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The household registration system's effect on migrant children's education: Challenges, reforms and perspectives.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

The household registration (*hukou* or *huji*[1]) system was established in 1958, as a way to control the Chinese population and internal migration. It was also a development strategy for the Chinese state, forcing peasants to stay in the countryside and provide cheap agricultural goods for workers in the cities, thus boosting industrialisation. Citizens with a non-agricultural *hukou* in cities were allocated food coupons, on top of health, education and housing benefits, while peasants' only benefits were land rights. This complex system created an unequal society, with a gap between rural and urban populations. Although the economic reforms of the last thirty years have led to a more flexible system, allowing farmers to come work in the cities, inequalities remain. In the past decade, various reforms and experiments have tried to ease the processes for *hukou* transfers, but there is still a long way to go. This dissertation will focus on the impact of the household registration system on migrant children's education, and will try to assess the effects of recent reforms.

Many scholars have studied the *huji* system, and the challenges it poses to migrant children's education. In order to give an overview of the academic literature, and to explain the main issues that will be discussed in this dissertation, this first chapter will offer a review of the literature, covering the themes that are relevant to the research question.

First, many scholars have focused on the household registration system and its reforms, providing a thorough depiction of the situation. Definitions and history of the system have been tackled by Wang (2004), Fan (2008), Chan and Buckingham (2008) as well as by Chan (2009). According to Chan (2009, p.201), when the system was created in 1958, it was a way to give priority to the industrial sector, by providing strong state-protection for city dwellers. Fan (2008, p.44) concurs by describing the *hukou* system as a development strategy, a way to

[1] *Huji* (户籍) is the formal term to refer to the household registration system. *Hukou* (户口) is the term used to talk about the actual registration permit, or to refer to the place of registration (an urban *hukou*, a Beijing *hukou*). However, *hukou* is now used more commonly to refer to the system as well, thus both terms are interchangeable.

promote industrialisation by supporting urban workers. The rural population was left on its own, and was meant to be self-sufficient as well as a provider of cheap food for the cities (Chan, 2009, p.201). Originally, the household registration had two criteria: type and location. The *hukou* type could be agricultural or non-agricultural, and the location was based on the place of birth (Fan, 2008; Chan, 2009). A 1977 law by State Council stated that *hukou* could only be inherited through the mother (Mackenzie, 2002, p.307), however, since 1998, children can choose to inherit either of their parents' *hukou* (Constitutional Executive Commission on China, 2005, p.2; Wang, 2004, p.123).

Since the *hukou* types and locations decide what kind of benefits one can obtain, and they offer greater advantages to urban dwellers, the household registration system has divided China into two unequal populations: rural and urban. The situation is all the more complicated because of migration. Before the 1990s, migration was limited as *hukou* transfer was very difficult and required approval from the state (Chan and Buckingham, 2008, p.590) The process was called *nongzhuanfei*, and only applied to a minority of migrants: permanent employees of state-owned enterprises, people displaced after state-initiated land-expropriation and other categories of migrants with high qualifications. On top of all these requirements, only a limited quota from 0.15 to 0.2 per cent of the non-agricultural population was allowed to transfer.

However, Deng Xiaoping's economic and agricultural reforms in the 1980s changed the scenery. Cheap labour was needed in the coastal cities, and migration became an easy solution for farmers, who were suffering from surplus labour in the agricultural sector (Mackenzie, 2002; Li, 2006). The lack of land and the improvement of agricultural techniques were strong push factors for farmers to find work elsewhere. Migrant workers became an important cog in the big machine of China's economic development. As Chan (2009, p.207) argues, in the mid-90s, migrant workers accounted for around 70 to 80 per cent of the workforce in coastal cities such as Shenzhen and Dongguan. In 2004, according to the Ministry of Agriculture, there were around 150 million surplus workers in the farming sector (Li, 2006, p.174). Because of their lack of urban *hukou*, migrants can be *de facto* urban dwellers without being *de jure* residents. They are

often described as a "floating population". Since the mid-80s, it is possible for migrants to access temporary residence permits, but those are not linked with any rights and benefits, which contributes to the inequality between rural and urban populations (Chan, 2009, p.207). According to the National Bureau of Statistics, the floating population was estimated to be around 150 million in 2006, which represented about 12 per cent of the Chinese population (Fan, 2008). However, this number keeps growing, and in 2008, the same Bureau was estimating the number to have risen up to 225 million migrants (Gui, Berry and Zheng, 2011, p.2). Wang Xin, China's director of the National Population and Family Planning Commission, thinks that there will be over 300 million new rural migrants in the next 20 years (Wu, 2012).

The high level of migration, combined with the difficulties of the *huji* system, has led to the development of a migrant class. Due to the inequalities created by the household registration system, migrant workers in the cities find themselves to be in the margins of society, as they do not belong to the rural world anymore, but have yet to belong to urban society. Being denied urban rights and benefits, and often living in their firms' dormitories or in areas dominated by migrants, they are further excluded from urban life and create their own migrant communities, and can thus be defined as a different class of population in the city. In Shenzhen, where there were around eight million migrants in 2005, only one million of them had an urban *hukou* (Chan, 2009, p.208). Most migrants[2] suffer from their lack of local *hukou*, which prevents them from accessing any benefits, and allows them to be discriminated against by their employers and other urban dwellers. As part of her research, Pun (2005) worked as a *dagongmei* (woman migrant worker) for a few months in Shenzhen, and she describes the bad living and working conditions of her job as a factory worker. Not only do migrant workers suffer from long hours, mind-numbing tasks and poor salaries, but they also suffer from being excluded by the urban population. Due to their village accents and the way they

[2] The definition of the term "migrant" in China can vary widely. According to Fan (2008, p.61), there is a two-track migration system, one for the elite, and one for the farmers. In this dissertation, the term "migrant" will be used to refer to the rural-to-urban migrants who come to the cities looking for a job. Some of these migrants can be very successful and become business owners, but this dissertation will not focus on this minority. Indeed, education challenges are not the same for successful business owners who can afford to send their children to expensive private schools, or who can more easily transfer their *hukou*.

dress, they are easily identified as migrants and are ignored by salespeople, and by other urban residents, who look down on them[3]. One of Pun's colleagues, Yue, wrote a letter to her boyfriend, expressing her feelings of having a lesser identity in the city: "Why do the local people never treat us as human beings? Now that I'm out in the world, I find myself to be one hundred times more worthless than in the village" (Pun, 2005, p.161).

The first waves of migrants were mostly male-dominated. In the past decades, however, there has been an increasing number of female migrants, some of them married and with children (Connelly, Roberts and Zheng, 2012). According to Fan (2008, p.61), between 1990 and 2000, the proportion of temporary migrants who migrated to join their family increased from 7.8 per cent to 10.7 per cent, "which supports the observation that more temporary migrants are bringing their families to cities." Wang and Zhao (2008, p.122) observe a similar increase in the migration of whole families since the 1990s. Migrants who bring their families tend to settle in the cities, as Connelly, Robert and Zhang (2011, p.283) observe: "Recent evidence shows that not only are more women migrating, but they are migrating after marriage, often with their husbands and children. As migrants increasingly migrate as families, they are more likely to settle in their urban destinations". Wang (2008, p.691) concurs, by stating that more and more migrant women migrate with their children, and couples who stay longer usually start families in the city. In 1997, in Beijing, children under the age of fifteen represented seven per cent of the migrant population. According to Ding (2004, p.10), there were 47,000 migrant children of school age in the Pudong District of Shanghai in 2004. The actual number of migrant children is hard to pin down, as some of them are not registered legally, or were born outside of family planning. Official statistics estimated the number of migrant children to be around 25 million in 2000, but this number is still lower than unofficial estimates (Goodburn, 2009, p.496). According to Song, Zheng and Qian (2009, p.71), "in 2003 alone, 19.82 million children entered cities with their migrant parents."

[3] Further examples of discrimination against migrants can be found in the works of Beynon (2004), Fan (2008), Goodburn (2009), Gui, Berry and Zheng (2011), Liu and Zhu (2011), Mok et al. (2011) and Li, Lin and Wang (2012).

This increasing number of migrant children in cities can lead to many problems. As was mentioned before, children inherit their *hukou* from their parents, which means that migrant children are usually registered in their village of origin, and therefore do not have any rights to education in their city of migration. As Lu and Zhang put it, “the family’s migrations cause the children’s education to take on a migratory character" (2004, p.61). This dissertation will later expand on the challenges of the migratory character of their education.

But first, to better understand migrant’s children’s education conditions, it is important to have an overview of education for all Chinese children. Education has been compulsory in China since the Compulsory Education Law, which was promulgated by the National People’s Congress in 1986 (Wang and Holland, 2011, p.471). Education is compulsory for nine years of primary and secondary school. Children can then choose to continue to high school, if they pass the entrance examination and can afford the fees (Hu, 2012). Wang and Holland (2011) summarize the law: Article 2 states that compulsory education must be guaranteed by the state, while Article 4 states that education is compulsory for all children. Preschool education is not part of the compulsory education, but it can be subsidised by the state in cities like Beijing (Nyland, Nyland and Yan, 2011). However, as for primary and secondary education, migrant children are usually not part of the equation.

This is linked to the *huji* system and to the decentralisation of power. Since the 1980s, local governments have more power in managing the *huji* system (Wang, 2008; Chan, 2009). According to Wang, “the household registration system shapes the way educational administrative systems respond to demand for schooling. Local education authorities only take responsibility for children who have local household registration” (2008, p.692). Moreover, since 1993 and the CCPCC’s “Outline for reform and development of education in China”, processes of decentralisation also concern education decisions (Mok, Wong and Guo, 2011). Due to this decentralisation, local authorities have a power of decision, which further complicates the situation. The central government does not allocate extra funding, which makes it hard for local governments that do not have the necessary resources (Goodburn, 2009, p.502).

Since local governments are responsible for education, their local budget is based on the number of children registered as urban citizens (Wang and Holland, 2011). For every urban child, the government allocates from RMB ¥4,000 to ¥6,000[4] per year (Yuan, 2010). Migrant children are not taken into consideration and are "perceived as an extra burden on the local educational system" (Wang and Holland, 2011, p.474). Decentralisation thus leads to a marketization of education, as local governments try to expand their funding by charging migrant children with higher fees (Mok, Wong and Guo, 2011). Han perfectly sums up the situation by stating that:

> "Hijacked by the trend of marketization and elitism, the state, instead of actively shouldering the responsibility to provide education for the vulnerable, has transferred the burden of compulsory education for migrant children to the market" (Han, 2012, p.79).

Decentralisation of education also creates some problems linked to the content of the education programmes. Since different provinces offer different programmes, the high school and college entrance examinations are not the same everywhere in the country. Thus, if migrant children want to prepare their entrance examinations, they need to attend classes in their province of registration, where they are expected to sit the examination (Connelly, Roberts and Zheng, 2011; Han, 2012; Hu, 2012).

Because of the decentralisation of powers and the benefits linked to the *hukou* system, the education of migrant children has become a challenging problem, whose resolution is now all the more important as families increasingly migrate together. In a country where migrants' role is crucial to the economy, it is important to seek some solutions to these issues. Various reforms have been launched in the past few years, and this dissertation will introduce them in order to see whether any concrete results have been achieved.

[4] RMB ¥4,000 is the equivalent of around £400.

The second chapter of this dissertation will further elaborate on the challenges faced by migrant households regarding their children’s education. The issues of the “left-behind children” in the countryside and of the bad quality of private migrant schooling will be explained, as well as the difficulties for migrant children to access state education.

Once all of the problems and challenges have been understood, the third chapter will focus on various reforms that have come into action in the past decade. Local or national, these reforms have all attempted to reform either the *huji* system or the education system, to give better chances to migrants and their children. This chapter will explain these reforms in details and will assess their concrete results and their effect on migrant children’s education.

Then, a fourth chapter will expand on further perspectives of reform, by focusing on the recent reform in Chongqing. The provincial-level city is a very interesting case-study, and the fourth chapter will explain in detail why it is a perfect experimental zone, and why the reforms carried out there are important. This chapter will try to understand the key points in offering a successful *huji* reform, by defining the willingness of migrants to transfer their *hukou* and their expectations regarding their gain of urban rights and their loss of rural rights. The Chongqing reform will then be explained in detail, and its success will be assessed via various Chinese and international sources.

Finally, a fifth chapter will conclude this dissertation by offering some perspectives for future research. Shortcomings of previous reforms as well as challenges yet to face will be studied, in order to assess the situation and give an outlook for future reforms.

Chapter 2: The effects of the *hukou* regime on migrant households and children's education:

This chapter will expand on the challenges faced by migrants and their children regarding issues of education. The first chapter gave an introductory overview of the origins of such problems, and this chapter will now explain them thoroughly.

2.1: Difficulties in accessing public education

Children migrating to the cities with their parents have to face some inequalities, as it is very difficult for them to access public education. In the Pudong New District of Shanghai, out of 47,000 migrant children of school age, only 20,000 of them had access to public schools (Ding, 2004, p.10-11). According to Wang (2008, p.695), "local school systems and schools purposely create different policies for enrolling urban and migrant children to limit the number of migrant children." They sometimes ask migrant children to take difficult entrance examinations, even at a primary school level. For instance, Wang mentions one school in Xiamen, where only fifteen migrants out of the eighty who applied where admitted. Goodburn (2009, p.502) argues that this is due to a loophole in regulations, which do not forbid entrance tests for state schools. Although most schools do not have entrance examinations, some of them can use them as a pretext to refuse migrant students who are seen as an extra burden.

Entrance examinations are not the main obstacle for migrant children to enrol into state schools. The most important issue is a financial one. As was mentioned in the first chapter, migrant children are not included in the budget of local governments, and schools tend to charge them extra fees (Wang and Zhao, 2008, p.125). "Public schools often view migrants as a source of additional income, charging them unauthorized fees amounting to several thousand yuan per year" (Constitutional Executive Commission on China, 2005, p.8). There are several ways to charge migrant students. The children are labelled as *jiedui*[5] students and can be asked to pay *jiedui* fees for the privilege of "borrowing" a place from the

[5] *Jiedui* refer to the students who are from an outside community, and are seen as "borrowing" a place to study.

school. In Beijing, Wang (2008, p.696) states that these fees are usually around RMB ¥480/month. They can also be asked to pay *zexiao*[6] fees, for the selection of the school, which can vary as they are negotiated directly with the school. On top of that, they often have to make "donations", or *zanzhu* fees, to support the school. These fees are on average around RMB ¥1,900 per term, but they can go up much higher. Most migrant households cannot afford such costs[7] and thus cannot send their children to a state school. Various regulations have been set up about donation fees, but most schools continue to charge migrant families nevertheless. Goodburn (2009, p.498) observes: "even during the stage of so-called compulsory education from six to fifteen years, I found that migrant children had to pay five or six times the fees charged to local children." As most migrant families have more than one child, they have all the more trouble to find a way to pay for their children's education. Some schools also "often require parents to pay the temporary students' supplementary fees and donation for the next few years in one lump sum" (Lu and Zhang, 2004, p.67), which does not suit the migratory nature of the household.

Even when migrants can afford to pay the fees, they have to face administrative issues. To be admitted, *jiedui* students need to present a number of documents and certificates, which can sometimes be hard to obtain. Such documents include: provisional residential certificate, parents' employment certificates and household registration of the children back in the place of origin (Wang, 2008, p.698), apartment lease in the district or even certificates of immunisation of the children (Wang and Holland, 2011, p.481). Goodburn (2009, p.496-497) concurs and even goes further by stating that some schools "demand for up to nine separate official documents", for instance an "approval permit for temporary schooling", health and social certificates of the children, and a certificate proving that the children's birth has been authorised by population planning policies. The difficulty in acquiring all of these documents excludes a majority of migrant children. Students from households that violate family planning policies can be refused

[6] Local children are expected to go to the school assigned to them based on their place of residence, but they can pay a fee to select another school of their choice. As migrant children are not assigned seats in local schools, they are often asked to pay this fee no matter what school they apply to.

[7] The average migrant household income is between RMB ¥1,000 and ¥1,500 per month. (Ding, 2004, p.12; Lu and Zhang, 2004, p.66).

enrolment in state schools (Wang, 2008, p.702). According to Wang and Holland's study (2011, p.483), 40 per cent of the children who applied to state schools were barred from public education by admission requirements and procedures.

On top of these financial and administrative issues, migrant children who manage to enrol in state schools have to face yet another set of issues: discrimination and cultural exclusion (Wang, 2008). According to Goodburn (2009, p.498), because of a general low-opinion of migrants, discrimination is reinforced within state schools: migrant children's grades are not officially recorded, they cannot apply for scholarships, are ignored by teachers and cannot take part in competitions under their own names (Lu and Zhang, 2004, p.71). Beynon (2004, p.141) describes the experience of migrant women in the cities as one of "in-betweenness", where they suffer from a "sense of lack of belonging and feelings of cultural marginalization." Migrant children who attend state schools can experience similar feelings of isolation and of being unwelcome (Wang, 2008), as "temporary students and local students do not enjoy equal educational rights and receive different treatment" (Lu and Zhang, 2004, p.71).

2.2: Migrant schools

Because of all these difficulties, migrant children who cannot enrol in state schools can either go back to the countryside or stay in the city and enrol in private migrant schools. Migrant schools appeared in the 1990s as more and more farmers started to migrate with their families. In Shanghai's Pudong New District, the first migrant school was created in 1993 (Ding, 2004, p.13). They became an alternative for migrants who had difficulties in accessing public education. However, they are not always the best solution, as they are often privately owned and operated for profit (Goodburn, 2009, p.498) and as they do not receive any government funding, they usually have poor infrastructure and teaching quality. Researchers deplore the poor quality of most migrant schools' infrastructure (Ding, 2004, p.14), where classrooms are small and dark, conditions are unhygienic and there is no equipment (Wang, 2008, p.699). The first migrant schools were quite small and usually took place in migrants' homes, but as classes

expanded, they moved to bigger but less appropriate settings such as former factory buildings or storage facilities (Goodburn, 2009, p.498). According to Goodburn, some of these schools are under "serious safety hazards", and Ding (2004, p.15) concurs by giving the example of several migrant school bus accidents, that happened because of poorly skilled drivers and overloaded buses.

Due to a lack of funding, migrant schools also suffer from poor teaching quality. In Xiamen, only 40 per cent of teachers in legally recognised migrant schools have been trained as teachers (Wang, 2008, p.699). Migrant schools cannot afford to pay them a high salary, which results in a high turnover and an irregular attendance: according to Lu and Zhang (2004, p.75), "financial motives take precedence over teaching requirements." In Shanghai in 2005, only 59 per cent of teachers had a high school diploma or an equivalent (Wang and Holland, 2011, p.474). Moreover, discipline is hard to obtain in overloaded classrooms, and the administration suffers from a "chaotic financial management" (Ding, 2004, p.14). According to Wang (2008, p.702), "the low quality of education in migrant schools leads to inequality and reproduction of the low status of the migrant population."

The poor quality of migrant education can be partly explained by the fact that migrant schools are not recognised legally. The 1999 Private Education Law requires private schools to apply for licensing and to fulfil certain requirements (Wang and Holland, 2011). Most of migrant schools cannot be registered in the city, and are registered at the Department of Education in the locality of origin, which makes it harder to supervise and have authority over them (Wang and Holland, 2011, p.474). As they are not registered with local authorities, such schools are technically illegal. They can try to evade inspection, by paying a fee to the police, or by constantly shutting down and reopening elsewhere (Goodburn, 2009). This can further penalise migrant schools, and prevent them from developing, as Goodburn (2009, p.500) states: "not only did a lack of state support and investment make it difficult for migrant schools to provide migrant children with a decent learning environment of the sort that local children enjoy, but the state's efforts to eradicate such schools lowered the quality of migrant education still further." The constant fear of seeing the school closing does not

encourage staff to buy new equipment (Wang, 2008). In 2001, fifty migrant schools were closed in Beijing, and another fifty were shut down in 2006, to discourage migrant families from settling there before the Olympics (Mok, Wong and Guo, 2011, p.339). The authorities can use the fact that the Compulsory Education Law states that children should receive state education as a pretext to shut down migrant schools, but they often do not provide migrant children with alternative solutions. In Shanghai, after the closing of several migrant schools, only between 10 and 40 per cent of migrant children were accepted into state schools (Goodburn, 2009, p.496).

2.3: The "left-behind children"

Due to the difficulties faced by migrant schools and the bad quality of education and infrastructure, some households prefer to send their children back home when they reach school age (Fan, 2008, p.127). One of the most crucial issues due to migration and the *hukou* system is that of the "left-behind" children. There were an estimated 58 million of children left behind in the countryside in 2010 (Hu, 2012, p.402). This problem is a consequence of the *hukou* division and of the difficulties for migrant children to access education in the cities (Li, Lin and Wang, 2012). Due to the expensive fees or other reasons mentioned above, many migrants cannot afford to migrate with their children, and have to leave them in the countryside. As more women migrate alongside their spouses, most children are left at home with their grandparents or other distant relatives (Cong and Silverstein, 2012). While some households migrate with their children, there is a noticeable return migration of the children when they reach school age. Connelly, Roberts and Zheng (2011, p.296) state that "women migrants were more likely to co-reside with younger children while school-age children were more likely to be left in the village with relatives." However, there is some concern about leaving the children with their grandparents, who are sometimes deemed unfit to provide them with the necessary educational care, as they did not always receive secondary education (Connelly, Roberts and Zheng, 2012; Li, Lin and Wang, 2012). This does not mean that grandparents are incompetent and should be judged as responsible for the children's low education levels. The lack of decent funding for education in many rural areas affects the "left-behind" children as

well as other rural children who have parents who care for them. However, on top of the bad quality of education in the countryside, this can contribute to migrants' children's bad results in school and low education chances. Since the 2008 global meltdown, there has been an increase in return of migrant children to their village of registration. According to a survey by the All China Women's Federation, an estimated 15 per cent of migrant children returned home in 2009 (Liu and Zhu, 2011). Their return can be explained by the economic crisis, but also by the education system, which, as was mentioned earlier, prevents migrant children from taking the high school or college entrance examination outside of their place of *hukou*.

These left-behind children are negatively affected by their parents' migration: not only are they left with members of the family that are not always suited to help them with schoolwork, but they also have to undertake their share of housework and/or farm work, which can cripple their school performances (Hu, 2012). In his documentary *Last Train Home*, director Fan Lixin (2009) followed a couple of migrants for a few years as they lived and worked in Shenzhen, and returned home to their children once a year for the Spring Festival. The documentary showed both children working hard in the rice field to support their elderly grandmother. For returning migrant children who used to live in the cities, difficulties in adapting or re-adapting to rural life can be faced, on top of having to take care of older members of the family and undertaking housework and farm work (Liu and Zhu, 2011, p.451). Hu (2012, p.82) argues that returned migrant children suffer from an identity crisis:

> "Lacking identification in their home villages and having a sense of belonging in cities, they fall in between cities and the countryside, belonging nowhere."

Migration can have an impact on gender inequalities for left-behind children, by further increasing the imbalance between boys' and girls' education chances and opportunities. There is a gender-differentiated impact of migration, as left-behind girls are more likely to have an increased share of housework and farm work (Chang, Dong and MacPhail, 2011). A similar imbalance can be observed in

elderly relatives, as grandmothers often have an increased share of work when their children migrate. Fan (2008) argues that as boys are encouraged to stay in school longer than their sisters, girls often drop out of school to support their brothers' education. Hu (2012) concurs by stating that boys are more likely to attend high school than girls. Connelly, Roberts and Zheng's findings (2012, p.105) show that "women who gave birth to a boy are significantly less likely to migrate after childbirth", and that in migration, "sons are more likely to accompany their mothers than daughters" (2012, p.109-110). These findings confirm the idea that there is a gender imbalance in China, and that it is further increased by migration[8]. Gender expectations can be an obstacle to left-behind girls' chances of education.

Whether they migrate with their parents or stay in the countryside, children are negatively affected by their parents' migration, and encounter many problems regarding their education.

[8] For more information on gender imbalance in rural China and the gendered impact of migration, read *On the move. Women in rural-to-urban migration in contemporary China*, 2004, edited by A. Gaetano and T. Jacka.

Chapter 3: Attempts to reform the household registration system and their effect on migrant children's education:

Previous chapters have shown the extent of the problems linked with the household registration system and migration. Children of migrant workers can find themselves in a delicate situation as they face difficulties in accessing state education in cities, and often have to resort to migrant education, which — unauthorised and unsupervised— does not match the quality of state education. Going back to the countryside to study is another solution for migrant children, but it results in a split of the migrant household and the children "left-behind" have to overcome difficulties linked with rural life and education. As various reforms were launched to adapt the *hukou* system and to meet its challenges, they affected migrant children's education rights. This chapter will focus on these reforms to understand their effects on migrant children's education chances.

3.1: Education reforms

To meet the increasing number of migrant families in cities and to address the problems of migrant education, the Public Security Bureau and the Ministry of Education issued a joint policy in 1998. The policy offered guidelines stating that local authorities should be responsible for the education of migrant children (Wang, 2008, p.692). Instead of only putting the responsibility on the locality of origin, as previous policies had done, the document implied that the place of origin and of destination had to share educational responsibilities (Wang and Holland, 2011, p.474):

> "Article 5. People's governments of the migrant children and juveniles' places of permanent residence and the people's governments at the destinations should coordinate with one another and strengthen contacts to do a good job in providing compulsory education to migrant children and juveniles" (State Education Commission and the Ministry of Public Security, 1998, translated in *Chinese Education and Society*, 2004, p.8).

The policy goes on with its article 13, stating that "no school or class (group) attached to full-time public elementary and secondary schools can enrol migrant children and juveniles to make a profit, nor can they violate the state's regulations to collect indiscriminate and high fees." However, the policy is only a set of guidelines, and it specifies that local governments are free to formulate their own regulations. Goodburn (2009, p.496) describes this notice as an encouragement for cities to provide education for migrant children, but observes that the guidelines are not legally binding and can be ignored by local governments. In May 2001, a new document issued by the State Council announced that local governments had to be responsible for migrant children's nine-year compulsory education through the public school system (Chan and Buckingham, 2008, p.600). Beijing promulgated its own education policy in 2002, stating similar measures (Wang, 2008).

According to Goodburn, the lack of school places is a false excuse for schools to refuse entry to migrant workers' children. A 2002 Human Rights in China Report (HRIC, 2002, cited in Goodburn, 2009, p.500) showed that Beijing had the capacity to host 1.5 million pupils, whereas only 1.2 million were enrolled at that time. There have been various laws to reduce the barriers to access state education. In 2006, the "State Council's certain comments on resolving problems of migrant workers" stipulated that migrant children should be included in education planning and budgets, and treated equally with local children (Mok, Wong and Guo, 2011, p.333). Different local governments started to implement laws to "open urban public education to rural children" without extra fees as in Tianjin in 2002 (Li, 2006, p.187). In 2003, the central government released "Suggestions on further improving the education of the children of migrant workers in urban areas", which required state schools to "enrol as many migrant children as they could accommodate, and to do so without charging any fee beyond that paid by local urban students" (Wang and Holland, 2011, p.475). In March 2010, Zhejiang adopted the "Article of Compulsory Education of Zhejiang province", which stated that migrant children should not have to pay extra fees to access state education. A similar document was issued in Guangdong (Mok, Wong and Guo, 2011, p.334). Also, since 2004, Guangdong launched a new policy, stating that any migrant child that attended nine years of compulsory

education in Guangdong was allowed to take the local college entrance examination and enter Guangdong universities, even without an urban *hukou* (2011, p.340). Zhejiang might follow its example and allow migrant children to take the local university entrance examinations.

As a result, it has become easier for migrant children to enrol in state schools. According to Song, Zheng and Qian, "over 90 per cent of state schools in Hangzhou recruit children of migrant workers without charging extra fees, and another five specialized schools have been established to educate migrant children" (2011, p.71). Wang and Holland's study witnessed the closing of six migrant schools, and the following absorption of migrant children into state schools. Parents who did not have the necessary documents were given more time to gather them (2011, p.404). However, there are still some difficulties: the central documents are only guidelines and cannot be enforced in local governments, except in the places that released their own education documents. These are still a minority, and most places can carry on with their discriminatory approach to migrant education. In Beijing, where new provisions on education were released in 2004, it is still hard for migrants to be exempt of the "donation fees", as they have to provide a certain number of documents (Goodburn, 2009, p.497).

3.2: Supervision and guidance of migrant schools

Other solutions are being tested to give migrants better education chances. One of them is to provide help to migrant schools. One of the recommendations of the Constitutional Executive Commission on China (2005, p.13) was that local governments should support the establishment of private migrant schools and help them improve their quality. Lu and Zhang are of the same opinion: "schools with adequate facilities and students should be given support and guidance and encouraged to develop" (2004, p.82). Some local governments took steps towards this goal. In Shanghai, the "Circular n°30 on the opinions on sorting and overhauling the schools provided by migrants in the Pudong New District" was promulgated in order to control the number and the quality of migrant schools (Ding, 2004, p.17). As part of the operation, 28 schools were closed, 22 were

allowed to operate, and nine were "slated for overhaul and reform" or put on trial for one year to reach the requirements (p.22). Specific offices were created to take care of the supervision, guidance and assessment of these schools. In 2000, Xiamen's "Temporary Method of Education of Migrant Children" stated that migrant schools would be given legal status if they met certain requirements (Wang, 2008, p.701). Requirements for a migrant school to be able to operate include "solidly constructed and suitable houses to serve as school premises" (State Education Commission and the Ministry of Public Security, 2004, p.8), safety equipment such as fire exits and fire extinguishers (Ding, 2004, p.16), school managers qualified in education, clear courses schedules, and teaching materials approved by the educational administration (Ding, 2004, p.21). Xiamen's policy also allows migrant teachers to "participate in in-service training activities as public schools teachers." Guangdong province also undertook a regulatory approach to migrant education. March 2010's "Guangdong Province's method of implementing the 'The People's Republic of China's law of fostering *minban* education'" stipulated that local government had to oversee and regulate the management of migrant schools (Mok, Wong and Guo, 2011, p.340). According to the website *Study in China* (2009), the Pudong district government allocates RMB ¥2,000 per year for each migrant child enrolled in local public schools.

3.3: *Hukou* reforms

Another way for children of migrant workers to access public education is through the reform of the household registration system. *Hukou* transfer is becoming easier for migrant workers. In the early 1990s, transferring one's *hukou* was a rare privilege, as city authorities were only authorised to grant permanent or semi-permanent permits to a minority of migrants, usually investors or high-skilled professionals, who had stable jobs and residences in the city (Chan and Buckingham, 2008, p.591). In 1997, and later in 2001, the State Council approved the Ministry of Public Security's "Experimental Plans on reforming the *hukou* system in small cities and towns" and "Suggestions on improving rural *hukou* management", which eased *hukou* transfer in small towns and cities (Wang, 2004; Chan, 2009, p.205). The 1997 plan offered a relaxation of the migration

restrictions, especially for skilled workers, the highly educated, but also for the young and the elderly. In 2001, it expanded, allowing people with a stable non-agricultural income and a permanent residence in town for two years to qualify for urban *hukou* in small cities and towns. Medium and large cities were allowed to offer the same kind of transfer, but with higher requirements. Some provinces, like Guizhou, decided to experiment further by offering a small town or city urban *hukou* to anyone who met the requirements of a stable income and residence, without having to wait for the usual two-years period (Wang, 2004, p.120-121). However, most of these reforms were suspended by Beijing in 2002, due to a lack of funding and infrastructure.

Another step in the *hukou* reform is the abolition of the agricultural and non-agricultural distinction. This makes the transfer considerably easier, as it is no longer a two-step procedure. The distinction was abolished in the 1990s in several big cities like Shenzhen, Guangzhou, and some districts of Beijing, and several provinces followed their lead. In 2005, the Ministry of Public Security announced the elimination of the division in eleven provinces, where the *hukou* was now to be strictly divided into urban and rural (Chan and Buckingham, 2008, p.604-605). In the early 2000s, Shijiazhuang and Zhengzhou experimented to give urban *hukou* to qualified migrant workers. But the operation was limited and soon withdrawn. During the first year of the reform, between 11,000 and 70,000 migrants were admitted, but as the categories were revised in 2003, only 670 migrants were admitted (Chan and Buckingham, 2008, p.602-603). Other methods were experimented elsewhere, like a permit system with points in Guangdong province since mid-2010, where "migrants have vied to obtain the 60 points necessary to qualify for a *hukou*. […] Education and skills, years of work in the city, and even good deeds like giving blood are taken into consideration" (Roberts, 2012, p.22).

Some reforms have led to a commodification of the *hukou*, as it is mostly accessible for migrants with a high salary or money to invest in the city. Since the late 1980s, local authorities began selling *hukou* permits, and by the end of 1993, around three million farmers had bought a city or town *hukou* (Fan, 2008, p.50). In Shanghai, the blue stamp registration system benefited migrants with

skills or money to invest (Deng, 2012). According to Roberts, "state-owned enterprises in Beijing and Shanghai are allotted thousands of new *hukou* every year to make it easier for them to hire promising job candidates from the hinterlands", but most of those end up on the black market. Regulations have been set to ban the selling of *hukou*, but the practice kept on in the 1990s (Mackenzie, 2002, p.310).

3.4: Limitations of the reforms

Despite the reforms, *hukou* transfer only concerns a minority of migrants, as requirements are still quite high. Major investors, skilled professionals, retired servicemen and people with higher university degrees are categories that do not apply to regular migrant workers. According to the Constitutional Executive Commission on China, "these uneven reforms to the *hukou* system discriminate against poor migrant workers in favour of the wealthy and educated" (2005, p.1). This can be revealed in the actual numbers of migrants who manage to transfer their *hukou*: in Ningbo, only 30,000 migrants out of two million were able to meet the requirements in 2001 (2005, p.5). But even for those who manage to transfer their *hukou*, the reforms sometimes do not answer their expectations, as some reforms are disassociated with benefits. In Ningxia, many migrants transferred their household registration, only to realise that they did not have any social benefits in the city (Fan, 2008, p. 171). In a majority of cases, migrants can access benefits in the city only in exchange for the land rights in the countryside (Chan, 2009, p.205). Chan and Buckingham argue that there has been "no substantive change in peasant migrants' struggles for equality and the right to the city in 2005, 2006 or 2007" (2008, p.586). There is a "gap between implementation and intent" and a more thorough reform is needed (Wong, 2012, p.887).

The same can be observed regarding the education reforms mentioned earlier. State guidelines are not always followed by local authorities, and "city governments can tighten the policy at their discretion" (Fan, 2008, p.51). In Beijing, despite the regulations, only 47 per cent of migrant children are enrolled in public schools, and they still face extra fees and discrimination (Wang, 2008,

p.693). Some provinces with a high migrant population find it hard to accommodate their children in state schools, as in Guangdong, where accommodating migrant children would necessitate the construction of over a hundred schools (Mok, Wong and Guo, 2011). When migrant children are enrolled in public schools, they are often placed in separate classes, where they do not mingle with local children (Wang and Holland, 2011, p.479). In Guangzhou, it is very hard to get enrolled in a good public school. Yuan's report (2010) shows migrant parents waiting outside the gate of the schools for hours under the rain to ensure that their children might get a place. The 2010 policy is not clearly enforced and many migrant children have to continue going to private schools, which contribute to their social exclusion by reinforcing stratification (Wang, 2008, p.701). Regarding migrant schools, despite the increased help that some of them receive, many others keep being shut down because of safety code violations or other reasons. In August 2011, "about 24 migrant schools in Haidian, Chaoyang and Daxing districts, involving some 14,000 students, were slated for demolition to make way for urbanization", leaving many children with no place to study (Liu, 2012). Despite important reforms in the education and the household registration systems, inequalities remain, and migrant children still have difficulties in accessing public education.

Chapter 4: Further experiments in Chongqing: Perspectives for the future:

As the previous chapter revealed, reforms have yet to make a real impact on migrant children's education chances. Further reform is needed. This chapter will assess the necessary basis for an efficient reform, and will study the recent experiments that started in 2010 in the provincial-level city of Chongqing.

4.1: Better working and living conditions for migrants

The improvement of migrants' working conditions can be the first step towards efficient reform. Indeed, recent reforms allowed only migrants with stable jobs to obtain a *hukou* transfer. However, this requirement can be quite hard to achieve, as Wang explains (2004, p.121): "a key problem has been the difficulty to find a stable job in the city, which has already been plagued by high unemployment for years." Because of the high turnover of migrants, most employers see them as a disposable workforce, and only offer short-term contracts (Fan, 2008, p.103). As many firms offer on-site dormitories and migrants have low salaries, it is difficult for them to have a stable residence in the city.

Various local governments have begun to enforce regulations to improve migrant workers' lives, to help them integrate into urban society. Some local governments have opened job centres as well as offices that offer legal advice for migrant workers, while other cities grant some urban social provisions such as minimum wage, pension and health insurance to migrants (Li, 2006, p.175). In June 2007, the National People's Congress "passed a law that called for a host of protections for workers […] which has the potential to increase workers' ability to obtain long-term, stable employment" (Chan and Buckingham, 2008, p.600). Such regulations can improve migrant workers' lives, and help them reach their goal of obtaining a local *hukou*. The Constitutional Executive Commission on China offered many recommendations to advance *hukou* reform, one of them being to grant *hukou* based on non-discriminatory criteria. Such a reform would allow migrants to transfer their place of registration based on their length of stay in urban areas, or would grant an urban *hukou* to children of long-term migrants (2005, p.12).

4.2: Migrant workers' willingness to transfer their *hukou*

In order for the *hukou* reform to be successful, migrants need to see it as an improvement on their actual situation. Fan talks about what she calls a '*hukou* paradigm':

> "To many peasants, obtaining urban *hukou* may not be as appealing as household division of labour that permits one or more members to circulate between and straddle rural and urban economies" (2008, p.11).

Various studies have shown that migrant workers do no always ask to transfer their place of registration when they have the opportunity. For some migrants, the ultimate goal is to be able to work in the city for a while, and then retire in the countryside, where they can return to a better life (Pun, 2005; Fan, 2008, p.89). Fan (2008, p.13) argues that "temporary migration enables peasant households to advance economically by obtaining the best of both worlds and that this strategy does not necessitate permanent settlement in the city." However, an increasing number of migrants have adapted to city life, and want to spend the rest of their lives in the cities (Li, 2006). Connelly, Roberts and Zheng (2011, p.286) concur by stating that a "2006 survey in Beijing found that nearly half of the migrants expressed a strong desire to stay" in the city. However, for migrants to want to settle in the city and to transfer to an urban *hukou*, they need to be offered good benefits.

Benefits that can convince migrants to settle in the city are often linked with their children's education. As was explained in earlier chapters, migrant children can endure poor education conditions if they are left-behind in the countryside, or if they migrate but have to attend private migrant schools. As such, *hukou* transfers can offer a better solution for migrants, as it can allow them to send their children to state schools more easily. Education is an important factor in migration. The 2000 national census showed a low mobility for children aged between ten and fourteen, which "suggests that having school-age children may be a deterrent for migration" (Fan, 2008, p.78). Another survey conducted in China in 2007 with

over 11,000 respondents “revealed that the most important implications of urban *hukou* are for children to receive education, followed by health and social insurance” (Fan, 2008, p.171). Other scholars have found similar results, showing that education was a priority factor in migration decisions. Most of the women surveyed in Song, Zheng and Qian’s study (2009, p.68) admitted that “better education opportunities were a top concern.” According to Koo (2012, p.553), “parents see education as the route out of poverty and a means of establishing a better life for their children.” Due to the lack of good public education in many of their home villages, “all of the respondents said they want their children to leave the countryside. They may look back fondly to their home places, but they recognize its poverty and backwardness and hope the next generation will have a better life” (Lu and Zhang, 2004, p.69). Education is thus one of the main motives for migrants to ask for a *hukou* transfer, as they hope it will grant their children better life chances.

This is why *hukou* reforms that offered transfers not linked with educational and other benefits were not successful. There is no point for migrants to transfer to a local registration, if this will not benefit them and their families. The same can the observed with the loss of land rights. Many of the reforms that were mentioned in the previous chapter operated as a bargain: migrants could gain urban status if they agreed to give up their land rights back home. However, this can be a strong deterrent for migrants, as farmland is an important source of income and food. It is a highly valued possession, and can serve as a form of insurance for migrants who do not know what the future holds for them in the city (Fan, 2008). Such a security proved very useful during the 2008 economic crisis. Indeed, because of the low demand on the world market, many workers were left unemployed, and 20 million migrants had to go back to the countryside for a while (*The Economist*, 2011). Land use rights are thus an asset that most migrants are not ready to give up easily. Because of these high demands, an efficient reform would necessitate taking into account migrants’ needs and expectations.

4.3: The Chongqing reform

The 2011 Chongqing reform to this day comes closest to answering most of these expectations. First, it is important to understand why Chongqing is a perfect experimental zone for this kind of reform. Chongqing has a population of 33 million, 10 million of them being urban residents, while the rest live in the rural hinterland (Cai et al., 2012, p.42). There is a large rural-urban disparity in the municipality, and most of the migrants who work in the urban centre come from the rural part of Chongqing. The municipality accounts for 30% of China's motorcycle production, and is the biggest automobile maker in the Western region, thanks to the Ford factories. It is also important in the production of personal computers and other information and technology products (Cai et al., 2012, p.30). As such, it is a very attractive city for investors and migrant workers alike. But there is a disparity between the urban residents and the number of people registered in the city, as according to the Goldman Sachs report, only 29 per cent of the Chongqing population is under urban *hukou*, while the number of actual urban residents is over 53 per cent (2011, p.23).

Chongqing has been part of the Go West Programme since 1999, and has been a provincial-level city since 1997[9]. As such, it has "the autonomy, power and implementation levels to test new approaches to sustainable urban development", and in 2007, was designated as a large-scale experimental zone, also called the "Comprehensive Pilot Zone for Urban-Rural Integrated Development and Reform" (Cai et al., 2012, p.39). Chongqing has managed to innovate and develop its own model, and is regarded as a pioneer. Instead of trying to recreate the past successes of the developed coastal cities, the municipality has realised that it does not rely on the same assets, and has started to develop its own model. The result has been successful, as Chongqing's economy is booming, and the municipality has launched a series of institutional, social and environmental reforms since 2008. Because of all of these criteria, Chongqing is a perfect experimental zone. On top of it, it is often described as a gateway to China's interior provinces, which makes the municipality a key actor in the exchange of

[9] This paragraph is based on Cai et al. (2012, pp.39-42).

information, manpower, goods and skills between the Eastern and the Western regions of China. If the *hukou* reforms attempted by Chongqing are successful, they can offer a great example for the rest of the country, be it the successfully developed coastal cities, or the rural provinces in the West.

The Chongqing reforms of the *hukou* system were first initiated mid-2010, as the municipality released City Document n°78 "Regarding rural and urban *hukou* system reform" (Goldman Sachs 2011, p.24). This document set the target of granting 3.39 million migrants with urban *hukou* in the first year of the reform, and then 800,000-900,000 per year in the following years in order to reach the final target of around ten million by 2020. The costs of converting three million people were estimated at RMB ¥200 billion for the first year alone (*The Economist*, 2011). The qualifications to transfer to urban registration were easier and more accessible than under previous reforms. For the main city areas, migrants needed to have five years of work experience in the city. For other areas, three years of experience were enough (Goldman Sachs, 2011). Newly converted migrants could then access social benefits such as unemployment and retirement insurance, education and healthcare. On the other hand, they were allowed to keep their old rights linked to their rural *hukou*: residential land rights, arable land rights and forest land rights. As was mentioned earlier, the fact that they could keep their land rights was an important factor in migrants' decision to transfer their place of registration, and so was the access to education benefits. Because of these factors, migrants were more inclined to ask for urban *hukou* in Chongqing. An interview with Chongqing's mayor, Huang Qifan, revealed the ease of the process: he states that all that is needed is a job certificate, a *danwei* certificate, and information regarding the previous *hukou* (National People's Radio, 2011). Huang Qifan assured his audience that the whole administration process would only last around half an hour.

4.4: Results of the reform

The reform is still quite recent, which means it is hard to really assess its impact, but the Goldman Sachs report claims that the Chongqing municipality is "on track to reach targets thus far" (2011, p.28). The reform was officially launched

on July 11st, 2011, and after one month, less than 50,000 migrants had transferred their *hukou* to become urban residents, according to Cai et al. (2012, p.50). But following studies have shown a better progress. In his interview, Huang Qifan stated that: "in a little over five months, by February, already 1.65 million people had effectively transferred their *hukou*" (National People's Radio, 2011). This is quite an achievement, considering that the estimated number of those having already worked three years in the city was around two million. These people will probably bring their spouses and children, if they are not already in the city, which will lead to three million new urban residents in one year. *The Economist* described the reform as responsible for the emergence of a "new class of urban residents who can enjoy the best of both worlds" (2011). Chengdu is following in Chongqing's footsteps and has launched its own reform, planning to "eliminate welfare-related barriers to migration within the city boundary by the end of this year" (*The Economist*, 2012). Migrants there will be allowed to enjoy city benefits while keeping their land rights. This is a huge financial burden, but the excellent growth of both Chongqing and Chengdu may allow them to continue the reforms.

Concerning the actual effects on migrant children's education, it is still too early to provide a definite answer. However, education is one of the most attractive benefits for migrant workers. As migrant workers are being granted local registration, their children gain education rights. The Chongqing municipal government is planning for over 250,000 migrant children to be absorbed into state schools (China Up, 2011). There are already over 600 schools, and 150 more that are solely dedicated to serving migrant students. Because of the ageing of the population in the Chongqing municipality[10], public schools have the capacity to accommodate new migrant students. Even so, there is a plan to construct 115 new primary or secondary schools, in order to be able to host future students. It seems that migrant children are going to be the first ones to benefit from the reforms, as they can finally enrol in public schools.

[10] The number of primary and secondary students has been decreasing since 2002, according to the Chongqing Statistical Bureau (China Up, 2011).

Chapter 5: Conclusion:

This dissertation has presented and explained the various challenges of migrant education under the household registration system. The system has buttressed an unequal China, and because of difficulties in accessing good public education, the inequalities are being reproduced at school. Chapter two of this dissertation gave an overview of all the problems faced by migrant children, be it the hardship of being left-behind in the countryside, the difficulties in accessing state schooling in the cities, or the bad quality of private migrant education.

Several solutions have been tried out in the past decades in order to solve some of these issues. One solution is to attempt the equalisation of education, by allowing children with or without local *hukou* to benefit from the same education rights. That can be enforced either by allowing migrant children to enrol in state schools without paying extra fees, and without being segregated into special migrant classes, or by supporting and supervising private migrant schools, to help them reach the level of other local schools. The third chapter of this dissertation has summarised such attempts that were launched in the past few years. However, they were often localised attempts that were not very successful, or were shut down due to a lack of funding and infrastructure.

The third chapter also focused on another way to solve these problems, that is, via the reform of the household registration system. Various reforms have been experimented in the past decade to allow migrant workers to transfer their place of registration. However, most of these reforms only benefited the highly skilled, the highly educated and the very rich migrants, which represent only a small minority of the migrant population.

As it became clear that further reform was needed, the fourth chapter of this dissertation offered a reflection on what could be the foundations for a successful and efficient reform. In order to appeal to migrant workers, such a reform would need to protect their land rights, while offering them city benefits, such as health and education rights for their children. The recent Chongqing reform answers

both these expectations, which is why the chapter outlined the characteristics and consequences of this reform.

Chengdu has developed its own *hukou* reform, and some other cities might follow Chongqing's lead in the next few years. However, there are still many challenges left to face. First, too big and too rapid a reform could be a threat to the economy. According to Wang (2008, p.692), there are over 300,000 migrant families that would be willing to settle in Beijing, which lead to an "exacerbate[d] pressure on the urban infrastructure, energy supply and public transport." Such a strain on the infrastructure and the economy can hurt the reform, as happened in 2002 and 2004, when Guangzhou and Shenzhen put a stop to their *hukou* reforms, claiming that migrants were overloading the urban infrastructure (Fan, 2008, p.51). Another challenge to face is that of discrimination. Reforms can be a first step towards migrant integration into the cities, but a full integration will probably take more time. Migrant children still have to face prejudice that they might lower the level of the class in state schools (Goodburn, 2009). Despite the recent reforms in Tianjin, migrant workers are still discriminated against by their urban employers and the other urban residents (Li, 2006).

As the reforms are still on-going, there are many perspectives for future research. In order to assess the reality of the education conditions of migrant children in Chongqing, a long-term study could focus on their integration into public education. At the time when this dissertation was written, it was still early to see any concrete difference, and such a study would need more time and resources, but it could be a topic for future research.

This past year has seen the fall of Bo Xilai, who was Chongqing's Party Secretary. The municipality's model was tainted by the association. Although the reforms have not been stopped, these events might hurt the reform's chances to be reproduced elsewhere. As a new leadership comes to power and as changes continue to unfold, it might be worthwhile to study the consequences of the politician's downfall for the reforms he initiated.

Other models are being tested elsewhere, which could allow us to take a comparative viewpoint. Researchers could try to assess whether it is more successful to implement household registration reforms or to launch equalisation campaigns granting the same rights to locals and migrant workers. Both campaigns act toward a similar goal to reduce the inequalities created by the *huji* system, but their methods are different, and as such would be interesting to compare.

This dissertation mentioned briefly issues of gender and migration. It would be a worthwhile project to study whether the reforms are successful in decreasing gender differences between migrant boys and girls. Are migrant girls more likely to pursue high school or even higher education when they have better opportunities? This kind of research could focus either on the household registration reforms in Chongqing or elsewhere, or on the education reforms that granted more rights to migrant children in certain areas.

The household registration system is now seen as "a major obstacle in China's path to becoming a modern, first-world nation and global leader" (Chan, 2009, p.216). As such, it is a critical issue, which is why solutions keep being tested all over the country. In a *Wall Street Journal* article of 2010, Canaves stated that the issues linked to the *hukou* system would be on the agenda of the National People's Congress' annual full session, and that Premier Wen Jiabao had admitted the need for further reform.

In 2011, Goldman Sachs reported that the household registration system reform had been announced as a target by the State Council in 2009. The reform might even be featured in the 12th 5-year-plan (Goldman Sachs, 2011). Very recently, a State Council proposal was made public, granting migrant workers the right to ask for urban *hukou* in county-level and medium cities. According to the circular, "people who have had stable jobs for three years, stable residences, and have paid social security insurance for at least one year can also apply for permits to live in the city permanently, along with their spouses, unmarried children, and parents" (Page, 2012). According to Deng (2012), this notice delineates the future for *huji* reforms, as it also announces that welfare benefits should be stripped from the

huji system. However, this circular offers no implementation date, and local governments are free to continue with their current systems. According to the China Economic Review (2012), this vague timeline might hurt the reform, as it makes it dependant on local authorities. Lack of necessary funding can be used as an excuse by local officials to delay reforms, but under-reporting revenues and corruption have become very common in local governments. As such, the central government needs to be more involved in localities' finances.

The fact that the circular does not offer any implementation date reflects a pragmatic viewpoint. The practical reality is that cities need to develop in order to gain the absorptive capacity to welcome rural migrants. Only then can they afford to offer migrant workers the benefits that go along with the local registration. The central and local governments need to increase their investments in public welfare, while pursuing further economic development.

As such, there are still many challenges left to face, and the road to a real *hukou* reform will be a long and bumpy one. The household registration system has existed as a basic feature of Chinese society for 54 years, and the consequences of its reforms may well prove crucial to China's future development path.

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