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The marginality of migrant children in the urban Chinese educational system

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The present paper explores issues of the educational marginality of migrant children in urban settings in two cities in China. The numbers of urban migrants exceed 100 million and are growing as China modernizes. This is creating tensions between residents and recent arrivals who lack residential registration and access to public services. As a result, migrant children often attend informal, private and usually unregulated schools of low quality organized by their communities. These tend to reinforce social stratification and reproduce marginality across the generations. The paper argues that state failure to provide basic education risks a growing divide between urban residents and recent migrants that has social consequences that must be addressed to remove discriminatory practices and resolve potential conflicts between hosts and migrant communities.

Keywords: China; education; migrant children; citizenship; marginality

Introduction and context

China has experienced massive demographic mobility and reallocation of rural surplus labor caused by the rapid development of the market economy. Urbanization has proceeded rapidly, as economic growth of as much as 10% a year for two decades, and has transformed China’s agriculturally based economy. The new leadership in the post-Mao era adopted an open-door policy to foreign investment and market-oriented economic reforms, which have generated large demands for labor in and around the cities. The new policies have given more freedom than under the planned economy to develop individually owned and corporate businesses outside the managed labor system of the past, allowing employment of those without local citizenship. This has resulted in a ‘mobile labor force’ of over 100 million workers who follow work opportunities to areas where there are labor shortages. Incomes outside agriculture are much higher and provide a motor for migration of a temporary or semi-permanent kind. Increasingly, migrant workers are accompanied by their children and those who stay longer start families. In 1995, there were 80 million migrants throughout China, including two or three million school-age children. By 2000, the total number of migrants increased to 100 million. Estimates of the number of migrant children vary, but one recent analysis suggested there were seven million to 10 million (Zhou 2000, 34).

Beijing and Xiamen, the case-study cities for this study, are both large cities that draw large numbers of rural migrants. As the capital and political, economic and cultural center of the nation, Beijing is a focal point for investment, and with the successful Olympic bid...
many huge national construction projects are underway. Tourism is booming and Beijing is the gateway to China because of its rich historical and cultural heritage. It is also a major center for a wide range of service-sector industries. The migrant population makes up one-third of the total population of Beijing. There were about three million migrants in 1997, which was 10 times more than in 1978 (Public Security Bureau of Beijing Municipality 1997), and since then numbers have continued to grow. Those under 15 years old numbered 162,000 or about seven percent of the total migrant population.

Xiamen is a coastal city in the southern part of China, and is an island in the Taiwan straits. Administratively, it belongs to the southern Province of Fujian. It was officially defined as a special economic zone by the central government in the early 1980s. Because of the favorable policies associated with its status, the economy of Xiamen City has developed rapidly. Its pleasant environment and good living conditions have attracted increasing numbers of rural migrants. The proportion of the migrant population is equal to or even greater than that of local residents. Between 1984 and 1997, the migrant population grew from 39,000 to 380,000 (Mi and Ding 1998, 41). In Kaiyuan District, where this research was conducted, local residents numbered 290,000 while migrants numbered 230,000 (Government of Kaiyuan District 2000). In 2000, there were about 30,000 migrant children between ages six years and 14 years in Xiamen, and one-half of these children were in Kaiyuan District.

The growing number of school-age migrant children has created great challenges for urban public school systems that are constrained by resources and the existing social infrastructure. The dual-household registration system in China divides urban and rural residents into two different populations with different entitlements, opportunities and risks. The urban population enjoys a set of social welfare policies and access to facilities that is largely non-existent in rural areas. Although rural citizens can now move to urban areas, getting formal approval to register in a medium-sized or large city is unusual and often beyond their reach (Chan 1999, 52). 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.

The policy development process for addressing the educational needs of migrant children has been lagging behind the demographic changes. It was not until 1998 that the central government issued policy guidelines requiring local authorities to address the problems. In recent years, equal education opportunity of migrant children has increasingly become a high priority in the agenda of the present government since it regards building a harmonious society as an equally important goal as economic prosperity. The Chinese Government believes that the destination education authority should be responsible for the education of migrant children, and the public schools should be the major channel for the education of migrant children. However, within the present dual-household system, it is a paradox for the destination state to take the responsibility for the education of migrant children. To what extent the policy is implemented is largely determined by the awareness and attitudes of different local governments towards the issue.

In the capital Beijing the municipal government takes a very cautious attitude towards educational provision for migrants, as there is anxiety that easing the situation will accelerate the growth of migrants and will increase pressure to make it easier to obtain urban social rights. The policy-makers are particularly concerned with the image of the capital and generally consider migrants as a disproportionate source of social and civic problems. Over 300,000 migrant households are thought to wish to settle in Beijing, and this will exacerbate pressure on the urban infrastructure, energy supply, and public transport (Office of Management of Migrants of Beijing Municipality 1999, 187). It was only in 2002 that
the Beijing Municipal Government finally promulgated its own education policy (Beijing Municipal Government 2002) for migrant children under the pressure from research on the growing problems and media stories in the popular press. The school-age population in urban area is declining as a result of the family planning policy in recent years, making it possible for a growing number of migrant children to go to public schools. It is estimated that in Beijing about 47% of migrant children are now in public schools. Although they are in public schools and receive the same education as urban children, they are labeled jiedu students (students from outside community, borrowing a place to study) and have to pay extra fees, they are more likely to have learning problems due to more frequent school transfer experiences and they suffer from cultural and institutional discrimination within public schools.

More than 50% of the migrant children have to go to unregulated informal private schools that are often of poor quality and are located in a variety of non-purpose-built buildings. These informal private schools, also called migrant schools, are generally located in the outskirts of cities, where floating populations tend to concentrate. They are schools founded without government authorization and they exist specifically for migrant children and rarely, if ever, enroll local residents. In general, migrant schools suffer from poor and inadequate facilities and rarely have much outside space. The teachers are poorly qualified and there is a high turnover. There is little or no regulation and supervision from the local authorities. It is a matter of growing concern that many are run essentially for profit rather than to provide basic education services.

In Xiamen among 9158 migrant children known to be at primary schools, 3048 or 33.7% were studying in state urban schools in 2002. The Xiamen Municipal Government issued its own Temporary Methods of Education for Migrant Children in 2000 (Xiamen Municipal Government 2000). Realizing public schools have limited capacity to admit all of the migrant children, this document indicated that the government would recognize migrant schools officially when they met specified requirements. They would then acquire legal status for operation, and become integrated into the management system of local education authorities. The local school inspection had set up inspection and evaluation systems for these schools in order to supervise their quality. The approach has been more positive than in Beijing, and the contrasts between the two cities are worthy exploration.

The research
The present research focuses on children enrolled in private schools set up by migrants. It explores the educational marginality of migrant children in urban settings in two cities in China, Beijing and Xiamen, and draws on studies from other locations. It focuses on the low quality and unregulated migrant schools that lead to the reproduction of the lower status of migrant children.

Since most migrant schools are not registered there is no way of selecting schools according to a systematic sampling frame. In Beijing, migrant schools were identified through a scoping exercise with key informants in and around areas where such schools were known to exist. In Xiamen, migrant schools known to the Xiamen Education Bureau were identified. Sixty-one children were randomly selected from four schools in Beijing, and 48 children from four schools in Xiamen. Interviews were conducted using focus groups and individual discussion with these children. The data were tape-recorded and transcribed. Semi-structured semi-structured interview questions were used to guide discussion. In Beijing the sample included 29 boys and 32 girls, and in Xiamen the sample included 25 boys and 23 girls. Eight out of 61 children in Beijing had attended urban public schools.
and later transferred to migrant schools. The participating Beijing children came from 14 different provinces, and of these Anhui, Hebei and Henan were the most common. In the case of the Xiamen sample, nearly 70% of the children came from within Fujian Province (see Table 1). School leaders and teachers as well as local officials were also interviewed.

For better understanding of the issue of low-quality and unregulated migrant schools that lead to the reproduction of the lower status of migrant children, this article first examines the context of demographic changes and how urban citizenship contributes to the exclusions and marginality of migrant children in urban public systems.

Citizenship, marginality and exclusion in urban public system

Citizenship is commonly defined as inclusion in a shared community that confers a set of rights and responsibilities (Marshall 1950; Turner 1986). As noted above, urban citizenship in China is largely defined by urban household registration, which grants the urban population a set of social rights associated with the provision of a workplace, of medical care, housing and childcare as well as subsidies for public transport. Most important for this analysis is that urban children have a right to go to local schools with very low fees. These entitlements and rights are denied to rural citizens in rural areas, and even more so to migrants who live and work in cities. The citizenship of migrants and their children is therefore compromised despite the fact that access to basic education is compulsory and free under the Compulsory Education Law.

The concept of social exclusion has emerged as a central feature of debates and analysis of poverty, inequality and justice. Although the debate takes different forms in countries of the North and the South, the underlying constructs are converging. The Millennium Development Goals, to which China subscribes, provide for universal access to educational services and dramatic reductions in poverty. There is broad agreement that exclusion is multidimensional, including deprivation of economic, social, gender, cultural and political
rights. Social exclusion is a much broader concept than material poverty, and includes not only access to services but also discrimination in the delivery of those services through differences in quality, reach and effectiveness. Social inclusion implies integration into mainstream norms of access and citizenship undifferentiated by social characteristics of different populations (Haan 1998, 12–13). Migrants in China are yet to be included in this sense, not least because of their institutional and social exclusion from public education systems.

Institutional exclusions

Haan and Maxwell point out that social exclusion puts institutional processes at the heart of the poverty debate. They argue that institutions and the actors they contain are central to the processes that cause and reinforce deprivation, and that this has implications for public policy (Haan and Maxwell 1998, 5). Kabeer also notes that exclusion is the outcome of institutional processes. People are excluded by the act of some agent, the action of powerful ‘insider’ groups (Kabeer 2000, 87). At a macro-level, the dual-household registration system is the manifestation of an institutional process that acts through its agents to limit the number of people who can claim the social rights associated with urban social citizenship. At a more meso and local level, local education authorities are only mandated to take responsibility for the education of children within their community, which historically is strongly defined by local birth and residence, reinforced by language and cultural practices. Migrants do not possess these identifiers that signify membership of the community and are easily classed as outsiders.

One of the institutional practices of social exclusion identified by Kabeer (citing Parkin 1979) is social closure. It entails the deliberate, and often explicit, attempts through which ‘social collectivities seek to maximize rewards by restricting access to resources and opportunities to a limited circle of eligibles’ (Kabeer 2000, 92). Local school systems and schools purposely create different policies for enrolling urban and migrant children to limit the numbers of migrant children. The latter have to take difficult entrance examinations to gain admittance even at primary school level. One Xiamen primary school principal said that 80 migrant children applied to enter his school in August 2001, but only 15 were admitted. Another Xiamen primary school principal said that more than 100 migrant children applied for her school last year, but only 20 were admitted. These institutional exclusions are reinforced by financial and cultural marginalization as discussed below.

Financial excluders

Marginalization resulting in social exclusion occurs when financial obstacles are created that have a different impact on different groups seeking public services. The case studies indicate that public schools use financial means to exclude migrant children by systematically charging additional fees many times those for local residents. Migrant children are formally labeled as jiedu students (students from outside community, borrowing a place to study). Migrant children are excluded by this institutionalized process. As Evans argues, ‘Exclusion is the outcome of institutional process, and the excluded are defined by such institutional processes’ (1998, 43). With the identifier of jiedu, migrant students are excluded from the very low fee regime of residents, which amounts to 100 yuan or so, and cannot enroll normally.

Thus, in Beijing, jiedu students have to pay the following three types of fees in addition to the regular fees that all students pay (Beijing Committee of Mingmong Party 2000):
jiedu fei (fee for study in a school where you are not a local resident): 480 yuan/term per head according to the regulations of Beijing municipality.

ze xiao fei (fee for selection of a school): 1000 yuan/term per head.

zan zhu fei (fee for supporting the school): in principle this should not exceed the standard of fee for the joining schools, but the actual amount is based on the negotiation between the school and the parents. In 2000, 70% of the schools requested this fee. The highest fees were 20,000–30,000 yuan, while the average fee was 1908 yuan.

Few migrant parents are able to pay such high fees. A study of the household backgrounds of 500 pupils in migrant schools (Zhao 2000, 14) indicated that many parents were small family stall owners and casual workers. In most cases, their monthly household income was between 800 and 1500 yuan. Per-capita income was between 200 and 350 yuan/month, which was around the local poverty line (Cook, Wang, and Tang 2007, 218). A study in Shanghai showed that the migrant households’ expenses were around 100–600 yuan/month. The general average was 524 yuan/household. The Engle coefficient\(^1\) was as high as 63.7% for them when expenses were broken down, as 288 yuan out of 523 yuan would be spent on the consumption of food each month. The next two biggest expenses were savings and money sent home, and housing. Only 2.9% of the expenses were directed towards children’s education (Zhang 1998, 255) (see Table 2).

In the case studies amongst the 61 students in my Beijing survey, eight had studied in urban public schools but later transferred to migrant schools. The high cost of urban public education was one of the major reasons for them to transfer out of the urban schools. Several respondents in the case studies portrayed the problem from their own experience: a 12-year-old migrant boy in Beijing commented on whether he would prefer to go to public school:

Yes. But [we have] no money, prices are too high. I studied there before, [I paid] about a thousand yuan one year. Now it went up to 2000 or 3000 yuan … We pay more than them [local children]. We have to pay jiedu fee as wandi ren [people from outside Beijing]. We paid 480 yuan jiedu fee in advance and later it went up to 600 yuan. Beijing children don’t have to pay this fee.

He only paid 400–500 yuan each term for everything in Huangzhuang migrant school.

Table 2. Average monthly life expenses for migrant households.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Item</th>
<th>Average amount (yuan)</th>
<th>% of total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Daily drink and food</td>
<td>287.53</td>
<td>54.91</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Saving and sending home</td>
<td>72.33</td>
<td>13.81</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Housing</td>
<td>63.19</td>
<td>12.07</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cigarettes and wine for men</td>
<td>40.92</td>
<td>7.81</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Clothing and make ups for women</td>
<td>17.73</td>
<td>3.39</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Water, electricity and gas</td>
<td>15.31</td>
<td>2.92</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Children’s education</td>
<td>15.18</td>
<td>2.90</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Entertainment</td>
<td>7.91</td>
<td>1.51</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Transportation</td>
<td>3.54</td>
<td>0.68</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>523.65</td>
<td>100.00</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Cultural exclusion

Formally, social citizenship in China is predominantly determined by the household registration that directly implies rights to socioeconomic protections; it is also a crucial factor in determining cultural citizenship. Cultural citizenship refers to the right to belong to a broader community in ways that are felt by the individual and recognized by others, as well as to the responsibility to protect the dignity of that community (Fong and Murphy 2006, 2). Interviews with migrant children in Beijing indicate the extent to which they feel that they are not welcomed and accepted by their host communities. Migrant children said that such exclusion made them feel ‘very uncomfortable’, ‘angry’, ‘lacking in a sense of security’ and ‘annoyed’. Although they praised the prosperity and advanced development of their new urban homes, migrant children lamented that their new neighbors were ‘not friendly’, ‘bullying’, ‘detesting’ and ‘isolating’. Table 3 presents a chart accumulating migrant children’s comments about Xiamen and Xiamen people.

Migrant children as jiedu students threaten the status quo within particular communities without necessarily any overt and conscious decision-making at a local level. Cultural preferences of dominant groups and the conservatism of established communities with embedded social cohesion can be translated into ‘non-decision-making’, which is intended to reduce overt conflicts of interest between those entrenched within institutions and those they seek to deny voice and access (Kabeer 2000, 91). Labeling jiedu students ‘creates a boundary marker that could be used to exclude or marginalize other groups. It could be used to create “us–them” situation’ (Thompson 2003, 16).

Migrant children know that urban public schools are superior to migrant schools. Typical comments were that ‘We can learn more knowledge in the public schools because they have the strengths of better teaching quality’ (Xiaomei, female, age 12 years, Beijing). Some also saw public school as a means of social integration that they were denied. As Yang Song (an 11-year-old migrant boy in Xiamen) said, ‘It is better for us to study in the same school with local children so that we can better understand each other’. However, the rural migrant students in the sample felt uncomfortable with mainstream schools because they made them feel unwelcome. Hu Peng (a 14-year-old migrant boy in Beijing) suggests such discomfort motivates even a relatively wealthy migrant child to transfer to private migrant schools.

Table 3. Migrant children’s perception about Xiamen City and people.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>About Xiamen City</th>
<th>About Xiamen people</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>More developed economically</td>
<td>Some people are more conservative and can tell between local and waidi (outside) people</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Environment is better</td>
<td>They use local dialects to swear at me</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Life is richer (fengfu)</td>
<td>They are not as honest as we are</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Beautiful scenery</td>
<td>They are not friendly</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Green mountains and pretty water (shanqin shuixiu)</td>
<td>They bully waidi people on the ground that they are local</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Huge supermarket and department store</td>
<td>They call us xiangbalao (people from rural areas)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Has many interesting places</td>
<td>They are spoiled</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>They are annoyed by us and detest (xianqi) us</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>They are more fussy/picky</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>They isolate me</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Xiamen people are not very good</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Private Migrant Schools and the Reproduction of Migrant Marginality

*Growth of informal private schools*

In Beijing there were over 100 private migrant schools in 1999. This number increased to 150 in 2000 and over 300 in 2001. Duan estimated that, as of 1999, there were 50,000 migrant children (about one-third of all the migrant children in Beijing) who were studying in this type of schools (2000, 3). The growth of migrant schools was caused by the failure of state provision. In Chaoyang District of Beijing, only 54% of the 71,000 school-age migrant children can be enrolled into public schools. In Changping District of Beijing, only 9315 were admitted to public school from a population of 20,000 school-age migrant children, representing 47% of the total (Wang 2005, 67).

Xinhua Primary School is a typical example of a migrant school, set up as a direct result of state failure in providing basic education opportunities to migrant children. Ms Zhang, the principal of Xinghua Primary School for Migrant Children, was herself a migrant from Hebei Province. She used to be a public teacher in a rural primary school. She and her children went to Beijing to join her husband, who had migrated to Beijing a few years earlier. Realizing that it would be hard for their children to go to school in Beijing, she started to teach them herself. She lived in a migrant area in Fentai district, and her neighbors were all migrants. They all had difficulties trying to get their children enrolled at local public schools. When they heard that she was a teacher and taught her own children, they sent their children to her classes and soon she found her own home was too small to teach so many students. In 1998, she decided to set up her own school, which she called Xinhua Primary School. She rented an unwanted courtyard that used to be a township government building, and hired a few teachers from her hometown. The enrollments in this school have been growing rapidly. There were around 80 pupils in 2000 and it increased to around 500 in the second term of 2000/01 and 800 in the fall of 2001. This experience of rapid growth is replicated in many other migrant schools (e.g. Huangzhuang School in Beijing; see Table 4).

*Reinforcement of marginality*

China’s demographic changes and economic growth create challenges that are unique in magnitude and grounded in specific strategies to manage social transitions. Several issues emerge from recent changes in policy and from empirical data from the case studies, which are generating new patterns of exclusion.

First, although local policy has required fees for *jiedu* students to be reduced in line with those for local residents, a number of certificates and documents have to be presented to admit a *jeidu* student. These include a provisional residential certificate, parents’

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>School year</th>
<th>First term</th>
<th>Second term</th>
<th>Growth rate (%)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1998/99</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>300</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1999/00</td>
<td>500</td>
<td>700</td>
<td>57.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2000/01</td>
<td>1200</td>
<td>1500</td>
<td>53.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2001/02</td>
<td>1500</td>
<td>2100</td>
<td>28.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Annual average increase rate</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>46.3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Some migrant children do not have the birth registrations if they were born outside the family planning policy (which is more loosely regulated in rural areas). Second, even if public schools have the capacity to enroll more migrant students, they often remain unwilling to do so because the government financial allocation per head does not count children without local citizenship and they will thus receive less income per student. Third, it is difficult to allay fears that learning achievement will suffer, and migrant children will create extra work and affect the general teaching and learning quality of the school as a whole.

Marginality is reinforced not only by exclusion from the public school system, but also by poor quality within migrant schools.

**Quality issues**

Informal private schools – known in Chinese as *min ban xue xiao* – are mostly individually or family owned, located in poor, peripheral and recently settled areas around cities with weak infrastructure. The case studies indicated that school facilities were unpleasant, unhygienic and in areas where refuse remained uncollected and sewage disposal was inadequate. The classrooms were small and dark, with broken windows and falling ceilings. Desks and chairs did not match. Almost no space or equipment was provided for play or sports. Migrant children referred to state urban school as ‘proper schools’ (*zhenggui xuexiao*), implying that their schools were not proper. ‘Sometimes the ceiling in the back of the classroom is falling down in this school’, a nine-year-old boy in Beijing said about his private migrant school. ‘So we have our hearts in our mouths. It is quite dangerous.’

National requirements specify that teachers at public primary schools have to have received professional teacher training at the secondary level. These requirements, however, are not enforced even at legally recognized private migrant schools. It is estimated that nearly 40% of the teachers at legally recognized private migrant schools in Xiamen were not educated for teaching profession. The local school inspectors also reported that some of the teachers were completely unfamiliar with teaching and learning processes including lesson preparation, delivering lessons or correcting homework. The actual performance of the teachers was very inconsistent with the qualifications they claimed. At illegal private migrant schools, teacher qualification was even worse. None of the teachers in Xinghua School in Beijing had any teacher training, and two of them only had junior secondary school education (see Table 5).

The motivation of the teachers interviewed was very low at least in part because they were poorly paid, with one-half or less than one-half the income of public teachers. The monthly average salary for the teachers of Xinghua School in Beijing was between 250 and 333 yuan. It was 600–700 yuan for Zhenhua School in Beijing, and 600–1000 yuan for Huangzhuang School in Beijing. Teachers’ salaries in migrant schools are not regulated and

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Qualification</th>
<th>n (%)</th>
<th>Annual wages (yuan)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Junior secondary school</td>
<td>2 (20%)</td>
<td>3000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Senior high school</td>
<td>6 (60%)</td>
<td>4000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Secondary professional school</td>
<td>2 (20%)</td>
<td>4000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>10</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
are determined by the principals and owners. As a result the teaching force is very unstable. Most take teaching as a temporary job when they first came to the city. They leave as soon as they find another job that pays more. The principal of Jingming Primary School, a private migrant school in Xiamen, said that one-third of the teachers in this school had left between the fall term of 2001 and the spring term of 2002.

Teachers in migrant schools lack the social rights of public school teachers, including living allowances, housing allowances, medical security, retirement payments, and preference policies for the education of their children. According to the principal of Songyue School in Xiamen, the salary of the teachers in her school was less than one-half of the average salary of public school teachers. A consequence of low morale and salaries is irregular teacher attendance, which is widely reported as an issue.

Private migrant schools taught most of the subjects taught in public schools, including Chinese, mathematics, writing, physical education, English, fine arts, moral education, and social studies. But often one teacher has to teach many subjects, including those for which he or she is unqualified. Without specialized teachers and necessary facilities, minor subjects such as physical education, music and fine arts were not often taught in migrant schools.

The general guidelines of the Chinese Government for private schools suggest that local authorities should be ‘actively encouraging, rigorously supporting, giving appropriate guidance and strengthening management’. The provisional methods on education of migrant children of Beijing Municipality states that ‘In the areas that migrants are relatively concentrated, social organizations and individual citizen can refer to the municipal criteria for schools to open schools specially for migrant children after evaluation and approval of district or county education authorities’ (Beijing Municipal Government 2002, 4). However, up until 2007 very few migrant schools in Beijing had been officially approved and been granted legal status. In some districts more radical measures have been taken to outlaw these schools entirely. Students, teachers, and owners of illegal private migrant schools live in constant fear of adverse and unpredictable government action. In 2001, Beijing’s Fengtai District closed over 50 private migrant schools, leaving only six intact. Most of these schools eventually re-opened, returning back to their illegal, unregulated conditions. Although inability to meet the criteria for public schools is the major reason for not granting legal status to migrant schools, behind this excuse is that Beijing local government is unwilling to take responsibility for these schools. Therefore it is estimated that over 60% of the migrant children are studying in unregulated migrant schools where both hardware conditions and the teaching quality are very poor.

Xiamen takes a more positive approach towards migrant schools than in Beijing. Realizing the limited capacity of public schools, it regards existing migrant schools as an important supplement means for the education of migrant children. The local state plays the role of quality control for these schools. It grants legal status for those that have met the basic conditions issued by the local government. Although the basic conditions for these schools are much lower standards than that for public schools, these regulated migrant schools at least ensure the basic hardware conditions and the number of subjects required by the national curriculum to be taught. It is estimated that over 70% of the migrant children who are not in public schools in Xiamen are studying in regulated migrant schools. Integrated into the management system of local education authorities, they are under the supervision of the local school inspection system and the teachers in these schools can participate in in-service training activities as public school teachers. The government gives low-quality, illegal private migrant schools that lack the resources a certain period of time for them to make efforts to meet the basic requirements of the
government, and will recognize them when they are thought to be qualified after official inspection and evaluation.

Conclusion

The present paper has developed insights into the development of new social marginality related to education within China that contribute to and reinforce stratifications that exclude urban migrants from full citizenship. It contributes to a broader international debate about the role of private and community-based provision for marginalized groups. It provides case-study insights into an area where state failure to provide public services is not adequately addressed by dependence on alternative forms of provision.

Internationally the emergence of informal private schooling provision to cope with increased demand from the children of urban economic migrants is not uncommon. In many parts of Africa and South Asia there is substantial internal migration driven by growing economic opportunity, which stresses public school systems. Most states are now constitutionally obliged to provide basic education for all, but many poorer countries fail to do so. There are many reasons. Some are institutional – civil identity and registration and school admittance procedures may preclude attendance. Other reasons are financial – urban migrants are often relatively poor and unable to pay costs affordable by long-term residents. And yet others are cultural and reflect antipathy of hosts to new arrivals – language and cultural practices differ, residents resent the dilution of their benefits by extension of services to outsiders.

Case studies indicated that about 47% of migrant children in Beijing and that only 34% in Xiamen are now in public schools. State failure to deliver educational services to significant numbers of children, and growing levels of unmet demand, stimulate the growth of alternative providers. Informal unregulated schools remain a small proportion of the total number of schools in most countries but are significant as ‘providers of last resort’, a role the state has relinquished by default. Although some argue that these unregulated schools may displace public schooling for the poorest and represent a preference rather than a forced choice (Tooley 2006, 1–2), there is little evidence to believe that this could constitute an effective public policy choice intended to reduce exclusion and deliver services more equitably to those without purchasing power. Few if any middle-income countries and no rich ones adopt this strategy.

The present study reinforces the evidence that low-cost private schools, run for profit and serving marginalized groups, are unlikely to contribute to reductions in social inclusion. They may contribute to achieving higher nominal enrolment rates and thus appear to complement efforts to achieve the education related Millennium Development Goals. But without comparable resources, quality and outcomes with well-founded public systems, they will reinforce stratification and may harden boundaries that divide communities. The Oxfam Education Report, for instance, notes that private schools for the poor are of ‘inferior quality’, offering ‘a low-quality services’ that will ‘restrict children’s future opportunities.’ (Tooley 2006, citing Watkins 2000, 230). The government assessment of alternative provision within Indian’s Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan also suggested that the alternative system is inferior, second-rate and second-grade, both qualitatively and quantitatively (Rose 2007, 21).

In China the general debate has contextual characteristics that lead to conclusions specific to the subject of this paper. As elsewhere, formal private schools fulfill the regulations of the local education authority and follow the state-run school curriculum. Their fees are much higher than public schools and some of them are boarding schools. These schools are mostly for children with local household registration and satisfy effective demand from
wealthy families. The quality of this type of private schools is generally similar to or better than public schools.

Private migrant schools serve different needs and have grown in a largely unregulated way with consequences that this paper begins to expose. Although some of them are legal and regulated by the state, they are still of much lower standards than formal public schools when they were granted as legal schools. Although they partially meet demand for schooling from an underserved population, they do this within patterns of ownership that are essentially private and/or partial to the communities they serve. Their character is not determined within a public benefit framework orientated towards reductions in social exclusion. Their existence confirms aspects of that exclusion and may reinforce the boundaries between groups that coexist in tension.

These tensions and the exclusionary practices that result from them have been discussed. A final illustration reinforces the point. Together with the introduction of open-door and market development policy in the 1980s, the Chinese Government adopted the one-child policy – which allows each couple to have only one child to reduce the growth of population to more manageable rates. The policy has been observed quite rigidly in urban areas but has been difficult to implement in rural areas. For cultural and agricultural labor reasons, rural populations have continued to favor having more children, especially when the first child is not boy. Urban public schools and some state-recognized private migrant schools have refused to admit students from families that violate fertility control policies, creating a situation where migrant children are disadvantaged as a result of the actions of their parents. Xiguo, a private migrant primary school in Xiamen, refused to admit children from families with more than two children.

The dilemmas this paper has presented do not lead to a single simple resolution. Municipal authorities act for reasons that are understandable. Some argue that private migrant schools are temporarily necessary in the contemporary historical period as a pathway to provide some basic education to those who would otherwise have none. Private migrant schools provided a valuable alternative for migrant children who found urban public schools too expensive, too far away, and too unwelcoming. As Duan (2000, 3) wrote, ‘Migrants setting up schools for migrant children was a reasonable and inevitable development under the current constraints on educational resources in urban areas’. From an economic perspective, Zhou argued that private migrant schools could create more educational opportunities at lower costs. Zhou also supported this type of schools from a demographic perspective. He argued:

Migrants are not stable in their residential areas. It was relatively easy for the simple schools (or teaching classes) set up by the migrants to move with the movement of these people. It was more convenient for their children to get access to schooling at a commuting distance. (Zhou 1998, 23)

However, it is the argument of this paper that the poor quality of private migrant schools makes it difficult for the migrant children they enrolled to use education as a means to break through barriers to attaining urban citizenship and become socially included. Rather than helping them attain the full urban citizenship they desire, private migrant schools ensure that most migrant children would not get enough education to gain higher level schooling and higher education and access to the professional work that could help them win urban citizenship. In a broad sense, the low quality of education in migrant schools leads to inequality and reproduction of low status of the migrant population. Without better education the disadvantages of very limited social and cultural capital will continue to predetermine with consequences for both migrant and host communities.
Note
1. The Engle coefficient means the proportion of expenses on food from the total expenses. This coefficient is used internationally to indicate the consumption level of people and as an indicator for the standard of living in different countries. For example, the standards used by the Organization of Food of the United Nations to indicate the standards of living are above 60% is poverty, 50–60% is Wenbao, 40–50% is Xiaokang and below 40% is Fuyu.

References
Rose, P. 2007. NGO provision of basic education: Alternative or complementary service delivery to support access to the excluded? Creating a research agenda. Pathways to Access 3: 21, CREATE Research Monographs, University of Sussex, UK.