ “报告称6省农村留守儿童占全国52%男童多于女童” (Report shows the number of left-behind children in six provinces accounts for 52 % of left-behind children nationwide, more boys are left behind than girls), *中国发展门户网* (*China Gate Net*), 27 February 2008.

¹¹ *Ibid.*

¹² *Ibid.*

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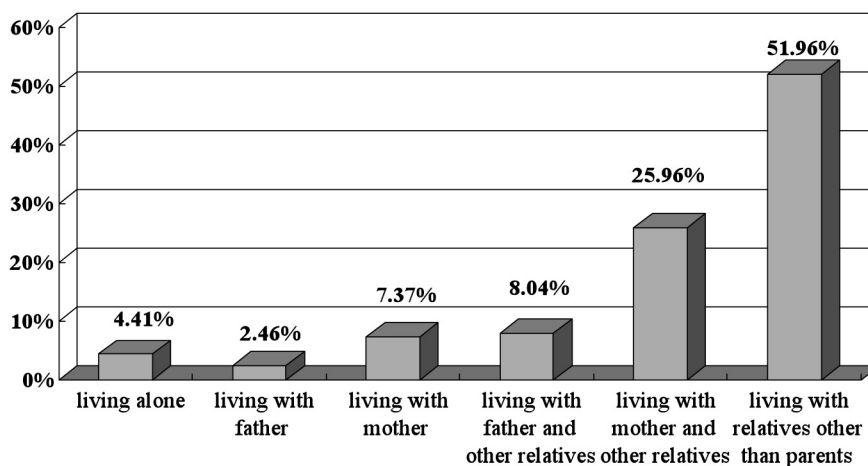
workers migrated, the proportion of left-behind children reached 53 percent or even 83 percent of all children.^{13,14,15}

The 2005 by-census showed 47 percent of left-behind children were living with one parent, usually the mother,¹⁶ and 26 percent with grandparents. In some instances, grandparents had to take care of up to seven children. More than 27 percent of left-behind children were living with other relatives or friends or with no adult care at all. In most cases,

the husband would work in the city for a few years before his wife joined him. More than half of all children left behind (53 percent) had no direct parental care. (See Figure 1).

In the western and central regions, the proportion of children living with grandparents was as high as 73 percent.¹⁷ Because it is relatively easier for young parents to find work in the cities, younger children are more likely to have both parents working away from home. About 75 percent of

Figure 1. The living arrangements of left-behind children



Source: Duan, C.Y. & Zhou, F.L. (2005), "Left-behind children in China" presented at a Conference on Left-behind Children, available at http://www.cinfo.org.cn/zhuanti/20050627zgnc/zgnc1setshzyxdyth_004.htm

¹³ "他们是当下中国最容易受伤害的人" (They are the most vulnerable group in China), *中国青年报 (China Youth Daily)*, 29 May 2006.

¹⁴ "Sichuan earthquake leaves migrant workers worrying about left-behind children", David Dollar in the World Bank blog: East Asia & Pacific on the Rise, 25 May 2008.

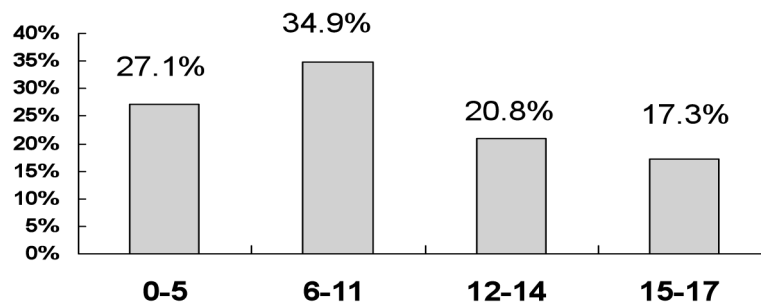
¹⁵ "农村留守儿童问题调查：谁来托起留守的‘太阳’" (A survey on left-behind children in rural areas: Who is responsible for holding up the "sun"), *人民日报 (People's Daily)*, 2 June 2006.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*

left-behind children below the age of six were not living with either parent compared with 47 percent of those aged between 15 and 17,¹⁸ reflecting

the higher proportion of younger workers in the migrant population. (See Figure 2).

Figure 2. Age structure of left-behind children based on the 2005 by-census



Source: “报告称6省农村留守儿童占全国 52% 男童多于女童” (Report shows the number of left-behind children in six provinces accounts for 52 % of left-behind children nationwide. More boys are left behind than girls), *中国发展门户网 (China Gate Net)* Based on the 2005 by-census. Quoted in February 2008

The reality for children left behind

Separated for years on end

Children living with relatives or friends or by themselves have limited contact with their parents. A survey by the Changsha municipal government showed 44 percent of children saw their parents once a year; the same proportion of children were able to see their parents twice a year; and three percent once every two years. In extreme cases,

children had not seen their parents in six years.¹⁹ More than 62 percent of parents of left-behind children in Hunan province had been working away from home for two years or more, and 26 percent for three years or more. Some parents had been away for more than 13 years. Nearly half the children (45 percent) did not know where their parents worked, and 75 percent had not visited them in their host cities.²⁰

A larger study by the China Agricultural University

¹⁷ Lu, S.Z. & Lu, D.P. (2006), “‘留守儿童’状况调查” (An investigation into ‘left-behind children’). In Yang, Dongping (ed.), 2005: *中国教育发展报告* (The Development report of China’s education 2005), Social Sciences Academic Press, p.329.

¹⁸ “农村留守儿童问题调查：谁来托起留守的‘太阳’ (A survey on left-behind children in rural areas: Who is responsible for

holding up the “sun”), *人民日报 (People’s Daily)*, 2 June 2006.

¹⁹ China Youth Research Centre, *中国未成年人数据手册* (China’s Children and Juveniles Statistical Handbook), Beijing: Science Press, p.241.

²⁰ Hunan Provincial Youth League (2006), *湖南农村留守儿童调查报告* (A survey report on left-behind children in Hunan).

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of ten villages in northern and western China in 2004 found that ten percent of the children interviewed had no communication with their parents during the year before the study.²¹ In some remote areas such as Weishan in Sichuan, 51 percent of parents returned home only once a year; 18 percent once in two years, and 13 percent had not returned home for three years.²²

Communication between parents and children left behind is basically through the telephone. A survey in Beijing found that about 80 percent of children talked with their parents on the phone once every two weeks.²³ The Agricultural University study found that 30 percent of left-behind children contacted their parents only once a month. Half of them talked for less than three minutes during each call.²⁴ Usually parents asked about the academic and practical aspects of the children's living arrangements, and rarely touched upon deeper psychological needs.²⁵

Despite these limitations, a middle school student in Shandong wrote about how much he wanted to talk to his parents.²⁶

Papa, mama,
You are not with me now. Every time you
go, you stay away for at least half a year.
I miss you so much. Whenever I dream
about you, I cry. When grandpa hears me

crying, he says your hearts are cold. But I know you are working hard in other places for me.

One day, I passed a kiosk in my primary school and saw a sign that read "public phone". I wished I could call you, but I did not have your telephone number. All I could do was look at the phone and cry.

Papa, mama, I am writing to ask for your telephone number. I will be as happy if you just give me a public telephone number where I can reach you. I could call you at an arranged time. The number of the public phone in my school's kiosk is 7254897. I hope you can call me when you receive this letter. If I know your number, I can call you too. I long to hear your voices every day!

But this letter will not be sent because I don't know where you are....

²¹ "农村留守儿童约有1000万 四成不知父母打啥工" (There are about 10 million left-behind children, four tenths do not know what their parents do for a living), published on the Chinese government website on 26 August 2005.

²² Wang, Daochun (2006), 农村留守儿童犯罪原因及预防对策初议 (The causes of and preventive measures for juvenile delinquency in left-behind children in rural China), *北京青年政治学院学报* (Journal of Beijing youth politics college), 15(3): 27-33.

²³ Lu, Shaoqing, "农村留守儿童：生活与心理的双重冲突" (Left-behind children: social and psychological conflicts), *中国发展观察* (China Development Review), 13 September 2005.

²⁴ "农村留守儿童约有1000万 四成不知父母打啥工" (There are about 10 million left-behind children, four tenths do not know what their parents do for a living), published on the Chinese government website on 26 August 2005.

²⁵ "农村留守儿童问题调查：谁来托起留守的‘太阳’" (A survey on left-behind children in rural areas: Who is responsible for holding up the "sun"), *人民日报* (People's Daily), 2 June 2006.

²⁶ "Lu, Shizheng (et al.), "未成年人德育大家谈：预防农村留守儿童道德滑坡" (Let's talk about the social values of minors: Preventing the moral deterioration of left-behind children in rural areas), *人民日报* (People's Daily), 17 January 2006.

Vulnerability to accidents and crime

Home is often the safest place for children, but it can also be the most dangerous if they are not properly supervised. Many studies have shown that left-behind children are more vulnerable to accidents and crime than other rural children. The most common injuries are animal bites, falls, vehicular accidents, burning or scalding and cutting and piercing.²⁷ In one migrant worker family in Guangdong, three sisters were each severely injured over a period of seven years. The older girl's legs were burnt during a fire, the second was badly scalded while helping her grandmother handle boiling water, and the youngest suffered terrible burns on her face when she was boiling water at home. After her injury, the youngest girl did not leave the house and was referred to by villagers as the "ghost child." In another tragedy in Chongqing, a child suffocated to death in a trunk while playing hide-and-seek with his cousin.²⁸

In a peaceful town in eastern Sichuan, 14 year-old Fangfang has just had an abortion. A month earlier, her mother noticed a marked decline in her school grades. Fangfang looked pale and continually complained of fatigue. When her mother took her to hospital, they discovered that Fangfang was three months pregnant. Fangfang confessed she had developed a sexual relationship with a 53-year-old teahouse owner, named Wang, known by the village children as Grandpa. Lying on her hospital bed, pale and weak, Fangfang told her story: [In January 2006], a primary

school girl named Honghong told me that Grandpa had some clothes in his shop for me to pick up. When I got to the teahouse, he dragged me to a hut behind his shop and raped me. He gave me 20 yuan and warned me not to tell a soul.

According to the police investigation, Honghong had taken many of her friends, aged between nine and 15 years, to the culprit. He gave the victims between 20 to 100 yuan. All the victims were left-behind children. Honghong was a victim herself. One day when she was idling in Wang's teahouse, Wang showed her pornography and seduced her. Like many left behind children, Honghong was being taken care of by an elderly grandmother.²⁹

In 2005, *Southern Metropolis Daily* reported that a 43-year-old serial sex offender, named Tang, had allegedly "bought" the virginity of 17 girls in a Henan city over a two year period from 2004. Tang had worked in the district tax office before starting his own business. In 2004, Tang "bought" the virginity of a 15-year old girl, named Xiao Tong, at a beauty parlor for 1,500 yuan. Xiao Tong then started to procure other young girls for him. Most of Tang's victims were teenagers who did not have proper parental care or were left-behind children. The victims were usually lured by Xiao Tong or other girls to Tang's vehicle parked outside the victims' school or to a hotel outside town. He would either "persuade" or coerce the girls into having sex with him. Every time, he

²⁷ Zhao, Kefu; Fang, Xue-hui; Su, Hong; He, Li; Chen, Juan; Chen, Mingchun & Ye, Dongqing (2007), "安徽省留守儿童意外伤害的流行特征及其影响因素" (The epidemiological characteristics of unintentional injuries among children left-behind in Anhui province), *疾病控制杂志* (Journal of disease control and prevention), 11(3):277-279.

²⁸ "农村"留守儿童"三姐妹7年内相继伤残" ("Left-behind children" - Three little sisters seriously injured over a seven year period), *新华网* (Xinhua Net), 20 November 2005.

²⁹ "色魔黑手伸向留守儿童 多名幼女遭蹂躏" (The black hand of the sex predator has reached left-behind children, young girls are sexually abused), (*Sichuan Online*), 7 July 2006.

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would provide a contraceptive pill and money to the victims.³⁰

A survey on sexual violence in Zhechuan in Henan province showed that 34 percent of the 62 rapes in the county involved left-behind children. Most victims were aged between five and 12. Offenders were usually acquaintances or neighbours: 61 percent of offenders were older than 60, and 24 percent aged between 50 and 60. They usually enticed the girls with treats and told them not to tell anyone. Lu, a nine-year old girl, was raped by a neighbour when she was grazing her family's herd of cows. The offender gave her just 1.50 yuan and told her to keep quiet. As extended family members usually do not pay enough attention to these girls, many victims are assaulted repeatedly over an extended period. A ten-year old girl named Li was repeatedly raped by four different men from January 2005 to September 2006. She was given money each time, and only when her grandfather asked where she got the money, were the crimes exposed.³¹

Girls left-behind are often vulnerable to sexual violence because they lack the awareness and ability to protect themselves from sexual predators. Some girls agreed to have sex for the money and the feigned "love" the offenders offered. Many of these tragedies might have been prevented had they been living with their parents.

The Ministry of Public Security and the All China Women's Federation have both said migrant children and left-behind children face the highest risk of abduction, and the two organizations have pledged to strengthen their protection of left-behind children from accidents and crime, especially from abduction, and sexual offences against young girls.^{32,33} An All China Women's Federation study showed that in addition to the abduction of babies and infants for couples desperate for a child, older children, women and even adult males have been abducted into criminal groups, the sex industry or as forced labourers.³⁴ Girls from Yunnan and Guangxi have been sold to Thailand, Malaysia and other Southeast Asian countries as sex workers.³⁵ There are no accurate statistics on the number of children being kidnapped but reports on child labour suggest it may be substantial. An investigation by the *Southern Metropolis Daily* over the 2008 Spring Festival showed that 76 children from the mountainous Liangshan region of Sichuan, the youngest of whom was only seven years old, were cheated or abducted into forced labour in Dongguan.³⁶ In another report, a kidnapper in Hunan claimed to "sell" more than 1,000 people a year, but the victims were not only left-behind children.³⁷

During natural disasters, left-behind children are particularly vulnerable. At the same time their inner-strength and determination can turn them

³⁰ "17名幼女被买处幕后：农村留守儿童安全存隐患" (The truth behind the theft of 17 young girls' virginity: left-behind children are at risk). *南方都市报* (*Southern Metropolis Daily*), 13 September 2007.

³¹ Su, Guojun & Wang, Yuxin (2006), "警惕农村留守女孩性监护缺位" (The alarming absence of guardians to protect left-behind girls in rural areas from sex predators), *中国妇女报* (*China women's news*), 18 December 2006.

³² "公安部將嚴厲打擊侵害農村留守流動兒童犯罪活動" (Ministry of Public Security vows to combat crimes against left-behind children), published in the official website of the Chinese government on 27 May 2007.

³³ "全國婦聯：被拐賣兒童中農村留守兒童居第二位" (The

All-China Women's Federation: Left-behind children are the second most at-risk group for kidnapping), *中國網* (*China Net*), 27 February 2008.

³⁴ *Ibid.*

³⁵ "留守儿童面临被拐卖风险" (Left-behind children face the risk of kidnap), *华夏经纬网* (*Huaxia Net*), 4 September 2007.

³⁶ "凉山童工" (Child Labour from Liangshan), *南方都市报* (*Southern Metropolis Daily*), 28 April 2008.

³⁷ "河南女人贩 每年贩卖上千名包身工" (A labour trafficker from Henan sells around a thousand slave labourers each year), China Central Television (republished in *Xinhua Net*), 11 August 2006; also see CLB article "From Shanxi to Dongguan, slave labour is still in business".

into heroes. On the night of 31 May 2005, a dozen children were swept away in a flashflood in Hunan; all but one was a left-behind child.³⁸ On 12 May 2008, an earthquake devastated Sichuan, the largest exporter of migrant labour in China, leaving nearly 70,000 people dead and more than 370,000 injured. In the immediate aftermath, cut-off from the outside world, thousands of children were left alone to face their fate. Of the many tragic and heart-warming tales that emerged from that time, one touched the nation. Accompanied by his elderly grandparents, Zhang Jiwan, 11, carried his three-year old sister on his back through rubble and fallen rocks for 12 hours until they and their fellow villagers reached safety.³⁹

Necessity makes the children more self-reliant. In a survey of 3,086 left-behind children in primary and middle schools in Yunfu city, Guangdong, about half the respondents said that when they faced problems, they tended to solve them on their own. Fewer than one third would go to their parents and only five percent would talk to teachers.⁴⁰ *The Wall Street Journal* interviewed 16 year-old Zhao Yan, who had lived on her own in rural Anhui for two years. Her mother died when she was a little girl. When she was old enough to cook for herself, her father moved to Shanghai to look for work. "I miss my dad a lot," she said.

On most days, Zhao Yan wakes early, and takes a 30-minute bicycle ride to school. She returns to an empty home to cook for herself. Her dogs run out to the road at

the sound of her voice when she hears her small brick house. They sit by her as she begins her daily ritual of lighting a fire in the large brick oven she uses to cook.

An elderly woman next door occasionally visits, and sometimes Zhao Yan has friends over. But the dogs and a borrowed black-and-white television are often her only companions. The middle-school student does her homework by the glow of the screen and listens to music videos in the unheated house.

"There isn't much to do when my father isn't here," she says...

Zhao Yan's father leaves about US\$100 for her each time he goes to the city, usually for two to three months at a time. She uses the money to buy groceries, mostly vegetables, because she waits for her father to return to eat meat, which is more expensive. Without her father around, Zhao Yan says she sometimes skips meals. She prefers to cook for him during the Lunar New Year and harvest seasons when he returns home for a few weeks.⁴¹

Left-behind children syndrome

Separation from parents causes some form of mental distress for the majority of left-behind children. Especially for younger children, the first few times their parents leave are traumatic. The following is a personal account of a teenager who,

³⁸ "專家稱 '留守兒童' 問題嚴重 可能將危及農村的未來" (Expert claims the problem of left-behind children is so serious that it might endanger the future of rural China), *中國青年報* (*China Youth Daily*), 3 June 2008.

³⁹ "抗震救災英雄少年張吉萬:背妹12小時安全轉移" (A young hero of the earthquake: Zhang Jiwan carries his little sister for 12 hours to safety), *山西晚報* (*Shanxi Evening News*), 13 June 2008.

⁴⁰ Guangdong Yunfu Youth League and the Guangdong Youth Research Centre (2007), *探索建立農村留守少年兒童幫助機制* (Exploring the establishment of an assistance mechanism for left-behind children), Hong Kong: Zhongguo Baihua Chubanshe, pp. 49-50.

⁴¹ Chao, Loretta, "Children are left behind in China", *The Wall Street Journal*, 24 January 2007.

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together with his brother, was in his grandmother's care:

I was studying in primary school. I remember I constantly cried as I missed my mom so much. One day, when I came home from school, I saw my mother preparing a meal in the kitchen. I was so excited that my heart started beating frantically. I was afraid that it was only my imagination, and I looked again and again. Oh, it was real! I was so happy! "Are you hungry?" my mother asked. "Yes! I am hungry. My stomach is grumbling," I replied loudly.

When I woke up the next day, I did not see my mother around! I hurriedly looked for her in every corner of the house but couldn't find her. I started to panic and rushed out on my bare feet to my grandma's home hoping she was there. When I reached grandma's home, I saw mom. "Mama, I was afraid that you had gone!"

A few days later, when I was playing on the roadside, I saw mother walking to the bus stop. This time she was really leaving. In order not to attract my attention, she quickened her step. Even so, I managed to see her. I ran to her and grasped her hand tightly. Seeing me not letting my mother go, grandma came and pulled me away. When I saw mama start to board, my heart sank. I used all of my strength to struggle away from grandma's arms, ran to the bus and pulled at my mom's clothes.

In the meantime, uncle rushed in and separated me from my mother. I became desperate and started kicking aimlessly. By the time my uncle let go of me, the bus had departed. Thinking about nothing but getting my mother back, I chased after the bus... But the bus grew smaller in the distance and finally disappeared. I slumped onto the road, cried, and cried... On my way home, the sky was grey. It was like the sky was feeling sorry for me. I was so angry that when I saw a frog happily hopping down the road I gave it a big kick. I hated everything in sight.⁴²

She Mao, a professor at Central South University, who conducted a survey in Hunan, Anhui and other provinces, concluded: "Very few left-behind children are healthy and lively... less than 20 percent." On the contrary, he said: "Deprived of love, more than 60 percent of children manifested mild to moderate psychological disorders." Professor She recalled a 10-year old girl he had met in a hilly village in Hunan province. According to her grandparents; "On the day her parent left, she cried for the whole day. Since then, however, no one has seen her shed a single tear, and none has heard her utter a word." When strangers came to her home, she would hide underneath her bed, like a frightened kitten. She had slashed her wrist many times. On one occasion, her teacher found a letter she had written: "I think, if I hurt my hands, my mother will come home. My mother came home the last time my hand was injured. She also brought me a lot of food. So, I must get hurt often... But, when I saw mother, I couldn't say a

⁴² "留守儿童来信：爸爸我不恨你我把思念写进日记" (Letters from left-behind children: Father I don't hate you, I will write all my thoughts of you in my diary), *半月谈* (Fortnightly Chats), 27 September 2007.

word, I just couldn't. I really miss mom.”⁴³

In a survey in Sichuan, the province with the highest number of left-behind children, 60 percent of children said their relatives did not treat them as well as their parents, 75 percent of left-behind children wanted their parents to come home as soon as possible, and 60 percent did not want their parents to work in the cities.⁴⁴

Relatives entrusted with the care of left-behind children often find it difficult to provide the emotional and psychological support growing children need. Most guardians regard the personal safety of the child as their most important task, followed by academic achievement and provision of material needs.^{45, 46} The Sichuan survey found that 80 percent of grandparents had difficulty satisfying the psychological needs of their grandchildren; 15 percent said they did not care about such needs.⁴⁷ Another survey by Zhejiang University found that 68 percent of guardians seldom found time to talk with their charges. Only 11.3 percent of left-behind children talked to a guardian when they had emotional difficulties.⁴⁸

When the need for parental care is not satisfied over an extended period, children begin to suppress their needs. In a survey by the Central

South Social Development Research Center, 43 percent of parents said their children gradually became less attached.⁴⁹ Some children try to fill the void with anything close to them. Missing his mother, an eight-year-old boy in Guizhou wondered whether he might marry his lamb when he grew up. “I used to miss my parents, but not anymore... there is no point missing them,” he said. For this little boy, his lamb had replaced the love his mother had once given him.⁵⁰ According to a report by the Hunan Provincial Youth League, 9.3 percent of children did not miss their parents at all.⁵¹ “Ever since birth, they have been cared for by their grandparents. Some don't even remember what their parents look like. For some left-behind children, the concept of parents is merely symbolic, not a genuinely emotional concept,” said the head of the Hunan Youth League.⁵²

After their parents leave, many children grow quieter and more withdrawn, keeping their unhappiness to themselves and losing the motivation to study.^{53, 54} At a seminar on left-behind children, 90 percent of those interviewed said they experienced some psychological changes after their parents left. Most girls claimed they became more depressed and fearful, and boys said they grew more irritated and anxious. The remaining 10 percent did not respond.⁵⁵

⁴³ “專家稱 ‘留守兒童’ 問題嚴重 可能將危及農村的未來” (Expert claims the problem of left-behind children is so serious it might endanger the future of rural China), *中國青年報* (*China Youth Daily*), 3 June 2008.

⁴⁴ China Youth Research Centre, *中國未成年入數據手冊* (China's Children and Juveniles Statistical Handbook), Beijing: Science Press, p.241.

⁴⁵ “A survey report by the All-China Women's Federation of Zhumei and Linyi counties in Shandong province in 2006”, Quoted in *中國未成年入數據手冊* (China's Children and Juveniles Statistical Handbook), p. 241.

⁴⁶ “誰來關心全國兩千萬農村留守兒童?” (Who cares about China's 20 million left-behind children?), (*Xinhua Net*), 27 September 2007.

⁴⁷ “四川省廣安市農村留守兒童現狀調查” (A survey of the left-behind children in Guang'an city, Sichuan province), published on 30 April 2006 by the Guang'an municipal Party. Quoted in *中國*

未成年入數據手冊 (China's Children and Juveniles Statistical Handbook), p. 241.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*

⁴⁹ China Youth Research Centre, *中國未成年入數據手冊* (China's Children and Juveniles Statistical Handbook), Beijing: Science Press, p. 244.

⁵⁰ “專家稱 ‘留守兒童’ 問題嚴重 可能將危及農村的未來” (Expert claims the problem of left-behind children is so serious it might endanger the future of rural China), *中國青年報* (*China Youth Daily*), 3 June 2008.

⁵¹ Hunan Provincial Youth League (2006), *湖南農村留守兒童調查報告* (A survey report on left-behind children in Hunan)

⁵² “農村留守兒童問題調查：誰來托起留守的‘太陽’” (A survey on left-behind children in rural areas: Who is responsible for holding up the “sun”), *人民日報* (*People's Daily*), 2 June 2006.

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Psychological studies have found that left-behind children were more likely than other rural children to feel depressed, emotional, anxious, fearful, become easily irritated and intransigent, and have lower self-esteem.^{56,57,58,59}

Knowing that their parents were working hard in a faraway place without family support, 90 percent of children worried about the health of their parents, and more than half were worried about their own safety.⁶⁰ This phenomenon is now so widespread that the Chinese media refers to it as “left-behind syndrome.”⁶¹

Despair leads to suicide

Although there is little academic research on suicidal behaviour among left-behind children, anecdotal evidence suggests it is a worrying problem. For example, a pair of cousins, aged nine and 13, drowned in a river after being accused of stealing from a neighborhood store. They tried to contact their parents for support, but failed to reach them. In their suicide note, they complained about living apart from their parents. The whole family was overwhelmed with sadness and their grandmother succumbed to illness.

See: “农村”留守儿童”三姐妹 7年内相继伤残” (“Left-behind children” - Three little sisters seriously injured over a seven year period), *新华网 (Xinhua Net)*, 20 November 2005.

In another incident, Zhang, a 12 year-old boy from Anhui, hanged himself in a shed near the clan hall after the Spring Festival in 2008. Zhang’s father left home to work in a tobacco factory when he was a toddler. And after his mother joined his father four years ago, leaving Zhang in the care of his grandfather and aunt, he became increasingly sullen and quiet. Nobody knew why Zhang committed suicide, but on the eighth day of the Chinese New Year, he told his mother that if she did not come home in two months, she would never see him again. He couldn’t wait for the deadline.

See: “安徽12岁留守儿童自杀” (A 12 year-old left-behind boy in Anhui commits suicide), *中国新闻周刊 (China Newsweek)*, 18 March 2008.

⁵³ China Youth Research Centre, *中国未成年人数据手册* (China’s Children and Juveniles Statistical Handbook), Beijing: Science Press, p. 244.

⁵⁴ Wang, Dongyu & Lin, Hong (2003), “福建省284名中学”留守孩”的心理健康状况” (The psychological health of 284 Fujian secondary school children left behind by their parents), *中国学校卫生* (Journal of Chinese School Health) 5:102-103.

⁵⁵ China Youth Research Centre, *中国未成年人数据手册* (China’s Children and Juveniles Statistical Handbook), Beijing: Science Press, p. 241.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*

⁵⁷ Lu, Zhongjing (2006). *农村‘留守子女’人格发展探析* (An exploratory analysis of personality development of ‘left-behind children’ in rural areas), Masters thesis, Nanjing Normal University.

⁵⁸ Wang, Liangfeng; Zhang, Shunfeng & Sun, Yehuang

(2006), *农村留守儿童孤独感现状研究* (A study of the sense of loneliness in left-behind children in rural areas), *中国行为医学科学* (Chinese journal of behavioral medical science), 15(7):639-640.

⁵⁹ Zhou, Congkui; Sun, Xiaojun; Liu, Ya, & Zhou, Dongming (2005), “农村留守儿童心理发展与教育问题” (The psychological development and education problems of children left behind in rural areas), *北京师范大学学报* (社会科学版) (Journal of Beijing Normal University. Social Sciences Edition), 1:72-80.

⁶⁰ “农村留守儿童家庭教育的调查研究报告” (A survey study of moral education of rural left-behind children), Quoted in *中国未成年人数据手册* (China’s Children and Juveniles Statistical Handbook), p. 242.

⁶¹ “关注农村‘留守儿童’综合症” (Don’t ignore rural “left-behind children” syndrome), *扬子晚报* (*Yangzi Evening News*), 25 August 2005.

Asocial and criminal behaviour

The kid's parents are working in the city. I can do nothing even if the kid misbehaves

~ *A grandmother*⁶²

Without proper guardians and care, some children developed behavioural problems. As one school teacher explained:

There is a student in my class named Zhang Xiaofei (pseudonym). His parents run an apparel business in Zhengzhou and he lives with his grandparents. His parents come home from time to time but usually only stay for a short period. Gradually, Zhang got addicted to internet games and showed no interest in school. And he is getting worse. During the last long weekend, he stayed in an illegal internet bar for two whole days and this drove his grandparents crazy.

Zhang's parents feel powerless... They cannot close down their business but neither can they let their son sink any deeper. They believe the only way they can compensate for their absence is by giving him more money. As Zhang's

teacher, I am anxious. I have tried many things but achieved little.⁶³

Lacking supervision and positive goals, some children turn to crime. Psychological studies have found that left-behind children have higher hostility scores than the norm.⁶⁴ Some left-behind children blame their parents for leaving them, or transfer their anger and shame on to others.^{65,66} Two surveys by Public Security Bureaus in 2004 showed that 80 percent of all cases of juvenile delinquency occurred in rural areas, and most of them involved left-behind children.⁶⁷ Data from several police stations in Fujian showed that about 60 percent of children arrested for public disturbances, pick-pocketing and theft were left-behind children.⁶⁸ In 2006, of the 1,708 detainees at the Hunan Provincial Juvenile Reform Centre, 40 percent were left-behind children.⁶⁹ And according to the head of the research department of the Supreme Court, there has been on average a 13 percent annual increase in youth delinquency since 2000. Moreover, 70 percent of the delinquents are left-behind children.⁷⁰

In March 2008, a 13-year old boy was arrested for raping two seven-year old girls in Fujian province. He had dropped out of school and was

⁶² “17名幼女被买处幕后：农村留守儿童安全存隐患” (The truth behind the theft of 17 young girls' virginity: left-behind children are at risk), *南方都市报 (Southern Metropolis Daily)*, 13 September 2007.

⁶³ Lu, Shizheng (et al.), “未成年人德育大家谈:预防农村留守儿童道德滑坡” (Let's talk about the social values of minors: Preventing the moral deterioration of left-behind children in rural areas), *人民日报 (People's Daily)*, 17 January 2006.

⁶⁴ “留守儿童心理健康的调查及干预” (Measures to improve the psychological health of left-behind children), *石泉县关注留守儿童网 (Left-behind children website of Shiquang county)*, 25 October 2007.

⁶⁵ Gong, Yongji, “留守儿童，不容忽视的教育问题” (Left-behind children: An educational problem that cannot be neglected), Published on *旬阳宣传网 (Xunyang government*

website) on 15 July 2008.

⁶⁶ Zheng, Zhe (2006), “农村留守儿童心理问题及对策探究” (An exploratory study on and the relevant responses to the psychological development of left-behind children in rural areas), *中小学心理健康教育 (Psychological health education in primary and secondary schools)*, 6.

⁶⁷ Wang, Daochun (2006), 农村留守儿童犯罪原因及预防对策初议 (The causes of and preventive measures for juvenile delinquency in left-behind children in rural China), *北京青年政治学院学报 (Journal of Beijing youth politics college)*, 15(3): 27-33.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*

⁶⁹ “專家稱‘留守儿童’问题严重 可能将危及农村的未来” (Expert claims the problem of left-behind children is so serious that it might endanger the future of rural China), *中国青年报 (China Youth Daily)*, 3 June 2008.

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living with his uncle.⁷¹ In another case, a 15-year-old boy hacked an old woman to death in order to get money for internet games. In Zhejiang, the police arrested a criminal gang nicknamed “The Seven Wolves” for several cases of kidnappings, rapes, theft and extortion. Six of the seven gang members were left-behind children. The oldest was only 16 years old.⁷²

No escape

One major hope of migrant parents is to earn enough money to finance their children’s education, so that can get a decent job and escape the poverty of the countryside. Indeed, according to a national survey, compared with other rural children, left-behind children are more likely to stay in school.⁷³ However, with little help, care and supervision, their academic performance is more likely to deteriorate after their parents leave home.⁷⁴ Zhou, the teenage girl interviewed by *The Wall Street Journal*, said she used to enjoy her literature class but found it difficult to keep up.⁷⁵ Surveys in Henan⁷⁶ and Sichuan found that

80 percent of left-behind children were ranked average or below average in school tests. About half were rated poorly. Some teachers said left-behind children were also more likely to be disruptive in class and to play truant. Some left-behind children countered that teachers did not care about them and that they were usually placed at the back of the class.^{77,78}

Although the majority of left-behind children understood their parents’ expectations,⁷⁹ many do not see the need to study. One survey found that half of the children interviewed wanted to earn big money when they grew up.⁸⁰ More than half wanted to be a migrant worker or go into business after middle school. Only one third of left-behind children saw studying as a path to achieve their goals.⁸¹ For most rural children, studying beyond middle school is not a viable or attractive option. A researcher in Guizhou found slogans such as “After graduating middle school, it is time to leave home for work”; “If you don’t study hard, make up for it with hard work” and “You can’t leave for the city until you have finished middle school”

⁷⁰ “中国未成年犯罪年升一成三 两千万留守儿童存忧” (Juvenile delinquency increases by 13 percent annually, 20 million left-behind children at risk), *中国发展门户网 (China Gate)*, 21 September 2007.

⁷¹ “警方呼吁加强农村留守儿童家庭和心理健康教育” (Police call for the strengthening of the family and better psychological health education of left-behind children in rural areas), *人民网 (People Net)*, 24 March 2008.

⁷² “專家稱 ‘留守儿童’ 问题严重 可能将危及农村的未来” (Expert claims the problem of left-behind children is so serious that it might endanger the future of rural China), *中国青年报 (China Youth Daily)* 3 June 2008.

⁷³ “报告称6省农村留守儿童占全国5%,男童多于女童” (Report shows the number of left-behind children in six provinces accounts for 5% of left-behind children nationwide, more boys are left behind than girls), published on *中国发展门户网 (China Gate)* on 27 February 2008.

⁷⁴ “青岛市农村留守儿童状况调查报告” (A survey report on left-behind children in Qingdao). *半岛都市报 (Peninsula City Daily)*, 28 March 2007. Quoted in *中国未成年人数据手册 (China’s Children and Juveniles Statistical Handbook)*. Beijing:

Science Press, p. 241.

⁷⁵ Chao, L. “Children are left behind in China”, *The Wall Street Journal*, 24 January, 2007.

⁷⁶ “农村留守子女问题之社会和政策因素简析--基于湖北京山县的调查” (A brief analysis of the social and political reasons for children being left behind in rural areas – Based on an investigation in Jingshan county, Hubei province), *中华硕博网 (China-B.Com)*, 3 May 2008.

⁷⁷ “他们是当下中国最容易受到伤害的人” (They are the most vulnerable group in China), *中国青年报 (China Youth Daily)*, 29 May 2006.

⁷⁸ “福建为农村留守儿童招募万名‘爱心妈妈’” (Fujian recruits 10,000 ‘caring mothers’ for left-behind children) *新华网 (Xinhua Net)*, 9 May 2007.

⁷⁹ “农村留守儿童家庭教育的调查研究报告” (A study of family education in rural left-behind children), Quoted in *中国未成年人数据手册 (China’s Children and Juveniles Statistical Handbook)*, p. 242.

⁸⁰ China Youth Research Centre, *中国未成年人数据手册 (China’s Children and Juveniles Statistical Handbook)*, Beijing: Science Press, p.241.

painted on walls everywhere he traveled in the countryside. Inevitably, many left-behind children end up taking low paying jobs in the cities just like their parents.

Left-behind children face more of life's adversities than ordinary children. Without the care of their parents, some children have developed the ability to take care of themselves, work hard and study hard. However, many have developed serious behavioural problems. And no matter how effectively these children learn to cope by themselves, extended periods of time away from their parents almost inevitably leads to pain and sorrow.

The government's response

Official initiatives

Migrant workers first began leaving their children behind in the care of relatives and other guardians in the mid-1980s;⁸² however the central government only really started paying attention to the issue after the Ministry of Education organized a seminar on left-behind children in May 2004. The State Council sent research teams to major migrant worker exporting provinces to gauge the extent of the problem^{83,84,85} and pledged⁸⁶ to improve the education,⁸⁷ personal safety,⁸⁸ and personal development⁸⁹ of left-behind children. (See *Appendix I* for a detailed list of central government initiatives to help left-behind children). In 2006, the Specialist Work Group on Left Behind Children (农村留守儿童专题工作组) was set up under the State Council to oversee these efforts.⁹⁰ In 2007, the All-China-Women's Federation, with 12 ministries and departments, issued the *Circular on Launching the National Campaign "Sharing the Blue Sky" for Left-behind*

⁸¹ “他们是当下中国最容易受伤害的人” (They are the most vulnerable group in China), *中国青年报 (China Youth Daily)*, 29 May 2006.

⁸² In 2003 when the State Council issued the “Circular on the improvement of the services and management of migrant workers” (国务院办公厅关于做好农民进城务工就业管理和服务工作的通知) and the “Decision of the State Council on Further Strengthening Rural Education” (国务院关于进一步加强对农村教育工作的决定), left-behind children, as a special group, were not mentioned. See Appendix IV for a list of related laws.

⁸³ “我国成立专门机构解决农村留守儿童问题” (A special department will be set up to handle the problems faced by left-behind children), *新华网 (Xinhua Net)*, 19 October, 2006.

⁸⁴ “關注農村留守兒童促進兩岸婦女兒童事業的發展” (Pay attention to left-behind children and promote women's and children's rights in China and Taiwan), *中国发展门户网 (China Gate)*, 15 May 2007.

⁸⁵ “我国成立专门机构解决农村留守儿童问题” (A special department will be set up to handle the problems faced by left-behind children), *新华网 (Xinhua Net)*, 10 October 2006.

⁸⁶ “中国农村留守儿童近2000万 身心发展出现新情况” (New developments in the physical and psychological condition of 20

million left-behind children in China), *中国发展门户网 (China Gate)*, 15 May 2007.

⁸⁷ “教育部关于教育系统贯彻落实《国务院关于解决农民工问题的若干意见》的实施意见” (Opinion of the Ministry of Education on the implementation of “Some opinions of the State Council on resolving the problem of migrant workers” in education), 17 May 2006.

⁸⁸ “公安部关于做好留守儿童有关工作的通知” (Circular of the Ministry of Public Security on handling the work of left-behind children), 20 August 2006.

⁸⁹ “关于深入实施“进城务工青年发展计划”进一步加强青年农民工工作的意见” (Opinion on intensifying the “Young Migrant Worker Development Plan”, and strengthening the work on young migrant workers), 26 September 2006.

⁹⁰ This working group is headed by the Joint Committee on Migrant Workers under the State Council (国务院农民工工作联席会议办公室) and the All China Women's Federation, in collaboration with ten other ministries and bureaus, such as the Ministry of Public Security, Ministry of Education, Ministry of Civil Affairs and Ministry of Finance. It deploys, coordinates and monitors projects to solve the left-behind children phenomenon.

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and Migrant children (关于开展“共享蓝天”全国关爱农村留守流动儿童大行动的通知) on 15 May 2007 in order to help the children in four key areas: 1) daily care, 2) education, 3) psychological and personal development, and 4) safety. The

measures were to be implemented through four distinct strategies; government initiatives, development of legal rights, social participation and media programmes. (See Figure 3 below.)

Figure 3. Four strategies to help left-behind children

| | |
|------------------------|---|
| Government initiatives | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • to strengthen cooperation among government departments, and to initiate policy changes in: household registration, education, health care, and social welfare; • to speed up building of boarding schools; • to set up a monitoring system in villages and schools to keep track of the activities and needs of left-behind children. |
| Legal rights | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • to define the legal responsibility of parents and guardians, and to set up a state guardian system (国家监护制度); • to heighten local governments' awareness of the rights of left-behind children; • to promote public awareness of the <i>Compulsory Education Law</i> and the <i>Protection of Minors Law</i>; • to mobilize non-government organizations to protect the rights of left-behind children; • to encourage judicial and social agencies to provide legal and psychological consultation; • to strengthen law enforcement. |
| Social participation | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • to recruit “stand-in parents” (代理家长) to take care of the practical and emotional needs of left-behind children; • to strengthen communication between left-behind children and their parents, and to provide education on parenting for the guardians of left-behind children; • to organize peer groups to provide emotional and social support. |
| Media | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • to build a loving and caring social atmosphere, and a society with equal opportunities; • to promote successful models that can be emulated. |

As part of the blue sky campaign, volunteers, usually referred to as “loving mothers” (爱心妈妈), “stand-in parents” (代理家) or “loving

buddies” (爱心伙伴) were recruited to provide emotional and practical support to left-behind children, in order to ease their feelings of alienation

and to improve their psychological health. The volunteers were expected to visit their charges regularly, listen to them and provide guidance. An advertisement recruiting volunteers read:

A loving family (爱心家庭) will be matched with a left-behind child. The mother of that family will be the “loving mother” and the child of that family will be the “loving buddy”. The “loving mother” should be under 50, responsible, caring and have a good education. She should have the time and resources to visit the child living in rural areas. The “loving buddy” should be in primary or middle school, with a good temperament...⁹¹

In many places, village officials and teachers were the major source of “stand-in parents”.⁹² In one town in Chongqing municipality there were more than 300 stand-in parents. About 60 percent were teachers and a third of them were government and Party officials.⁹³ Localities usually have their own selection criteria. For example, in Hangzhou, “stand-in parents” usually come from the same village as the children. In other areas, university

students are recruited.⁹⁴ National models are being promoted to provide guidelines to local governments. The Shantian model, based on a school in Hunan, for example, allows students to choose their “stand-in parents” from among the teachers.⁹⁵ To facilitate parent-children communication, free telephone lines have been set up in schools or in left-behind children’s centres.^{96,97} Some places provide communication skills training.⁹⁸ Schools and village cadres are urged to monitor left-behind children’s family circumstances and their behaviour in order to give timely support. Left-behind children themselves have been organized into squads to support each other and do community work.^{99,100} Community centres, usually referred to as left-behind children’s homes, have been set up to serve as a safe environment for play and study. And out-of-school activities have been organized, especially during vacations, to keep the children occupied.^{101,102} Educated adults in the neighborhood have been recruited to supervise them, and other private initiatives encouraged.^{103,104,105}

According to the government, the “stand-in parent” scheme has had positive results, as indicated in

⁹¹ “共享藍天”—關愛農村留守兒童大行動 (“Sharing the blue sky” – Action plan for caring for left-behind children), All-China Women’s Federation, 3 August 2007.

⁹² Ye, Jingzhong 叶敬忠 & Yang, Zhao 杨照 (2008), *关爱留守儿童-行动与对策* (Caring for Left-behind Children: Actions and Strategies), Social Sciences Academic Press, p.102.

⁹³ *Ibid*

⁹⁴ “江西千名大学生担任留守儿童“代理家长” (A thousand university students in Jiangxi become “stand-in parents” of left-behind children), *Xinhua Daily Telegraph*, 2 May 2007.

⁹⁵ “湖南團組織為留守兒童辦連串實事” (A number of things done by the Hunan Youth League for left-behind children), *中國青年報* (*China Youth Daily*), 7 June 2007.

⁹⁶ “留守小隊還是代理家長制留守兒童怎樣回‘家’?” (Left-behind children squads or stand-in parents? How do left-behind children return “home”), *新華網* (*Xinhua Net*), 11 July 2007.

⁹⁷ Ye, Jingzhong 叶敬忠 & Yang, Zhao 杨照 (2008), *Op Cit*.

⁹⁸ “代理家長:五一我该怎么陪留守兒童过?” (Stand-in parents: How should I spend Labour Day with left-behind children?), *Hangzhou Daily*, 20 April 2007.

⁹⁹ “留守小隊還是代理家長制留守兒童怎樣回‘家’?” (Left-behind children squads or stand-in parents? How do left-behind children return “home”), *新華網* (*Xinhua Net*), 11 July 2007.

¹⁰⁰ “全國助人為樂模範候選人:譚海美事迹” (The story of Tan Haimei: A candidate for national model for helping others), (*CCTV.com*), 30 August 2007.

¹⁰¹ “宁夏:各中小學校將建留守兒童心理健康檔”(Ningxia: All primary and secondary schools will compile a dossier on the psychological health of left-behind children), *新華網* (*Xinhua Net*), 15 April 2007.

¹⁰² “福建將對農村“留守兒童”展開心理健康教育”(Fujian province will provide education on psychological health for left-behind children), *新華網* (*Xinhua Net*) on 27 November 2006.

¹⁰³ “黑龍江100個“留守兒童之家”揭牌” (The opening of 100 left-behind children’s homes in Heilongjiang), 6 June 2007

¹⁰⁴ Ye, Jingzhong 叶敬忠 & Yang, Zhao 杨照 (2008), *Op Cit*.

¹⁰⁵ “重慶:“小老師”留守兒童項目启动” (Chongqing: Kicking off of the “little mentors” project for left-behind children), *新華網* (*Xinhua Net*), 6 April 2007.

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the following example.

During the 2006 Spring Festival, a primary school student named Xiaoqing was paired with a young female township government officer, Yangling, who showed great concern for her needs. Yangling bought her textbooks, school bags, stationery and snacks. She also visited her or let Xiaoqing stay with her. Every time they parted, she would walk Xiaoqing to the bus and phone her later to make sure that she arrived home safely. After Xiaoqing got Yangling as her stand-in parent, she improved noticeably in school and even received a progress award.¹⁰⁶

However, it seems this case is the exception rather than the rule. Many stand-in parents enroll in the scheme simply because their government office or school has quotas to fill, and are not really qualified for the role. One stand-in parent working in a hospital said that, she, her ward matron, and the head of her department were all deputy parents. However, she said they were all busy and could only occasionally visit their charges.¹⁰⁷

One of the main efforts was to strengthen the supervision of these children. Official reports

claim that Public Security Bureaus across China have organized educational activities to boost social awareness of children's rights and enhance their sense of self protection.¹⁰⁸ They launched "strike hard" (严打) campaigns to combat crime against left-behind children.¹⁰⁹ Police increased patrols and strengthened neighborhood-watch schemes.^{110,111} In 2008, Public Security Bureaus launched campaigns to combat the abduction of minors, arresting 5,000 criminals and rescuing 8,000 victims.¹¹² And an inspection team under the Standing Committee of the National People's Congress was set up to examine the enforcement of the Protection of Minors Law.¹¹³

In order to ensure schooling and better supervision for children in poor rural areas, the central government invested 900 million yuan from 2004 to 2006 in the Boarding School Development Project.¹¹⁴ By 2006, about ten percent of primary school students in China's western regions and about 40 percent of middle school students in the central and western regions had been placed in such schools.¹¹⁵

¹⁰⁶ Ye, Jingzhong 叶敬忠 & Yang, Zhao 杨照 (2008), *Op Cit.*

¹⁰⁷ *Ibid.*, p.100-101.

¹⁰⁸ "四川华蓥"留守学生"普及法律知识" (A city in Sichuan province promotes legal knowledge among migrant children), *新华网 (Xinhua Net)*, 29 March 2007.

¹⁰⁹ "公安部专项整治行动严打侵害农村留守儿童犯罪" (A special campaign of the Ministry of Public Security to combat crimes against left-behind children), *新华网 (Xinhua Net)*, 28 May 2007.

¹¹⁰ *Ibid.*

¹¹¹ "公安部:侵害留守儿童案不管大小都要"及时侦破" (The Ministry of Public Security: crimes against left-behind children must be solved speedily), *中国网 (China Net)*, 6 July 2007.

¹¹² "全国人大常委会执法检查组关于检查《中华人民共和国

未成年人保护法》实施情况的报告" (Report on the enforcement of the PRC Protection of Minors Law submitted by the inspection team of the Standing Committee of the National People's Congress), *中国人大网 (National People's Congress Website)*, 19 September 2008.

¹¹³ "人大常委会执法检查组检查未成年人保护法实施报告" (Report of the inspection team under the Standing Committee of the National People's Congress on implementation of the Protection of Minors Law), *中国人大网 (National People's Congress Website)*, 16 September 2008.

¹¹⁴ Jia, Xiaonuo 贾小娜 (2007), "农村寄宿制学校建设工程纪实" (A report on the construction of boarding schools in rural areas), *教育旬刊 (Education tri-monthly)*, 13:22-25.

¹¹⁵ *Ibid.*

The limitations of government policy

According to the Blue Sky circular issued by the All-China Women's Federation, structural changes are crucial to resolving the left-behind children problem. However, to date, few changes have been initiated. In 2006, the Ministry of Public Security proposed relaxing the *hukou* system and enabling migrants to transfer their *hukous* to cities.¹¹⁶ Yet migrant children remain outsiders in the cities. In the same year, the Protection of Minors Law was revised to include a new article on the legal responsibility of parents. However, the clause affords little substantive protection for left-behind children. It merely says:

When parents are unable to perform their duties as guardians to their underage child because they need to work in other cities or for other reasons, they shall entrust their children to another adult who has the capacity to provide guardianship to their child on their behalf. (Article 16)¹¹⁷

Many of Beijing's initiatives rely too heavily on individual citizens and groups providing *ad hoc* help to left-behind children. Programmes lack

resources and proper planning. The rights and duties of the "stand-in parents," for example, have not been clearly defined and many of them do not know whether they are guardians, or under what circumstances they can represent the interests of the children. Some biological parents have refused to pay school fees for their children because they think stand-in parents should bear such expenses. Even though some stand-in parents are devoted volunteers, many lack the skills to work with children.^{118,119,120} Realizing these problems, Shiquan county in Shaanxi province drafted two documents: the Responsibilities of Stand-in parents (代理家长职责) and the *Memorandum on the Beneficial Pairing of Stand-in parents and Left-behind Children* (代理家长与留守儿童结对帮扶协议) which have now been promoted as a national model.¹²¹

To raise awareness and lessen the government's financial burden, individuals,¹²² NGOs¹²³ and businesses¹²⁴ have all been urged to fund¹²⁵ and staff left-behind children's homes. In some areas, private funds are now the major source of finance.¹²⁶ The lack of government funds affects the substantiality of programmes. For example, some telecommunication companies give telephone

¹¹⁶ "公安部关于做好留守儿童有关工作的通知" (Circular of the Ministry of Public Security on handling the work of left-behind children), 20 August 2006.

¹¹⁷ "中华人民共和国未成年人保护法" (Law of the People's Republic of China on the Protection of Minors) issued by the Standing Committee of the National People's Congress, promulgated on 29 December 2006, and effective on 1 June 2007.

¹¹⁸ "留守小队还是代理家长制留守儿童怎样回'家'?" (Left-behind children squads or stand-in parents? How do left-behind children return "home"), *新华网* (Xinhua Net), 11 July 2007.

¹¹⁹ Ye, Jingzhong 叶敬忠 & Yang, Zhao 杨照 (2008), Op Cit.

¹²⁰ "代理家长:五一我该怎么陪留守儿童过?" (Stand-in parents: How should I spend Labour Day with left-behind children?), *Hangzhou Daily*, 20 April 2007.

¹²¹ "六位一体'留守儿童教育;成功试点炼就'石泉模式'" (The success of the "six-in-one" education model for left-behind children creates the "Shiquan" model), *华商报* (China Business Net) 22 September 2008.

¹²² "大学生创办留守儿童之家 免费教孩子学乐器" (Two university students set up a left-behind children home to teach children musical instruments), *东方今报* (Oriental Daily), 18 December 2007.

¹²³ "上海大学生在四川建起6个'留守儿童之家'" (Shanghai university students set up six left-behind children homes in Sichuan), *解放日报* (Liberation Daily), 13 August 2007.

¹²⁴ "新闻特写:走进半李小学留守儿童之家" (Feature article: Walking into the left-behind children home of the Panli Primary School), 漯河教育电视台 (Leihe Education TV), 19 August 2008.

¹²⁵ "山东省牵手关爱留守流动儿童5·11大型募捐雨中火爆进行" (The 5.11 donation campaign for left-behind children proceeded successfully despite rain in Shandong province), *百灵网* (Bailing Net), 11 May 2008.

¹²⁶ "安庆市开展'留守儿童之家'认建活动" (Anqing city kicks off donation campaigns for the building of left-behind children's homes), *中青网* (China Youth Net), 24 April 2008.

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cards to left-behind children. However, they usually sponsor such schemes for a few months to a year, with no guarantee of renewal. Further, many corporate initiatives are not carefully planned. Some children do not know how to use telephone cards or find them inconvenient. Some schools installed dedicated telephone lines for children in an open area and found that few children used them because of privacy concerns. In a report to the National People's Congress in September 2008, the inspection team for the Protection of Minors Law said many activities organized for young people in rural areas were obsolete and failed to attract participants. It suggested employing qualified adults to improve the operation of left-behind children's homes.¹²⁷

A commentator in *Science Education News* pointed to the need to fix weaknesses in government programmes:

Many things need to be done in order to make the stand-in parent scheme more effective. One is incentives: The education, finance, and civil affairs departments should arrange for education and management, guarantee basic funding,

and monetary subsidies to teachers. Education departments at various levels should examine and monitor the scheme regularly, set up a reward mechanism and make the scheme more systematic and sustainable. Preliminary estimates for the cost of setting up left behind children squads nationwide are about 100 million yuan a year, with the stand-in parent scheme coming to 300 million yuan. However, to date, few places have raised enough money.¹²⁸

Similarly, according to a report in the *China Youth Daily*, accommodating all left-behind children in boarding schools would require about 600 billion yuan, with the cost shared by the central and local governments and the public.¹²⁹ In reality, many local governments lack the resources to build enough boarding schools. Some are able to build new schools but they lack basic facilities, such as heating, drinking water and bathrooms.^{130,131} Many boarding schools have serious hygiene and safety issues.^{132,133} In Guangxi, up to 250 schools were found to have an "extremely high risk" of water pollution, and 400 to 500 had a moderate risk.¹³⁴ A 2006 report by the Ministry of Education

¹²⁷ "全国人大常委会执法检查组关于检查《中华人民共和国未成年人保护法》实施情况的报告" (Report on enforcement of the PRC Protection of Minors Law submitted by the inspection team of the Standing Committee of the National People's Congress), 中国人大网 (National People's Congress Website), 19 September 2008.

¹²⁸ "在农村推行代管家长制的实践与思考" (Promoting stand-in parents in rural areas: practice and reflection), *科教新报* (Science education news), 12 January 2005.

¹²⁹ "留守小队"、寄宿制，还是代理家长制" (Left-behind children squads, boarding schools or stand-in parents), *中国青年报* (*China Youth Daily*), 11 July 2007.

¹³⁰ "省教育厅副厅长杨辉做客中国福建政府网 '下大力气落实好教育为民办实事项目' 专访实录, (An interview with the deputy head of the provincial education department, Yang Hui, by the Fujian government website on working hard for the education

for the people project), Provincial Education Department Website, 27 August 2008.

¹³¹ 洪泽县寄宿制小学巡礼 (An overview of the primary boarding schools in Hongze county), *教育旬刊* (*Education tri-monthly*)

¹³² "陕西省安排专项经费改善农村寄宿制学校设施" (Shanxi province sets aside a special fund to improve the facilities of boarding schools in rural areas), *华商报* (*Chinese business news*), 25 November 2007.

¹³³ Jia, Xiaonuo 贾小娜 (2007), *Op Cit.*

¹³⁴ "19名代表联名呼吁解决农村寄宿学校饮水安全问题" (19 delegates to the Guangxi People's Congress call for improving the supply of safe drinking water in boarding schools in rural areas), *广西新闻网* (*Guangxi News Net*), 24 January 2008.

found that schools, particularly in rural areas, were vulnerable to accidents, food poisoning and contagious diseases.¹³⁵

At some rural schools, children suffer from malnutrition. A donor visiting a rural boarding school in Shanxi in 2008 wrote:

On the Sunday morning of 22 June, we arrived at the Gaojiata primary school... At about 8 o'clock, the sun was high and it was breakfast time for the students. Every one of the students seemed to have a surprisingly big appetite. The portions served were much bigger than the norm for urban children of the same age. But none of them was chubby. Like their parents and grandparents, these children had only two meals a day: one after the morning lesson and the other in the afternoon. A menu was posted at the entrance of the canteen. Once every ten days, these children could have two meals of pork and one meal of pork dumplings. At other times, the staple was the "three-olds:" potatoes, rice noodles and beancurd. Many children had white fungus-like patches on their face, which, according to nutrition experts, is a symptom of malnutrition...¹³⁶

A shortage of teachers has also marred the boarding school initiative.^{137,138} The headmaster

of one boarding school said his staff had to teach more than 30 classes a week. They got up at six in the morning and worked until ten at night. Yet, they could only earn 600 yuan a month, and were often not paid on time. Teachers who joined the school in September 2007 only got paid at the time of the Spring Festival in February 2008.¹³⁹ Heavy workloads and low salaries have turned many away, while those who stay have to take care of the emotional and physical needs of the children as well as their teaching duties. One journalist reported:

Because many children's parents left town for work, the teachers took care of them and became their temporary parents. They not only helped the children study, but took responsibility for their daily needs – they helped them clean themselves, mend their clothes, and made sure they would not catch a cold... Some children did not know how to make their bed. These teachers would show them. Some students suffered from insomnia because they were home sick. Teachers would tell them bed time stories...¹⁴⁰

Many boarding schools lack the facilities to meet the psychological needs of the students or ensure their safety. Children at boarding schools are more likely to experience bullying. One student said: "The older students often came to our dormitory, stamping on our blankets, and jumping on our

¹³⁵ Jia, Xiaonuo 贾小娜 (2007), *Op Cit.*

¹³⁶ "記者關注：黃河邊寄宿制學校的孩子" (Reporter's focus: Children studying in boarding schools by the Yellow River), *中國青年報 (China Youth Daily)*, 3 September 2008.

¹³⁷ Postiglione, G.A. (2006), "Schooling and inequality in China". In G.A. Postiglione (ed.), *Education and Social Change in China*, Armonk, New York, London, England: M.E. Sharpe, p.21.

¹³⁸ "留守兒童路在何方" (Whither the left-behind children?), *人*

民公安報 (People's Police News), 12 March 2007.

¹³⁹ "貧困地區寄宿制學校經費不足 學生處境堪憂" (Shortage of funding for boarding schools in poor areas warrants concern for students), *鳳凰衛視 (Phoenix TV)*, 2 September 2008.

¹⁴⁰ Su, Ran 苏然 (2007), "困扰寄宿制学校的两大难题" (Two important problems faced by boarding schools), *教育旬刊 (Education tri-monthly)*, 13: 29.

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bed. If we don't give them money, they will beat us up.”¹⁴¹

Xiaogong had been sent to this boarding school for one semester. Both of his parents were working elsewhere, and they only came home during the Spring Festival. His school did not allow the students to call their parents or leave the school (to make a phone call). He wished he could find a place to call his parents. He wished his teachers could be more caring but he dared not to tell them what he thought. He said if the teachers were more caring, he could have told them more.¹⁴²

In some regions, local government boarding school programmes have forced private schools to close. As a result, children who used to study in private schools in their neighborhoods now go to boarding schools, sometimes in other villages.¹⁴³ Although the state has waived the tuition and textbook fees for students in compulsory education and gives subsidies, the costs at boarding schools are still higher than in day schools. On average a family in central and western China needs to pay 1,360 yuan annually for two children to study in boarding schools.¹⁴⁴ The rural per capita income in 2007 was only 5,791 yuan.¹⁴⁵

In order to deal with delinquency, measures have been taken to safeguard the rights and welfare of

children. However, some measures devised in the name of “child protection” aim to control them. Many left-behind children have official dossiers, and the after-school activities organized for them are primarily aimed at keeping them off the streets. Boarding schools often have high walls to keep students inside and “protect” them from criminal gangs, and accidents outside. However, without adequate facilities they are like prisons. Even with good facilities, the rules in boarding schools can be rigid.¹⁴⁶ In 2008, the report of the *Protection of Minors Law* inspection team focused on preventing internet addiction and imparting moral education to juvenile delinquents.

A noted Chinese sociologist has suggested that since, “the cause of left-behind children is the separation of parents and children, our ultimate goal should be to use all possible methods to reestablish the family connection.”¹⁴⁷ However, the government's response thus far has addressed the symptoms of separation and does not get to the cause. The root cause of the long term separation of parents and children is the *hukou* system and the uneven development of rural and urban areas.

¹⁴¹ Ye, Jingzhong 叶敬忠 & Yang, Zhao 杨照 (2008), *Op Cit*, p.102.

¹⁴² *Ibid*, p.64.

¹⁴³ “河南鹿邑县民办学校之困” (Difficulties faced by private schools in Luyi county in Henan province), 人民政协网 (People's Political Consultative Conference Website), 9 May 2007.

¹⁴⁴ “記者關注：黃河邊寄宿制學校的孩子” (Reporter's focus: Children studying in boarding schools by the Yellow River), *中國青年報* (China Youth Daily), 3 September 2008.

¹⁴⁵ China Statistical Yearbook 2008, Table 9-18.

¹⁴⁶ “小学生跪求妈妈不上学的拷问” (The tortuous problem of a primary school student begging his mother to be allowed to miss school), (*cedu.cn*), 24 September 2007.

¹⁴⁷ “留守小隊還是代理家長制留守兒童怎樣回‘家’?” (Left-behind children squads or stand-in parents? How do left-behind children return “home”), *新華網* (Xinhua Net), 11 July 2007.

Rural Migrant Children in Urban China

When Premier Wen Jiabao visited a school for migrant children in Beijing in 2003, he wrote on the blackboard: 同在蓝天下, 共同成长进步 (Under the same blue sky, grow up and progress together).¹⁴⁸ Sadly, the same blue sky is just about the only thing the children of migrant workers share with urban children. Lower family income combined with the restrictive household registration (*hukou* 户口) system means they are marginalized and deprived of equal access to education, social and medical welfare and the right to participate in urban life.

Despite immense hardships, more and more migrant workers are taking their children with them rather than leaving them behind in the countryside. Recent studies have shown that whole family units now account for about a quarter of the migrant population. One-third of all migrants say they have no plans to leave the city,¹⁴⁹ suggesting that in future a higher number of children of migrant workers will be brought up in urban areas. Indeed, in Henan province, the

number of migrant children has increased by 25 percent annually since 2000.¹⁵⁰

However, because many migrant workers are not registered, children under 16 years old are not legally required to register as temporary residents, and as only a small proportion of migrant children born in urban areas have their births registered,¹⁵¹ it is difficult to accurately gauge their number in China's cities today.^{152,153} The most commonly cited estimate is based on the 2000 census, which showed 19 percent of the migrants were below 18 years of age, amounting to 19.8 million, or six percent of all children in China then. Some 11.2 million migrant children were below 15 years of age. Overall, 51 percent of migrant children were boys but more girls were found in the 16 to 17 year age bracket, indicating a higher demand from factories for young female workers (*See Figure 4 below*).^{154,155}

¹⁴⁸ Ren, Yunxia任云霞 & Zhang, Bomei张柏梅 (2006), “社会排斥与流动儿童的城市适应研究” (A study of social exclusion and the adaptability of migrant children to city life), *山西青年管理干部学院学* (Shanxi Youth Managerial College Studies), 19 (2).

¹⁴⁹ Zou, Hong 邹泓; Qu, Zhiqiong屈智勇 & Zhang, Qiuling张秋凌 (2005), “中国九城市流动儿童发展与需求 (The development and needs of migrant children in nine Chinese cities), *青年研究*, (Youth Studies) 2.

¹⁵⁰ “河南省一年为农民工子女免去借读费超过1亿元” (Henan waives more than 100 million yuan in temporary student fees for migrant children), *新华社* (*Xinhua*), 26 November 2006.

¹⁵¹ Liu, Xiaobing 刘晓兵; Li, Shuzhuo李树茁 & Zhang, Yexia 张烨霞 (2007), “中国流动儿童出生登记的探索性研究” (An exploratory study on the registration of migrant children births), *市场与人口分析* (Market and Demographic Analysis), 13 (1) p. 49-55.

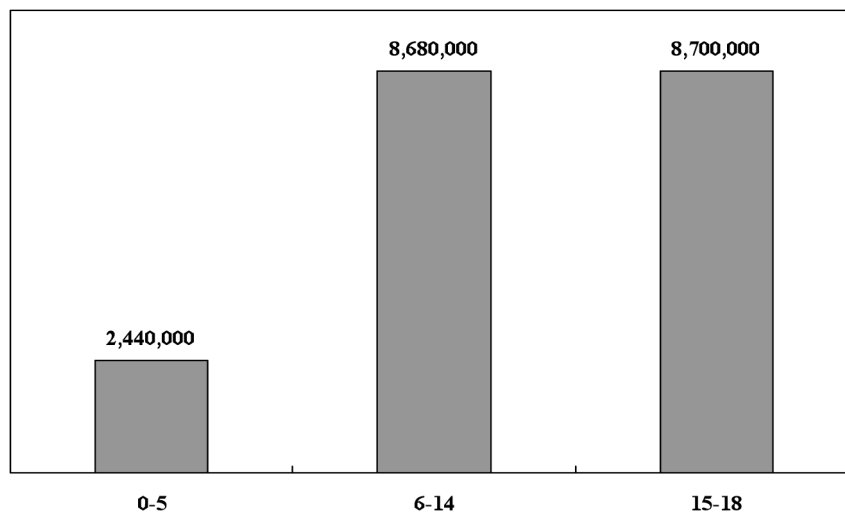
¹⁵² “中华人民共和国居民身份证法” (Law of the People's Republic of China on Residents' Identity Cards), issued by

the Standing Committee of the National People's Congress, promulgated on 28 June 2003, and effective on 1 April 2004.

¹⁵³ UNICEF, in collaboration with the Office of the State Council Women and Children's Committee, started to promote the registration of migrant children below 16 years old in 2006 in Beijing, Wuxi in Jiangsu, and Shijiazhuang in Hebei. “登记制度让中国流动儿童不再是城市‘隐形人’” (Registration system will mean migrant children are no longer the city's “invisible children”), *新华网* (*Xinhua Net*), 21 March 2008.

¹⁵⁴ China Labour Bulletin Research Report (2007), *Small Hands: A Survey Report on Child Labour and the Failings of the Rural School System in China*, p.8.

¹⁵⁵ National Bureau of Statistics, *中国2000年人口普查资料* (Data obtained from the 2000 census), quoted in *中国青少年研究中心* (China Youth Research Centre), (2008), *中国未成年人数据手册* (China's Children and Juveniles Statistical Handbook), Beijing: Science Press, p.4.

Figure 4. Numbers of migrant children by age

Based on the data of the 2000 census, quoted in China Youth Research Centre (2008), *中国未成年人数据手册 (China's Children and Juveniles Statistical Handbook)*. Beijing: Science Press, p. 4

The highest concentrations of migrant children were in Guangdong, Anhui, Henan and Sichuan, which, together with Hunan, Hubei, Shandong and Jiangsu, accounted for 49 percent of migrant children in China.¹⁵⁶

The 2000 census showed that about 72 percent of migrant children were living in a family environment (56.5 percent with their parents; 7.5 percent with their grandparents and about 6 percent with other family members). The younger the child, the higher the likelihood they were living within the family. About 80 percent of those under 15 years of age were living with their parents, 12 percent with grandparents and six percent with other relatives.¹⁵⁷ This pattern differs from that of left-behind children in which a lower proportion

of younger children were living with their parents. The 28 percent of migrant children living outside the family were predominantly older children who had entered the workforce themselves and were living in dormitories or sharing accommodation with co-workers.

Far from being a “stranger in the city,” most migrant children have lived in urban areas for a large part of their lives. The 2000 census estimated that 29.9 percent of migrant children were born in cities. Among those who were not, 30 percent had been living there for five years or more, and 75 percent for two years or more. A survey of migrant children in Beijing by the China Youth Research Centre in 2006 showed that 10.4 percent of migrant children in the third year of primary

¹⁵⁶ *Ibid.*

¹⁵⁷ China Youth Research Centre (2008), *中国未成年人数据手册 (China's Children and Juveniles Statistical Handbook)*, Beijing: Science Press, p.228.

school to the third year of middle school were born in Beijing, 32.8 percent had been in Beijing for five years or more, 28 percent between two and five years, and 23.9 percent between one half and two years. Only 4.9 percent had been in Beijing for less than half a year.¹⁵⁸

Despite being long-term residents in the city, these children are treated as outsiders. Their rights to medical care, education and social participation are limited, leading to a higher incidence of physical and psychological problems, and a greater vulnerability to crime.

Under the same blue sky?

Exclusion from healthcare

For migrant workers in China's cities the single biggest barrier to decent healthcare is the exorbitant cost of seeing a doctor or other healthcare professionals. With the development of the private economy and privatization of most state-owned enterprises over the last two decades, the vast majority of Chinese citizens now have to bear the cost of medical care.^{159,160} The state has reduced funding for healthcare and encouraged public health institutions to see themselves as independent economic entities operating on a fee-for-service basis. As a result, in the early 2000s, out-of-pocket expenditure accounted for more than 60 percent of total health spending in China, compared with less than 20 percent in Japan.¹⁶¹ At present most medical expenses, ranging from outpatient consultations to major surgery, are borne by users. A simple influenza vaccination can easily cost about 200 yuan, equivalent to a quarter of the minimum wage in Guangzhou.^{162,163,164}

Soaring medical expenses have become the most pressing concern for ordinary Chinese citizens, concerns summed up in the now commonly used phrase “看病难 看病贵” (Seeing a doctor is both difficult and expensive).¹⁶⁵ And for migrant workers, who usually earn much less than their

¹⁵⁸ *Ibid*, p.227.

¹⁵⁹ Beach, M, “China’s rural health care gradually worsens,” *The Lancet*, No. 358 (1997), pp. 567–68.

¹⁶⁰ Gao, J.; Tang, S.; Tolhurst, R. & Rao, K. (2001), “Changing access to health services in urban China: implications for equity,” (*Health Policy and Planning*), 16(3):302–312.

¹⁶¹ Yip, W. and Hsiao, W (2008), “The Chinese health System at a Crossroads”, (*Health Affairs*), 27 (2):460-468.

¹⁶² “广州卫生局副局长说中国看病最不贵遭绝大多数人质疑” (The overwhelming majority of people question the assertion of the deputy head of the Guangzhou Health Department that healthcare in China is not expensive), *羊城晚报* (*Yangcheng Evening News*), 20 February 2008.

¹⁶³ 长沙看病忒贵” (Seeing a doctor in Changsha is excessively expensive!), *长沙妈妈宝宝网* (Changsha mothers and babies network), (*Iyaya.com* discussion group), 16 June 2008.

¹⁶⁴ “医院发文让医生开贵药 感冒学生入治后死亡” (Hospital orders doctors to prescribe expensive medicines. Student with a cold dies after treatment), *文汇报* (*Wenweipo*), 6 December 2007.

¹⁶⁵ “社科院發2007藍皮書看病難看病貴居社會問題首位” (China’s Academy of Social Sciences 2007 Blue Book shows that expensive and inaccessible healthcare is the most pressing concern for ordinary Chinese people), *新京報* (*The Beijing News*), 26 December 2006.

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urban counterparts, the burden is even worse. Although maternal healthcare, for example, is theoretically open to migrant workers once they have temporarily transferred their healthcare account to the cities,¹⁶⁶ most of these services are not free. A routine delivery in coastal cities cost on average about 3,000 yuan in the mid 2000s,^{167,168} and few migrant women are able to afford even the checkups.^{169,170} A study on the health of pregnant migrant workers in Yiwu, Zhejiang province, in 2005 noted:

Migrant workers earned between 500 and 800 yuan a month. Registration and initial check-up costs came to between 100 and 150 yuan. The cost for delivery in a street-level health clinic was 600 to 800 yuan; in a regular hospital it was 1,500 to 2,000 yuan. Medical expenses for a complicated delivery came to about 4,000 yuan. Most migrant women, therefore, do not have any neonatal examinations and opt for a home delivery by unlicensed midwives.¹⁷¹

A study in Beijing in 2006 found that only 30 percent of migrant women had prenatal

examinations. Whilst locals usually had their first checkup a month after conception, most migrant workers had their first examination in the 28th week or later, and usually only to have an ultrasound examination. Similarly, all local mothers registered with the after-delivery healthcare schemes. However, migrant workers only came back when they had complications.¹⁷² A survey of more than 1,200 Dongguan children at the end of 2004 found that only 64 percent of migrant children were delivered in regular hospitals, compared with all local children.¹⁷³

As a result, migrant women had a much higher maternal death rate than local women. In Beijing, the maternal death rate of the migrant population between 1998 and 2002 was 52.2 per 100,000, three times higher than in the local population.¹⁷⁴ In Guangzhou, the maternal death among migrants was double that of locals. In one district in the Pearl River Delta which had 850,000 permanent residents and nearly 1,000,000 migrant workers, almost 90 percent of maternal deaths between 1995 and 2005 were of migrant workers.¹⁷⁵

Once the child is born, the situation for migrant families does not improve much. Migrant

¹⁶⁶ “关于印发宁波市流动人口孕产妇女儿童保健管理办法(修订)的通知”(Circular on the publication of implementing regulations for the management of maternal and child health care for the migrant population, revised), issued by the Ningbo Bureau of Health, 25 April 2006.

¹⁶⁷ “从7月1日开始生育保险规定居住证生育费可报”(From 1 July residence card holders will be entitled to maternal insurance), 39健康网(39 HealthNet), 2 June 2005.

¹⁶⁸ “低保孕妇分娩全免费政策将在福田区出台”(Women on social security will be eligible for free birth services in a new policy to be implemented in Futian district (Shenzhen)), 本地宝新闻(Local Treasure News), 20 September 2007.

¹⁶⁹ Gao, Yanqiu高燕秋; An, Lin 安琳 & Guo, Chunhui郭春暉 (2006), “流动人口妇幼保健服务利用及服务提供模式的定性研究”(A qualitative study of the provision method and utilization of maternal and child healthcare services by the migrant population), 中国妇幼保健 (Maternal and Child Healthcare in China), 21: 1022-1025.

¹⁷⁰ Lu, Shuiling 卢水灵 (2005), “东莞市流动儿童保健现状及对策”(The current healthcare conditions of migrant children in Dongguan and measures to address them), 南方护理学报 (Nanfang Journal of Nursing), 12 (7): 59-60.

¹⁷¹ Wu, Liping 吴莉萍 (2006), “流动人口孕产妇保健服务状况分析与对策”(An analysis of and prescription for maternal healthcare for the migrant population), 中国妇幼保健 (China Maternal and Child Care), 21:1172-1173

¹⁷² Gao, Yanqiu高燕秋, An, Lin 安琳 & Guo, Chunhui郭春暉 (2006), *Op Cit.*

¹⁷³ Lu, Shuiling 卢水灵 (2005), *Op Cit.*

¹⁷⁴ “北京市流动人口孕产妇死亡率降至历史新低”(Maternal death rates for the migrant population in Beijing hit an all time low), 中国人口信息网 (China Population News Net), 28 March 2008.

¹⁷⁵ “民工:黑诊所关了,我到哪看病外来工医疗保障缺失”(Unlicensed clinics for migrant workers have been closed. Where can I go for treatment? The system is deficient), 恩施新闻网.

children usually have a lower birth weight and a significantly higher proportion of congenital illnesses.^{176,177,178} In the spring of 2008, China's national broadcaster, CCTV, reported on the case of a premature and seriously ill infant who became progressively worse because his parents could not afford the cost of medical treatment. The child's mother, Xiaomin, was only 15-year-old. Originally from Sichuan province, she had traveled to Guangzhou and Beijing to work when she was 13 years old. She gave birth in a rented home, assisted only by her mother.

Although some urban governments have opened up their healthcare services to migrant children, this is only done on a temporary and discretionary basis. The primary responsibility for healthcare remains with the child's place of permanent residence.¹⁷⁹ Most migrant families cannot afford to participate in urban healthcare programmes. A 2004 survey in Dongguan found that only 55 percent of migrant children joined healthcare programmes compared with 100 percent of locals. Indeed, as an official from the All China Women's Federation said, even if schools arranged check-ups for students, the parents of migrant children might refuse to take

part because of the cost.¹⁸⁰ When migrant children fell sick, 89 percent of their parents would seek medical help compared with 100 percent of local parents. And among those who sought medical advice, 60 percent went to unlicensed clinics.¹⁸¹ A survey of migrant children under seven years old in Wuxi, Jiangsu province, found that 81 percent had never had a medical checkup, and another 15 percent only one. About 84 percent of parents said they were unaware of the importance of regular physical examination.¹⁸²

In 2007, many provinces provided one off free medical examinations for migrant children. The doctors who helped to examine these children found that although some children suffered from serious health problems, they had never once sought medical treatment.¹⁸³ In Shijiazhuang, a girl in her final year of primary school had never had a medical checkup despite being mentally retarded, and having serious eye problems.¹⁸⁴ In a free medical checkup campaign in Wuxi in 2007, only 16 percent of 1,020 migrant children were

¹⁷⁶ Zhu, Xin朱新 & Yang, Cunying杨俊莹 (2006), "流动人口儿童保健管理模式初探" (An exploratory study on the health care services for migrant children). *中国妇幼保健* (Maternal and child healthcare in China), 21:1178-1179.

¹⁷⁷ Zhang, Jing张晶; Ma, Jin马进; Fang, Binghua方秉华; Yao, Guoying姚国英 & Wei, Mei魏梅 (2007), "0~3岁流动儿童保健状况调查" (An Investigation into the health of migrant children up to three years old), *中国妇幼保健* (China Maternal and Child Care), 22 No.36 pp.5091-5094.

¹⁷⁸ "民工:黑诊所关了,我到哪看病外来工医疗保障缺失" (Unlicensed clinics for migrant workers have been closed. Where can I go for treatment? The system is deficient), *恩施新闻网* (*Enshi News Net*); Wang Ruiming王瑞明(2002), "福州市流动人口儿童保健现状调查" (A study of migrant children's healthcare in Fuzhou), *中国公共卫生* (Public Health in China), 18(6): 724.

¹⁷⁹ "关于印发宁波市流动人口孕产妇女儿童保健管理办法(修订

的通知" (Circular on the publication of implementing regulations for the management of maternal and child health care for the migrant population, revised), issued by the Ningbo Health Bureau, 25 April 2006.

¹⁸⁰ Ministry of Health, PRC, UNICEF, WHO, UNFPA (2006), *Joint Review of the Maternal and Child Survival Strategy in China*, p. 50.

¹⁸¹ "仨社区流动儿童享免费体检" (Migrant children in three districts get free medical checks), *河北青年报* (*Hebei Youth Daily*), 24 November 2007.

¹⁸² Lu, Shuiling卢水灵 (2005), *Op Cit.*

¹⁸³ 体检出一串忧虑农民工子女需要更多的关爱" (Health checks reveal that migrant workers' children need much more care), *齐鲁晚报* (*Jilu Evening News*), 9 June 2007.

¹⁸⁴ "仨社区流动儿童享免费体检" (Migrant children in three districts get free medical checks).

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found to be free from disease.^{185,186} Nine percent of migrant children in Wuxi suffered from anaemia compared with only one percent of the overall population. A quarter of all migrant children were classified as physically weak, compared with only 10 percent of the general population. None of the physically weak migrant children was receiving specialist care whilst almost all of the local children were.¹⁸⁷

In September 2008, at least four children died from kidney failure and 13,000 more were hospitalized¹⁸⁸ because of the Chinese milk industry's use of the banned chemical melamine to artificially inflate protein level readings in milk products. Migrant workers could not afford imported baby milk powder and thus became one of the most severely affected groups. As the *South China Morning Post* reported:

In Shenzhen, 19 children have been diagnosed with kidney stones and their parents, most of them migrant workers from remote villages, said they were considering using rice porridge as a substitute. A tin of imported milk powder costs about 200 yuan (US\$30) in Shenzhen – one-fifth of the city's statutory minimum monthly wage. Although the Ministry of Health has promised

free medical treatment to all children diagnosed with kidney stones, Ms Feng said she had already paid at least 3,000 yuan in medical bills since her baby was admitted to hospital.¹⁸⁹

The mortality rate of migrant children is much higher than that of their urban counterparts. A study on the causes of death of children under five in Guangdong found that the rate of migrant children dying of infectious and parasitic diseases was 31 per 100,000 compared with two per 100,000 for local infants.¹⁹⁰ The death rate from complications of pregnancy, labour and delivery was more than five times that of local infants. Among eight preventable causes of deaths of young children, migrant children had significantly higher death rates in all categories. (See *Figure 5 below*).

Only 73 per 100,000 local infants died of neonatal asphyxia compared with 411 migrant infants.¹⁹¹ See comparison of the cause of death of children below five years of age in urban Guangdong in *Figure 6 below*.

¹⁸⁵ Yuan, Quanlian 袁全莲 (2000), “城市户口与流动户口儿童喂养方式与健康状况分析比较” (A comparative analysis of the health and nurturing of urban and migrant children), *中国儿童保健杂志* (*China Child Health Magazine*) 8 (1):pp.63-64.

¹⁸⁶ Zhu, Xin 朱新 & Yang, Cunying 杨俊莹 (2006), “流动人口儿童保健管理模式初探” (An exploratory study on the health care services of migrant children), *中国妇幼保健* (*Maternal and child healthcare in China*) 21:1178-1179.

¹⁸⁷ *Ibid.*

¹⁸⁸ 有毒奶粉企业曾要政府管制媒体” (Tainted milk powder industry asks government to control media), (BBCChinese.com), 1 October 2008.

¹⁸⁹ “What can I feed my baby now, poor parents ask”, *South China Morning Post*, 18 September 2008

¹⁹⁰ Li, Ronghan 李容汉; Zhao, Qingguo 赵庆国; Zhong, Xixia, 钟细霞; Deng, Qundi 邓群娣 & He, Qiuyuan 何秋苑 (2006). “广东省流动人口五岁以下儿童可避免死因的研究” (Preventable deaths of children below five years old in Guangdong's migrant population), *国际医药卫生导报* (*International Medicine & Health Leader*), 12(03): 111-113.

¹⁹¹ *Ibid.*

Figure 5. Death rate of children below five years of age in urban Guangdong by international classification of diseases (100,000 p)

| ICD-10 | Classification | Infant | | 1-4 years old | |
|---------|---|----------------|--------------|----------------|--------------|
| | | <i>Migrant</i> | <i>Local</i> | <i>Migrant</i> | <i>Local</i> |
| A00-B99 | Certain infectious and parasitic diseases | 31.26 | 2.87 | 15.63 | 4.31 |
| C00-D48 | Neoplasms | 13.02 | 4.31 | 2.6 | 14.38 |
| E00-E90 | Endocrine, nutritional and metabolic diseases | 10.42 | 0 | 5.21 | 0 |
| I00-I99 | Diseases of the circulatory system | 13.02 | 10.06 | 10.42 | 4.31 |
| J00-J99 | Diseases of the respiratory system | 93.81 | 44.59 | 18.24 | 15.82 |
| K00-K93 | Diseases of the digestive system | 39.08 | 4.31 | 18.24 | 1.44 |
| Q00-Q99 | Congenital malformations, deformations and chromosomal abnormalities | 130.28 | 90.61 | 2.6 | 10.06 |
| P00-P96 | Foetuses and newborns affected by maternal factors and by complications of pregnancy, labour and delivery | 783.7 | 148.81 | | |
| S00-T98 | Injury, poisoning and other consequences of external causes | 59.93 | 16.69 | 125.08 | 11.51 |

Figure 6. Death rate of children below five years of age in urban Guangdong by cause of death (100 000 p)

| ICD-10 | Cause of Death | Infant | | 1-4 years old | |
|---------|---------------------------|----------------|--------------|----------------|--------------|
| | | <i>Migrant</i> | <i>Local</i> | <i>Migrant</i> | <i>Local</i> |
| A40-A41 | Septicaemia | 26.06 | 1.44 | 13.03 | 4.31 |
| K52 | Diarrhoea | 36.48 | 2.88 | 18.24 | 1.44 |
| G00-G05 | Meningitis | 10.42 | 4.31 | 13.03 | 0 |
| A33 | <i>Tetanus neonatorum</i> | 10.42 | 0 | NA | NA |
| E40-E46 | Malnutrition | 10.42 | 0 | 5.21 | 0 |
| P21 | Neonatal asphyxia | 411.07 | 73.35 | NA | NA |
| W65-W74 | Drowning | NA | NA | 59.93 | 5.75 |
| V01-V99 | Traffic accident | 5.21 | 0 | 41.69 | 2.88 |

Source: Li, Ronghan; Zhao, Qingguo; Zhong, Xixia; Deng, Qundi & He, Qiuyuan (2006).

Discrimination in education

The *Compulsory Education Law of the PRC* (revised 29 June 2006) mandates nine years of education for all children regardless of gender, race, religion and wealth. It specifies that local governments should provide an “equal environment” for both local and migrant children in terms of access to education. However, because this “equal environment” is not clearly defined and because local governments decide how to implement the law, many migrant children are denied their basic rights to education. Very often, the only way migrant children can get an education in cities is by paying exorbitant fees to get into a state school or by studying in a substandard private school specifically set up for migrant children.

Because government funding for education is based on the number of school age children of local residents, urban governments have no absolute obligation to educate migrants. To help migrant children to study in the cities, the *1996 (Trial) Measures for the Schooling of Children and Young People in the Migrant Population*, and the *1998 Provisional Measures for the Schooling of Migrant Children and Young People* urged municipalities to accept migrant children aged between six and 14 in state-run or privately run schools under the status of temporary students. However, it also stressed that the main responsibility for education should remain with the out-flowing areas. Only children who had no guardian in their place of permanent residence could study elsewhere. As migrants are not included in the local education

budgets, schools were allowed to collect temporary student fees (借读费), within limits set by the local government, to cover their expenses.

However, the government limits rarely covered the additional costs incurred by schools. As a result many urban schools were extremely reluctant to admit migrants. For example, the annual cost for a primary school student in Nanjing in 2003 was 1,500 yuan. However, the Nanjing municipal government set a ceiling of 480 yuan for temporary student fees. In other words, to recruit one migrant student, the school would have to pay about 1,000 yuan.¹⁹² Schools would often collect additional fees to make up the shortfall. In 1999, in addition to the 300 to 400 yuan in miscellaneous fees paid by the local students each term in Beijing, migrant parents had to pay a 480-yuan temporary student fee, a 2,000-yuan education compensation payment (教育补偿费) and a one-off 1,000-yuan school selection fee (择校费). Prestigious state schools can demand over 10,000 yuan, and some as high as 230,000 yuan in school selection fees from parents.¹⁹³ Despite many attempts to make urban education more accessible to these children, it can still be incredibly difficult and prohibitively expensive for migrant workers to find decent schools for their children. A national survey in the mid-2000s showed that average educational expenditure for migrant children was 2,450 yuan per head per year, accounting for about 20 percent of family income,^{194,195} with the cost in some coastal cities being even higher. In Shenzhen, migrant children have to pay on average three times as much as local students in state primary

¹⁹² Zhu, Xiaobin 朱晓斌, “流动人口子女义务教育政策的价值分析” (An analysis of compulsory education policies for migrant children), *教育评论* (Education Commentary).

¹⁹³ Kowk, J. (2006), “The integration of migrant children in Beijing schools”, *Op Cit.*, p. 170.

¹⁹⁴ “农民工子女在城里读书年均学费支出2450元” (Average

annual school fees for the children of migrant workers in the city is 2,450 yuan), *中央政府门户网站* (Central Government Website), 24 October 2006.

¹⁹⁵ “国家统计局：农民工平均月收入966元” (National Bureau of Statistics: Migrant workers’ average monthly income is 966 yuan), *人民网* (People Net), 24 October 2006.

schools.^{196,197} Between 2003 and 2005, the school selection fee in Guangzhou provincial grade middle schools ranged from 30,000 to 60,000 yuan.¹⁹⁸ However, in 2005, the minimum wage in Guangzhou was 684 yuan.¹⁹⁹

In 2005, China National Radio (CNR) interviewed two migrant workers, both of whom had to take their children out of school because of exorbitant costs. Mr Shi moved to Shenyang in 2003 and found work as a delivery driver. He worked from dawn to dusk to provide for his wife who could not work because of health problems, and for their two children. The son attended a state-run primary school but had to pay 200 yuan more than local students each semester. The daughter dropped out after primary school because of the higher financial burden. In the central city of Hefei, CNR interviewed Mr Zhang, who had taken his daughter out of a state-run primary school because he could not afford the fees. He earned about 30 yuan a day working on construction sites, and would have had to pay several thousand yuan each year for his eight-year-old son to attend a city primary school.²⁰⁰

On average, about half of all migrant children enroll in school one or even two years after the usual entry age, and about six percent of them have never attended school.²⁰¹ Even when they are in school, migrant children tend to have a high drop-out rate, low daily attendance and low graduation rates.^{202,203} Their attendance rate in Beijing in 1995 was only 12.5 percent, and although this has improved to nearly 90 percent over the last decade, it is still below that of their urban counterparts.²⁰⁴ A survey in the Pearl River Delta found the attendance rate of migrant children in primary schools was 91.7 percent compared with 99.8 percent of urban local children. And it dropped to just 75 percent in middle schools (compared with 99.9 percent of urban local children).²⁰⁵

China's educational system is highly competitive and examination oriented. Schools are desperate to maintain their academic standards because prestigious schools can demand higher fees and donations. Migrants are usually seen as academically inferior and are usually assigned to mediocre or poor quality schools,²⁰⁶ shunned by those of a higher standard.²⁰⁷ Even migrant workers

¹⁹⁶ “深圳义务教育将免费34万外地生可免书杂费” (Shenzhen compulsory education will be free; 340,000 migrant students will be exempt from book and miscellaneous fees), *深圳新闻网*

¹⁹⁷ (*Shenzhen News Net*), 10 April 2008.

¹⁹⁸ Shen, Xiaoge 沈小草 & Zhou, Guoqiang 周国强 (2006), *流动人口子女教育公平问题研究* (A study on the fairness of education for migrant children), 群众出版社 (Masses Publishing), p.69.

¹⁹⁹ “广州最低工资标准拟升” (The minimum wage in Guangzhou will be raised), *金羊网* (Jinyang Net), 2 September 2005.

²⁰⁰ “新闻纵横：《农民工子女教育调查》之借读费” (Newline: An investigation of migrant children's education – temporary student fees), *中广网* (China National Radio), 21 March 2005.

²⁰¹ “深圳市宝安区新安街道办事处建安小学收费公示栏” (Jian'an primary school fees, displayed at Xin'an sub-district office in Shenzhen's Baoan district), 25 December 2007.

²⁰² Zou, Hong 邹泓; Qu, Zhiqiong 屈智勇 & Zhang, Qiuling 张秋凌 (2005), *Op Cit.*

²⁰³ Wu, Ni 吴霓; Ding, Jie 丁杰; Deng, Youchao 邓友超 & Zhang, Xiaohong 张晓红 (2004), “中国进城务工就业农民子女义务教育问题调研报告” (A survey on the education of the children

of migrant workers), *科研与决策* (Research and policy) 5. Shen Xiaoge 沈小草 and Zhou Guoqiang 周国强 (2006), *流动人口子女教育公平问题研究* (A study on the fairness of education for migrant children), 群众出版社 (Masses Publishing), p. 67.

²⁰⁴ Shi, Bainian 史柏年 (2002), “城市流动儿童少年就学问题政策分析” (A strategic analysis of the school attendance of migrant children), *中国青年政治学院学报* (Journal of China Youth Political Science College), 21(1):31-35.

²⁰⁵ “教育部发展规划司：中国教育事业发展统计简况” (Educational Development Department, Ministry of Education: A brief introduction to educational statistics in China). Quoted in Shen, Xiaoge 沈小草 & Zhou, Guoqiang 周国强 (2006), *流动人口子女教育公平问题研究* (A study on the fairness of education for migrant children), 群众出版社 (Masses Publishing), p. 67-67.

²⁰⁶ “2005年教育事业发展计划公布 热点问题问个明白” (Communique on the 2005 education development plan; understanding the key issues), *龙虎网* (Dragon Tiger Net), 4 January 2005.

²⁰⁷ “借读费为啥不买中南海的眼” (Why can't we benefit from the central government's policies on temporary student fees?), *东方网* (Eastday.com), 24 May 2006.

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who have been living in their host cities for many years face problems in getting their children into decent state schools.

Mr Zhang came to Guangdong from Hunan 10 years ago and now earns 1,800 yuan a month as a manager. As he was wary of the academic standard of schools for migrant children, he decided to send his son to a state-run school. He went to a nearby primary school to enquire about the admission procedures.

A teacher told him: "We only have a few migrant students here, and the tuition fee is high." He was asked to present a temporary student certificate, a local property deed or a government approved rental agreement in order to apply. When the school authority learned he might have difficulties in getting the documents, they suggested he take his son back to his hometown.

But Mr Zhang did not give up and went to a school near his work place. A notice at the entrance said: "To apply for admittance, a student should have the following documents: temporary student card, identity card, household registration card, and work permit of the parents. Local students should pay 350 yuan in advance, and migrant children 470 yuan. Admission is based on merit..." A school employee told him a stricter admission standard was set in order to control the number of migrants.²⁰⁸

Because of the difficulties migrant children face

getting into state schools, many have no option but to study in substandard privately-run institutions. Many older privately-run schools for migrants are housed in converted factories that ignore basic safety standards and lack qualified teaching staff.²⁰⁹ These schools pay poorly and usually do not provide staff with social insurance or other benefits paid in the state sector. They often have a high staff turnover; a class can have as many as seven different teachers in one semester.²¹⁰ The poor infrastructure and teaching conditions of these schools are reflected in the students' academic performance. A survey of privately-run schools in Guangzhou showed that only 27 percent of students in migrant schools reached the required academic standard. The proportion of students who performed well ranged from 42 percent to 64 percent in schools for migrant children compared with 71 percent to 91 percent in state-run schools.

Many privately-run schools do offer good facilities and dedicated teaching staff but there are many others more interested in profit than education, and these schools can become a breeding ground for tension and violence, as one head teacher revealed:

There is one school that recruits students all year round. Every day, they go to the markets, sieve through streets and alleys, give away leaflets to recruit students... As long as you pay, you are able to study in this school... the Education Bureau set the qualifying score for taking the university entrance examination at 250 marks. There are 14 students in this school who do not

²⁰⁸ Shen, Xiaoge 沈小草 & Zhou, Guoqiang 周国强 (2006), *流动人口子女教育公平问题研究* (A study on the fairness of education for migrant children), 群众出版社 (Masses Publishing), p.115-116.

²⁰⁹ *Ibid*, p.69.

²¹⁰ *Ibid*.

meet this standard. Not only can they not take the national university entrance examination, they will not even receive a high school graduation certificate. But parents are not aware of it and they are still paying 10,000 to 20,000 yuan a year to the school... This school also fakes the students' results ... If only one student gets a good grade, others in the class are also given good marks... Students join gangs: bullying, fighting and extortion are common...²¹¹

Fees for high school and university are even higher than for middle school and as a result it is estimated that only one third of migrant children who pass out of middle school go onto high school, compared with 95 percent of urban children.^{212,213} A survey of migrant children in nine cities by the National Bureau of Statistics and the State Council's National Working Committee on Children and Women, showed that while the overall attendance rate of migrant children aged between seven and 17 years was 90 percent, only 40 percent of those aged between 16 and 17 were in school. Moreover, it is estimated that 78 percent of parents of migrant children did not attend high school or beyond.²¹⁴ As such they were less likely to be able to help their children with the rigorous

course work required for higher education, nor could they afford supplementary classes.

And even if migrant families can afford the additional costs of higher education, and their children do well enough at school to take the university entrance examination, they still face another almost insurmountable barrier. According to the 2008 *Working Regulations for the Enrollment of Regular High School Students*, all candidates have to take the university entrance exam in their place of permanent residence. As such, most students are forced to return home to study in a high school. However, as school districts have different syllabuses, migrant children are at a disadvantage.^{215,216} Many students who return home get disillusioned rapidly, as the head of the Shanghai Joint Working Committee on Migrant Workers, Zhao Jiande, said: "Many migrant children go back to their place of permanent residence with the intention of going to high school, but few in fact continue with their studies. Many simply stay at home."²¹⁷ Because these children have been living in cities for large parts of their lives, the sudden change of environment creates enormous stress.²¹⁸

Although some cities such as Wuhan and Wuxi do allow migrant children to study in high

²¹¹ *Ibid.*

²¹² "教育部发展规划司: 中国教育事业发展统计简况". (Educational Development Department, Ministry of Education: A brief introduction to educational statistics in China). Quoted in Shen, Xiaoge 沈小革 and Zhou, Guoqiang 周国强 (2006), *Op Cit.*, p. 67-67.

²¹³ Shi, Bainian 史柏年 (2002), "城市流动儿童少年就学问题政策分析" (A strategic analysis of the school attendance of migrant children), *中国青年政治学院学报* (Journal of China Youth Political Science College), 21(1):31-35.

²¹⁴ China Youth Research Centre (2008), *中国未成年人数据手册* (China's Children and Juveniles Statistical Handbook), Beijing: Science Press, 229.

²¹⁵ "农民工子女: 我的高中在哪里?" (Migrant workers'

children - Where is my high school?), *教育时报* (Education Times), 11 March 2008.

²¹⁶ Pan, Fang 潘芳 (2006), "流动人口子女义务教育现状的调查研究 - 以江苏省常州市为例" (A survey on the current circumstances of compulsory education for migrant children - A case study of Changzhou), Masters thesis, Department of Educational Administration, East China Normal University.

²¹⁷ "农民工子女: 我的高中在哪里?" (Migrant workers' children - Where is my high school?), *教育时报* (Education Times), 11 March 2008.

²¹⁸ "农民"工子女没高中可读, 为什麼呢?" (Why can't migrant workers' children study high school?), *工人日报* (Workers' Daily) 21 February 2008.

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schools, they still have to go back to their place of permanent residence to take the university entrance examination. However, some districts will not allow returning students to take the examination as only those registered in the school district are eligible.²¹⁹

The number of new students enrolled in higher education doubled from 2.2 million in 2000 to 5.46 million in 2006.²²⁰ And while the overall enrollment rates of 18- to 22-year-olds in higher education expanded from 10.5 percent in 2000, to 20 percent in 2005,²²¹ the proportion of rural students in tertiary education has declined.²²²

Social, geographical and cultural marginalization

Until recently, even if rural children could get into urban state schools, they were not treated as integral members of the school. They could not take part in extracurricular activities or join social organizations, such as Young Pioneers. Nor could they be nominated as “outstanding students” (三好学生), good in academic work, character, and physical ability.²²³ This sent a clear signal to these children that they were inferior and outsiders. It was only in the early 2000s that Beijing started to encourage local governments to recruit migrant children into the Communist Youth League. However, little actual improvement has been seen, partly because financial difficulties have limited the ability of migrant children to participate in

social activities. According to the China Youth Research Centre’s survey in 2006, only 34 percent of migrants joined supplementary classes and interest groups compared with 63 percent of local children.

Discrimination in the state school system is common. A study in Changzhou found a third of migrant children in state-run schools claimed they were often or sometimes mocked or teased.²²⁴ In Beijing, 33.7 percent of migrant children said they were not accepted by locals, and 40 percent claimed they were discriminated against. In some studies, the proportion of those suffering from discrimination was as high as 76 percent.²²⁵

The following accounts show how two local students saw their migrant classmates:

There is a student in our class who comes from Anhui province. Most of us eat the lunch arranged by our school which only costs about three yuan a day. However, this student only eats rice buns. We asked him why he did not eat the lunch prepared by the school. He said he likes eating buns. In fact, the actual reason is that he does not have enough money for the school lunch.

A primary school student wrote:

There is a boy from the countryside in our class. He wears dirty clothes and his

²¹⁹ “女孩在京求学因户口无法参加高考被迫留学” (A female student is forced to study abroad since she cannot take the university entrance exam because of her *hukou* status), *发展论坛* (Development Forum), 6 April 2007.

²²⁰ China Statistical Yearbook 2007, table 21-5.

²²¹ 中国宏观数据挖掘系统China Macroscopic Data Mining System.

²²² “数字“看”教育--“4年学费等於35年纯收入””(Statistics show that four years’ school fees can amount to 35 years’ net income), *新華網(Xinhua)*, 9 March 2005.

²²³ *China Youth Daily*, 15 June 2001; *Beijing Youth Daily*, 6 August

2001, Quoted in Kowk, J. (2006), “The integration of migrant children in Beijing schools”, In Postiglione, G. (ed.), *Education and Social Change in China*, Armonk, New York; London, England: M.E. Sharpe, p. 170.

²²⁴ Pan, Fang 潘芳 (2006), *Op Cit.*, p.25.

²²⁵ Lei, Youguang 雷有光 (2004), “都市”小村民”眼中的大世界--城市流动人口子女社会认知的调查研究” (The world through the eyes of urban villagers. An investigative study into the social cognition of migrant children in the cities.), *教育科学研究* (Educational Science Research), 6.

face is black, as if he has not washed it properly. He does not like talking, does not have any friends, and performs poorly in school. He always fails examinations; I don't know whether or not he pays attention.²²⁶

Pressure from local parents can even force the authorities to scrap plans for greater school integration. Since 1999, migrant children in Wuhan have been allowed to study only in designated schools. But when some schools tried to bring migrants into local children's class, local parents claimed their children's studies would suffer and the plan was abandoned.²²⁷ One Wuhan headmaster said it was not only the migrant children who suffered, the teachers assigned to them also felt discriminated against:

Segregated classes are not healthy for migrant children. It damages their self-confidence and hinders their integration into school life. Besides, it creates a psychological burden for those who teach migrants. Some will be discriminated against by other teachers.²²⁸

The relationship between migrant children and their teachers is problematic. A study entitled "Social adaptability of the children of migrant workers to city life" by the China Youth Research Centre showed that a higher percentage of migrant students agreed with the following statements than locals: "teachers don't understand me," "teachers seldom pay attention to me," "head teachers don't like me," and "I am not satisfied with the teacher-student relationship."²²⁹

Because of long working hours and poor educational background, few migrant workers are able to help their children with schoolwork.²³⁰ In a Guangdong survey, only 23.9 percent of parents said they regularly contacted their children's schools, compared with 82 percent of urban parents.²³¹ And if they found their children were not doing well, they would blame the children – creating family tension.²³² A study on the adaptability of children to school life (455 migrant children and 444 locals) in northeastern China found that migrants had lower scores in self-acceptance, teacher-student interaction and academic performance than locals.²³³

A 2006 survey by the China Youth Research Centre showed that 69 percent of migrant children lived in migrant enclaves,²³⁴ usually located on the

²²⁶ Shen, Xiaoge 沈小草 & Zhou, Guoqiang 周国强 (2006), *Op Cit.*, p.174.

²²⁷ "武漢：欲試行農民工子女單獨編班惹爭議"(Wuhan: Parents object to plans to hold exclusive classes for migrant workers' children), *新華每日電訊 (Xinhua Daily Telegraph)*, 26 May 2006.

²²⁸ *Ibid.*

²²⁹ "课题报告显示：农民工子女学习状况喜忧参半"(Research project shows that the children of migrant workers have both positive and negative responses to school), *中国教育报 (China Education Daily)*, 24 January 2007.

²³⁰ "農民工子女，七成感到生活幸福"(Seven out of ten migrant children feel happy about life), *人民日報 (People's Daily)*, 30 January 2007.

²³¹ Shen, Xiaoge 沈小草 & Zhou, Guoqiang 周国强 (2006), *Op Cit.*, p.133.

²³² "農民工子女，七成感到生活幸福"(Seven out of ten migrant children feel happy about life), *人民日報 (People's Daily)*, 30 January 2007.

²³³ Guo, Hong 郭虹 (2005), "从'外来人口'到'流动人口' - 城市化中一个亟待转变的观念"(From outsider to migrant - the critical need for a conceptual change in the process of urbanization), *经济体制改革 (Systemic Economic Reform)*, 5. Quoted in Ren, Yunxia任云霞 & Zhang, Bomei张柏梅 (2006), "社会排斥与流动儿童的城市适应研究"(A study of social exclusion and the adaptability of migrant children to city life), *山西青年管理干部学院学 (Shanxi Youth Managerial College Studies)*, 19 (2).

²³⁴ 中国青少年研究中心 (China Youth Research Centre) (2006), "进城务工农民子女的社会融入"(The adaptability of migrant children to urban life), quoted in *China's Children and Juveniles Statistical Handbook*, pp. 229-230.

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outskirts of the city, where the ratio of migrants to local residents could be as high as 20 to one.²³⁵ The large majority of migrant families (in a study up to 93 percent) lived in rented accommodation.^{236,237} A study of 3,872 children in Hangzhou found that about 85.5 percent of city children had their own room compared with only 25.6 percent of migrant children.²³⁸ According to a study by the State Council's Working Committee on Children and Women in nine cities, 60 percent of migrant families did not have a refrigerator and 63 percent had no washing machine whereas almost all local families had them.²³⁹ There were only 35 television sets per 100 migrant households in Guangdong and 11 percent of them had internet access compared with 164 television sets and 61 percent net access among 100 local households respectively.²⁴⁰

Living in migrant enclaves far from the city centre makes social integration difficult, and limits the chances for children of different backgrounds to meet. When migrant children do mix with urban residents they are often looked down on. A 12 year-old named Zhao who arrived in Hangzhou when he was eight and lives with his parents in a small attic room, said: "Sometimes, I am made to feel very inferior. People look down on us. City people are very bossy, and I am afraid of having any contact with them."²⁴¹

Another boy studying in a migrant children's school in Shanghai wrote:

The standard of living of local children and children from other places is miles apart. They eat much better than us; they live in apartments with a proper address; they go to proper schools. We... eat much worse than they do; live in small houses; study in migrant schools. These local Shanghainese look down on people from other provinces, I'll make them look up to us one day.²⁴²

Economic and social segregation has created and enforced stereotypes among migrant and local children. A survey in Beijing revealed an "us" and "them" attitude among migrant children. Urban residents were usually seen as richer, better dressed, more knowledgeable and speaking better Chinese than migrants. However they were also seen as disrespectful, impolite, lazy and living off the hard work of migrants.²⁴³ While a survey in Guangdong found that 58 percent of students in migrant schools did not like or even hated local children, 26 percent said they disliked locals because they were bullies, and 37 percent said city children looked down on them.²⁴⁴ Half of the migrant children played only with other

²³⁵ Huang, Bangmei黄帮梅, Lu, Huasong骆华松, Li, Jiansu李江苏 & Zhao, Xingling赵兴玲 (2008), "流动人口聚居区拐卖儿童现象, 产生的原因、社会影响与对策" (The problem of abduction of children in migrant enclaves: causes, social effect and remedies), *产业与科技论坛*, (Industry and Science and technology forum), 7 (2) pp. 33-35.

²³⁶ *Ibid.*

²³⁷ Ren, Yunxia任云霞 & Zhang, Bomei张柏梅 (2006), *Op Cit*, 19 (2):14-16.

²³⁸ Yan, Zheng 严征 (2006), 农民工子女健康和行为的比较研究 (A comparative study of migrant workers' children's health and behaviour), PhD thesis, Zhejiang University, p. 15.

²³⁹ Zou, Hong 邹泓; Qu, Zhiqiong屈智勇 & Zhang, Qiuling张秋凌 (2005), *Op Cit*.

²⁴⁰ Shen, Xiaoge 沈小革 & Zhou, Guoqiang 周国强 (2006) *Op*

Cit., p. 67.

²⁴¹ 蒲公英"想要一个家 走近杭州流动儿童" (Dandelion wants a home. The story of a migrant child in Hangzhou), *钱江晚报* (*Qianjiang Evening News*), 19 April 2007.

²⁴² "农民工子女犯罪率上升, 难以融入城市致心理偏差" (The crime rate among children of migrant workers is rising. Difficulty adapting to urban life leads to deviance), *瞭望新闻周刊* (*Outlook News Weekly*), 17 October 2006.

²⁴³ Lei, Youguang 雷有光 (2004), "都市"小村民"眼中的大世界--城市流动人口子女社会认知的调查研究" (The world through the eyes of urban villagers. An investigative study into the social cognition of migrant children in the cities.), *教育科学研究* (Educational Science Research), 6.

²⁴⁴ Shen, Xiaoge 沈小革 and Zhou, Guoqiang 周国强 (2006), *Op Cit.*, p.76.

migrants.²⁴⁵ A study on Beijing migrant children found that 40 percent did not have local friends and 33.7 percent did not want to have local friends because they said the locals were arrogant, looked down on outsiders, were spoilt and were careless with money.²⁴⁶ Some local parents reinforced this attitude and did not want their children to associate with local children.²⁴⁷

Very often, because their parents work long hours and are rarely home, migrant children receive little emotional support and usually have to rely on themselves. According to the China Youth Research Centre's 2006 survey, about 85 percent of migrant children had to do regular household chores and many were unable to go out to celebrate festivals or birthdays.²⁴⁸ As these children did not have the money to take part in after-class activities, they were limited to activities in their homes and neighborhoods, such as watching television (88 percent); reading (68 percent), sports (67 percent); playing with children next door (60 percent), playing alone or with siblings (60 percent) and playing in parks (54 percent). Lacking proper supervision, migrant children were 14 times more likely to be killed or injured in a traffic accident.²⁴⁹

A Guangdong survey showed migrant workers did not put much emphasis on communication and the personal development of their children:

72 percent of them regarded provision of material needs as their most important task followed by the academic performance (47 percent) and conduct (43 percent) of their children. However, 62 percent of local parents regarded fostering good personal development as the most important part of parenting.²⁵⁰

Social discrimination, relative deprivation and little parental support makes it difficult for children to adjust to city life. A 14-year-old boy who came to Hangzhou when he was ten years old said:

I come from a rural area. Now I am living in a city, but I am not living a city life. What am I – a half city-dweller and a half peasant? My parents are busy working and they do not pay much attention to me. Many times, I feel very lonely.

Teachers only come to my home to tell my parents about my bad behaviour. This is no use. My parents have no time to care about me... Most of the time, they stay in a dormitory. Otherwise, they come home late and go out early. I usually only see them a few times in a month. And when I do see them they just nag me about my performance in school or lecture me about other stuff, like I were a three-year-old.

When I feel lonely, I watch TV, or wander around the neighborhood, or go to internet

²⁴⁵ Guo, Hong 郭虹 (2005), “从“外来人口”到“流动人口” - 城市化中一个亟待转变的观念” (From outsider to migrant – the critical need for a conceptual change in the process of urbanization) *经济体制改革* (Systemic Economic Reform) 5. Quoted in Ren, Yunxia 任云霞 & Zhang, Bomei 张柏梅 (2006), “社会排斥与流动儿童的城市适应研究” (A study of social exclusion and the adaptability of migrant children to city life), *山西青年管理干部学院学* (Shanxi Youth Managerial College Studies) 19 (2).

²⁴⁶ Lei, Youguang 雷有光 (2004) *Op Cit.*

²⁴⁷ “课题报告显示：农民工子女学习状况喜忧参半”, (Research project shows that the children of migrant workers have both positive and negative responses to school), *中国教育报* (China Education Daily), 24 January 2007.

²⁴⁸ “农民工子女，七成感到生活幸福” (Seven out of ten migrant children feel happy about life), *人民日报* (People's Daily), 30 January 2007.

²⁴⁹ Li, Ronghan 李容汉; Zhao, Qingguo 赵庆国; Zhong, Xixia 钟细霞; Deng, Qundi 邓群娣 & He, Qiuyuan 何秋苑 (2006). “广东省流动人口五岁以下儿童可避免死因的研究” (Preventable deaths of children below five years old in Guangdong's migrant population), *国际医药卫生导报* (International Medicine & Health Leader), 12(03): 111-113.

²⁵⁰ 中国青少年研究中心 (China Youth Research Centre) (2008), *中国未成年人数据手册* (China's Children and Juveniles Statistical Handbook), Beijing: Science Press, p. 231.

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bars. I feel better when my parents are not at home. Local children are very lucky; they eat well, live well and wear Nike and Adidas. They look down on us. It is difficult for us to make friends with them.²⁵¹

In the China Youth Research Centre study on social adaptability, 88 percent of migrant children in Beijing said they did not see themselves as Beijingers and 11.2 percent felt they neither belonged to the capital nor to their home towns.²⁵²

Like left-behind children, migrants are more likely to have negative emotions and lower self esteem. One survey found 63 percent of migrant children believed they were a useful person compared with 80.9 percent of locals; only 60.3 percent had confidence in their abilities compared with 84.9 percent of locals; and only about 70 percent of migrant children felt happy about their lives, compared with more than 85 percent of city children.²⁵³ Many studies found migrant children were more prone to anxiety over study and social

issues. They were more vulnerable to self-blame, more likely to develop psychosomatic symptoms, be over sensitive, fearful and impulsive.^{254,255}

Juvenile delinquents and victims of crime

The second generation of migrants is different from the older generation in that they have roots neither in the city, nor in the countryside.

~ A researcher at the Shanghai Juvenile Reform Centre²⁵⁶

In 2005, the juvenile court in Haidian district, Beijing, recorded a criminal offence rate for migrant children three times higher than that for locals.²⁵⁷ In Shenzhen and Dongguan, about 86 percent of the overall population are migrants.²⁵⁸ However, 99 percent of juvenile delinquents in Shenzhen are migrants (85 percent had come from other provinces, 14 percent from other parts of Guangdong). Similarly, in Dongguan, 95 percent of juvenile delinquents were migrants. The delinquency rate rose five-fold from 2002 to 2004.²⁵⁹ In Xiamen, the proportion of migrant delinquents doubled from 22 percent of all young

²⁵¹ “蒲公英”想要一个家 走近杭州流动儿童” (Dandelion wants a home. The story of a migrant child in Hangzhou), *钱江晚报* (*Qianjiang Evening News*), 19 April 2007.

²⁵² “北京农民工子女虽背井离乡 但七成感生活幸福” (In Beijing, the children of migrant workers are far from home, but seven out of ten are happy with life), *人民日报* (*People's Daily*), 30 January 2007.

²⁵³ China Youth Research Centre (2008), *中国未成年人数据手册* (China's Children and Juveniles Statistical Handbook), Beijing: Science Press, p.238.

²⁵⁴ Guangzhou Education Association (2003), *Selected Essays on the Findings of Educational Research*, quoted in Shen, Xiaoge 沈小革 and Zhou, Guoqiang 周国强 (2006), *Op Cit.*, p.167.

²⁵⁵ Lin, Zhi林芝 & Weng, Yanyan 翁艳燕 (2004), “民工子弟学校初中生心理健康状况调查” (A survey of the psychological health of middle school students in migrant schools), *中国儿童保健杂志*, (*China Child Health Magazine*), 18(2):11; Yan, Zheng 严

征 (2006), 农民工子女健康和行为的比较研究 (A comparative study of the health and behaviour of migrant workers' children), PhD thesis, Zhejiang University, p. 15.

²⁵⁶ “农民工子女犯罪率上升, 难以融入城市致心理偏差” (The crime rate among children of migrant workers is rising. Difficulty adapting to urban life leads to deviance), *瞭望新闻周刊* (*Outlook News Weekly*), 17 October 2006.

²⁵⁷ “舆论:留守和流动儿童是全社会的伤痛” (Public opinion sees left-behind and migrant children as a source of anguish for society at large), *山西晚报* (*Shanxi Evening News*), 5 March 2008.

²⁵⁸ “深圳明日将对500万流动人口发放2万张居住证” (Shenzhen will issue 20,000 residence cards to five million migrants tomorrow), *南方日报* (*Southern Daily*), 31 July 2008.

²⁵⁹ Ying, Peili 应培礼 & Zhun, Hongmei 肫宏梅 (2007), “关于农民工第二代犯罪问题的若干思考” (Some thoughts on the criminality of the second generation of migrant workers), *青少年犯罪问题* (Issues of Juvenile crime and delinquency), 5, pp.66-68.

offenders to 57 percent from 2004 to 2006.²⁶⁰

According to the Shanghai Juvenile Reform Centre, in 2000, four in ten delinquents were migrants. In 2005, the number rose to seven out of ten. Crimes included homicides, assaults and rape. These children had been living in Shanghai for an average of 6.5 years, and their parents had been in the city on average for 10.2 years.

Domestic violence seems to be an important factor in juvenile delinquency. Liu Ming, an 18-year-old from Jiangsu lived with his poorly educated father in Shanghai, and was frequently subject to corporal punishment. On one occasion, Liu's father knocked out his front teeth. Feeling misunderstood and alienated, Liu started taking drugs and was eventually sentenced to four years in prison for theft.²⁶¹ A survey of more than 3,000 students in Beijing found the proportion of migrant children being scolded or beaten was higher than locals. Moreover, they were more likely to engage in activities endangering their health, such as drinking, smoking and ignoring traffic rules.²⁶²

An academic at Shanghai University claims the second generation of migrants is more sensitive to inequality and discrimination because, while their parents usually compared their life in the city with that back home, the second generation was more inclined to compare themselves with urban families.²⁶³

Without effective care and support, migrant children can more easily fall victim to crime. A professor at the Public Security Bureau University listed six risk factors behind child abduction in Beijing: 1) living in areas with a high concentration of migrants; 2) children under three; 3) parents working in the service industry; 4) children without regular care; 5) migrant worker parents; 6) living outside the third ring road in Beijing – where most migrants live.²⁶⁴

As more and more locals move away from migrant districts, the administrative network has begun to break down in some areas and a social welfare vacuum has been created. Between 2000 and 2004, as many as 325 children went missing

²⁵⁶ “农民工子女犯罪率上升，难以融入城市致心理偏差” (The crime rate among children of migrant workers is rising. Difficulty adapting to urban life leads to deviance), *瞭望新闻周刊* (*Outlook News Weekly*), 17 October 2006.

²⁵⁷ “舆论:留守和流动儿童是全社会的伤痛” (Public opinion sees left-behind and migrant children as a source of anguish for society at large), *山西晚报* (*Shanxi Evening News*), 5 March 2008.

²⁵⁸ “深圳明日将对500万流动人口发放2万张居住证” (Shenzhen will issue 20,000 residence cards to five million migrants tomorrow), *南方日报* (*Southern Daily*), 31 July 2008.

²⁵⁹ Ying, Peili 应培礼 & Zhun, Hongmei 肫宏梅 (2007), “关于农民工第二代犯罪问题的若干思考” (Some thoughts on the criminality of the second generation of migrant workers), *青少年犯罪问题* (*Issues of Juvenile Crime and Delinquency*), 5, pp.66-68.

²⁶⁰ “同安法院调查报告：未成年人犯罪农民工子女占半”

(Report by Tongan District Court shows that more than half of all juvenile crimes are committed by migrants), *海峡网* (*Straits Net*), 24 April 2007.

²⁶¹ “农民工子女犯罪率上升，难以融入城市致心理偏差” (The crime rate among children of migrant workers is rising. Difficulty adapting to urban life leads to deviance), *瞭望新闻周刊* (*Outlook News Weekly*), 17 October 2006.

²⁶² Zhai, Lei 翟蕾 & Huang, Na 黄娜, 北京市海淀区流动儿童与本地儿童健康危险行为现状分析 (Analysis of the health risk behaviour of local and migrant children in Beijing's Haidian district), *首席医学网* (*Shouxu Medical Net*), 19 August 2008.

²⁶³ “农民工子女犯罪率上升，难以融入城市致心理偏差” (The crime rate among children of migrant workers is rising. Difficulty adapting to urban life leads to deviance), *瞭望新闻周刊* (*Outlook News Weekly*), 17 October 2006.

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in Kunming. Only two of them were locals. Of the missing, 319 were from two outlying districts with a high concentration of migrants. Unlike local children, fewer than half of these migrants were under the care of a nursery or kindergarten.²⁶⁵

Central government policy and local government implementation

Beijing began to recognize and respond to the problems faced by rural migrant children in China's cities almost a decade before it started to tackle the issues related to left-behind children. The inequalities faced by migrant children in the urban education and healthcare systems were readily apparent in the 1990s, and the central government issued a vast array of directives, policy initiatives, laws and regulations to address them. (See *Appendix II*).

However, Beijing expected local governments to pick up the bill for these initiatives, providing no or little funding from central coffers. A State Council study in 2001 showed the central government accounted for a mere two percent of educational funding, provinces 11 percent, and counties nine percent, with village and township administrations putting up 78 percent.²⁶⁶ In 2007, local governments provided 96 percent of public expenditure on education and 98 percent of the public expenditure on medical services.

Inevitably, these central government initiatives to include migrants in urban healthcare and schooling systems met with resistance from local governments reluctant to provide additional services to the children of non-residents.

The national programmes to improve healthcare and education that the central government did fund, moreover, took little or no account of the needs of migrant workers and their children in the cities. The main purpose of these programmes was to provide aid to the poorest sections of society – rural residents in central and western China, and urban residents laid off from work in state-owned enterprises – and in so doing help boost China's standing in the global indicators of economic and social development, such as infant mortality rates and school attendance rates.

Healthcare

China has made remarkable strides in the last two decades in improving maternal, infant and child healthcare. In 1994, the National People's Congress promulgated the *PRC Maternal and Neonatal Health Care Law* (中华人民共和国母婴保健法) stipulating for the first time that Chinese citizens are legally entitled to maternal and infant healthcare. In 2001, the State Council issued the *Implementing Regulations for the PRC's Maternal and Neonatal Health Care*

²⁶⁴ “京沪联动寻婴建立捐款账户 专家提供危险预警表” (Beijing and Shanghai combine to fund parents' search for missing infants. Experts propose early warning system), *法制晚报* (*Legal Evening News*), 8 April 2005.

²⁶⁵ Huang, Bangmei 黄帮梅; Lu, Huasong 骆华松; Li, Jiangsu 李江苏 & Zhao, Xingling 赵兴玲 (2008), “流动人口聚居区拐卖儿童现象, 产生的原因、社会影响与对策” (The problem of

abduction of children in migrant enclaves: causes, social effect and remedies), *产业与科技论坛*, (Industry and science and technology forum), 7 (2) pp. 33-35.

²⁶⁶ Chang, Yen (2006), “我国流动人口子女的教育问题研究” (Education of the children of migrant workers in China), Master of education, Yangzhou University, p. 32.

Law (中华人民共和国母婴保健法实施办法) spelling out the content and the standards of maternal health care. It said maternal health care should include: 1) education on maternal health; 2) pre-marital physical examination; 3) pre-natal examinations for genetic diseases; 4) delivery; 5) contraceptive surgery; and 6) screening for neonatal diseases. Local governments should incorporate maternal and neonatal health care into their plans and ensure that newborns receive inoculations and regular physical examinations. It also said local governments should set up facilities and encourage pregnant mothers to sign up for pre-natal health plans. A few months later, the State Council published the National Programme of Action for Child Development in China (2001-2010) pledging to increase the rates of pre-marital physical examination in urban areas to 80 percent; to reduce maternal death rate by a quarter, to increase the coverage of pre-natal care to 90 percent; to reduce the prevalence of underweight infants to five percent, and to reduce infant deaths from diseases such as pneumonia and diarrhoea. Local governments also set up community health centres for mothers and children.

The National Programme of Action for Child Development pledged to reduce the death rate for children under five years old by one-fifth (of

the 2000 figures), and to increase the coverage of child health services in cities to at least 90 percent. China now has strict guidelines on the monitoring of children's health up to the age of six, when children enter school, covering nutrition, eye, dental, height, weight and other development indicators, vaccinations and screening for common diseases.²⁶⁷ New-born children are closely monitored during home visits. Children under one-year-old undergo thorough periodic examinations. Children aged between one and three years have to get half-yearly checkups and those between three and seven need to undergo yearly checkups.^{268,269,270}

These measures have been so successful that the maternal death rate has been reduced from 80 per 100,000 in the early 1990s to 36.6 in 2007. The death rates for new-born children (under 28 days), infants (under one year old) and children under five years old, all declined by approximately two thirds from 1991 to 2007. (See *Figure 7 below*.) China's child death rate of 18 per 1,000 is now lower than the average for other developing countries but still triple the average in developed countries.²⁷¹

However, as we saw earlier in this chapter, these efforts have done little to help migrant workers and

Figure 7. Maternal, neonatal, infant and child mortality rates in China 1991-2007

| Year | 1991 | 2000 | 2007 |
|---|------|------|------|
| Maternal mortality rate per 100,000 live births | 80 | 53 | 36.6 |
| Neonatal mortality rate per 1,000 live births | 33.1 | 22.8 | 10.7 |
| Infant mortality rate per 1,000 live births | 50.2 | 32.2 | 15.3 |
| Child mortality rate per 1,000 live births | 61 | 39.7 | 18.1 |

²⁶⁷ “宁波市儿童保健管理常规”, (General regulations for the management of child health care in Ningbo), issued by the Ningbo Health Bureau on 25 July 2008.

²⁶⁸ *Enshi News Net*.

²⁶⁹ “宁波市儿童保健管理常规”, (General regulations for the

management of child health care in Ningbo), issued by the Ningbo Health Bureau on 25 July 2008.

²⁷⁰ United Nations Human Development Reports, 2007/2008.

²⁷¹ “UNICEF report sounds alarm bells about child survival”, *China.Org.Cn*, 25 January 2008.

their children. Employers in China are supposed to provide maternal healthcare insurance for their female employees under the terms of the 1994 *Labour Law and the then Ministry of Labour's Circular on the Trial Implementation Regulation of Maternal Insurance for Enterprise Employees* (劳动部关于发布《企业职工生育保险试行办法》的通知), issued the same year: enterprises are required to cover maternal medical expenses, including costs for pre-natal examinations, child delivery, surgery, and hospitalization. The circular also said that by 1999, all urban workers should be covered by maternal insurance. As this goal was not achieved, in 2001, the Women's Development Plan revised the target to cover at least 90 percent of urban workers by 2010. The Ministry of Labour and Social Security reiterated this goal in 2004.²⁷² The same year, the ministry (which is now known as Ministry of Human Resources and Social Security) issued the *Opinion on further strengthening the work for maternal insurance* (关于进一步加强生育保险工作的指导意见), pledging that all workers will have access to subsidies during pregnancy and have their medical costs covered. However, these laws and regulations only applied to local residents. It was only in November 2007 that the Shenzhen government started to think about including migrant workers in its maternal insurance coverage but no concrete policies have been

implemented and the city's much vaunted green card does nothing to help. Similarly, in 2005, cities such as Beijing,²⁷³ Tianjin²⁷⁴ and Chongqing initiated enterprise-based maternal insurance systems that covered pre-natal and neonatal health. However, many of these insurance policies target local residents, and most female migrant workers are not covered.^{275,276}

Before 2007, there was no national law for the provision of health insurance to children and the elderly. In 2007, under the *Guiding Opinions of the State Council on the Pilot Scheme for Basic Medical Insurance for Urban Residents* (国务院关于开展城镇居民基本医疗保险试点的指导意见), 79 cities were chosen to set up health insurance schemes for children and the elderly for a number of serious illnesses, before being launched nationwide in 2010. In 2008, university students were included in the scheme.²⁷⁷ Although the document does not specifically bar migrants from participating in the insurance schemes, it does not specify the rights of migrant workers, and most of them are in reality excluded from the scheme.

Some cities, such as Shanghai, Beijing²⁷⁸ and Zhuhai²⁷⁹ had already established health insurance schemes for the non-working population before 2007. Dalian,²⁸⁰ Hangzhou,²⁸¹ Shenzhen,

²⁷² “劳动和社会保障部办公厅关于进一步加强生育保险工作的指导意见” (The guiding opinion of the Ministry of Labour and Social Security Office on further strengthening the work for promoting maternal insurance), 8 August 2004.

²⁷³ “从7月1日开始生育保险规定持居住证生育费可报” (From 1 July residence card holders will be entitled to maternal insurance), 39健康网 (39 HealthNet), 2 June 2005.

²⁷⁴ “天津市城镇职工生育保险规定” (Tianjin Urban Employees' Maternal Insurance Regulations), issued by the Tianjin Municipal Government on 16 August 2005.

²⁷⁵ “社保高门槛让农民工望而却步 医保参保率仅10%” (The high cost of social insurance is prohibitive for migrant workers – the take-up rate for health insurance is only 10 percent), 山东泰山网 (Shandong Taishan Net), 20 December 2007.

²⁷⁶ “流动儿童的健康状况堪忧” (The poor health of migrant children is worrying), 新华网 (XinhuaNet), 17 January 2005.

²⁷⁷ “国务院办公厅关于将大学生纳入城镇居民基本医疗保险试点范围的指导意见” (Guiding opinion of the State Council

Office on inclusion of university students in the pilot scheme for basic medical insurance for urban residents), 15 October 2008.

²⁷⁸ “政策解读：如何参加少儿住院互助金？” (Understanding policies: How to join the children's hospitalization mutual fund?), (People's Daily), 8 November 2004.

²⁷⁹ “关于印发珠海市未成年人医疗保险暂行办法的通知” (Temporary implementing regulations for medical insurance for the under-age population in Zhuhai city), issued by the Zhuhai Municipal Government, promulgated and effective on 2 August 2006.

²⁸⁰ “大连投入6000万元为31.5万人看病埋单” (Dalian city injects 60 million yuan to pay medical bills of 315,000 residents), 人民网 (People Net), 16 December 2007.

²⁸¹ “杭州：调整14项医保养老政策 明年1月1日起实施” (Hangzhou: 14 policies relating to social and medical insurance are modified and will take effect on 1 January next year), 每日商报 (Business Daily), 15 October 2007.

Guangzhou and Xiamen²⁸² have schemes covering common out-patient illnesses. However, migrant children are not necessarily eligible. In Beijing, only children whose parents have a “work-and-residency permit” (北京市工作居住证) or do not have to pay temporary student fees, are eligible.^{283,284} Tianjin,²⁸⁵ Shenzhen²⁸⁶ and Hangzhou²⁸⁷ have similar restrictions. In some other cities, medical insurance is only open to local children.

Shenzhen is a telling example. In June 2007, the municipal government set up a children’s health insurance scheme covering serious illnesses. The government claimed that all Shenzhen workers who have joined the city’s basic comprehensive medical insurance scheme and whose children are in nursery, primary and secondary schools were eligible.²⁸⁸ However, these two conditions proved to be major obstacles. Firstly, employers are not required, only encouraged, to include migrants in their basic comprehensive medical insurance. In 2008, only 240,000 migrants in the city had joined the scheme.²⁸⁹ Secondly, while local children of all

ages are eligible to join the scheme, only migrant children who are in school can do so. Neither are children born outside the state-family planning quota eligible.²⁹⁰ As a majority of migrant children do not enter nursery schools, a large number are not covered.

The state council’s 2006 *Opinion on Resolving the Problems Faced by Migrant Workers* (国务院关于解决农民工问题的若干意见) stated that local governments should include migrant children in local inoculation plans and provide migrant workers with free family planning services, including free contraceptive pills and devices.²⁹¹ In fact, since 2005, Guangzhou and many other cities had already provided free vaccinations²⁹² for tuberculosis, polio, whooping cough, diphtheria, tetanus, measles, hepatitis B and encephalitis to all children, as part of their efforts to contain contagious disease in their jurisdictions.²⁹³ In 2008, the Beijing Health Bureau issued a notice that all migrant children should be able to receive 15 vaccinations without charge.²⁹⁴ The same year, Yantai government said all children, no matter

²⁸² “厦门未成年人基本医保年缴费额降到50元” (Premium for medical insurance for children in Xiamen is lowered to 50 yuan), 福建省医疗保险中心 (Fujian provincial medical insurance centre), 13 June 2008.

²⁸³ On 24 June 1999, Beijing promulgated its “Circular on the temporary implementing regulations to attract talent and the processing of the “Beijing residence card” (北京市引进人才和办理〈北京市工作居住证〉的暂行办法)”的通知, to grant residence to migrant workers and attract talent.

²⁸⁴ “北京持绿卡人员子女可参加大病医疗保险” (Beijing greencard holders’ children can have medical insurance for serious diseases), *京华时报* (*Jinghua News*), 28 July 2007.

²⁸⁵ “天津启动城镇居民基本医疗保险宣传服务月活动” (Tianjin city kicks off promotion month for basic medical insurance for urban residents), *天津日报* (*Tianjin Daily*), 15 October 2007.

²⁸⁶ “深圳将农民工子女纳入住院医疗保险” (Shenzhen includes migrant children in hospitalization insurance), *新华网* (*Xinhua Net*), 6 December 2006.

²⁸⁷ “杭州设立少儿医保基金 农民工子女可享受” (Hangzhou sets up medical insurance plan for children; migrant children are allowed to join), *新华网* (*Xinhua Net*), 10 December 2006.

²⁸⁸ “深圳少儿医保制度9月1日起实施每年交75元即可享少儿医保” (Shenzhen medical insurance for children will take effect on 1 September; the annual premium is 75 yuan), *深圳晚报* (*Shenzhen Evening News*), 18 June 2007.

²⁸⁹ 深圳認真落實科學發展觀高度重視農民工工作 (Shenzhen government diligently follows the scientific development approach; places great importance on assisting migrant workers) *深圳特区报* (*Shenzhen Special Economic Zone News*), 17 November 2008.

²⁹⁰ “深圳市少年儿童医疗保险试行办法” (Trial implementing regulations for medical insurance for children in Shenzhen), issued by the Shenzhen Municipal Government on 14 June 2007, and effective on 1 September 2007.

²⁹¹ “中共中央国务院关于全面加强人口和计划生育工作统筹解决人口问题的决定” (Decision of the CPPCC and the State Council on the problem of strengthening the coordination for implementing the family planning policies), 17 December 2006; 流动人口计划生育工作条例” (Regulations on the work of state family planning of the mobile population), issued by the State Council, promulgated on 29 April 2009, and effective on 1 October 2009.

²⁹² “上海：流动人口儿童将享受免费疫苗接种,” (Shanghai: Migrant children enjoy free vaccinations), *中央政府门户网站* (Central Government Website), 26 April 2006.

²⁹³ “廣州查漏補種疫苗流動兒童也享受免費疫苗” (Guangzhou surveys unvaccinated children; migrant children receive free vaccinations), *南方日報* (*Southern Daily*), 28 April 2008.

²⁹⁴ “北京：流動兒童可免費接種15種疫苗” (Beijing: Migrant children can get 15 free vaccinations), 2008年7月27日 中央政府網 (Central Government Website), 27 July 2008.

how long they had been or would be in the city, were eligible for free vaccinations.²⁹⁵

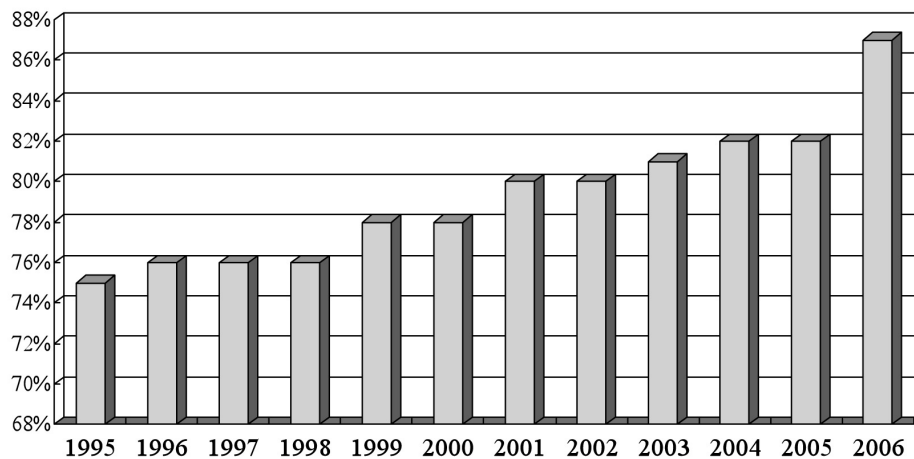
At the end of 2008, the central government issued two important documents: the *Medical Reform Consultation Paper*²⁹⁶ and the Draft Social Insurance Law, both acknowledging the needs of migrants. And the draft law for the first time specified the rights of migrant workers to social insurance. However, neither document mentioned welfare benefits for migrant children.²⁹⁷

Education

As with healthcare, the central government has made great efforts over the last two decades to boost China's key indicators of educational development, with the main focus being on attendance rates, specifically primary school attendance in rural areas. The 2001 National

Programme of Action for Child Development in China pledged to increase the attendance rates of primary school to 99 percent, middle school to 95 percent, and high school to 80 percent. To reduce the financial burden of rural children, in the same year, the central government initiated the "two-waiver and one subsidy" (两免一补) policy. Students in the poorest rural areas were no longer required to pay textbook and miscellaneous fees, and boarding students with financial difficulties were subsidized. In addition, a so-called "one-fee system" was introduced to prohibit schools from collecting fees arbitrarily.²⁹⁸ To ensure implementation, the government increased its funding for primary schools from barely over 50,000 million yuan in 1995 to 200,000 million yuan in 2006, or from only 74 percent of all funding (including donations from private sources) for primary education to close to 87 percent in 2006.²⁹⁹ (See Figure 8 below.) Consequently, the

Figure 8. Percentage of government funds in overall primary school funding 1995-2006



From China Statistical Yearbook 1997-2008

²⁹⁵ “烟台：提醒流动儿童可免费接种11种疫苗” (Yantai: Reminding migrant children they are entitled to 11 types of free vaccination), 29 July 2008.

²⁹⁶ “‘关于深化医药卫生体制改革的意见’公开征求意见 (Public consultation on the “Opinions on deepening health care and medical reform”), 14 October 2008. One is to integrate the rural and urban medical insurance systems so that migrant workers are able to receive medical care in the cities. The other is to make sure enterprises pay for medical insurance for migrant workers with a labour contract, and have a relatively stable employer-employee

relationship.

²⁹⁷ “中华人民共和国社会保险法（草案）(Draft Social Insurance Law), issued by the Standing Committee of the National People's Congress on 28 December 2008.

²⁹⁸ “国务院办公厅转发教育部等部门关于2003年治理教育乱收费工作实施意见的通知” (Circular of the Ministry of Finance to strengthen efforts to curb arbitrary school fee collection), 23 June 2003.

²⁹⁹ From *中国社会统计年鉴* (China Statistical Yearbook), 1997-2008.

enrollment rates of primary school students did increase from 74.6 percent in 1990 to 99.9 percent in 2007.³⁰⁰

However, migrant children did not directly benefit from these policies because once they left their “home town” they were no longer eligible for the two-waiver and one subsidy policy or the one fee policy. In the mid-1990s, the main focus of the central government’s efforts to help migrant children receive education was to encourage state-schools to accept them. In this earlier effort, the central government acknowledged that the main responsibility of providing education for migrant children remained with the rural governments. Hence, city governments were not required to shoulder the cost. Instead, as we saw earlier in this chapter, migrant children were required to finance their own education, mainly in the form of temporary student fees and school selection fees. From the early 2000s onwards, the central government switched the responsibility for educating migrant children from the out-flowing rural areas to the receiving cities, with the focus on education within the state school system.³⁰¹ In 2004, the State Council stated that migrant children should not be subjected to different admission

requirements.³⁰² And in 2005, the Ministry of Finance further stated that migrant children should have the same rights as the children of residents and should not pay more than the locals for education. It also prohibited the collection of temporary student fees and school selection fees.³⁰³ And again in late 2008, the Ministry of Finance and the National Development and Reform Commission stated that temporary student fees would be abolished nationally by 2009.

To implement the central policies, local governments started to allocate funds to accommodate migrant children into the state school system.³⁰⁴ In 2003, the Hefei municipal government designated 29 schools for migrants and invested 20 million yuan to improve teaching facilities; and by 2005, the number of designated schools had risen to 32.³⁰⁵ Beijing and Shanghai had accepted 270,000 and 400,000 migrant students respectively by 2006, raising migrants’ attendance rates (when private schools were included) to about 90 percent.³⁰⁶ By 2008, the Henan government had invested 18 million yuan to upgrade 24 primary and secondary schools and had accommodated 83 percent of migrants in state-run schools.³⁰⁷ In the mid-2000s, a national survey found that more

³⁰⁰ *中国社会统计年鉴 2008* (China Social Statistical Yearbook 2008), Table 2-26.

³⁰¹ *Decision of the State Council on the Development and Reform of Elementary Education* (国务院关于基础教育改革与发展的决定), 29 May 2001.

³⁰² *Circular of the State Council on further improving the conditions for peasants who seek employment in the cities* (国务院办公厅关于进一步做好改善农民进城就业环境工作的通知), 27 December 2004.

³⁰³ *Circular of the Ministry of Finance to Strengthen the Efforts to Curb Arbitrary Collection of Educational Fees* 财政部关于深入开展治理教育乱收费工作的通知, 25 March 2005.

³⁰⁴ “武汉市共免收农民工子女借读费4400多万元”(Wuhan waives more than 44 million yuan in temporary student fees for migrant workers’ children), *新华社* (Xinhua), 30 November 2005.

³⁰⁵ “关于“切实取消对农民工子女的‘借读费’”的答复”(Concerning the response [of the education bureau] to the

cancellation of temporary student fees for the children of migrant workers), *合肥市政协网站* (Hefei Municipal Political Consultative Conference Website), 5 December 2007.

³⁰⁶ “華建敏：切實加強農民工工作 認真解決農民工問題”(NPC Vice-Chair, Hua Jianmin: Strive to improve our work for migrant workers. Earnestly resolve their problems), quoted during a national telephone conference on migrant workers on 7 September 2006.

³⁰⁷ “河南农民工子女入学率达99%”(School attendance rate for migrant workers’ children in Henan reaches 99 percent), *农民日报* (Farmers’ Daily), 23 January 2008.

than 70 percent of children were able to study in state-run schools.^{308,309}

However, these policies put tremendous pressure on local governments with a high concentration of migrants. After the Zhengzhou municipal government abolished temporary student fees in 2006, the average class size in one district increased in one year to 72 students, and in some schools the class size exceeded 100. It was estimated that in the five years after 2006, Zhengzhou would have a shortfall of 74 primary and secondary schools. Yet, the city's budgetary provision for education was still below three percent of GDP.³¹⁰ In 2008, there were 430,000 migrant children in Guangzhou,³¹¹ about two-thirds of whom were studying in privately-run schools.³¹² In order to reach its target of accommodating at least 50 percent of migrant children in state-run schools, it was estimated that the city would need to raise 137 million yuan, with the number of migrants increasing all the time.³¹³ The 2003 *Decision of the State Council on Further Strengthening Rural Education* states that local governments should assist privately-run schools. However, by 2004, only eight out of 109 privately-run schools in Guangzhou had obtained

subsidies, ranging from just a few hundred yuan to at most 450,000 yuan.³¹⁴

Local government resistance to education reforms

In order to minimize the potential influx of migrant children, many local governments, especially in coastal cities, delayed the implementation of, or limited the number eligible to benefit from, central policies aiming at making education more accessible.³¹⁵ Collection of assorted fees remains commonplace, and cities such as Xiamen,³¹⁶ Shanghai³¹⁷ and Guangzhou³¹⁸ apply strict criteria for temporary student fee waivers. Guangzhou abolished temporary student fees in 2006, but restricted the benefits to selected groups such as children of overseas Chinese, revolutionary martyrs and legally adopted orphans. Only in 2008 did Guangzhou lift restrictions to allow children whose parents had obtained temporary residence for three years, to receive free education in the state system. Migrant children whose parents had made great contributions to Guangzhou, and had paid higher taxes, would be considered more favourably and children of permanent residents

³⁰⁸ “农民工子女在城里读书年均学费支出2450元” (Average annual school fees for the children of migrant workers in the city is 2,450 yuan), 中央政府门户网站 (Central Government Website), 24 October 2006.

³⁰⁹ “国家统计局：农民工平均月收入966元” (National Bureau of Statistics: Migrant worker average monthly income is 966 yuan), 人民网 (People Net), 24 October 2006.

³¹⁰ “郑州拟抬高农民工超生子女入学门槛惹争议” (Zhengzhou's plan to bar migrant children born outside family planning quotas from state schools provokes backlash), 河南商报 (Henan Commercial Daily), 22 February 2008.

³¹¹ “农民工在穗务工3年以上子女借读费将减免” (The children of migrant workers who have been working in Guangzhou for more than three years will be eligible for temporary student fee waivers), 中国发展门户网 (Chinagate.com), 17 May 2008.

³¹² “外来工子女拖欠学费普遍 民办学校因欠费倒闭” (It is common for migrant labourers to fall behind with school fees. As a result migrant schools close down), 广州日报 (Guangzhou Daily), 20 December 2006.

³¹³ “农民工在穗务工3年以上子女借读费将减免” (The children of migrant workers who have been working in Guangzhou for

more than three years will be eligible for temporary student fee waivers), 中国发展门户网 (Chinagate.com), 17 May 2008..

³¹⁴ “外来工子女拖欠学费普遍 民办学校因欠费倒闭” (It is common for migrant labourers to fall behind with school fees. As a result migrant schools close down), 广州日报 (Guangzhou Daily), 20 December 2006.

³¹⁵ Zhu, Xiaobin 朱晓斌 “流动人口子女义务教育政策的价值分析” (An analysis of compulsory education policies for migrant children), 教育评论 (Education Commentary).

³¹⁶ “农民工子女免交借读费” (Temporary student fee waivers for migrant workers' children), 厦门晚报 (Xiamen Evening News), 13 January 2007.

³¹⁷ “上海：人才引进类居住证子女义务教育免借读费” (Shanghai: Talent scheme resident card holders' children eligible for temporary student fee waivers), 上海青年报 (Shanghai Youth Daily), 5 August 2008.

³¹⁸ “广州将免除13类流动人员子女借读费” (13 categories of migrant workers' children in Guangzhou will be eligible for temporary student fee waivers), 苏州健康网 (Suzhou Health Net), 3 March 2006.

would have priority.³¹⁹ Shanghai only allows migrant children whose parents have obtained a *hukou* through the talents and investment scheme (blue stamp *hukou*) or if either parent is a permanent resident of Shanghai, to enjoy the same rights as local students.³²⁰ Tangxia township in Dongguan abolished temporary student fees but limited the policy to migrant workers who had been working in Tangxia for five years.³²¹ In some cities only children born within the state family planning quota were eligible.³²² In September 2007, Shanghai's Huangpu district announced that a temporary student fee waiver would only cover children who: 1) were under 16 years of age; 2) were the only child; 3) had no guardian in their place of permanent residence, and 4) whose parents had a temporary *hukou* for at least one year.³²³

In order to qualify for fee waivers, parents have to submit numerous documents such as a temporary *hukou* certificate, labour contract, property deed, rental agreement and vaccination certificates.³²⁴ However, many migrant workers are not registered because of the complicated procedures and high cost of the process. Similarly,

few migrant children are registered with the local governments. In Changzhou city in the Yangtze Delta, where migrants comprise more than one-third of the overall population, only 20 percent of migrant children benefited from more inclusive educational policies.³²⁵

Local governments continue to issue circulars criticizing schools that on the one hand abolish tuition fees, while on the other collecting fees under other categories such as nutrition, pure water, uniform, supplementary classes and extra circular activities.³²⁶ However, in some cities, education fees continue to soar. A state-run primary school in a migrant area in Guangzhou asked for temporary student fees of 30,000 yuan in 2006, a ten-fold increase over the previous year.³²⁷ The average annual fees for a student in a regular state-run school in Guangzhou was 3,117 yuan during that time.³²⁸

In August 2008, miscellaneous and textbook fee waivers were extended to urban areas.³²⁹ However, local governments received discretionary powers to decide whether to include migrant children. In Shenzhen's Longgang district, which has a

³¹⁹ “廣州：流動人員辦暫住證子女有機會享義務教育” (Guangzhou: Temporary resident cardholders' children eligible for free compulsory education), *南方網 (Southern.Net)*, 25 July 2008.

³²⁰ “上海：四類學生免收義務教育借讀費” (Shanghai: Four groups of students eligible for compulsory education temporary student fee waivers), *中央政府門戶網站 (Central Government Website)*, 26 August 2008.

³²¹ “塘厦新莞人子女可免借读费” (Migrant workers' children in Tangxia, Dongguan, will be eligible for temporary student fee waivers), *南方都市报 (Southern Metropolis Daily)*, 19 March 2008.

³²² “郑州拟抬高农民工超生子女入学门槛惹争议” (Zhengzhou's plan to bar migrant children born outside family planning quotas from state schools provokes backlash), *河南商报 (Henan Commercial Daily)*, 22 February 2008.

³²³ “黄浦区教育局，务工就业农民子女办理减免借读费须知” (Huangpu District Education Department's guidance notice on the waiving of temporary student fees for migrant workers), 4 September 2007.

³²⁴ “关于进城务工子女接受义务教育免收借读费实施方案的

通知” (Sha County Government notice regarding the waiving of compulsory education temporary student fees for the children of migrant workers), *沙縣人民政府網 (Sha county website)*, 27 June 2008.

³²⁵ Pan, Fang 潘芳 (2006), *Op Cit.*

³²⁶ “湖南教育系统灾后重建 杜绝“边免费边乱收费” (Post-disaster reconstruction of the Hunan education system. Do away with waiving fees on one hand and collecting arbitrary fees on the other), *长沙晚报 (Changsha Evening News)*, 4 March 2008.

³²⁷ 广州省级小学借读费1年涨近10倍教育局称合理 (Provincial grade primary school in Guangzhou increases temporary student fees ten-fold in one year – education department says it is reasonable), *新快报 (New Express)*, 25 May 2005.

³²⁸ “外来工子女拖欠学费普遍 民办学校因欠费倒闭” (It is common for migrant labourers to fall behind with school fees. As a result migrant schools close down), *广州日报 (Guangzhou Daily)*, 20 December 2006.

³²⁹ “国务院关于做好免除城市义务教育阶段学生学杂费工作的通知” (Circular of the State Council on the abolition of tuition and miscellaneous fees for students in compulsory education in urban areas), 12 August 2008.

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higher proportion of migrant factory workers, for example, the head of the district education department argued that it was impossible to waive textbook and miscellaneous fees as well as temporary student fees for all students in the compulsory education age range. After comparing

four different scenarios (*See Figure 9 below*), he suggested an option that would cost the district 360 million yuan a year but still exclude about 21 percent of the district's children in the compulsory education age range.³³⁰

Figure 9. Four scenarios for implementing the “two-waiver” policy in Longgang district in Shenzhen, as proposed by the Longgang Education Department

| Plan | Coverage | Strengths, weaknesses and cost |
|------|--|--|
| 1 | To waive textbook and miscellaneous fees only for the 44,000 students with permanent household residency who are studying either in state or private schools. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 31.8 million yuan per annum • Advantages: fiscally feasible; clear targets. • Disadvantage: contravenes the principle of equality. |
| 2 | To waive miscellaneous and textbook fees for students with permanent household residency, and; waive miscellaneous, textbook and temporary student fees for migrant children who are eligible for compulsory education in Shenzhen and studying in state schools. Total 83,000 students. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 140 million yuan per annum • Advantage: fiscally feasible, clear targets and easily managed. • Disadvantage: more expensive than Plan 1 and contravenes the principle of equality, in that students studying in state schools and private schools are treated differently. |
| 3 | To waive miscellaneous, textbook and temporary student fees for all 226,000 students in the compulsory education age range regardless of their residence status. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 440 million yuan per annum • Advantage: in line with the central policy. • Disadvantage: Imposes a huge burden on the government and schools. It may also trigger an influx of migrant children. |
| 4 | To waive miscellaneous and textbook fees for students with permanent household residency, and waive miscellaneous, textbook, and temporary student fees for migrant children who are eligible for compulsory education in Shenzhen. Total 178,000 students. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 360 million yuan per annum • Advantage: a considerable coverage. • Disadvantage: increased government expenditure. |

In Shenzhen as a whole, only migrant children who were in compulsory education and had registered

with the education department were eligible for waivers. And in order to register, children had to

³³⁰ “程畅：关于我区城市义务教育免费问题的建议”，(Cheng Chang: Some suggestions regarding the implementation of free compulsory education for urban children in our district), (Website

of the Longgang Committee of Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference), 20 February 2008.

satisfy the following conditions: 1) parents have been living in Shenzhen consecutively for at least one year; 2) both parents and children have obtained a temporary residence card; 3) have a stable residence; 4) children's birth and the state family planning certificates are in order; parents have Shenzhen employment and social insurance documents; 5) have documents issued by the original schools for school transfer.³³¹

The Shenzhen government estimates there are about 800,000 students in compulsory education in the city. Of these, it claims, 600,000 students would benefit from the waiver policy, including 340,000 migrants.³³² Even if these figures are accurate, more than one third of migrant children are ineligible. And the figures do not include children in school in their hometowns. Moreover, the complicated application procedures have led many eligible migrant workers to shun the waiver and send their children back to their hometowns. Indeed, many children born in the city go to their "hometown" for compulsory education.

And even when children and their parents fulfill all the requirements, they may not benefit from the scheme, as one parent explained:

This is the first year that Shenzhen started to waive textbook fees and miscellaneous fees. It is very difficult to actually benefit from the "two-waiver" policy. Firstly,

both parents should be covered by Shenzhen social insurance...; secondly, we still need to draw lots to decide who can actually benefit from the policy.³³³

In November 2008, the Ministry of Finance and the National Development and Reform Commission promulgated the Circular on the Abolition and Suspension of 100 Administrative Fees (国家发展改革委关于公布取消和停止征收100项行政事业性收费项目的通知), effective on 1 January 2009. Temporary student fees and miscellaneous fees for compulsory education were on the list. However, once again the State Council allowed local governments flexibility in this issue, and as such the circular has not yet led to significant changes. Indeed, in late 2008, migrant children in Shenzhen were still paying three times as much as locals for their education.^{334,335} In the fall semester of 2009, the town of Foshan in Guangdong waived textbook and miscellaneous fees for temporary students who fell into the 13 restrictive categories, including the children of migrants who had invested more than US\$500,000. Those students who did not qualify still had to pay more than local students.³³⁶ Leqing, an administrative area of Wenzhou in Zhejiang, abolished temporary student fees in 2009, but still only ten percent of migrant children in the city were eligible for free compulsory education.³³⁷

Some urban governments do subsidize privately run migrant schools. However the subsidies are

³³¹ "深圳市关于加强和完善人口管理工作的若干意见" (Some opinions of the Shenzhen government on strengthening and improving population management in Shenzhen), 1 August 2005.

³³² "中小学开学 义务教育"双免"政策惠及60万学生" (600,000 students in compulsory education will benefit from the "two-waiver" policy when the semester starts), *晶报* (*Crystal Daily*), 1 September 2008.

³³³ "我们的孩子能否享受"双免"吗?" (Can our children benefit from the "two-waiver" policy?), 深圳政府在线 (Shenzhen Government Online), 18 September 2008.

³³⁴ "深圳市各类中小学收费标准表" (Fee chart for primary and secondary schools in Shenzhen), Shenzhen government website.

³³⁵ "我们的孩子能否享受"双免"吗?" (Can our children benefit from the "two-waiver" policy?), 深圳政府在线 (Shenzhen Government Online), 18 September 2008.

³³⁶ "佛山市非户籍常住人口子女政策性借读生免费义务教育实施办法" (Regulations on the provision of free education for temporary students who do not have a permanent *hukou* in Foshan), implemented on 1 September 2009.

³³⁷ "乐清市教育局采取三项措施, 确保外来务工人员子女入学" (Three policies launched to ensure migrant children's opportunities in education), The Education Bureau of Leqing City, 4 March 2009.

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small (about 80 yuan per student, per semester in Beijing) and limited to approved schools. The majority of migrant schools in most cities are not approved. Migrant schools still rely heavily on fees and donations from the private sector, such as old computers, musical instruments and library books. Local governments make only occasional donations to upgrade facilities. The Wenzhou government has, since 2005, set aside a proportion of the rural education development fund to subsidize migrant schools and to aid children facing financial difficulties. But again not all migrant children are eligible.³³⁸

Improving the quality of urban population?

As local governments have no absolute responsibility to provide migrants with educational, medical and social services on a permanent basis, they usually fund the cost of improving migrants' social welfare through extra-fiscal revenue. The central government is now urging cities to include migrants in their budgets, and has asked both the host cities and the migrants' places of origin to share the costs of social services. However, no substantial regulations have been promulgated in this regard. There are only sporadic and small scale projects that allow migrants to obtain medical services.

Many cities claim that by granting permanent residency to only the highly educated and skilled workers, they are enhancing the "quality" of their population. Migrants with no or minimal skills are seen as temporary residents to be disposed of once the city attains its development goals. In the

2007 *Shenzhen Yearbook*, the government proudly boasted of its success in slowing the growth of the permanent population in order to facilitate its transition to a high-technology hub.

One of the main reasons for the gradual fall in the growth rate of permanent population is that the government is determined to restructure the composition of its population to assist high-technology industries... This form of industry not only has higher added-value productivity, but it also has a lower demand for labour... In 2007, a total of 15,207 out of 100,000 persons aged 6 and above had a tertiary education or above, compared with 952 last year...³³⁹

Local governments are more willing to extend social services to higher paid workers with better qualifications rather than to those with the greatest needs (low-skilled workers). In recent years, the southern coastal city of Zhuhai, which has a GDP per capita equivalent to Beijing and Shanghai, has striven to improve social services and welfare for its permanent residents. Many of the city's welfare provisions are much higher than the national standard, and include 12 years compulsory education and free medical consultations for common illnesses. In 2007 Zhuhai was rated as one of the ten happiest cities in China.³⁴⁰ However, at about the same time, the city unveiled plans to raise the threshold for local residency. The head of the Zhuhai Statistical Bureau said the city needed to spend at least half a million yuan on social services for each new permanent resident. It was,

³³⁸ “關於做好流動人口子女教育問題的建議” (Opinions on improving education for migrant children), The General Office of the Wenzhou government, 22 September 2008.

³³⁹ 深圳统计年鉴 2008 (Shenzhen Statistical Yearbook 2008), p. 55 and p. 57.

³⁴⁰ “在哪里居住最幸福? 中国十大最具幸福感城市出炉” (Where is the best place to live? Ten Chinese cities where residents have the strongest feeling of happiness), 中新网 (Zhongxing Net), 7 November 2007.

therefore, reasonable to raise the threshold. “I don’t think just having a post-graduate degree is enough. Whether or not a person should be granted a Zhuhai *hukou* should be determined also by the contribution they have made to the city.”³⁴¹ And in Dongguan, before 2008, migrants purchasing an apartment in the city could apply for permanent residency, but now this requirement in and of itself is no longer good enough.³⁴²

And the international financial crisis of 2008 and 2009 made it even harder for migrant workers and their children to gain a permanent foothold in the city. At least 30 million migrants lost their jobs during the crisis³⁴³ and many of those who did manage to keep their jobs had to accept lower wages and benefits.

In December 2008, the central government issued a series of new policies³⁴⁴ designed to help migrant workers. However these initiatives contained few specifics to aid migrant children. Moreover, they saddled rural governments with the primary responsibility for extending social services to returning migrants and their families, while urban authorities only provided services for permanent residents and a limited number of skilled migrants.

Those who most needed assistance in the cities – unskilled migrants – were left out in the cold.

In Guangdong, only those who had worked continuously for at least half a year could register as unemployed, and only skilled workers (or those from the Sichuan earthquake zone) were entitled to one-on-one job referral services.³⁴⁵ Migrants from Guangdong or skilled workers were eligible for free or subsidized training. In addition, the provincial government allowed skilled migrants or those in management positions to apply for budget housing and for their children to ask for scholarships when they enrolled in technical schools.³⁴⁶ Unskilled migrants from other provinces were ineligible for the programmes and once they lost their jobs they usually had to return home, taking their children with them.

As noted at the beginning of this section, prior to the financial crisis, there was a trend towards more migrant children being taken to or kept in the cities by their parents rather than being left behind in the countryside. Temporarily at least the trend has now been reversed, greatly increasing demand for services in rural areas. The central government expected local governments to

³⁴¹ “户籍人口增长太快 珠海拟提高购房入户门槛” (The increase of local population is too rapid; Zhuhai plans to raise the threshold of apartment purchase value for local residency applications), *广州日报* (*Guangzhou Daily*), 20 February 2008.

³⁴² “东莞人入户难 东莞拟财政拨款建新型虚拟社区解决” (It is difficult for migrant workers to obtain household residency in Dongguan; City plans to apply for budgetary funds to build a virtual community to solve the problem), *南方都市报* (*Southern Metropolis Daily*), 8 December 2008.

³⁴³ “China Says 30 Million Workers Have Lost Jobs”, *Bloomberg*, 22 April 2009.

³⁴⁴ The Office of the State Council’s Circular on Performing Well the Current Tasks for Migrant Workers (国务院办公厅关于切实做好当前农民工工作的通知) outlined the following measures: 1) creating jobs and preventing mass layoffs; 2) providing training for migrant workers and organizing promotional activities for workers; 3) assisting migrant workers to set up their own businesses, and launching local projects to create job opportunities; 4) speeding up procedures for mediation and arbitration of labour disputes; and

assisting workers to recover wage arrears and compensation; 5) facilitating the cross-province transfer of social security funds and helping migrant workers who are in difficulties to obtain social welfare; 6) helping returned migrant workers get back their land transferred in their absence, or obtain rightful compensation. To implement this circular, 13 central government ministries issued the Circular on Stepping up Measures to Prevent Enterprises Delaying Wage Payment (关于进一步做好预防和解决企业工资拖欠工作的通知) urging local governments to set up wage protection funds, and to monitor enterprises closely for large scale layoffs or closure.

³⁴⁵ “农民工滞留深圳调查:无技术男农民工最难找工作” (A survey of unemployed migrant workers in Shenzhen: unskilled male workers have the greatest difficulties in finding jobs), *中国网* (*China Net*), 17 February 2009.

³⁴⁶ “广东省八项举措帮助农民工稳定就业”(Guangdong province launches eight measures to stabilize the labour market for migrant workers), *中国网* (*China Net*), 4 December 2008.

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meet the demand and ordered rural schools to admit returned migrant children unconditionally. However, Beijing offered little practical help. Because local governments were unable to provide the additional resources needed, class sizes in some places doubled to as much as 100 and many students had no textbooks.³⁴⁷

Another serious problem experienced by many of the children “returning” to the countryside is the adjustment they have to make to their “home” environment. Many returnees have lived in the city for most or all of their lives and will almost certainly struggle to come to terms with a different lifestyle in the countryside. And they might well have to move again if their parents find work in another city, further disrupting their education and psychological development.

In cities, access to services for the migrants largely depends on employment. Even if they had sufficient savings to stay on after losing their jobs, many migrants would be unable to enroll their children in schools because that would require proof of stable employment. Although urban services have been gradually opening up to migrant children over the last decade, unskilled migrants are seen as temporary residents at best. As the closure of labour intensive, low-tech and export oriented factories in the wake of the economic crisis has shown, once unskilled migrants are deemed surplus to requirement, they are discarded, and the responsibility for their welfare abdicated to their home government.

³⁴⁷ ‘农民工子女集体返乡读书调查’ (An investigation into migrant children returning home to attend school), *南方日报* (*Southern Daily*), 14 March 2009.

Conclusions and Recommendations

It has been argued that migrant workers have a choice whether or not to leave home and work in the cities. In reality, this is a choice between economic deprivation in the countryside or social disadvantage in the cities. Children, however, can only passively accept the choices made by their parents and often suffer more than them in terms of psychological harm as well as economic and social deprivation.

If they are left behind in the countryside, children have to deal with a range of problems engendered by long-term separation from parents; insecurity, anxiety and fear. They are more likely to be victims of accidents and crime, or suffer from psychological and behavioural problems. The government has sponsored a programme of stand-in parents to care for left-behind children but all too often they are recruited under a quota system and lack the time or ability to do the needful.

Left-behind children have to pay excessive fees to study in under-resourced and under-staffed rural schools. Often, their only option is to leave after completing middle-school (or even earlier) and become migrant workers themselves. The government has been building more boarding schools in rural areas for them but such schools are often more concerned with social control than education.

Migrant children in the cities suffer from systematic discrimination and exclusion from social welfare, healthcare and education. They and their mothers suffer from noticeably higher levels of disease and preventable death simply because they do not have the same level of access to healthcare as their local neighbours. They

have to pay up to three times as much as locals to receive the same education or alternatively study at inferior quality migrant schools. And even if they do get a decent education in the city and wish to go on to university, rules dictate that they have to return to their “hometown” to take the entrance examination.

Migrants in urban areas are both geographically and socially segregated from the local population. Migrant children often have to study in segregated schools because of resistance to integration from local parents who fear that including migrants in local schools would hamper their own children’s educational development. Segregation has only reinforced suspicion and misunderstanding between the two groups.

Since the issue first came to national prominence early this decade, the Chinese government has promulgated laws, regulations and directives (mainly related to education) to address the problems faced by these children and their parents. Many of these initiatives could have been effective if they had been implemented in full. However many programmes were stymied at the local level. Because local governments are almost entirely responsible for funding schools, healthcare and social welfare services, they have been reluctant to give migrants and their children full and unfettered access to these services.

The level of access to education and healthcare for migrant children has undeniably improved over the last few years. However these improvements have been piecemeal, have often created an additional financial burden for migrant workers, and can be rescinded at any time at the discretion of local

governments. What is needed is wide-ranging and systemic reform to the *hukou* and social welfare systems.

On 2 March 1992, long before the recent flood of legislation and government initiatives, Beijing ratified the *UN Convention on the Rights of the Child*, which obliges the government to safeguard children's rights "within its jurisdiction without discrimination of any kind, irrespective of the child's or his or her parent's or legal guardian's race, colour, sex, language, religion, political or other opinion, national, ethnic or social origin, property, disability, birth or other status." (Article 1)

CLB contends that this fundamental principle should be the cornerstone of policies towards the children of migrant workers. The government should take strong and enforceable measures to end the discrimination, exclusion and injustices suffered by migrant children and ensure they no longer have to pay the price for China's economic development. To this end, CLB recommends:

Link between social services and the *hukou* system should be severed. The discrimination faced by migrant children is tied up with the complex social, economic and political structure of China. The ultimate solution is to reduce the disparity between urban and rural areas in terms of socio-economic development and welfare provisions, and to eventually abolish the *hukou* system. This, of course, is a long-term process. In the meantime, the government should ensure the rights of children are not compromised by their residence status. The link between social services and *hukou* for children should be severed. All children should be entitled to the same rights to health and education services, social advancement and social participation. All barriers, such as the

link between university entrance examinations and the *hukou* should be abolished.

Urban governments should take responsibility for welfare provision. Migrants make a vital contribution to economic development of the cities. Urban authorities should shoulder the responsibility for migrant children's welfare. Urban governments are clearly more able, in terms of financial resources, than poorer rural ones to shoulder this burden. Rather than urging rural and urban authorities to share the responsibilities, the central government should place the onus for providing social services for migrant children on urban governments. Crucially, authorities should not limit access to social services only to the children of workers in stable jobs, to those with high qualifications or who meet the requirements of the city's population policies.

Integrate migrant children into the urban environment. The measures outlined by the State Council and the Ministry of Education in 2003 to improve the education of migrant children contained important provisions related to social integration. These need to be enforced at the local level. Rather than providing migrant children with mere formal education, urban governments should initiate extra-curricular and social programmes aimed at increasing their understanding of the city and boosting their sense of belonging. Subsidies should be given to migrant children who have financial difficulties to participate in such programmes. Urban children and their parents should be encouraged to be more tolerant and accepting of their migrant classmates.

Give proper funding to migrant schools. As a stop-gap measure before migrant children are fully integrated into the state system, local government subsidies for privately-run migrant schools should

be included in cities' annual budgets. Moreover, the subsidies should be sufficient to cover all of the costs, so that students do indeed receive a free compulsory education, and ensure that qualified teachers in the private sector receive salary and benefits comparable to those in the state sector. Urban governments should not just close down non-approved schools but rather help them improve their facilities and teaching standards.

Increase government role in and commitment to left-behind children's programmes. Local and central governments should both increase their commitment in terms of financial and human resources to develop programmes to help left-behind children. Apart from building or renovating schools, the software of education, such as the standard of teaching needs to be greatly improved; better qualified rural teachers should be recruited, salaries should be raised and, crucially, paid on time. Rural schools should employ qualified counsellors to look after the psychological needs of left-behind children. Stand-in parents should be screened, given proper training and the time off work they need to look after their charges. Moreover, their rights and obligations should be clearly defined.

Ensure equitable economic development and improve social welfare in rural areas. The government's four trillion yuan economic stimulus package to counteract the impact of the international financial crisis in China includes public construction and environmental projects that will create much needed rural employment. However, since a significant proportion of rural income is currently derived from migrant labour, rural incomes are likely to fall this year as a result of the mass lay-offs in the cities. It is essential, therefore, that the government investment in rural social welfare increases and that a transparent

breakdown of the funds used be available to the public. In particular, a much greater effort is needed to stamp out the misappropriation of funds earmarked for education and healthcare.

Appendix

I. Central government measures designed to help left-behind children

| Scope | Relevant ministerial opinions and circulars |
|---|--|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To gather information on the living arrangements etc of left-behind children | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “公安部关于做好留守儿童有关工作的通知” (Circular of the Ministry of Public Security on handling the work of left-behind children), 20 August 2006. |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To combat criminal gangs targeting left-behind children | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “公安部关于做好留守儿童有关工作的通知” (Circular of the Ministry of Public Security on handling the work of left-behind children) , 20 August 2006 • “国务院办公厅关于印发中国反对拐卖妇女儿童行动计划(2008—2012年)的通知” (The opinion of the State Council Office on releasing China’s action plan against the abduction of women and children), 13 December 2007. |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To strengthen the awareness of local governments, parents and children themselves, of children’s rights | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “教育部关于教育系统贯彻落实《国务院关于解决农民工问题的若干意见》的实施意见” (Opinion of the Ministry of Education on the implementation of “Some opinions of the State Council on resolving the problem of migrant workers” in the education system), 17 May 2006. • “公安部关于做好留守儿童有关工作的通知” (Circular of the Ministry of Public Security on handling the work of left-behind children), 20 August 2006. |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To strengthen rehabilitation facilities for left-behind children who commit minor crimes | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “公安部关于做好留守儿童有关工作的通知” (Circular of the Ministry of Public Security on handling the work of left-behind children) 20 August 2006. |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To promote school attendance rates and construct boarding schools | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “教育部关于进一步推进义务教育均衡发展的若干意见” (Opinion of the Ministry of Education on further strengthening the promotion of even development of compulsory education) 25 May 2005. • “教育部关于教育系统贯彻落实《国务院关于解决农民工问题的若干意见》的实施意见” (Opinion of the Ministry of Education on the implementation of “Some opinions on resolving the problems faced by migrant workers” in education), 17 May 2006. • “公安部关于做好留守儿童有关工作的通知” (Circular of the Ministry of Public Security on handling the work of left-behind children), 20 August 2006. • “教育部关于进一步加强和改进对省级实现”两基”进行全面督导检查的意见” (Opinion of the Ministry of Education on strengthening and improving the work of provincial governments in supervising and inspecting the promotion |

| | |
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| | <p>of compulsory education and the elimination of illiteracy), 6 February 2007.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “教育部基础教育司关于印发《教育部基础教育司2008年工作要点》的函” (Letter from the Basic Education Section of the Ministry of Education on “The 2008 work plan for the Basic Education Section”), 15 February 2008. • “国务院妇女儿童工作委员会关于印发国务院妇女儿童工作委员会2007年工作总结和2008年工作要点的通知” (Circular on disseminating the 2007 work report and the 2008 work plan of the Working Committee on Women and Children Development of the State Council), 20 March 2008. • “国务院关于做好免除城市义务教育阶段学生学杂费工作的通知”, (Circular of the State Council on the abolition of tuition and miscellaneous fee for students in compulsory education in urban areas), 2 August 2008. |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To launch cultural activities and social campaigns to heighten social awareness of the problems faced by left-behind children | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “关于深入实施”进城务工青年发展计划”进一步加强青年农民工工作的意见” (Opinion on intensification of the “Young Migrant Worker Development Plan”, and strengthening the work on young migrant workers), 26 September 2006. • “劳动和社会保障部关于印发国务院农民工工作联席会议2007年工作要点的通知” (Circular of the Ministry of Labour and Social Security on the dissemination of the 2007 work plan of the Joint Committee on Migrant Workers), 3 April 2007. • “国务院办公厅关于印发人口发展”十一五”和2020年规划的通知” (Circular of the State Council Office on the dissemination of the population policy of the 11th Five-Year Development Plan and the 2020 Development Plan), 9 June 2007. • “中共中央、国务院关于加强农业基础设施建设进一步促进农业发展农民增收的若干意见” (Some opinions of the Chinese Communist Party Central Committee and the State Council on strengthening agricultural infrastructure, further promoting agricultural development and raising rural income) , 31 December 2007. • “国务院妇女儿童工作委员会关于印发国务院妇女儿童工作委员会2007年工作总结和2008年工作要点的通知” (Circular on the dissemination of the 2007 work report and the 2008 work plan of the National Working Committee on Women and Children under the State Council), 20 March 2008. |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To strengthen the guardianship of left-behind children | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “教育部关于教育系统贯彻落实《国务院关于解决农民工问题的若干意见》的实施意见” (Opinion of the Ministry |

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| | <p>of Education on the implementation of “Some opinions on resolving the problems faced by migrant workers” in education), 17 May 2006.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> “中共中央、国务院关于切实加强农业基础设施建设进一步促进农业发展农民增收的若干意见” (Some opinions of the Chinese Communist Party Central Committee and the State Council on strengthening agricultural infrastructure, further promoting agricultural development and raising rural incomes), 31 December 2007. |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> To improve the health of left-behind children | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> “教育部关于教育系统贯彻落实《国务院关于解决农民工问题的若干意见》的实施意见” (Opinion of the Ministry of Education on the implementation of “Some opinions on resolving the problems faced by migrant workers” in education), 17 May 2006. “国务院妇女儿童工作委员会关于印发国务院妇女儿童工作委员会2007年工作总结和2008年工作要点的通知” (Circular on the dissemination of the 2007 work report and the 2008 work plan of the National Working Committee on Women and Children under the State Council), 20 March 2008. |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> To enhance the ability of self-care and living arrangement of left-behind children | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> “教育部关于教育系统贯彻落实《国务院关于解决农民工问题的若干意见》的实施意见” (Opinion of the Ministry of Education on the implementation of “Some opinions on resolving the problems faced by migrant workers” in education), 17 May 2006. “教育部关于进一步推进义务教育均衡发展的若干意见” (Opinion of the Ministry of Education on further strengthening the promotion of even development of compulsory education), 25 May 2005. |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> To improve the psychological health of left-behind children | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> “教育部关于深入贯彻《中共中央、国务院关于进一步加强和改进未成年人思想道德建设的若干意见》精神，做好2005年中小学德育工作的通知” (Circular of the Ministry of Education on thoroughly implementing the “Opinion of the Chinese Communist Party Central Committee and the State Council on improving moral education of the under-age population”, and carrying out moral education properly in primary and secondary schools), 1 March 2005. “教育部关于进一步推进义务教育均衡发展的若干意见” (Opinion of the Ministry of Education on further strengthening the promotion of even development of compulsory education), 25 May 2005. |

II. Government measures to promote migrant children's education (by date of issuance)

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| 2 April 1996 | “城镇流动人口中适龄儿童少年就学办法（试行）” (Measures for the Schooling of Children and Young People in the Urban Migrant Population) (Trial measure) |
| 2 March 1998 | <p>“流动儿童少年就学暂行办法” (Provisional Measures for the Schooling of Migrant Children and Young People)</p> <p>Related points:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Municipalities should allow migrant children aged between 6 and 14 to study in full time state-run and privately run schools with the status of temporary students • The main responsibility for education should remain in the out-flowing areas. |
| 22 May 2001 | <p>“中国儿童发展纲要(2001-2010年)” (National Programme of Action for Child Development in China (2001-2010))</p> <p>Related points:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Migrant children are entitled to 9 years compulsory education • Accommodate migrant children in the urban school system |
| 29 May 2001 | <p>“国务院关于基础教育改革与发展的决定” (Decision of the State Council on the Development and Reform of Elementary Education)</p> <p>Related points:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To curb arbitrary fee collection and to practice “one-fee” system in selected rural areas • To waive miscellaneous and textbook fees and to subsidize accommodation fees for boarding school students with financial difficulties in selected rural areas (“two-waiver and one-subsidy” 两免一补) • To guarantee migrant children's rights to education – hosting cities should take the main responsibility for providing places in state-run schools. |
| 12 June 2001 | <p>“国务院纠风办、教育部关于进一步做好治理教育乱收费工作的意见” (Opinions of the State Council Rectification Office and the Ministry of Education on Further Curbing Arbitrary Fee Collection)</p> <p>Related points:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Schools should admit students who are living in the same districts as their schools and shall not admit unqualified students simply because their parents have made donation to the school. • Primary and middle schools should admit temporary students (借读生) and collect school fees according to provincial regulations, and shall not collect miscellaneous and other fees on top of the temporary student fee. |
| 15 May 2003 | <p>“国务院办公厅转发农业部等部门关于2003年减轻农民负担工作意见的通知” (The State Council forwarding the Circular of the Opinions of the Ministry of Agriculture and other Departments on Relieving the Burden of Peasants in 2003)</p> |

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| | <p>Related point:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Schools shall not collect fees other than miscellaneous, temporary student and textbook fees which have not been approved by the state. |
| 23 June 2003 | <p>“国务院办公厅转发教育部等部门关于2003年治理教育乱收费工作实施意见的通知” (State Council forwarding the Circular of Opinion of the Ministry of Education and other Departments on the Work of Curbing Arbitrary Fee Collection in 2003)</p> <p>Related points:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To clarify and standardize different types of school fees • To insist on the practice of “one-fee system” in compulsory education in selected rural areas • To prohibit primary and secondary schools collecting fees arbitrarily in the name of supplementary classes, remedial classes, and elite classes, etc. • Schools shall not collect fees for other parties, apart from textbook fees. • To prohibit the collection of school bus fees and any involuntary donations • Temporary student fees in compulsory education shall not be used to pay for the salaries of school staff or for the improvement of school facilities |
| 17 Sept 2003 | <p>“国务院关于进一步加强农村教育工作的决定” (Decision of the State Council on Further Strengthening Rural Education)</p> <p>Related points:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Host cities should guarantee migrant children the right to education and make sure that the majority of migrant children are admitted to state-run full-time schools. • Vocational schools in urban areas should be opened to migrant children • To strengthen the effort to curb arbitrary fee collection • To strive to extend the “two-waiver and one-subsidy” policy to all rural areas. |
| 30 Sept 2003 | <p>“国务院办公厅转发教育部等部门关于进一步做好进城务工就业农民子女义务教育工作意见的通知” (The General Office of the State Council forwarding the Circular of the Opinion of the Ministry of Education and other departments on further improving the education of migrant children)</p> <p>Related points:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Governments of host cities should: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - provide compulsory education to migrant children; - admit most migrant children to state schools and increase the admission rate of migrant children in compulsory education to the level of local children; - incorporate compulsory education for migrant children into the local education plan, and to coordinate different departments to assist migrant children to receive education; |

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| | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - make sure migrant children are given equal opportunity to join the Youth League and the Youth Pioneers, and to compete for honors and awards; - help migrant children adjust to city life and strengthen the communication between schools and the parents; - guarantee the educational expenses for migrant children, and subsidize schools which have admitted a certain proportion of migrant children; - set aside a proportion of the city's additional education tax for the education of migrant children; - create supportive social atmosphere for migrant children and encourage society to make donations towards the education of migrant children; - ensure private migrant schools attain the standards of state schools in terms of teaching staff, safety and hygiene. • Governments in sending and receiving areas of migrant workers should strengthen cooperation. • Governments in host areas should: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - prohibit schools from collecting money from migrant children who apply to transfer to urban schools or return to study in their hometowns; - send officials to host cities to assist migrant children in obtaining education. |
| 16 March 2004 | <p>“财政部关于规范收费管理促进农民增收收入的通知” (Circular of the Ministry of Finance on Regulating Fee Collection and Increasing the Income of Peasants)</p> <p>Related points:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Migrant children should not pay higher fees than local students. • Other than miscellaneous fees, tuition fees, boarding fees and textbook fees that have been approved by the state, migrant children should not be asked to pay temporary student fees or school selection fees. • To prohibit the solicitation of donations from migrant workers for building schools or for other purposes. • To help migrant children who have financial difficulties have access to schooling. |
| 27 Dec 2004 | <p>“国务院办公厅关于进一步做好改善农民进城就业环境工作的通知” (Circular of the State Council on further improving the conditions for peasants who seek employment in the cities)</p> <p>Related point:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Admission requirements for migrant children set by primary and middle schools should be the same as for local children; schools should not collect fees that contravene state regulations. |
| 25 March 2005 | <p>“财政部关于深入开展治理教育乱收费工作的通知” (Circular of the Ministry of Finance to Strengthen the Efforts to Curb Arbitrary Collection of Educational Fees)</p> <p>Related point:</p> |

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| | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Migrant children studying in the cities should be entitled to the same rights as the locals. All fees shall be standardized and schools shall not collect temporary student fees or school selection fees. |
| 31 Jan 2006 | <p>“国务院关于解决农民工问题的若干意见” (Some Opinions of the State Council on Resolving the Problems Faced by Migrant Workers)</p> <p>Related points:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> To address the problems faced by migrant workers, such as low pay, wage arrears, long working hours, poor work safety, children’s education, living environment, lack of effective protection for economic, political and cultural rights To include migrant children in local inoculation plans To include migrant workers in the cities’ state family planning programme; to include costs in the cities’ financial budgets, and to provide migrant workers with free medical services relating to state family planning. |
| 29 June 2006 | <p>“中华人民共和国义务教育法(2006修订)” (Compulsory Education Law of the PRC (2006 revised))</p> <p>Related points:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> No miscellaneous fees or textbook fees for students in compulsory education. To provide textbooks to children in financial difficulty. Schools shall collect fees according to state regulations. Local governments shall guarantee the funds for primary education. Local governments shall provide an “equal [education] environment” for local and migrant children.. |
| 12 August 2008 | <p>“国务院关于做好免除城市义务教育阶段学生学杂费工作的通知” (Circular of the State Council on the Abolition of Tuition and Miscellaneous fees for Students in Compulsory Education in Urban Areas)</p> <p>Related points:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Abolish miscellaneous and textbook fees for students in compulsory education in the urban areas. Local governments should admit migrant students who fulfill local criteria to state-run schools in their districts, waive tuition and miscellaneous fees and not collect temporary student fees. Local governments at different levels shall provide adequate educational funds for migrant children. |
| 13 Nov 2008 Implemented 1 Jan 2009 | <p>“财政部、国家发展改革委关于公布取消和停止征收100项行政事业性收费项目的通知” Circular of the Ministry of Finance and the National Development and Reform Commission on the Abolition and Suspension of 100 Administrative Fees.</p> <p>Related point:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Miscellaneous fees and temporary student fees for compulsory education are on the list |

About China Labour Bulletin

Founded in 1994 by labour activist Han Dongfang, CLB seeks to defend and promote workers' rights in the People's Republic of China. We support the development of democratic trade unions, respect for and enforcement of the country's labour laws, and the full participation of workers in the creation of civil society. We seek the official recognition in China of international standards and conventions providing for workers' freedom of association and the right to free collective bargaining. Our long-term goal is to assist in the formation of a strong and dynamic Chinese labour movement.

Over the past six years CLB has developed one of the largest labour rights litigation programmes in mainland China. Since local enforcement of the country's labour laws is weak, litigation is one of the few avenues open to ordinary Chinese workers seeking redress for labour rights violations. In collaboration with mainland labour lawyers, CLB is committed to helping workers bring lawsuits against employers and government agencies across the entire spectrum of labour issues – from non-payment of wages and benefits to employment discrimination and workplace injuries – and to ensuring that detained labour activists have access to criminal defence services.

CLB also has an extensive research programme and to date has web-published 12 reports in English and 15 in Chinese on a wide range of key labour rights issues. The report titles are listed at the end of this report and all the reports are available as downloadable PDFs on our website at www.clb.org.hk.

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Paying the Price for Economic Development The Children of Migrant Workers in China

The mass movement of more than 200 million rural labourers to China's cities has been described as the greatest internal migration in history. Migrant workers have built the gleaming skyscrapers, super-highways and shopping malls that have transformed China over the last three decades. They have worked for hours on end in stifling factories to produce the cheap electronics, clothes and shoes demanded by Western consumers, and all the time they have endured the contempt and abuse of city dwellers, and the exploitation and mistreatment of their employers.

They do this because they want to build a better life for themselves and their families. They want to escape the poverty, austerity and rigidity of life in the Chinese countryside and sample at least some of the benefits that city dwellers take for granted. The vast majority of migrant workers are aged between 16 and 40, and at some point nearly all of them will start a family of their own. But when their first child is born they will face a stark choice; either take that child with them to the city and subject them to institutionalized discrimination, or leave them behind in the countryside in the uncertain care of relatives. There are already an estimated 58 million children left behind in the countryside, and another 19 million living with their migrant worker parents in the cities. Together, these two groups account for about one quarter of all children in China.

This report examines the plight of both groups of children as well as the attempts of the Chinese government to address the increasingly serious problems they face. Psychological and behavioural problems caused by long-term separation from their parents are so prevalent among rural children, the Chinese media has now coined the phrase "left-behind children syndrome." In the cities too, the children of migrant workers usually attend sub-standard schools and unlicensed health clinics because of their "inferior" status and low household income. As their parents have to work excessively long hours in arduous jobs leaving little or no time for their families, migrant children in cities consequently develop psychological problems disturbingly similar to those of the children left behind.

China Labour Bulletin argues that the only long-term solution to the problems facing the children of migrant workers is wide-ranging and systemic reform of the social welfare system and abolition of China's antiquated household registration system. In the shorter term, CLB argues that the link between household registration and social services for children should be eliminated and that urban governments should be made wholly responsible for the provision of social welfare to migrant children.

Front cover photograph. A migrant worker carries his belongings as he leads two children outside the railway station in China's southern city of Guangzhou. February 2008. AFP Photo / Liu Jin

中国劳工通讯 China Labour Bulletin

