

Note on Methodology for Rural Migrant Children' s Education Research: Monograph to describe a process of data collection

WAN, Yi
Graduate School of Human-Environment Studies, Kyushu University

<https://doi.org/10.15017/4475439>

出版情報：飛梅論集. 21, pp.31-53, 2021-03-25. 九州大学大学院人間環境学府教育システム専攻教育学
コース
バージョン：
権利関係：

Note on Methodology for Rural Migrant Children's Education Research: Monograph to describe a process of data collection

WAN Yi*

Abstract

This paper aims to introduce the planning and process of data collection for researching migrant children's education in China. Geographically, the fieldwork focuses on the cities located in Yangtze River Delta, which is one of China's regions with the most active labor market, economic innovations, and development in China. Considerable numbers of migrants work and live in this region, with the largest number of migrant children receiving basic education. This paper highlights some of the challenges of research in this domain, and indicates ways in which the challenges were tackled in one particular study. Discussion focuses on the collection of data, and stresses the importance of cultural, social and economic contexts. The paper may be seen as a case study that provides insights into methods for researching rural migrant children's education. Methodological lessons from the fieldwork in the Yangtze River Delta have wider relevance, particularly in settings where different levels of cities established various policy restrictions upon rural migrant children's education in public schools, in similar urban agglomeration.

Keywords: migrant children; research plan; data collection; fieldwork; China

Introduction

This paper is a monograph to describe a process of data collection for a doctoral research project named 'Urbanization, Migration and Educational Access in Contemporary China: Migrant Children's Access to Public Schools during the Compulsory Phase,' beginning in 2018. This research aims to investigate the implications for migrant children's educational access of household registration reform within the context of China's New Urbanization Plan (NUP) of 2014, against the backdrop of continuing large scale rural-urban migration.

The term *migrant children*-both international and internal-broadly refers not only to children who migrate and live in a place different from they were born with their parents, but also includes those who

*Graduate School of Human-Environment Studies, Kyushu University

are left behind with one parent or other family members (UNESCO, 2018). As significant attention has been paid to children of immigrants in educational research, this paper focuses on children accompanying their domestic migrant parents moving from rural countryside to urban cities in contemporary China and investigates the inequality brought about by the policy changes regarding their educational access. The word ‘access’ is taken from a broad view, instead of only looking at the beginning of schooling indicated by gross or net enrolment rates. Lewin (2007) argued that access is not secured unless enrolment is linked to high attendance, progression, learning outcomes, and the opportunity for most if not all to enter and complete the next stage of schooling. Equitable access implies that the variance between schools on key indicators (e.g. pupil-teacher ratio, cost per child, measured performance on basic learning outcomes) should fall within a narrow range.

The study of Chinese migrant children’s education did not gain significant interest from educational researchers until the 2000s, although the phenomenon arose from the 1990s. Investigations have increased during the first decade of the 21st century, following the great interest attracted by the rural-urban divide and China’s household registration (*hukou*) system. As might be expected, researchers have employed diverse methodological approaches according to their disciplinary orientations, their objectives, and available data.

The recognition of contexts is important for understanding the interpretation of previous findings, and equally important for shaping appropriate research methods. Most research has been carried out mainly in mega cities, including Shanghai (e.g. Chen and Feng, 2013; Xiong, 2015), Beijing (e.g. Han, 2004; Uemura, 2006; Goodburn, 2009), Shenzhen (Goodburn, 2016), and other provincial capitals (Wang, 2008; Li & Placier, 2015), either in a single case or multi-city study. While many features of the cities above match those in other parts of China, variations in cultural, social and economic features may be found around the country. The contextual differences between mega cities and other parts of the world are even more obvious. Keeping in mind the possible contextual variation, this research turns its focus to the new reform era under the New Urbanization Plan (NUP) of 2014, in which cities were categorized into five different levels and instructed to take various measures to progress household registration system reform and urbanization. Thus, techniques for researching migrant children’s education might be very different in Beijing, Shanghai, and Shenzhen or other mega cities. Moreover, Wu (2010) insisted that migrant workers are not merely treated discriminatorily vis-à-vis the local *hukou* residents at the national level, but varyingly across regions. In order to respond to the specific contexts, the research was conducted as a case study, allowing for possible integration into other mixed-methods research. At the same time, some similarities in appropriate research methods might be identified across various cases despite the contextual differences.

The nature of research is also shaped by its objectives and by the identities of the researchers. Some research aims to shape policy and practice, while other research aims to advance conceptual

understanding. Some research is undertaken by large teams, perhaps with counterparts in countries across the world, while other research is undertaken by single researchers in single locations. Some research is supported by considerable financial resources and the authority of governments, international agencies and/or other bodies, while other research is undertaken by individuals working on their own with tight budgets. The study reported here is on the individual end of the spectrum, undertaken for academic purposes by the author of this paper as part of her doctoral studies. The researcher received methodological advice from her university, but chose her own site and relied on her own abilities to negotiate access to informants. As such, it may be compared with other fieldwork-based doctoral studies of migrant children (e.g. Hu, 2012; Yu, 2017), but is rather different from the national and multi-country studies sponsored by governments and international agencies of various types (National Bureau of Statistics of China, UNICEF and UNFPA, 2015; Yang, 2017; UNESCO, 2018).

The identity of the researcher also affects the nature of the research and has been addressed in some methodological literature (e.g. Potts, 2007; Louisy, 2011). Current literature stresses the significance of the researcher's identity as an insider or outsider, male or female, and young or more mature. This particular research was undertaken by a female in her 20s who spoke both the local dialect of Yangtze River Delta and the standard spoken form of Mandarin Chinese (*Putonghua*). She was an insider in the sense of having herself studied in Zhejiang province for twelve years, but was an outsider insofar as she held no official position in the education system or related bodies. Her youth and gender helped to shape some dimensions of the research in a beneficial way, but posed challenges in some other respects.

The paper begins by explaining the context in more detail. It then turns to the specific goals of the research and the evolving strategies that were employed to accomplish these goals. It notes ways in which the research design was changed following initial exploration of the field and the piloting of instruments, and then turns to further challenges encountered during the main study. The data collection was undertaken in the Yangtze River Delta of China during 2018 and 2020. This paper aims to describe and clarify the process of data collection through the fieldwork done during these three years. The paper concludes with remarks on the lessons from experience that might be applicable to other regions, countries and cultures as well as within China.

Approaching the research question

A large body of literature has theoretically and empirically established the various influences on migrant children's educational opportunities, such as the low enrollment of migrant children in public schools during the compulsory education phase and the low quality of private migrant-run schools (e.g. Han, 2004; Murphy, 2004; Goodburn, 2009). Recent studies highlight the negative results of lacking

access to public schools by measuring migrant children's academic performance (Chen & Feng, 2013; Lai et al., 2014), mental health (Zhang, Yan, & Yuan, 2018), urban adaptation (Liu, Holmes, & Zhang, 2018) and social mobility (Xiong, 2015).

Previous studies demonstrate a continued problem with migrant children's educational inequality, which has not been solved during the past 30 years. Questions arise, asking why this phenomenon has not improved if policies have been formulated and implemented by the state government. One possible answer may be that the *hukou* system continues to act as an institutional barrier for equaling migrant children's education. Indeed, this response became a common view over the years (e.g. Uemura, 2006; Goodburn, 2009; Yang, 2017). However, this answer was complicated by the recent changes in the social context. In 2014, the State Council issued two important documents which declared the abolition of the rural/urban distinction, the implementation of a Residence Permit (RP: *juzhuzheng* 居住証) system⁽¹⁾, and a larger scale urbanization plan (NUP)⁽²⁾ through the introduction of points systems (*jifenzhi* 積分制) to increase *hukou* transfer. This argument gives rise to a further question: where do these restrictions to educational access come from, if the *hukou* factor is less crucial? Is it because of the ineffective implementations or (re)interpretations/translations of the policy by different jurisdictions? Or does the points system itself reinforce the barriers for migrant children's education access, and if so, how?

Currently, there is only a limited amount of research investigating the new reforms and related policies which affect migrant children's educational access. Though the RP system and the points system combined with a New Urbanization Plan were not officially introduced in central government policies until 2014, they were adopted by localities as experimental innovations as early as 2004 in Shanghai (Dong & Goodburn, 2019). Since the emergence of these policies, there have only been six academic papers, three written in English (Zhang, 2012; Guo and Liang, 2017; Dong and Goodburn, 2019) and three in Chinese (Wang, 2017; Shan and Qin, 2017; Wang and Lu, 2019) to formally investigate the points system since it was applied in deciding RP or *hukou* transfer.

Moreover, many studies that aimed to shape policy and practice adopted limited methods in their research work. Studies on Chinese migrant children witnessed an expansion of qualitative research during the past 30 years which has provided a range of insightful accounts of the factors that influence the development and delivery of free public education to them during the compulsory education phase. However, as much of this qualitative work has focused on the collection of individual interviews to generate evidence, the result has been the creation of a largely perceptual account of what children, migrant parents and schools think about migrant children's education, rather than more comprehensive accounts of what actually happens in this domain. Furthermore, limited academic research has sought to discuss the methodologies which they adopted or the process of data collection while doing fieldwork in Chinese society, and particularly the methodologies of those researching migrant children

or migrants are underdeveloped.

Ethnography offers a way to help overcome the above limitations of relying solely on literature review and interview data. Through the collection of observations, interviews and documentary data, which are triangulated (i.e. compared and contrasted with one another) ethnographic research offers a qualitative approach with the potential to yield detailed and comprehensive accounts of different social phenomena (actions, behaviour, interactions, beliefs). As Hughes (1992) addressed, the central aim of ethnography is to provide rich, holistic insights into peoples' world views and actions, as well as the nature of the location they inhabit. Hammersley (1985:152) also states: 'the task [of ethnographers] is to document the culture, the perspectives and practices of the people in these settings. The aim is to "get inside" the way each group of people sees the world'.

Amongst previous studies, Murphy (2020), Goodburn (2009) and Xiang (2005) adopted an ethnographic approach to research the reality of Chinese rural migrants or migrant children. These studies provided useful insights into planning the author's fieldwork at the initial stage. Murphy's work concentrated on left-behind children in rural Jiangxi province by examining the impacts of parents' migration on childhood and family relationships, and paid less attention to migrant children's education in destination cities. Goodburn's fieldwork in Beijing mentioned her experience of being a volunteer English teacher to access migrant schools but lacked a detailed description as well as examination of her methodological work. Her fieldwork in Shenzhen (Goodburn, 2016) used a combination of methods, primarily door-to-door interviewing in areas where rural migrants lived and worked but also visiting factories with a local auditor and occasional 'snowballing'. Xiang's (2005) study might be the longest ethnography researching Chinese rural migrants with a six-year tracing project in a village of migrants from Zhejiang province and located in *Dahongmen*, Beijing, drawing a vivid picture of migrants' responses to the Beijing government's clean-ups and the inter-relationship of migrants' communities. However, all of these studies' fieldwork was conducted in single case sites from the late 1990s to early 2000s. Dong and Goodburn (2019) also discussed the new points systems and other policy changes and extended their research to include multiple cities: Beijing, Shenzhen and Shanghai. They found the NUP and points systems to have considerable variance among the case cities, suggesting a decentralized implementation, with local governments' largely responsible. However, this study overlooked the voice of migrants in middle and small sized cities. Indeed, based on their findings, a multi-case comparative study that incorporates different levels of cities, running up and down China's hierarchy of places is necessary to explore the diversity of the policies' impacts, including any structural changes or implications for migrant children's access to education.

Therefore, this study draws on a multi-sited ethnographic approach, aiming to identify, explore and link the new reforms, the NUP and migrant children's educational access, which, on the surface, have unclear connection with each other. The fieldwork was carried out in places existing on three levels: (1)

the destination townships and villages with relatively small numbers of migrants; (2) the county seat to which the townships and villages belong; (3) the capital city of the prefecture.

Research framework

Planning issues: access and ethics

Before undertaking ethnographic work, planning is essential but also challenging. Access and ethics are the two primary difficulties when drawing a research plan to target migrant parents and their children, especially as their residence is by default temporary, and they are always on the move.

First is the challenge of access. Migrants and their children are not a familiar community for the researcher. Lee (1993:3) suggests that 'social access crucially depends on establishing interpersonal trust'. Gatekeepers, people who will facilitate one's entry into closed or formal organisations, play a significant role in research, particularly in ethnographic research (Miller & Bell, 2002: 53). Therefore, gaining credibility with the initial gatekeepers to a particular community is the first step. Once this has taken place, the researcher may begin to build a rapport with study participants, and identify additional gatekeepers. However, as Hammersley and Atkinson (2007) note, access into the research setting cannot be considered a 'one-off' event. Often access will need to be re-negotiated with the different individuals at different stages of a study (such as initial contact or entry into different research sites) as the work proceeds over time. Moreover, some informants are often reluctant at the thought of being 'scrutinised' by researchers. Such difficulties require the negotiation of resources and strategies. Bell (1991:37) recommends gaining official permission with fully informed consent, and indicating to participants the possible benefits of the research. In this study, gaining access to consenting informants meant contacting, in person or in writing, an appropriate official/or the leader of the school, along with the headteacher or principle where appropriate. Later, people who are responsible for, or assist in, the organization and administration of the research, such as the class teacher were also contacted. A similar approach was adopted when accessing migrants in a factory/shop/enterprise. Finally, to keep a reliable relationship with the informants, gaining their permission and contact information was indispensable, particularly if they planned to return or in the case of extending the study. These connections were achieved and maintained by engaging in some negotiations or offering benefits, for example, private tutoring for migrants' children for low charge fees or free.

Second, the sensitivity of researching Chinese migrant children's educational access increases the challenges of undertaking the research in an ethical way. The micro-atmosphere of advocating for the achievements of promoting migrant children's education by the government in a highly controlled system potentially poses substantial stress to both researcher and participants involved in the research. Participants are more likely to be fearful of scrutiny and exposure (Lee, 1993:4). Some private schools

avoid attention because they operate with doubtful legality, evade taxation, and/or have questionable credentials. Teachers employed by public schools may consider the risks of being critical of policies or their schools. Identifying students as 'migrant children' must also be done with sensitivity, because such a label indicates the students as 'outsiders' of the city, and as 'inferior' to their peers. For similar reasons, parents may also prefer to avoid attention. Furthermore, this study examines policies by taking a critical perspective regarding migrant children's education. Such research potentially risks negative findings. Therefore, the fieldwork project was undertaken with due care and attention to safeguarding the interests of research participants, following the key principles of ethical research outlined by Punch (1994:89): 'the avoidance of harm, fully informed consent and the need for privacy and confidentiality'.

By first addressing the starting obstacles, this paper demonstrates how initial planning and anticipated strategies occurred in the reality of the fieldwork. Particular attention is given to gaps between ideal plans and complex realities.

Research Plan

This study aims to understand the implications for migrant children's educational access of household registration reform within the context of China's New Urbanization Plan (NUP) of 2014. Investigation examines the nature of the household registration reform itself, its interpretation in policies issued by various local jurisdictions throughout China, and what these changes have meant for migrant communities themselves, including for the access of their children to urban schooling during the compulsory education phase. Compulsory education in China is a nine-year structure including primary and junior high education from grade one to grade nine. Thus, the subjects of our study are current policies related to migrant children's admission to public schools issued by central governments and local jurisdictions, migrants and their children who are experiencing or have experienced the process of applying for studying in urban public schools. In order to meet the aim, this research project consists of four phases between 2018 and 2020 (See Figure 1).

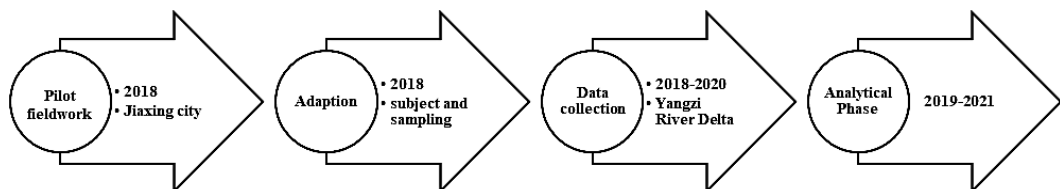


Figure 1 Research Plan

The preliminary year of 2018 was spent drafting the preparation to design an overall research framework, literature review, identification of research methods, and drafting research tools. The

literature review indicates that admission policy regarding migrant children's education has been changed on an official level, and a new points system has been adopted by several cities in Guangdong provinces. The new points system policies lack detailed information and academic research. A pilot fieldwork between August and September in 2018 was conducted in order to explore the origin, potential scale, contents, implementation of the new points system and its relationship with the 2014 NUP.

After confirmation and an initial round of data collection, adjustments for the research design of the main study were made. These adjustments included identification of the research subject, methods and sampling. The pilot study intended to target the admission criteria established by local public schools for migrant children, and then to focus on those children who entered public schools before and after 2014 (Grade one, Grade two, Grade five and six in the year of 2018) to illustrate the variation among policy restrictions. However, after visiting and talking with several teachers and migrants introduced by the key gatekeepers, the points system plays a significant role in determining migrant children's qualification of studying in most cities of Yangtze River Delta. The direct operation and management of the points system are made by a new administrative office which is called 'New Residents Affairs Bureau' (*xinjumin shiwuju* 新居民事務局). In this light, the population for the main study was changed to involve different stakeholders related to this new policy: schools, teachers, migrant parents, migrant children, administrative office staff, and factory/enterprise/shops that employed migrants with children in the compulsory education stage. Three key gatekeepers (the government officer, the university professor and the leader of one enterprise) were contacted to provide assistance in the initial step. In general, access was gained in a top-down manner as shown in Figure 2.

The second adjustment related to the methods of collecting information. The researcher attempted to use questionnaires to gain more information related to migrant children's family background and their parents' attitudes to the point system. However, it became a challenge for the migrant population to fill in a form or read and understand the definition of some key words despite the researcher's explanations and instructions. The language used in the questionnaire is both academic and formal Mandarin which is far from their language use in everyday life. Moreover, this challenge was linked to another obstacle faced by some migrants. Some participants could not identify or interpret the meaning of official government documents related to their residence applications, such as some criteria in the form required by the New Residents Affairs Bureau. For instance, some migrants regarded the new 'Residence Permit' to be the same as the 'Temporary Residence Permit' that they hold because they did not understand the difference. The problems posed by the original questionnaire was partly caused by the researcher's preconceived idea that migrants might have been familiar with the points system, its operation, and certain key terms. Thus, the pilot study demonstrated that the questionnaire form was by itself not sufficient.

Recognizing the challenges above, for the main study the researcher conducted interviews and

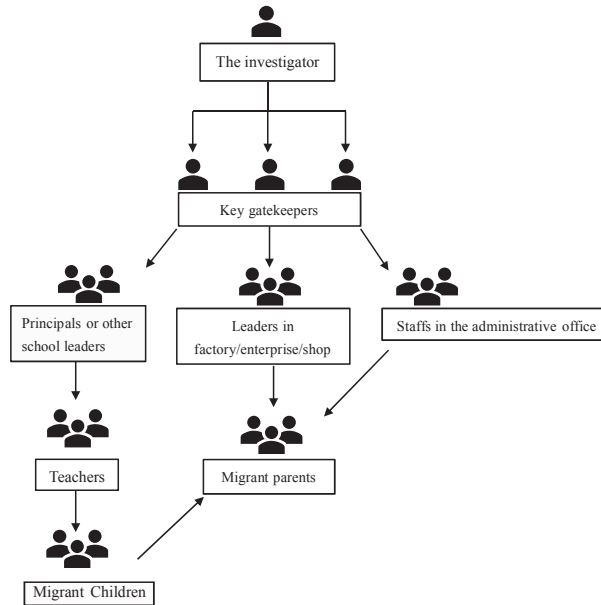


Figure 2 The Flow Chart for Accessing Interview and Observation Participants

observations to collect data on migrant populations' experiences. Conversations were recorded with the full permission from interviewees. Furthermore, the researcher explained the study when highlighting the definition of some specific words by writing down key points on paper, giving correct and incorrect examples, and orally checking their understanding. The migrant parents were generally comfortable with the procedure because it also provided some useful information regarding their children's school choices and helped them gain a better understanding of the policy itself.

The final adjustment after the preliminary study was the selection of case cities for this study. The pilot study revealed that the points system significantly differs from district to district and city to city, with minor differences even between various townships. To explore the types of the points system and its potential relationship with the 2014 NUP, a hypothesis is raised that different population scales of cities indicated by the 2014 NUP promulgated different types of points system due to various degrees of flexibility in the *hukou* transfer policy. Based on the 2014 NUP's categorization of cities and the key gatekeeper's network, nine cities were selected as case cities. Figure 3 illustrates the sampling procedure following three steps. Three types of administrative areas were first selected by different population scales: the metropolitan cities (over 5 million), middle-sized cities (3-5 million) and small sized cities (1-3 million). Then, in the metropolitan cities, two schools were selected; in the middle-sized cities, three schools, one factory, and one administrative office were selected; and finally, in the small-sized cities, two schools, one enterprise and two administrative offices were selected.

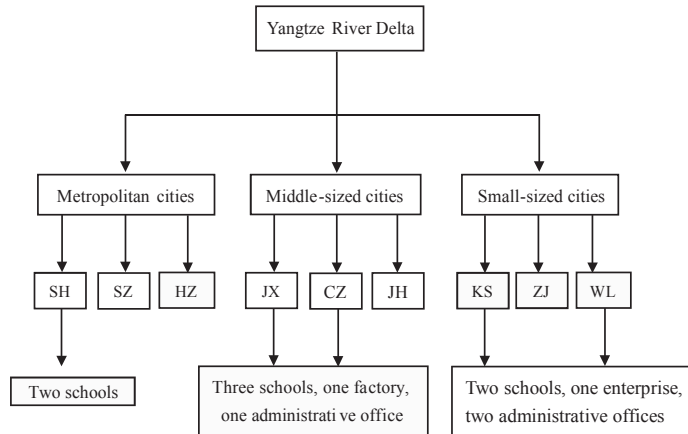


Figure 3 Sampling of the Research Sites

Data Collection

The pilot fieldwork

The pilot fieldwork was conducted in Shanghai and Jiaxing city of Zhejiang province in 2018. As introduced above, major revisions related to research instruments and sampling followed the pilot. In addition, the pilot also identified three key gatekeepers to help the researcher with further research during the main study, shown in Figure 2. Since the government officer, a key gatekeeper, had greater power than the other gatekeepers due to his position and network, the other gatekeepers (i.e. principals and teachers) agreed to collaborate. Despite the strategy's efficiency, this particular set of power relations had some negative effects on the dynamics of communications. In particular, some teachers and school leaders avoided talking about their involvement in the process of recruiting migrant children, and some students and parents withheld information for fear of offending the teachers. During the initial period of data collection, some teachers changed the topic or gave vague answers when asked about their attitudes to the point system or separated campus/class for migrant children. After communications with the gatekeepers and a few teachers progressed some, the researcher realized that teachers and school leaders had feared that she would show the research data to the key gatekeeper despite the promise of privacy and confidentiality. Therefore, some teachers who agreed to provide information that the researcher could use for research purposes still refused to be interviewed formally or record the conversation. Thus when visiting schools and conducting interviews with principals or teachers, observation also became necessary to verify the validity of the information provided by the informants.

Moreover, through the pilot fieldwork, the researcher realized the importance of collecting official

documents of various localities to explore and examine policy content, especially those detailed criteria to participate in the points system. Some documents were not able to be accessed through government websites, and some were introduced in vague terms instead of explicit explanations so as to be understood easily. Interviewed migrants and the key gatekeepers suggested the researcher find proper data from the New Residents Affairs Bureau where migrants can receive consultations about the points system and other public services related to their urban life.

Venues for collecting official documents

Three main venues for collecting official documents regarding the points system and migrant children's admission policy (generally named as 'migrant children's admission management based on the points system') were introduced by gatekeepers. First, in Kunshan, Wenzhou, Jiaying and Shanghai city, the researcher was able to acquire the official documents from the New Residents Affairs Bureau. Second, with the help of the gatekeepers, some administrative staff explained the contents of the documents to the researcher. Some provincial or sub-provincial cities like Hangzhou, Ningbo, Nanjing and Suzhou city uploaded official documents with question-and-answer interpretations and instructions on their website, allowing for direct download. The third venue came from the migrant parents who introduced to me several SNS platforms to gather necessary information or gave me a copy of the documents which they received. However, the documents collected from different venues showed different publishing dates. This is problematic in some sites, as the contents of the points system may have revisions across years within the same city, since the system itself still has an experimental status. On the other hand, some cities made few revisions since the system was introduced several years ago. Moreover, some districts within the same city may use the same documents to apply for residency, while other districts or cities may have more autonomy to publish their own version which indicates a variety at district or county level. Therefore, in order to be rigorous and accurate in record-keeping, each document regarding the points system was coded with abbreviations of the city names and the year of establishment. Table 1 below shows the list of the cities and districts/counties and the publishing year of the documents.

School visits

School visits played an important role in understanding the implementation of the points system and schools' attitudes to this new policy as key stakeholders. The purpose of school visits is to identify what kind of role public schools play in the admission procedure and to confirm whether migrant children receive equal treatment in practice, as these practices are invisible in official documents or propagandas.

School visits consisted of three public schools and four private schools for migrant children in

Shanghai, Jiaxing and Kunshan. The researcher went to three schools accompanied by gatekeepers after gaining permission from the school in the initial stage. Three other school visits were also organized by the gatekeepers through initial contacts but were conducted by the researcher herself. Because during the first three visits, despite helpful networks built by the gatekeeper who introduced principals of the school, teachers felt uncomfortable or unnatural to answer the questions from the researcher. Additional communication helped to improve the situation. The researcher initially contacted the gatekeepers before the other three school visits were conducted, providing a checklist of procedures for data collection and possible aspects in which she would need assistance, including a quiet space for interviews. The researcher also kept in touch with several teachers to revisit the same three schools in 2019.

To note, both public and private schools take stronger measures to enhance the school security than in past years. The researcher had to register her Identification Card on the electronic system connected with police at the security room before entering the campus. And staff in the security room contacted the gatekeeper in the school whom the researcher would meet first for confirmation, and then again passed the researcher a signature collection sheet for the gatekeeper when she came out.

Table 1 The list of locations of collected documents and publish year

Province	City (year)	Districts/Counties (year)
Shanghai	Shanghai (2019)	FX (2019)
Zhejiang	HZ (2019)	/
	NB	BL (2018), ZH (2017), HS (2017), JZ (2017), YY (2017), FH (2019)
	WZ	LC (2017), OH (2017), LW (2018), CN (2019), RA (2019)
	TZ (2016)	WL (2017), LH (2018)
	JH	PJ (2019), JD (2019)
	JX	XZ (2019), NH (2019), PH (2019), HY (2019), GQ (2019)
	HZ	DQ (2014)
Jiangsu	SZ (2019)	/
	CS (2019)	/
	KS (2019)	/
	ZJG (2019)	/
	CZ	WJ (2019)

Interviews-principals, teachers, administrative staffs, migrants

The venues and time for interviews vary from each site and largely depend on the mutual trust the researcher has built with the interviewee. For instance, interviews with principals and teachers were conducted during the school visits. Despite trying to revisit the schools, the school security limitations

and teachers' busy schedules made it difficult for lengthy conversation. The interviews were held in school facilities when the principals or teachers were free from their work. Meeting rooms, classrooms and the teachers' offices were commonly used as venues. Each interview inside the school campus lasted for 30 to 60 minutes each.

Interviews with the administrative staff working in the New Residents Affairs Bureau were held in informal locations, like in restaurants and cafes. Although they refused to be formally interviewed and recorded, they provided necessary information through informal talks and permitted the researcher to take notes. Some of these informal talks took place over dinner gatherings, which were accompanied by considerable amounts of alcohol. This eased the flow of conversation, but created its own challenges for a female researcher in her 20s not used to the drinking culture. Nevertheless, information obtained during and after dinners increased the effectiveness of the qualitative data collection. The researcher was introduced to migrants who were willing to talk about their experiences in gaining access to the point system, and to employers of migrants who were willing to let her visit their premises.

Interviews with migrants consisted of both group interviews and individual interviews. Three group interviews happened when the researcher went to a factory, a migrant barber's shop and a sub-urban village where migrants were living in groups. The group interview in the factory was organized by the researcher and the gatekeeper—a factory leader and held in the meeting room of the factory. It continued for one and half hours during the lunch break time. In fact, migrants often work from morning to night without much rest as they are paid on piecework, and their average salary is about 3000 to 5000 yuan per month. Thus, the researcher paid 8 interviewees by 50 yuan/hour to compensate the time lost, and a group interview was designed to save costs and time for both the interviewer and interviewees. However, a disadvantage appeared in that only migrants who succeeded in sending their children to urban public schools via the points system and those who plan to participate in the process were willing to participate. Though the researcher would have liked to invite those migrants who eventually failed in enrolling their children to urban public schools or any schools in the city, none responded to the invitation. Despite this, the group interview in the factory represents a small group of migrants' opinions towards the points system.

Furthermore, having more than one interviewee present provided a cross-check that one migrant complements the other with additional points, leading to a more complete and reliable record. Two other group interviews held in a migrant barber's shop and a sub-urban village were not organized or designed intentionally by the researcher or the gatekeeper beforehand. The barber's shop is located in a crowded urban street where lots of migrants work or live and it mainly serves migrants. The talk between the researcher and the woman barber attracted the attention of the customers and other nearby migrants who were invited into conversation by the barber. A natural gathering of eight people provided different valuable information and discussion based on their own experience, with the inter-

view lasting for two hours.

The village tour began in a village grocery managed by a migrant couple. When the researcher reached the shop with the gatekeeper, there were already five migrants sitting in front of the gate. Their occupations were all part of the raw material processing for cloth, but had much spare time due to the depression in the summer of that year. Finally, the researcher gained permission of a total of seven migrants to hold a group interview on the grounds in front of the grocery and purchased water and snacks to relax the interviewees. This interview lasted for one and half an hour and most of the participants showed limited understanding about children's school admission policy and generally expressed a negative attitude about joining in the points system, stating that instead they prefer to choose a more direct and simple way to send their children to rural hometowns.

Individual interviews were held in migrants' homes or workplaces. They were introduced mainly by gatekeepers and people who accepted group interviews. As mentioned above, while group interviews provided mutual communication and confirmation of the information, individual talks with migrants faced linguistic problems. In these cases, migrants came from different provinces or minority groups of the country and therefore speak different dialects as their first language. Individual interviews through *Putonghua* were challenges for both migrants and the researcher. Rather than highly structured interviews, open-ended interviews were used to follow the train of thought and response of the interviewee and enable self-disclosure, wherein both the researcher and migrants share experience and feeling with each other. In addition, several short interviews were conducted during a day's time instead of a single lengthy interview, as migrant workers can be easily interrupted by their work or small children. It seems that short interviews helped interviewees to be able to concentrate and not become tired or bored. The interviews were recorded with the permission of each interviewee, and telephones were used for searching for information when one word or one particular idea could not be understood during the interview. Moreover, it was hard to fix a specific time to interview migrants since many of them are self-employed workers who do not set a regular time to work or rest. In several cases, the researcher spent separate days waiting from morning to night, in order for an appropriate time to conduct interviews to arise.

Challenges and Lessons

As a form of training for the main study, the pilot study helped the researcher to handle various difficult situations with flexibility. During the main study, the researcher visited three public schools and four private migrant-run schools located in Shanghai, Jiaying and Kunshan, and visited local New Residents Affairs Bureaus for document collection. Usable official document resources of 14 cities, including 17 districts and 5 counties across three provinces in the Yangtze River Delta were successfully

accessed and gathered. Qualitative data were mainly obtained in three ways: namely interviews with principals and teachers; informal interviews and chats with administrative staffs; group and individual interviews with migrants and participant observation. Six principals and teachers, three administrative staffs and 39 migrants (until 2019) were interviewed in groups and/or as individuals. Qualitative data from various stakeholders contributed to four case studies of migrant children, one case study of a teacher, and three case studies of schools. This section notes major challenges encountered and lessons learned during the main study, beginning with entering public schools before turning to access to migrants and limitations of the study.

Entering public schools

Materials introducing the study were sent to the gatekeepers (principals) of school visits in advance, in order to inform them of the research objectives and procedures. However, some gatekeepers did not have time to read the materials, and not all of those who did read the materials fully understood them. Therefore, it was important to call before reaching the research site and to meet the gatekeepers in person after arrival to explain matters clearly.

During the school visits, the researcher faced pressure brought by the school security management and her identity as a doctoral student studying in a Japanese university. While registering an individual ID card on the electronic system and supervisory monitors around the campus do not necessarily threaten the researcher's academic life directly, these measures can make the researcher feel stressed, especially when conducting domestically sensitive and critical research. Moreover, some teachers were suspicious of the researcher's motivation behind her interviews related to migrant children's education after listening to the researcher's self-introduction and explanation. They took precautions against any negative words or behaviors which may lead to harmful effects on the reputations of their schools as well as the nation. For example, a teacher admitted that migrant children were arranged to study in a segregated teaching building within the same school, but then refused to take the researcher to the location or allow any class observations.

The logistics of getting into the schools located in different cities required particular effort. It took at least half a day to reach each city by public transport from Shanghai International Airport, in part due to poor or indirect mass transit options, requiring several bus transfers and long wait times. Schools that receive migrant children are mostly located in sub-urban areas rather than near city centres. In view of the distance and frequency of bus transfers to remote schools, the researcher chose to take taxis to schools from her living accommodations. School locations increased the cost of both money and time of transportation, especially when necessary data was not collected in a short period of time.

Access to migrants

After the pilot study, the main fieldwork strategies adopted group interviews to enlarge the pool of potential interviewees of migrants, but this dimension of the study still faced constraints. Although many migrants were willing to talk about the admission policies when they successfully sent their children to urban public schools, those parents who failed were more inhibited and refused to respond. As a result, more effort had to be devoted to securing interviewees who did not succeed in passing the enrollment criteria. The extreme was found in Shanghai city, where the policy includes more restrictions than other cities and few migrants were interviewed as case studies. This problem influenced the diversity of the sampling, which ultimately could not be resolved in the main study.

The procedure for accessing individual migrants and gaining consent to conduct interviews was particularly challenging. Despite the gatekeepers' help to conduct three group interviews and other individual interviews, the researcher expected to find more migrant interviewees through the snowball approach. However, this seemed neither efficient nor effective. The mobility of migrant families and their busy daily work of livelihood made it difficult for the researcher to fix objectives and then organize an appropriate time for interviews without leading to their potential loss. For instance, when a former interviewee introduced a migrant to the researcher for the next interview, in the end, the migrant had left the site before the interview could be conducted. In another case, the researcher arrived at the accommodation of the next targeted interviewee, meeting a migrant mother who only spoke a minority language at home, a situation in which the researcher found it difficult to communicate well. It was many long hours of waiting before the migrant father returned home, who then showed little interest or attention to respond to the interview questions with a tired body from hard work.

The researcher also needed flexibility in the design of group interviews, as illustrated by the interview with eight migrants in barber's shop. One of the migrants stopped talking about his family situation after hearing that other migrants had previously spent a lot of money on social insurance investment and gathering necessary materials. As Watts and Ebbutt (1987) address, one group opinion may dominate the interview, in which case personal matters might not emerge; or in other circumstances, the researcher must aim a series of follow-up questions at one specific member of the group. Following this experience, the researcher asked participants to write down all contact information and asked specific participants whether they were able to be interviewed again, letting them choose the most comfortable way in which they would like to be interviewed. Methodological lessons such as these were recorded each day as part of the process for further improvement of interviewing, communication and other skills. Bullet points notes also helped to sharpen and sometimes redefine the focus of investigation, and to identify data that needed to be verified.

Emphasizing multi-cited, multi-level and multi-scale

As mentioned at the beginning of this monograph, discussions about the methodology/data collection process of information regarding migrant children is underdeveloped. Moreover, there is no doubt that it is becoming more and more difficult for foreign scholars (including Chinese national scholars based in foreign countries) to conduct fieldwork in China, not only because of the Covid-19 outbreak in 2020 around the world, but also a stronger surveillance and control taken by the CCP government in recent years (Xiao, 2019). The approach applied in this study sought to collect data and information from both the macro policy level and the micro level by listening to migrants' voices. A top-down review of official documents from central-provincial-county-district-township governments helped the author to conceptualize the multi-level complexity of the points system before doing multi-site fieldwork across different levels of jurisdiction.

The bottom-up ethnographic approach provided empirical data about the reality of challenges for migrants who expect to send their children to public school but lack economic and cultural capital as well as other elements requested by the points system to do so. Different scales of interviews-both group and individual-were useful in widening and deepening the analysis of migrants' feelings and opinions towards the policy implementations. The interviews with migrants also reflect a tension as well as distance arising between the vested migrant group with respectively stable employment status, stronger economic capacity and longer residency in destination cities, and those who do not have sufficient understanding of the policy changes or those who are excluded from applying.

The project's multi-site fieldwork in different sizes of cities and at different levels of jurisdictions within each city, incorporated observations, interviews, and collection of local official documents to explore the variety of design, content and implementation of the points systems. This investigation provided evidence to confirm the hypothesis of the research. Furthermore, at every case site, both the top-down and bottom-up approach led to visitation at one administrative agent-the New Residents Affairs Bureau, which had never appeared in previous studies. It is clear that the office plays an important role in governing and managing migrant populations. The fieldwork process in this study suggests that accessing migrants through the New Residents Affairs Bureau in each jurisdiction would also be an efficient way to find gatekeepers or interviewees in future research.

Limitations

As for the limitations in regard to the process of data collection, the researcher was expecting to interview education bureau officers in the sample cities, but failed to gain access. Although the data collected from the three staffs of New Residents Affairs Bureau are sufficient to support the project's arguments, the researcher still believes that it would be ideal if she could have interviewed some

government officers at the city level who might have a holistic view of the policy situation from a higher status. Additionally, as reported by some interviewees, apart from the public and private schools for migrant children that the researcher has visited and investigated, there are a small number of elite state schools that also recruit a small number of migrant children, as well as some public schools that recruit migrant children who perform well at sports competitions for a period of years. However, the researcher was unable to contact the school leaders at these elite schools owing to the limits of her social network.

Furthermore, given the limited time and funding in the field, the researcher was not able to undertake fieldwork in other cities, especially those outside the Yangtze River Delta to make additional comparison. Lastly, an extended participant observation for the migrant families engaging in the process of accessing public schools could not be realized. Ideally, participant observation (for example, working as a teaching assistant or an administrative assistant, or participating in related administrative affairs for migrant children, such as teachers' meetings and parents' meetings) would have provided the researcher with another set of data (in addition to the interview data) to support the analysis of the interpretation and enactment of policy with actors in schools.

Conclusion

This paper presents only one approach to research on migrant children's educational access, which is itself a sensitive research topic and challenging for an outsider. The lessons learnt serve as one set of methodological options, but are not perfect solutions to all challenges. Other researchers may find better strategies to tackle similar problems.

The researcher identified as an outsider to the sampled schools and migrant groups, and had left the Zhejiang province five years previously to pursue her studies outside Mainland China. This granted her a 'fresh eye' to capture phenomena that insiders might have taken for granted (Pitman, 2002), but she was aware of the danger of missing or misinterpreting some subtleties as well as the challenges of limited networks. Born and brought up in the same culture, the researcher also identified as an insider who had been educated in the same system and was familiar with the themes of local micro-politics and sensitive to some local practices (Asselin, 2003). Her insider identity likely contributed to a deeper understanding of the research setting and automatically provided more trust than would have been the case for a non-native researcher. However, on the other hand, the researcher also received suspicions and doubts towards her other aspect of identity: a doctoral student in a Japanese university. This outsider identity became stressful, and discouraged her from continuing certain interviews or asking certain questions. This required the researcher to aim consciously for objectivity, reflexivity, and authenticity.

Networks proved effective in this study, and a top-down approach of gaining access proved both

possible and efficient in the hierarchical education system. These strategies might be workable in other cultures, but perhaps according to different nuances. As a female with an outgoing character, the researcher usually felt comfortable to negotiate with the relevant parties and to attend to details according to the social etiquette. However, she sometimes found herself in difficult situations, for example when facing the drinking culture and in navigating the expectations of reciprocity with social contacts.

Despite the specificity of the study in Yangtze River Delta, the following lessons may be shared with other researchers on migrant children's education. First, multi-site ethnographic research with mixed approaches and methods may help to produce a more complete picture than either the quantitative or qualitative strategies. Numbers and narratives in documents describe the overall patterns, but are not sufficient for in-depth understanding. For example, through qualitative interviews the researcher learned that the high percentage of migrant children did not mean that public schools are generally open for them and their educational access were guaranteed, because many migrants were excluded at an earlier stage, preventing migrant parents from understanding and joining the points system process. Thus, the official data may not represent the proportion of the achievement of local government to respond to migrant children's needs. Additionally, access to schools may encounter particular challenges in settings where teachers hesitate to respond. Nevertheless, research can be facilitated by appropriate gatekeepers, though effective identification of gatekeepers requires connections and a deep understanding of the local context. Finally, when researching sensitive topics, researchers should think seriously about what protections they can offer to participants. Ethical practices should go beyond the clearance procedures and consent. Understandings of ethics may differ among researchers and the participants, and may change over time. Fieldwork is a process, during which the researcher may gain insights on what risks and benefits the research might bring to the people involved. Reflection should continue during the course of data analysis and publication of research findings.

Notes

- (1) State Council. 2014a. *Guowuyuan guanyu jinyibu tuijin huji zhidu gaige de yijian* (Opinions of the State Council on Further Promotion of Reform of the Household Registration System), No.25, 24 July, http://www.gov.cn/gongbao/content/2014/content_2729568.htm. Accessed 18 October 2019.
- (2) State Council. 2014b. *Zhongguo Xinxing Chengzhenghua Guihua* (The New National Urbanization Plan for 2014-2020), http://www.gov.cn/gongbao/content/2014/content_2644805.htm. Accessed 1 October 2019.

References

- Asselin, M. E. (2003). Insider research: Issues to consider when doing qualitative research in your own setting. *Journal for Nurses in Staff Development*, 19 (2), pp. 99–103.
- Bell, J. (1991). *Doing Your Research Project* (second edition). Milton Keynes: Open University Press.
- Chen, Y., & Feng, S. (2013). Access to public schools and the education of migrant children in China. *China Economic Review*, 26(1), pp.75–88.
- Dong, Y., & Goodburn, C. (2019). Residence Permits and Points Systems: New Forms of Educational and Social Stratification in Urban China. *Journal of Contemporary China*, <https://doi.org/10.1080/10670564.2019.1704997>
- Goodburn, C. (2009). Learning from migrant education: A case study of the schooling of rural migrant children in Beijing. *International Journal of Educational Development*, 29(5), pp. 495–504.
- Goodburn, C. (2016). Educating Migrant Children: The effects of rural-urban migration on access to primary education. *Spotlight on China: Changes in Education under China's Market Economy*, pp. 365–380. <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0033291716000714>
- Guo, Z., & Liang, T. (2017). Differentiating citizenship in urban China: a case study of Dongguan city, *Citizenship Studies*, DOI: 10.1080/13621025.2017.1353744
- Han, Jialing. (2004). Survey report on the state of compulsory education among migrant children in Beijing, *Chinese Education and Society*, 37 (5), pp. 29–55.
- Hammersley M. (1985). Ethnography: What it is and what it does. Research and evaluation methods in special education: Quantitative and qualitative techniques in case study work, In: Hegarty, Seamus and Evans, Peter eds. *Research and Evaluation Methods in Special Education*. Windsor: NFER-Nelson, pp. 152–163.
- Hammersley, M., and P. Atkinson. (2007). *Ethnography: Principles in practice*. 3rd ed. London: Routledge. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.4324/9780203944769>
- Hughes, C.C. (1992). 'Ethnography': what's in a work — process? product? promise? *Qualitative Health Research*, 2, pp. 451–74.
- Hu, Bo. (2012). *Education for Migrant Children: Policy Implementation in the Changing Urban Education System in China*, PhD thesis, The London School of Economics and Political Science.
- Lai, F., Liu, C., Luo, R., Zhang, L., Ma, X., Bai, Y., Rozelle, S. (2014). The education of China's migrant children: The missing link in China's education system. *International Journal of Educational Development*, 37, pp. 68–77.
- Lee, R. M. (1993). *Doing Research on Sensitive Topics*. London: Sage.
- Li, N., & Placier, P. (2015). Migrant and non-migrant families in Chengdu, China: Segregated lives, segregated schools. *Social Sciences*, 4(2), pp. 339–360. <https://doi.org/10.3390/socsci4020339>

- Liu T, Holmes K, Zhang M. (2018). Better educational inclusion of migrant children in urban schools? Exploring the influences of the population control policy in large Chinese cities. *Asian Social Work Policy Review*, 12, pp. 54–62. <https://doi.org/10.1111/aswp.12138>
- Lewin, K. M. (2007). Improving access, equity and transitions in education: Creating a research agenda. Consortium for Research into Educational Access Transition and Equity (CREATE), Working Paper No. 1. Brighton: University of Sussex.
- Louisy, P. (2011). Dilemmas of insider research in a small country setting: Tertiary education in St. Lucia. In Crossley, M., & Vulliamy, G. (Eds.), *Qualitative educational research in developing countries: Current perspectives* (pp. 199–220). New York: Routledge.
- Miller, T. & Bell, L. (2002). Consenting to What? Issues of access, gatekeeping and ‘informed consent’. In M. Mauthner, M. Birch, J. Jessop and T. Miller (eds) *Ethics in Qualitative Research*. London: Sage, pp. 53–69.
- Murphy, Rachel. (2004). Turning peasants into modern Chinese citizens: ‘population quality’ discourse, demographic transition and primary education. *The China Quarterly*, 177, pp.1–20.
- Murphy, Rachel. (2020). *The Children of China's Great Migration*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- National Bureau of Statistics of China, UNICEF China, UNFPA China. (2017). Population Status of Children in China in 2015: Facts and Figures, <https://www.unicef.cn/en/reports/population-status-children-china-2015/> accessed September 29, 2020.
- Pitman, G.E. (2002). Outsider/insider: The politics of shifting identities in the research process. *Feminism and Psychology*, 12, pp. 282–288.
- Potts, P. (2007). The place of experience in comparative education research. In Bray, M., Adamson, B., & Mason, M. (Eds.), *Comparative education research: Approaches and methods*, pp. 63–81. Hong Kong: Comparative Education Research Centre, The University of Hong Kong, and Dordrecht: Springer.
- Punch, M. (1994). Politics and ethics in qualitative research. In N.K. Denzin & Y.S. Lincoln (Eds.), *Handbook of qualitative research*. Newbury Park, CA: Sage.
- Shan, C., & Qin, Y. (2017). Compulsory Education Enrollment Requirements of the Migrant Children of Off-farm Workers. *Journal of Sichuan Normal University (Social Sciences Edition)*. 44 (5), pp.92–100. [in Chinese]
- Uemura, H. (2006). Min-gong School Management in China: The Guarantee of Educational Opportunity as a Human Right. *Comparative Education*. 32, pp. 25–45. [in Japanese]
- UNESCO. (2018). *Global Education Monitoring Report 2019: Migration, Displacement and Education – Building Bridges, not Walls*. Paris, UNESCO
- Wang, Lu. (2008). The marginality of migrant children in the urban Chinese educational system, *British*

- Journal of Sociology of Education*, 29 (6), 691–703. doi:10.1080/ 01425690802423361
- Wang, Weiping. (2017). The evolution of the conditions for the admission of compulsory education for migrant children. *Journal of Shanghai Educational Research*, 4, pp.74–79. [in Chinese]
- Wang, Y. J & Lu, N. (2019). Study on Enrollment Policy of Migrant Children-Based on Analysis of 11 Cities in Pearl River Delta and Yangtze River Delta. *Jiangsu Social Science*, 1, pp. 69–79.
- Watts, M., & Ebbutt, D. (1987). More than the sum of the parts: Research methods in group interviewing. *British Educational Research Journal*, 13(1), pp. 25–34.
- Wu, Jieh-Min. (2010). Rural Migrant Workers and China’s Differential Citizenship: A Comparative Institutional Analysis. In Whyte M. (Ed.), *One Country, Two Societies: Rural-Urban Inequality in Contemporary China*, pp. 55–82. Cambridge, Massachusetts; London, England: Harvard University Asia Center. doi:10.2307/j.ctt1sq5t74.6
- Xiao, Qiang. (2019). “The Road to Digital Unfreedom: President Xi’s Surveillance State.” *Journal of Democracy* 30, 1: 53–67.
- Xiang, Biao. (2005). *Transcending Boundaries: Zhejiangcun: The Story of a Migrant Village in Beijing*, trans. Weldon J. Amsterdam: Brill Academic.
- Xiong, Yihan. (2015). The broken ladder: Why education provides no upward mobility for migrant children in China. *The China Quarterly*, 221, pp.161–184.
- Yang, Dongping. (2017). The development and policy evolution of China’s migrant children’s education. *Annual Report on Education for China’s Migrant Children (2016)*. Social Science Academic Press (China). pp. 275–278. [in Chinese]
- Yu, Hui. (2017). From access to quality? The enactment of school enrolment policy for internal migrant children in urban China, Doctoral thesis (Ph.D.), University College London.
- Zhang, L. (2012). Economic migration and urban citizenship in China: The role of points systems. *Population and Development Review*, 38(3), pp. 503–533.
- Zhang, Jun-hua; Yan, Li-xia; Yuan, Yang. (2018). Comparing the mental health of rural-to-urban migrant children and their counterparts in china, *Medicine*: 97 (17). pe0597. doi: 10.1097/MD.00000000000010597

中国における「農民工子女」の教育調査方法論の考察： 長江デルタでのフィールド調査を事例研究として

万 奕

本研究は、中国の長江デルタの各都市で実施したフィールド調査の経験をもとに、農民工という社会の弱層に置かれている人たちを対象とした調査方法の在り方とその課題について考察する。長江デルタは、中国で最も活発な労働市場として、さらには経済革新及び開発が行われている地域として知られている。また、国内出稼ぎ労働者が多く暮らしており、基礎教育の需要を有する農民工子女の数が国内で最も多い地域でもある。本論文では、この地域を対象に行った著者の調査を事例研究として、中国国内の移民を対象とした調査計画段階やデータの収集過程で生じ得る課題、そしてその対処法を提示し、中国という特殊な文化的、社会的、経済的文脈における国内移民子女の教育調査方法の考察を行う。様々な規模の都市が、農民工子女の教育に対して異なる政策制限を設けている社会的背景をもとに行った長江デルタでのフィールド調査から得られる方法論に関する知見は、同様に都市化が進む国及び地域研究に対しても有意義な示唆を与えるものであると考える。