A multi-method study of the everyday lives of migrant children in urban China

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DEDICATION

To my dear husband, Qiang and lovely daughters, Laura and Sarah

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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ABSTRACT

The present study aims to explore migrant children's experiences and perspectives on their family migration from rural to urban China. More specifically the study seeks to find out the family conditions of migrant children in the host society; the educational experiences of migrant children in the urban area; their coping strategies when they arrive at the new place and finally their social and cultural integration in the new community.

The social studies of childhood provide the theoretical framework that guides this research. This study also uses structuration theory to understand how social structures influence migrant children's lives from their perspectives, and how children, as active agents, create their own cultures and friendships under the social environment.

A total of twenty three migrant children and nineteen local children participated in the study and their ages ranged from six to thirteen years. The study uses qualitative research methods in a case study in China, including participant observations, semi-structured interviews and in-depth interviews.

The research findings indicate that family migration has serious impact on migrant children's everyday lives. Migrant children experience a different everyday life in urban China compared with local children. The social status is a main factor preventing them from enjoying equal rights and integrating in the urban city. It also affects migrant children's lives in a fundamental way and shapes their opportunity in education. The study also finds that migrant children receive less discrimination in the city compared with previous studies, which shows that Chinese government is trying to solve structure problems in a right direction.

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LIST OF ACRONYMS

CRC……………………………Convention on the Right of the Child

GDP……………………………Gross Domestic Product

IMO……………………………International Organization for Migration

NOSEB………………………...Norwegian Center for Child Research

OECD…………………………The Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development

PRC……………………………People's Republic of China

RMB…………………………...Ren Min Bi (Chinese currency)

UNCRC ………………………United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child

UNESCO……………………...United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization

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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

1.1The background of research for master thesis

Migration, while not a new phenomenon, has become a key issue in the world due to the growing pace of economic globalization. In most cases, rural-urban migration (people moving from rural to urban areas) happens due to the economic development of industrialized countries. During the industrialization process, employment opportunities increase in urban cities, while technological progress in agriculture decreases the labor need in rural areas. According to the International Labor Organization (2013), the number of migrant workers has kept rising worldwide. Internal migration in China is one of the most extensive phenomena in the world. The number of migration population is 236 million people in China in 2012 (National Bureau of Statistics of China, 2012). Most migrants leave their farmlands to urban cities and some labors flow from central and western regions to the most developed eastern areas. The National Statistics Bureau revealed that in 2003 China's GDP was 11,669.4 billion RMB and the value created by migrant workers was 2,333.8 billion RMB contributing to 20 percent of GDP in that year (cited in Ye, 2008). Their work in cities boosted their family income, supported the economic and social development of the area where they came from and contributed virtually to China's overall economic and social development. Therefore, migrant workers in China have been playing an important part in the development of urban and rural areas, and of the society as a whole. Migration involves both adults and children. With the continuous development of economy in China, many children migrate with their parents to urban cities. However, these migrant children are facing many difficulties in cities, such as social exclusion and education problems.

This study focuses on understanding migrant children's experiences with family migration to urban China and their coping strategies in the new environment. It draws on empirical material from my fieldwork, carried out from June 15 to July 28, 2014 in Shenyang, China. During this period, I have experienced their hardships, happiness, expectations and ambitions. I hope this master thesis can attract some serious attention to the problems migrant children are facing in contemporary urban China. A solution can only be found after the problem is identified and recognized by the public.

1.2 Problem statement

The movement of rural laborers to urban China is apparently different from migration happening in other countries. The number of rural-urban workers in China is large and few of the rural migrants could become permanent urban residents due to the household registration system (*Hukou* System). The household registration system was gradually instituted in China in 1950s. A household registration record identifies a person as a resident of a particular area of the country. In other words, it classifies the whole population into two groups: agricultural residents and non-agricultural residents. A child inherits *hukou* status from his/her parents from birth, thus the identity is destined to carry and pass on to his/her descendants. By the household registration system, China strictly controls the population and its movement. People with rural residence permits have disadvantages compared with urban residents in almost every aspect of life since it not only links people's accessibility to state benefits and welfare, but also decides the opportunities in labor market. Rural migrants have high possibility to be employed in the positions in cities with characters of long hours, poor working conditions, low and unstable pay and no benefits (Wang & Zuo, 1999). Even worse, the absence of labor security and delayed payments in cities can plunge them into economic instability. Therefore, the *Hukou* restrictions are the biggest barriers for migrant families to integrate into China's cities. People who move out of their designated *Hukou* zones will be restricted to access to public services such as schools or hospitals and restricted from buying properties, which are essential for their everyday life.

In the 1980s and 1990s, China has gradually loosened *hukou* restrictions since migrants began flooding into cities and coastal factories. In certain areas, migrants can register freely and get temporarily residence permits but cannot easily become residents of the larger and more attractive cities. It has gradually become possible for migrant parents to enroll their children in schools in cities, although they have to pay extra money to schools in order to compensate for the parts that schools do not get from governments. This is one of the reasons why many parents no longer have to leave their children behind in villages when they migrate to cities for work (the phenomenon called 'left-behind' children) but rather choose to raise their children in cities as long as they can. Fleisher and Yang (Fleisher & Yang, 2003) found that migrant families often have to pay an annual fee ranging from 3,000 to 30, 000 Yuan per child (484 to 4840 US$) to have their children enter public schools.

In 2004, the Ministry of Education, National Development and Reform Commission and Ministry of Treasury issued a document that intended to provide access to education for migrant children and prohibit the public state-operated schools from charging extra fees (Liu *et al.*, 2005). However, this policy has proven to be not very effective, since the local governments have not carried it out properly and extra money is still charged for migrant children in certain cities in China.

On July 30, 2014, two days after I finished my fieldwork, it was reported that China launched the new *hukou* system reform to remove the distinction between urban and rural residents. However, there is no reason to believe that the change will happen overnight. It is interesting to observe how the new reform will influence the children I have interviewed. As pointed out by the reporter, Ankit Panda, this was a limited *hukou* reform since migrant workers and their children might get better access in small cities but in medium-sized and large-sized cities, they were still not entitled to equal treatment, such as salary, work time and workload, as urban residents (Panda, 2014). Therefore, the migrant children will continue to meet a lot of obstacles to integrate in the new environment in cities.

1.3 Definition of migrant children in the study

Migrant children in this research are defined as children, aged from 6 to 13, who move with their families from the rural areas to urban cities in China, specifically Shenyang city where I did my fieldwork. They have not been registered in the Shenyang household registration System.

1.4 Aim and objectives of the study

The aim of the study is to understand migrant children's life in urban China from children's perspectives and their coping strategies with family migration in the new community. Thus the study will seek to:

- Explore the family conditions of migrant children in the city after family migration.
- Examine the impact of education system on migrant children.
- Explore the coping strategies chosen by migrant children after family migration.
- Explore the social and cultural integration of migrant children in the new community.

1.5 Research questions

The aim and objectives are approached by the following research questions.

- How is the family condition of migrant children compared to the local children in the urban context?
- How do problems associated with educational benefits include or exclude migrant children in the new community?
- Which coping strategies do migrant children adopt when they arrive at the new place?
- To what extent do migrant children feel a sense of social and cultural belonging in the new community?

1.6 Significance of the study

Large-scale population mobility is a major aspect of China's industrialization and urbanization. After the economic reform in 1978, the migration of cheap labors from rural areas of China to urban areas started. At that time, rural workers had to migrate to cities in order to gain money for the survival of their families. Even in the past decade, the first choice for most of migrant workers was to leave their children behind in the villages due to the financial restrictions. The children were left in families with one single parent or grandparents. According to local reports, these so-called left-behind children are more likely to be victims of crimes, and a higher proportion suffers from psychological and behavioral problems due to long-term separation from their parents (Global Children's Vision, 2013). The problems related to their health are also of big concern. There has also been a lot of negative attention on the left-behind children in the media, revealing the inhumane conditions in which many of them live in. For example, the explosion of a firecracker workshop in Hezhou City, Guanxi Province killed two children and seriously injured 11 children and all of them were left-behind children in the village of Yang Hui (Global Times, 2009). Such incidents have helped to change migrant workers' determination from leaving children behind to travelling with them.

With the continuous economic development in China for around thirty years, people have increased their living standard. Moreover, the Chinese government has been working on loosening the control of the household registration. Migrant workers have options on the issues related to their children. According to National Bureau of Statistics (2012), the number of

migration population is 236 million people in 2010, which means that one in every six inhabitants is a migrant worker. Compared with the previous generation, the new generation of migrants is young. The data collected in the sixth census in 2010 (NewsChina, 2013) show that the migration pattern has shifted from individual mobility to family migration since the purpose of the migration has changed from survival model to future developmental model, which is satisfying basic need of family to investment in family future. Rather than leaving their children behind in their villages, more and more children get to travel together with their parents in order to have a better future, and it was this emerging phenomenon that caught my interest.

Moreover, some research has been carried out to gain migrants' own perspectives about their reasons for migrating, their experiences before and after migration and other issues. However, according to Sime *et al* (2011) migrant children have been less studied, especially children who follow their families' migration without participation in their families' decisions. In addition, although Asia is the world's biggest continent with the world's highest number of children (ESCAP, 2012), there are far fewer studies on children in Asia, particularly children in East Asia according to Zhang (2013). Finally, Orellana *et al* (2001, p. 578) argue that "in migration studies, the position of children has often been equated with that of luggage" which means that migrant children have been considered as things transported by adults or simply as extensions of their adult counterparts (Dobson, 2009). Thus, migrant children have been viewed as dependent objects without feelings, power and agency for a quite long time. With the increasing number of migrant workers, there has been a strong need for research with migrant children.

This research aims to address this gap by exploring the impact of migration on children and their coping strategies to the new environment in the city as competent social actors from multiple perspectives, emphasizing children's perspectives.

1.7 Outline of the thesis

This thesis is structured as follows: Chapter one presents a brief introduction to the study, including main sub-topics as problem statement, aim and objectives, research questions and significance of the study. Chapter two gives an overview of country profile and context of the study area. First, it presents a description of China and then, it takes look at migration and migrant children in China. In addition, a more detailed description of Shenyang, the study area, is provided. Chapter three focuses on key concepts and relevant theoretical perspectives which

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serve as a guide to the study. The relevant literatures are reviewed. Chapter four presents the methodological framework of the study. It covers issues such as methodological perspectives underpinning the research design and research site and accessibility. It also discusses the methods used in generating data and related ethical concerns. Chapter five and six provide the analysis of the data and discuss the findings. It presents analyses of migrant children's everyday life in Shenyang, their coping strategies and friendship. The excluding mechanisms for their integration into the new environment is also analyzed. Chapter seven provides a summary of the thesis as well as some suggestions and recommendations for future research.

CHAPTER 2: COUNTRY PROFILE AND STUDY CONTEXT

2.1 Introduction

This chapter presents the profile of the country. It begins with a brief description of the country, the People's Republic of China (PRC), and then provides an overview of economic development and the migration situation of the country. In addition, a more detailed description of Shenyang, where the study was conducted, is given.

2.2 Brief description of China

The People's Republic of China is located in East Asia, covering approximately 9.6 million square kilometers. It is the fourth largest country by land area according to National Geographic (2013). The population of China is about 1.36 billion in 2013 based on Statista (2014). Beijing is the capital city of China, located in northern China. It is the second largest city in China after Shanghai but it is the nation's political, cultural, and educational center. China exercises jurisdiction over 22 provinces, five autonomous regions (Inner Mongolia, Xinjiang, Guangxi, Ningxia and Tibet---which have their own local governments with legislative rights), four direct-controlled municipalities (Beijing, Tianjin, Shanghai, and Chongqing---which have the highest level classification for cities and have the same function as provinces), two self-governing special administrative regions (Hong Kong and Macau---which have their own governments and legal systems), and one separate political entity (Taiwan---which is a sovereign state) (See Figure 1).

Figure 1: People's Republic of China (PRC)

China's landscape is highly diverse, ranging from plains, rivers and hills in the east side and plateaus, mountains and deserts in the west side. Climate in China is various as well. In the south, it is tropical climate with hotness and humidity while the northeastern part is subarctic climate with dryness and coldness.

2.2.1 The economic development in China

China has a long and amazing civilization with more than five thousand years. It underwent a series of reforms and evolutions in history in aspects of society, culture and economy. Prior to 1979, China, under the leadership of Chairman Mao Zedong, maintained a centrally planned economy. Under this system, a large share of the country's economic output was directed and controlled by the state, which set production goals, controlled prices and allocated resources throughout most of the economy. In this way, the economy was relatively inefficient and stagnant mainly due to the lack of incentives and competition. Therefore, by the end of culture

revolution in 1979, Chinese living standards were substantially lower than those of many other developing countries.

Since Deng Xiaoping took power in 1978, Chinese government gradually reformed the economy to market oriented economic principles and opened up to foreign trade and investment with the Western countries. In addition, the government established four special economic zones along the coast for the purpose of attracting foreign investments, boosting exports and importing high technology products into China. China has benefitted dramatically from free market economy system and the opening door policy. Since 1979, China's average annual real gross domestic product (GDP) has grown by around 10% (see Figure 2). Thus, this has meant that over the past 30 years, China has been the world's fastest-growing major economy. In 2014, China has become the world's second-largest economy by GDP in the world, overtaking all but the United States (Yueh, 2014). As the economy has developed, the people's material and cultural conditions are constantly improving. As indicated in Figure 3, China's average monthly wages in 2000 were $94, which increased to $694 in 2013. In 2000, China's wages were around 52.2% the size of the wages in neighboring Thailand, while they were around 73.5% higher than those in Thailand in 2013. From 2000 to 2013, Chinese average real wages grew at an average annual rate of 16.6%.

Figure 21. Chinese Real GDP Growth: 1979-2013

(percent)
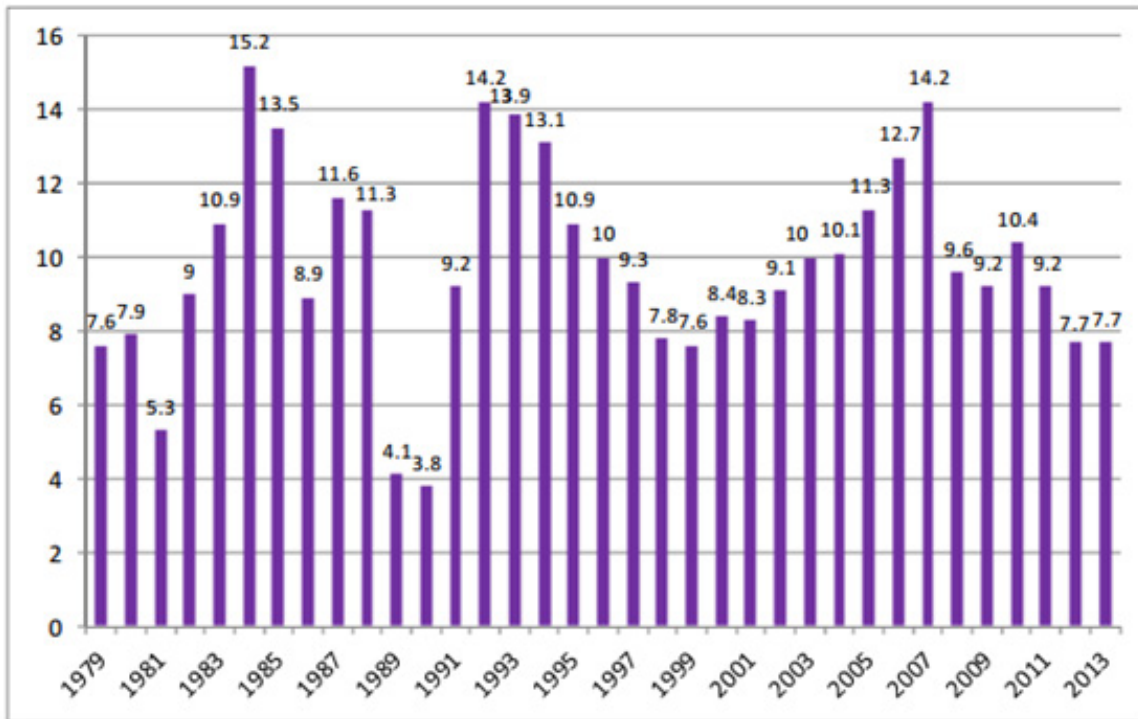
Source: Economist Intelligence Unit and official Chinese government data.

Figure 3. Average Monthly Wages for Selected Countries: 2000-2013

(U.S. dollars)
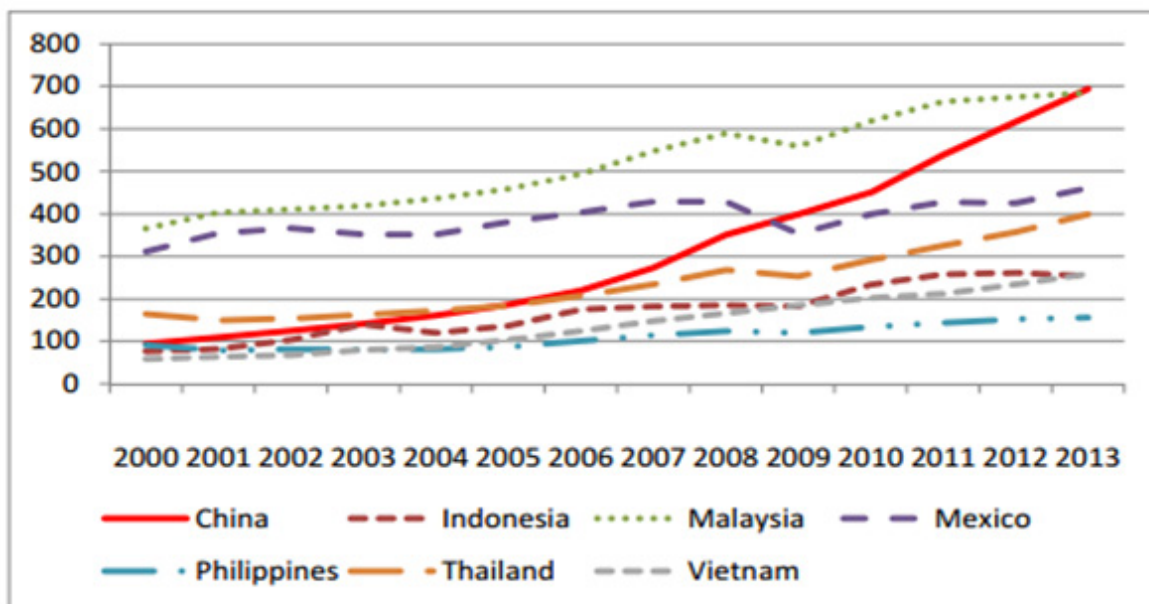
Source: Economist Intelligence Unit.

2.3 Migration and migrant children in China

In China, there is rural-urban migration, urban-urban migration and rural-rural migration, in addition to the huge of number of Chinese who also migrate to other countries. This research focuses on the rural-urban migration. In the following sections, the reasons behind migration in China and current migration situation are discussed and the condition of migrant children is presented as well.

2.3.1 Causes of migration in China

Rural-urban migration is especially prominent in China. As mentioned, China experienced a rapid economic growth after the economic reforms in 1978. The fast industrialization process caused the increased need of labor in urban areas. Meanwhile, the technology used in the farmland also freed some farmers. Moreover, the agricultural land was shrinking as a result of the conversion of agricultural land to non-agricultural uses, which led to surplus labor released from agricultural production in rural areas.

The economic reforms contributed to the development of China on the one hand; on the other hand they led to the vast and increasing gaps between rural and urban areas of China. This was particularly due to the imbalance in political intervention and economic investment, where governmental policies usually favored the coastal cities. Therefore, the urban populations have better access to resources, such as housing, employment and wages. Since the late 1980s, the urban-rural income ratio rose rapidly as development policy supported urban areas (Oi, 1993). As indicated in Figure 4, the ratio of urban household income per capita to rural household income increased from 1.9 in 1985 to 3.3 in 2009. At the early stage of China's economic reform, the gap between rural and urban households has already reached a rather high level with the ratio between urban and rural household's disposable income per capita of 2.6 in 1978. This huge income disparity between rural and urban areas provided an enormous incentive for the rural people to migrate to the urban areas in search of higher living standards. Along with the initiation of economic reform, the household registration system started to loosen. As a result, rural-urban migration in China became one of the aspects of economic development, which could not be avoided.

The low income level and emergence of labor force surplus in rural areas, higher living standards and better overall life prospects in urban areas drove large numbers of rural residents to move into urban cities (Gui *et al.*, 2012).

Figure 4. Urban-rural income gap in China, 1978–2012.

urban/rural income ratio
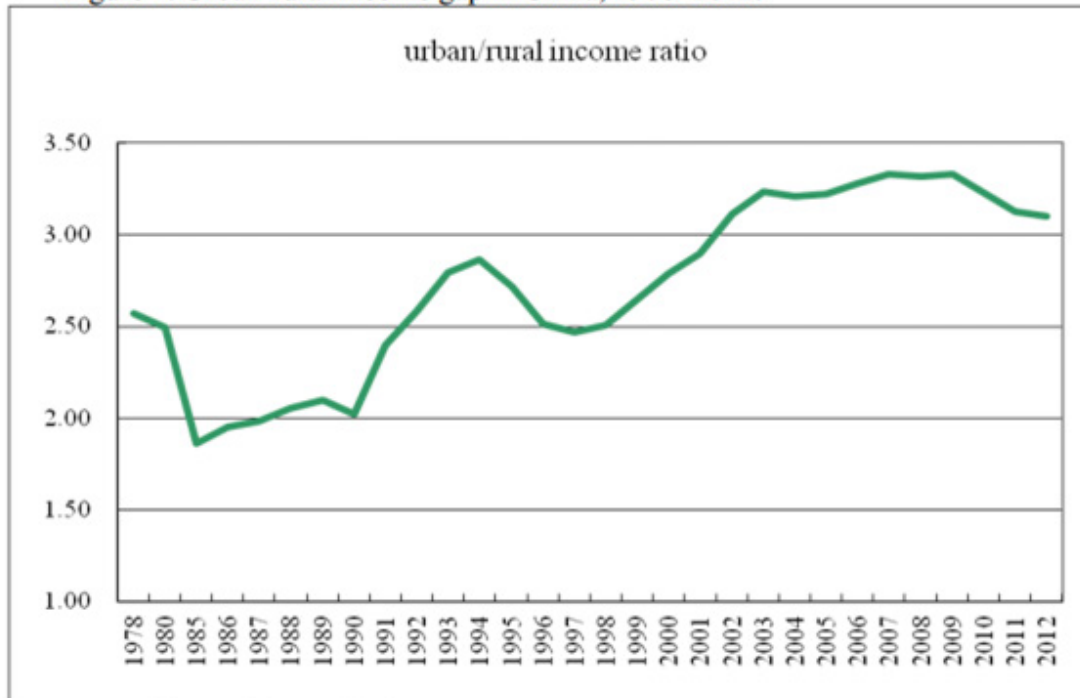
Source: China Statistics Yearbook 2012.

2.3.2 Migration policies and education-related policies for migrants in China

Like migration itself, governing policies for migration have changed dramatically in the past three decades. In 1982, three years after China's economic reform, a document was issued by the State Council of China about strictly controlling rural to urban migration and the change of status from agricultural to non-agricultural *hukou* (Bai & Song, 2001). With the increasing agricultural productivity in rural areas and the demand for rural workers in urban city, governments started to loosen the control in 1984 and allowed farmers to enter towns to do business as long as they could take care of their own lands. However, at the early 1990s, governments tightened the policies on migration again by strictly controlling people moving out from rural areas, specially discoursing migrating to Guangdong City. These policies did not slow down the flow of migrants in reality. By the mid-1990s, the governments realized that it was no longer realistic to control the flow of migrants and started to manage the migrant labor at the national level, such as

migrant employment registration cards. In 1997, the State Council authorized small cities to issue local *hukou* status for migrants who met certain requirements and this policy was extended to county-level cities by 2000. A document was issued by the State Council in 1998 to call for the local governments to accommodate the educational needs of migrant children, but the fact was that few local governments implemented the policy, and migrant children still could not go to local schools due to the extra charge (Liang & Chen, 2007). In Beijing, these fees can exceed the annual earnings of construction workers (Scheineson, 2009). In Shenzhen, migrant children enrolled in public primary schools had to pay three times as much as local students (Chan, 2009). In 2004, the Ministry of Education, National Development and Reform Commission and Ministry of Treasury called for abolishing the policy of charging extra fees for migrant children (Liu *et al.*, 2005). However, the actual implementation of the policy took a long time. Former Prime Minister Wen Jiabao called for speeding up reform of the *hukou* system to advance urbanization in a speech during the opening of the annual National People's Congress in 2013 (The free encyclopedia, 2014a). Bearing in mind that China recently launched a new *hukou* system reform to remove the distinction between urban and rural residents, migration policies in China are clearly moving into a right direction in spite of the slow pace.

Compared with urban workers, migrant workers do not enjoy equal employment opportunities. The Ministry of Labor once released a document called "The Interim Regulations Regarding the Management of Employment of Inter-provincial Rural-urban Migrants", which includes the discriminatory principle of "local job seekers first, migrants second" (Zhu *et al.*, 2009, p. 4). In Beijing, migrant jobs are restricted to certain professions: migrants are not allowed to be hired in occupations such as finance, insurance, accounting, star-level hotel and telephone operator (Bai & Song, 2001).

The type of the household registration migrant children hold is related to the opportunities for attending schools at their places of destination. Children who can be admitted to state-operated schools must be registered in the school district (household registration) and must reside within the school district in the city as well. The educational budget from the central government is allocated based on the number of school age children of local residents and the local governments are responsible for allocating the education budget to schools. If local governments recruit migrant children, it will add financial burden to them. Instead of denying young migrants

access to education in public schools, special requirements were set up in some areas: Parents of migrant children need to provide a range of documents, such as residence permit, employment permit, health certificates of the parents, population planning certificate, social insurance of the child in addition to paying extra fees in order to register in the urban state-operated schools.

2.3.3 The 'Left-behind' Children in China

As mentioned in the introduction, the migration from the rural areas to the cities has created millions of children left behind in the rural areas in China due to various reasons, mainly family financial restrictions and household registration system. According to Fan *et al* (2010), among children in condition that both parents have migrated, 74% were left with their grandparents, 12.8% were left in the care of their uncles/aunts, and 13.2% were left with no one. In most cases, the caregivers do not have physical ability, regular income or own the knowledge about taking care of children. Many of these left-behind children meet their parents only once a year, during the Chinese Spring Festival (He *et al.*, 2012). The most recent data revealed that about 70 million children have been left behind by one or both parents; 88% of these are from rural areas (Duan *et al.*, 2013). The lack of proper supervision and care puts these children at the greater risk of emotional difficulties (Ren & Treiman, 2013).

2.3.4 Migrant Children in China

As mentioned above, the total number of migrant population reached 236 million on a national level in 2012 (National Bureau of Statistics of China). This number increased by 80.7% since 2000. Along with the changing pattern of migration from personal to family migration and from temporary inhabitation to permanent settlement, increasing numbers of children have also migrated to cities with their parents. According to the 2000 census, there were a total of 121 million migrants in China (National Bureau of Statistics, 2000). Among these, nearly 23 million were children under the age 18 (National Bureau Committee on Children and Women, 2003). However, the number of migrant children is increasing. In 2011 the number of migrant children aged between 0 to 14 years old was 42 million, representing about 19% of the total migrant population (National Health and Family Planning Commission of China, 2011).

2.4 The study area

This section presents a description of the specific area under study--- Shenyang. The topics of the location, population and size are discussed and the socio-economic characteristics are presented as well. A description of the basic education in Shenyang is given at the end of this section.

2.4.1 Location, population and size

Shenyang city is the capital of Liaoning province and located in the Northeast China (Figure 5). It is also the province's most populous city with a population of 8.23 million and a land area of 4992 square miles (Baidu, 2014). The city is comprised of nine districts and four counties. There are six small to medium sized cities surround Shenyang city.

Figure 5. Location of Shenyang City in Liaoning Province

2.4.2 Socio economic and historical characteristics

Shenyang is a political, economic as well as cultural center of Liaoning Province. It has also an important industrial base in China and serves as the transportation and commercial center of China's northeast region, particularly with Japan, Russia, and Korea. Many major industrial companies have their headquarters in Shenyang, including cars, automotive components, building products, agricultural product processing, chemical product manufacturing, and steel and non-ferrous metal smelting and rolling (The free Encyclopedia, 2014b).

It is a celebrated old city with more than 2000 years of history. It was the former capital of China's Qing Dynasty and has many cultural relics which symbolize its prosperity. The most famous of these is the Shenyang Imperial Palace, which is one of China's two best preserved imperial palace complexes. After Beijing was established as the capital of Qing, Shenyang was considered an auxiliary capital.

Shenyang's economy is ranked among the top 10 in China, The GDP of Shenyang in 2012 was 660.68 billion RMB, representing growth of 11% from the previous year. International trade and investments play considerable contribution to Shenyang's economy. In 2012, foreign trade was valued at 12.750 million in Shenyang (Baidu, 2014). The fast economic development in Shenyang has attracted large amount of immigrants. About 11% of Shenyang's population is migrants and more than a half of the migrants hold rural *hukou* in 2006 (National Bureau of Statistics, 2006). For the male migrants, labor work is usually their first choice, such as working as carpenters, plumbers, drivers or working at the construction site and renovation companies. The female migrants usually work as domestic workers employed either by an individual or by an agency to carry out tasks such as cleaning, cooking, laundry, childcare, maternity care, nursing care or care for the elderly. Some works are on a part-time basis but often for multiple employers.

2.4.3 Basic education

Education in China is a state-run system. All citizens must attend school for at least nine years which are funded by the government. It includes six years of primary education and three years of middle school education.

In Shenyang, different kinds of schools for basic education are available. Children can study at the state-operated schools. Students should hold Shenyang household registration and must live in areas within the school district. If students do not have Shenyang household registration, some other regulations may apply. Children can go to private high-standard schools, which reach high academic scores. These schools are for gifted children or children with excellent academic achievements. Usually students need to pass the entrance exams. The instruction language is in both English and Chinese for some of these schools. Migrant children can study at the private schools especially for rural migrant workers' children. The condition of these schools is usually poor, since they do not receive governmental funding.

CHAPTER 3: THEORITICAL PERSPECTIVES AND LITERATURE REVIEW

3.1 Introduction

A theory is a well-accepted principle that can be used to explain some topics in the society. Theories are important for this research since they work as the conceptual basis for understanding and analyzing the phenomenon under study. The theoretical framework connects the researchers to the existing knowledge and guides the researchers on the choice of research methods, and "help to lift the empirical experiences in serving the important task of providing insights and understanding" (Nilsen, 2005, p. 119).

The structure of this chapter is threefold. Firstly, I start with social studies of childhood which is the main framework for the study, including the emergence of social studies of children and childhood, children as social actors, childhood socially constructed, the concept of a child, agency and social structure, children's rights and listening to children. Secondly, I discuss the concepts of migration, resilience, inclusion and exclusion, belonging and we-ness, which are the chosen analytical tools in the research. Finally, the relevant literature is reviewed at the end of the section.

3.2 Social studies of childhood

Social studies of childhood is the overall theoretical framework for this research. In this section, the key concepts and theoretical perspectives of social studies of childhood in regard to the study are introduced and the related applications in the thesis are explained in the following subsections.

3.2.1 The emergence of social studies of children and childhood

There are different theoretical approaches concerning children and childhood. Developmental psychology believes that children as individuals developing into adulthood can be achieved by specific stages in relation to cognitive subjectivity, physical development and ages (Woodhead & Montgomery, 2002). The conception of the socially developing child views children as "human becomings", incomplete human beings compared to adults or mature persons, and childhood is as steps to "the achievement of adulthood" (James *et al.*, 1998, p. 208). However, advocates of the social studies of childhood have challenged this developmental approach. Some scholars,

such as Corsaro (1997) and Prout (2005), help to shift the focus from viewing children as dependent, incompetent and passive objects towards an emphasis on children as independent, competent, active subjects as well as holders of rights. Such conception of the child views children as "human beings" and moves to "study real children in the present or the experiences of being a child" (James *et al.*, 1998, p. 208) rather than a focus on adults and adulthood. The social developing model by contrast ignores the real experience of the child actually living in the social world as a child (James *et al.*, 1998).

The philosophy and the tenets of the new social studies of childhood is the basis of this thesis. The social studies of childhood emerged in 1980s. It attempts to give a voice to children and emphasizes that children are active beings whose agency is important in the creation of their own life world (Qvortrup, 1994). The key features of the social studies of childhood, as discussed by James and Prout (1990, p. 8-9), are listed as followings:

- Childhood is understood as a social construction;
- Childhood is a variable of social analysis;
- Children's social relationships and cultures are worthy of study in their own rights, independent of the perspective and concern of adults;
- Children are and must be seen as active in the construction and determination of their own social lives, the lives of those around them and of the societies in which they live.
- Ethnography is a particularly useful methodology for the study of childhood as it allows children a more direct voice;
- The development of the social studies of childhood devotes to the process of reconstructing childhood in society.

3.2.2 Children are social actors

Traditional theories, such as Parson's socialization theory and Piagetian child development theory, viewed children as "less than fully human, unfinished or incomplete" whereas adults were seen as mature, rational and competent (Jenks, 1996, p. 10). The social science considered children as human becomings and childhood as a structural process of becoming, which led to the arguments that children were not citizen and did not have rights since they lacked competence and needed protection. Lee (2001a, p. 8) argued that adults acted in society due to

their "stability and completeness" while children were often viewed as dependent because of their "instability and incompleteness". The sociology of childhood emphasized children as competent active social actors on a par with adults (Qvortrup, 1994). James and Prout (1990) provided a definition of what this notion of children as social actors: children are actively constructing their own lives and the societies in which they live. Children are not just the passive receivers of social structures and development. It is also important to know that children should be studied as persons in their own right, separating from the views and concerns of adults (James & Prout, 1990).

James *et al* (1998, p. 207) discussed that "the child is conceived of as a person, a status, a course of action, a set of needs, rights or differences – in sum, as a social actor". Mayall (2002) argued that the actor refers to a person who does something; the agent refers to a person who does something with otherness. This is the way to produce social and cultural relationship. Therefore, children have their own agency and continue to create their own culture different from adults and also they should be given a voice on things around them since they have capability on them (Corsaro, 2005). This is further clarified by James (2009, p. 41) that children should be considered "as active in the construction of their own lives and as leading lives that are worthy of study in their own right".

As discovered in current study, migrant children actively created their own culture and utilized their agency by adopting a variety of coping strategies to improve their living condition in order to cope with family migration. It was worth of studying their experience from their own perspectives. Therefore, this theoretical perspective may help to explain migrant children's everyday world in the study.

3.2.3 Childhood is socially constructed

Childhood is usually viewed to be a natural biological stage of development, experienced by all human beings in all countries. There were some arguments concerning the definition of childhood. The French scholar Philippe Ariès (1962) discussed whether childhood is universal and ahistorical in his "Centuries of Childhood". He believed that the evidence drawn from historic paintings and texts revealed that children seemed to be viewed as miniature adults. Later, Jean Piaget assumed that the child has a certain universal nature which predisposes it to develop in identifiable stages regardless of the social or cultural context (James & Prout, 1997). However,

anthropologists suggested that there was no single and universal experience or understanding of what childhood was. Biological-anthropologists believe that childhood, one of stage in human development process, is for the preparation of adulthood. This means that children have been perceived as incompetent research participants, resulting in accounts of research *on* but not *with* children. This idea of childhood was challenged by the promoters of the social studies of childhood who argued that childhoods are socially constructed. As James and Prout (1997) argued, sometimes it is useless to compare childhood with chronological ages, when cultures and societies are different.

Moreover, childhood is not universal. In some societies, children go to school and are free to play, while children have to do hard labor work or earn money for the family in others. Laoire *et al* (2010) discussed that a group of articles explored the high mobility of the lives of children living in global south contexts which challenge the prevailing western concepts of a fixed and stable nature of childhood. Thus, childhood can be an important feature in some societies but does not exist in others. As such, according to Qvortrup (1994), it is more accurate and helpful to talk of many childhoods or a plurality of experiences within and across cultures. The diversity of experience due to class, culture, ethnicity, gender, religion, place of living and health makes it impossible to have universal childhood for all the children in the world. This trend led to the appearance of the account of research into diverse childhoods, due to the culture, class, gender, ability and other circumstances. Christensen and Prout (2005) point out the change of thinking from children being viewed as a natural or biological phenomenon to being understood as products of history, society and culture.

In addition, Qvortrup (1994, p. 23) further suggested that childhood is "a permanent form" and due to external forces, the correlation of childhood with other structures change constantly. Therefore, childhood is not simply a natural, biological stage of development. Rather it is a permanent structural form which integrates within any other social system. It has changed through history, culture, and society in different ways, which has more impact on childhood than biological characteristics.

In the current study, the perspective of childhood as being socially constructed is applied since age and physical maturity are not the only characters to considerate in childhood. Childhood is permanent structural form which is worth of studying. The socio-economic, cultural and

educational factors play important roles to form different childhoods for children. This theoretical perspective fits well with my study of migrant children's experience in relation to their family migration.

3.2.4 The concept of a child

Who is considered as being a child differs from culture to culture, and country to country. As James and Prout (1997) pointed out, a ten-year old boy, going to school in the western societies, is considered as a child while a ten-year old boy may be not considered as a child since he is the main person to make money in the family in the global south. In 1991, the government of China became a signatory to the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC). Therefore, China defines a child as a person below eighteen years of age following the Article 1 in the UNCRC. In line with the definition of the Chinese government, the term child as used in this study refers to a person below eighteen years of age. However, participants in the study ranged from 6 years old to 13 years old because the research was conducted in a primary school in China.

3.2.5 The concepts of agency and social structure

According to James and James (2012, p. 3), agency refers to the "capacity of individuals to act independently". It is the core idea in the social studies of childhood to view children as having agency. It emphasizes children's capacity to make choices on the things around them and speak their own ideas. In this sense, children have some control in the society in which they live since they are able to build their own culture or world through their interaction with others.

Social structure refers to the "social institutions and relational components of the social fabric around which societies are organized" (James & James, 2012, p. 127). Two important meanings can be derived from the definition of social structure: Every society is built around different social institutions and every society has special ways of structuring and conducting social relations (James & James, 2012). Childhood is one of many social structures, which is interrelated with other social structures.

Giddens (1979) suggested that social structure and agency cannot be seen as stand-alone concepts since they are irrevocably intertwined: social structures provide the means through which people act, but the form these structures take is a result of their actions. In this way, social

life is not only reproductive, in terms of both the continuity of structures and institutions, but also potentially transformative. People do have the power, through their actions, to change the social structures and institutions through which they have to live and work. Therefore, children do not simply imitate adults and follow parents' decision, rather they are agents as any adult, actively making choices, taking action and constructing their own world. Children's potential effectiveness as agents should not be underestimated (Valentine, 2011). However, there is an existing debate questioning agency. Tisdall and Punch (2012, p. 255) argued that "childhood studies has perhaps been more likely to stress the notion of children as social actors to counteract traditional views of children as passive dependents". James (2009, p. 43) discussed that children's positions in society within inter-generational and intra-generational relationships "offer different opportunities and constraints for children to act and in doing so, exercise their agency". I agree with White and Choudhury (2010) that children's agency like that of adults is shaped by structures. To understand the interplay between structure and agency, Giddens' structuration theory (1984) clearly pointed out the balance between agency and structure as the duality of structure in the sense that social action is possible through social structures, at the same time social structures created by social actions. Giddens (1984) suggested that human agency and social structure are in a relationship with each other and it is the repetition of the acts of the individual agents which reproduces the structures and social structures have both enabling and constraining effects on individuals' lives. This indicates that there is a social structure, such as institutions and traditions, establishing ways of doing things; but these can be changed when people reproduce them differently. Giddens's structuration theory received some criticisms. For example, Layder (2006, p. 185) stated that "it is difficult to analyze the way in which structural features may predominate in certain areas at certain times, while the creative and transformative activities of people may come to the fore". I found that Giddens's structuration theory may help to explain migrant children's experiences in urban China.

In this study, agency is connected to the structure of the society. Instead of studying children alone, I did research on how social structures have impact on children's lives from their perspectives, and how children, as active agents, create their own cultures, friendships and live their everyday life under the social environment. Migrant children's family economic structure and social and political structures of receiving society, for instance, children's right to education, influenced the experience of migrant children. With this study, I have tried to find out how

migrant children exercised their agency within these constraining structures and how they actively created their own world or passively accepted the consequence of the wider social structures.

3.2.6 Children's rights

Rights refer to life, liberty, and security of a person; privacy and freedom of movement; ownership of property; freedom of thought, conscience, and religion (Beitz, 2001). With the help of the UNCRC, rights have been given to children. The basic premise of the Convention is that children are born with the fundamental freedom and inherent rights of all human beings. The UNCRC has been ratified by all the countries in the world except for United States of America, Somalia and the newly independent country of South Sudan. It has a very powerful impact: it makes children the holders of over 40 fundamental rights and it has undoubtedly improved the lives of countless children all over the world (Save the Children, 2009). As pointed out by Fottrell (2000, p. 1), "the UNCRC is a significant legal and political achievement: it elevated the child to the status of an independent rights-holder and placed children's issues at the center of the mainstream human rights agenda".

Some rights of the UNCRC are closely related to my study. The content of the Article 12 of the UNCRC emphasizes on participation and expressing views freely. "Participation refers to take part in and to contribute actively to a situation, an event, a process or an outcome" (James & James, 2012, p. 86). However, Chinese society traditionally ranks social and economic rights over individual civil rights and the idea of individual rights is less important than fitting in with social customs and expectations. Thus, the rights of children's participation and expressing views freely around the things affecting them do not gain sufficient attention. In the current study, children had freedom to participate in the research and withdraw at any time (see methodology chapter). They were encouraged to express their perspectives although they were not used to do that and their views were appreciated, respected and valued.

According to the Article 28 of the UNCRC, all the children have the right to education and have the right to access free primary education. In line with this Article, China implemented the nine-year compulsory education. However, this right has come under strain as a consequence of migration in China due to the household registration system. For instance, some parents with low income have to pay the tuition for their children themselves which is a heavy burden for them.

Also, as discussed more fully later, some of my participants had waited for some time in order to be registered in the current school. Their rights to education have been flouted in the years.

According to Article 32 of the UNCRC, children should not perform any work which is harmful or interferes with their education. However, the use of children to help with domestic work or agricultural work has a very long history in China and indeed is still widespread. Some migrant parents need to work long hours each day. Migrant children have to help their parents with household work or labor work, such as selling the vegetables, since their parents depend upon these incomes for survival. This may impact their time of rest and study since they have to stay at their stall in the market until late.

This touches upon a strong critique about the UNCRC. UNCRC has introduced the global north perspective of childhood to the world. However, what is practical and good for western children may be impractical or even impossible for the children in the global south. Thus, although UNCRC has improved the life of many children all over the world, it has caused difficulties and even conflicts since it has failed to account for the local economic condition and differences within the cultures and societies it applies to. The criticisms continue about the applicability of Minority world conceptualizations and priorities to the Majority world (Hart, 2006). The Minority World perspective of childhood suggests that childhood should be in a family and school and children should not involve in paid work as argued by Tisdall and Punch (2012). According to Abebe (2007), the amount of literature that discusses the living conditions of different childhoods in non-Western contexts, such as working children has increased. In India, most parents said the main reason of working children was that they contributed to at least 20 percent of household income (International Labour Organization, 1996). In Indonesia, more than 25 percent of parents stated that obtaining additional income was the reason for allowing children to work, and one-third felt that their household income would decline if their children stopped working (International Labour Organization, 1996). In Africa, children are participating in a lot of productive work and they make considerable economic contribution for the household and national economies although their economic contribution is still largely overlooked. In Ethiopia, according to Abebe's (2007, p. 80) study, "the burdens of social reproduction fell forcefully on children and young people, who began to shoulder most of the household responsibilities at the expense of, among other things, their schooling." These childhoods

contradict the global north model of childhood as being a work-free, playful and schooling stage of the life. Tine and Ennew (1998) argued that no matter what the reason is for economic crises, family strategies of survival influence children's rights. We have to agree that "Since our views on what capacities children develop at what ages are culturally conditioned, different cultures assign different responsibilities to children for different actions at different ages" (James & James, 2004, p. 91). Ennew (2002, p. 399) also rightfully argued that "children have a right to be active in the labor market until welfare provision reaches a level at which children do not have to work to provide for themselves and their families". Furthermore, children who participate in paid work often make them feel proud and enjoy the freedom which is brought by money. They are able to buy exercise books, pay school fees and pay bills for the family. Abebe (2007, p. 85) argued that "monetary remuneration from paid jobs provides children with opportunities to exercise their own agency in how and when to spend the money they earn." Thus, these global north norms are not universal, but depending on the socio-cultural and economic contexts.

3.2.7 Listen to children

The word, *listening*, appears as an easy word and has a simple meaning in the dictionary. However, in the society, the word is very powerful. Everyone, from politicians to construction men, wants to be listened to, including children. Rinaldi (2005, p. 16) defines that "listening is part of a way of relating, part of a wider culture and part of an ethic". She believes that "listening as emotion and reciprocity, interpretation and meaning making, an openness and sensitivity to connections, difference and change, the importance of doubt and uncertainty" (p. 17). Based on Rinaldi's explanation, I believe that listening to others is a hard process and it becomes even harder to understand children's perspectives. Dahlberg and Moss (2005) discuss how listening can be understood as a value in the ethics of an encounter, with its attention to otherness that cannot be grasped, resisting attempts to make the other into the same. This ethics of an encounter for culture of listening can be seen as promoting different competences by encouraging children's active participation and exploration of their environments together with other children and adults. Today listening to children has become prominent. It is often inscribed in rights discourses, constructing children as competent social actors with rights to be listened to (Kjørholt, 2004).

As an adult, I have experienced many emotional moments that I cannot express or describe verbally. I still remember the moment when a Chinese girl, named Junxia Wang won the Gold Medal in the Women's 5000 Meters at Atlanta Olympics in 1996. She changed the Chinese history and a lot of emotions aroused inside my body at that moment. However except for tears in my eyes, I did not say anything and actually I did not know what I should say. I believe many persons have experienced this, thus, not everything can be verbalized for adults. Compared to adults, children often have a smaller vocabulary, thus their language literacy and proficiency might obstruct them to speak out their sentiments and perspectives to a higher extent than adults. Therefore, I strongly agree with Kjørholt, Moss and Clark (2005, p. 176) that "it is highly important to be aware of the unspoken words, by which children construct their identities and social practices in everyday life".

In short, understanding children is not simply a process of accumulating data. We have to think about their social environment, backgrounds, and personal issues. I agree with Lee's argument (2001b) that the experiences of children may vary from and with ethnicity, culture, gender and social class. The mosaic approach (Clark, 2005) was a successful example of how to listen to children's perspectives. In the present study, multiple research methods were applied in order to listen to children, which increased migrant children's opportunity to choose and have at least some control about how to contribute and what to say. This could be explained by the metaphor of "The Hundred Language of Children" written by Loris Malaguzzi (1998), which discussed that the various ways children use to express themselves.

3.3 The chosen analytical tools

Migration is a huge topic covering different study fields. In order to analyze the phenomena under study, some relevant analytical tools were chosen. In this section, the key concepts and theoretical perspectives associated with the study utilized to analyze empirical data in the thesis are presented.

3.3.1 Migration

Migration as a "form of spatial mobility implies the crossing of the boundary of a political or administrative unit for a certain minimum period of time" (Faist, 2012). Migration can be classified into two major categories – internal and international migration. Internal migration refers to a move from one area (a province, district or municipality) to another within the

boundaries of a single country (Faist, 2012). It can be rural – urban, rural – rural, urban – rural and urban – urban migration. International migration refers to the intended relocation of people between one country and another (Faist, 2012). Both internal and international migration can be permanent or temporary. The reasons behind migration are various, for example, economy, culture, study, marriage, and work etc. According to Cheng *et al* (2006), the pull-push theory is largely used to illustrate the motivations of labor migration taking all factors concerning economics, demography and sociology into consideration. Lack of farmland, educational institutions, medical care and other infrastructure: alienation of interpersonal relationships, and natural tragedies pushing agricultural workers to migrate to other regions on the one hand; on the other hand, more employment chances, higher wages, better schooling condition and facilities pull them to immigrate to these developed regions.

Migration in this research refers to internal migration with the feature of rural to urban in China. The pull-push theory is also applied to explain the motivations behind family migration of my participants. With the economic development, some farm land has been reused as non-agriculture purposes, such as building highway mentioned by one migrant child and the rural population growth has caused a pressure on natural and agricultural resources, which pushed my participants' families out of rural areas. And the main reasons mentioned by migrant families were the economic conditions and better education to pull them into cities since most of them sought better living standard for the families and good future development opportunity for their children. Therefore, push-pull theory incorporates several factors and plays an important role in the migration decision of my participants. The general view of labor migration could best be achieved using a push-pull framework (Bauer & Zimmermann, 1998).

3.3.2 Resilience

Resilience is defined as "patterns of positive adaptation in the context of significant risk or adversity" (Masten & Powell, 2003, p. 4). The concept is addressed to recognize the need of understanding individual differences in people's reactions to stress and hardship (Rutter, 1990). This helps to put an emphasis on the active role taken by individuals in dealing with stress and hardship. In order to decide resilience, two judgments are required: the first one is that the person is doing okay and the second one is that the person has experienced significant risks that could weaken the successful negotiation of age-salient developmental tasks (Masten & Powell, 2003).

Gillian (1997, p. 15) defines a resilient child as one "who bounces back having endured adversity or who continues to function reasonably well despite continued exposure to risk." Children, especially street children or children with AIDS, have been identified as a vulnerable group. However, researchers' focus on the resilience of children who negotiate their living in difficult situations has led to a shift in thinking about childhood from one that focuses on vulnerability to one that focuses on resilience. According to Evans (2005, p. 114), the previous research on child resilience has presented three sets of variables cooperating as protective factors: "attributes of the children themselves; characteristics of their families; and aspects of the wider social context". Therefore, this concept may fit in my study.

In the context of this study, I explored the framework of resilience to understand the process by which migrant children negotiated the impacts of the family migration. Resilience is associated with migrant children's agency, their adaptive and coping abilities, and their competence to make choices and exercise a degree of control. The migrant children clearly were exposed to different risks in urban China: most migrant children had lower self-esteem and they had less access to resources and opportunities (as discussed in the following chapters). They did many different things in order to make themselves feel better in this condition, witnessing that children are social actors and are able to find useful solutions to the difficult circumstances they face (Boyden & Mann, 2005). The study explores the coping strategies that migrant children adopt to solve the problems they face in order to cope with family migration.

3.3.3 Inclusion and exclusion

Inclusivity has been defined as being primarily concerned with equity and justice (Dei, 1996). One of the objectives of the present study is to find out whether migrant children feel included or excluded in the host community based on their school experience. In the school setting, inclusion refers to "the right to quality education for all, including access, participation, and achievement of all students, with special emphasis on those who are at greater risk of being excluded or marginalized for various reasons" (Blanco & Takemoto, 2006, p. 56). Dei (1996) also defined inclusionary pedagogy at the school level as teaching practices that respond to classroom and societal differences based on race, class, gender, sexual orientation, age and ability. In addition, social inclusion at the school setting is associated with mutual respect and mutual listening among students and staff and between staff and students (Richardson & Wood, 2000). Thus, in

the school setting, the curriculum and teaching practices should be tailored to meet the demands of students with different backgrounds and schools should welcome and respect students with diversified culture and identities, making children feel included. The report from the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development identifies migrant children as one of three groups which need additional support to full participation in early childhood programs since "they may face linguistic and other challenges that are barriers to their full participation" (OECD, 2001). However, according to Corter *et al* (2006), there is a lack of sufficient documentation of programs for inclusion of migrant children in China.

Inclusion and exclusion are related to each other. The concept of social exclusion refers to a process of social disqualification, leading to a breakdown of the relationship between society and the individual (Bhalla & Lapeyre, 1997). Children have the rights to a certain basic living standard and to participate in social and cultural institutions in the society, such as housing, health care and education. Exclusion occurs when children are unable to secure these rights. Exclusion in the school setting can been described as "those practices that exclude various students, and groups of students, from full participation in the benefits of formal education" (Brady, 2005, p. 301). There are some instructional practices or regulations that have been considered to be exclusionary. For example, UNESCO (1996) regarded those educational practices that over-emphasize competition as exclusionary. Some regulations of the schools working as Exclusionary Act, such as children who have to live in the school district for three years having the rights to register in the school, prevent migrant children from having the same opportunities of the local children,. These concepts are very important theoretical perspectives underpinning my study.

In the present study, migrant children are living in disadvantaged position in the society compared to local children. Their backgrounds, family condition, family education levels as well as financial issues are different from those of their counterparts. Therefore, migrant children may be at risk of being excluded at schools. Thus, these concepts may be useful to analyze data and understand migrant children's behaviors.

3.3.4 Belonging
This study is aimed at analyzing children's school experiences to find out if migrant children feel a sense of social and cultural belonging in the new community. Thus, belonging may be an

important concept for the study. According to Probyn (1996, p. 19), the term "belonging" refers to "the desire for some sort of attachment, be it to other people, places or modes of being. Melton (2006) states that belonging can be defined as immersion in a sea of relationships within and across the generations. Belonging creates a sense of togetherness and presents an experience of a common ground (De Haan & Singer, 2001). In the school setting, Bruner (1996) argued that performing jointly is the basis for all learning at school. According to Dunn (2004), belonging is needed for children to develop peer relations, friendship and play in childhood years. Jans (2004) confirms that being part of the group is very important on children's agenda. If different types of spaces or groups "become sites of security for children and provide a sense of belonging" (Laoire *et al.*, 2010, p. 157), such as home, they feel that they are safe in places and a member of the groups. However, creating a sense of belonging with peer relations may be difficult for migrant children who are different from the local children because of issues of culture, financial condition, mobility, language and parents' education levels. The present study explores the sense of belonging that migrant children have in relation to the new school, the area where they currently study.

3.3.5 "We-ness"

Randi Dyblie Nilsen (2005) uses the concept of "we-ness" to illustrate the approach for carrying out the analysis. The purpose of this creative concept was because none of the existing studies could take the movement and dynamics in children's interaction into account. She did fieldwork in two Norwegian daycare centers with participation observation as the main strategy to gain children's perspectives and increase our understanding of how children establish their social relations on their terms. Based on observations of child-child interaction, Nilsen (p. 122) realized that "children's daily life at the day-care centers was characterized by an undergrowth of spontaneously created groups, where the children repeatedly constructed social relationships with one another". The concept we-ness, related to the friendship, "involves an intimate relationship, with meanings such as we are friends and we are together" (p. 123). According to Nilsen's study, children use different ways to establish social relationship in order to construct a sense of we-ness: "they share knowledge and interests, share objects and secrets, engage in joint play, use their bodies and voices to communicate such as sitting closely together, emphasize sameness, discuss and break adult-initiated rules" (p. 122-123). However, the definition is not settled. The friendship does not mean always the same thing at all time. They make friends or

construct we-ness repeatedly, either with same or different children. Thus, the definitions change based on the situation. This concept describes children's dynamic social relationship with peers. Nilsen's concept of we-ness will be used to describe some patterns of social interaction in the school environment in this study.

3.4 Review of literature relevant to the current study

Some research has been done about the topics of migrant children with family migration. This section reviews this body of literature and gives an overview of migrant children in urban city after family migration. This section is discussed from three aspects. Firstly, the studies about the migrant children's experience with negotiating a sense of belonging in the settled areas are reviewed. Secondly, some consequences of family migration for migrant children are presented. Literature about migrant family and migrant children in China are illustrated at end of this section.

3.4.1 Migrant children's experience with negotiating a sense of belonging in the settled areas

Migrant children are seen to be the most affected persons during the family migration process (Blunt, 2007). Schmitt (2010) gives an example of a boy who was attacked after family migration to Germany by a group of 50 children at school because he was Muslim. The author further discusses the notions of belonging, writing that "It can be about the constant reproduction of one's own position within discourses and structural frameworks that are informed by their adaptation" (Schmitt, 2010, p. 165). Belonging is also about "experiences of being part of the social fabric and should be thought of in exclusively ethnic terms" (Anthias, 2006, p. 21). However, we cannot take the sense of belonging in the societies for granted. Schmitt (2010) did two case studies in Canada and Germany respectively to show that belonging held different meaning for migrant children in different societies after family migration. She found that belonging is not static but rather constantly changing. Migrant children as social actors may have ability to interact and negotiate with others in specific situations and settings in order to create or achieve the feeling of belonging in the new environment.

In another study, done by den Besten (2010), immigrant children's emotional experiences of their neighborhoods in Paris and Berlin were explored through subjective maps drawn by the children. The participants had different backgrounds and experiences. The author utilized the

concept of local belonging in the study, defining it as "the sense of belonging that immigrant children have in relation to their neighborhood: the area of the city where they currently live" (p. 182-183). The activity theory was applied to serve as a framework for the analysis of children's mental maps. According to the author, human activity is mediated by the society's symbolic tools. The activity shows information about "the character of children's sense of belonging to their locality" (p. 185). Some migrant children's pictures showed dense social networks while others showed only two narrowly confined local spaces. The author found that a sense of local belonging is grounded in emotional attitudes to one's neighborhood and migrant children have different access to resources depending on their living place which is related to their social status of the families.

3.4.2 Some consequences of family migration for migrant children

There is a significant body of literature on the consequences of family migration for migrant children. Decades ago, Kantor (1969) suggested that residential mobility appeared to have some initial adverse effect on both the social adjustment and the emotional wellbeing of the child. Migrant children were usually found to be less accepted by their peers and more withdrawn in the new community. In addition, the author noted that migrant children were described as more emotionally maladjusted than their peers by their teachers. In a study with seven-year old children in five London schools, Bagley (1972) found more behavior disturbance among migrant children than among native children. Moreover, he explained that migrant children with long separation experiences had higher rate of disturbance problems after migrated with their family. Kao (1999) conducted research with migrant youth in the United States focusing on their social-psychological well-being. According to his study, immigrant youth of all racial and ethnic backgrounds felt more alienated from their school peers than native-born whites. Kao's study further indicated that immigrant youth suffered from low feeling of self-efficacy and problems of social adaption at school. The immigrant youth faced greater hardships in their daily lives due to difficulty in communicating in English, which led to feelings of helplessness.

3.4.3 Literature about migrant families and migrant children in China

According to Ren and Treiman (2013), there is a lack of knowledge about migrant children in China since most research to date has focused mainly on adult migrants. However, there are some exceptions. According to Chan (2009), recent studies show that more and more migrant

workers in China prefer to take their children with them despite immense hardship. And he also discusses how migrant children are still facing a lot of obstacles in the urban China, for instance that those who attend public schools sometimes suffer discrimination by teachers and local-residents classmates, leading to emotional difficulties. In addition, some primary schools impose substantial special fees on migrants, such as, "temporary education fee" (p. 34). Chan (p. 29) summarizes that existing research on migrant children in China demonstrates that migrant children have a "higher incidence of physical and psychological problems and a greater vulnerability to crime" since they are excluded from medical, educational and social rights.

Wang's (2004) report on the living conditions of migrant families in Shenyang and Chongqing shows that their housing condition were very poor: most of them did not have a private toilet; 28% did not have a place to cook; only 4% had their own shower and bath; and 8% were even without a water tap. Thus, there are clear housing differences between local residents and migrant families in the study area.

In this chapter, I have presented the theoretical framework and key concepts, which my study is based on. Moreover, the review of different articles and studies in this section illustrates some experiences of migrant children in host areas. Although I only presented limited discussions from the current debates about the family migration, it showed diverse impacts on migrant children due to family migration. Migrant children were confronted by different structural forms which influenced their life in cities even though they exercised agency in their daily life.

CHAPTER 4: RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

4.1 Introduction

This chapter explains the methodological approach of this research study and methods employed in the period of fieldwork. I will also discuss the methodological perspectives underpinning the research design including childhood studies, qualitative research method, participatory technique and the researcher's role. In the social studies of childhood, children are viewed as active social actors and competent individuals (James & Prout, 1997). These theoretical perspectives play an important role in my study. The research objectives of the study are to find out the impact of rural-urban migration on children and their coping strategies to the new environment in the city as competent social actors. My choice of methods is based on these theoretical perspectives which help me to meet my objectives.

Children have been considered as important participants in social life and as worthwhile informants for research (Lange & Mierendorff, 2009). Given the increased interest in engaging children in research, there are plenty of methods and techniques available for researchers doing research with migrant children. When selecting the research methods. I combined traditional methods, such as interviews, with more innovative techniques like the drawing technique. In this chapter, I will discuss the research process, methods used for generating data, ethical consideration as well as challenges of the study.

4.2 Methodological perspectives underpinning the research design

A research design can be referred to as a systematic plan to study a scientific problem and it outlines the way that an investigation will take or took place. Several factors were considered to design this research in order to carry out the research to get better understanding of children's experience and perspectives of family migration in urban China. I will achieve this by discussing the following points.

4.2.1 Childhood studies

Sociological and psychological studies carried out within the development notion viewed children as incompetent agents for a quite long time, as already mentioned. They were "denied the right to speak for themselves either because they are not competent in making judgments or

because they are thought of as unreliable witnesses about their own lives" (Qvortrup, 1994, p. 2). In the social studies of childhood, there is respect for children's lived experiences and their capabilities to provide insightful accounts of how they understand and interpret these experiences. This shift was initiated by writers such as James and Prout (1997), who viewed children as co-participants in the research process and stressed their competency and agency rather than see them as objects of research. In this study, children are viewed as competent social actors who have the right to be listened to and have a say in matters that affect their life. They are placed as the center of the research process and their views are valued.

4.2.2 Qualitative research method

Because childhood studies places an "emphasis on children's interpretation of their experience, the usefulness of qualitative research approaches have been stressed" (McKechnie & Hobbs, 2004, p 282). Qualitative research methods are used to describe human behaviors and involve the generation and analysis of data which gives meanings to people's everyday lives and experiences in setting where they live (Fraser *et al.*, 2004). Qualitative research is empirical research and generates word data from participants (Punch, 1998). Qualitative research is concerned with developing explanations of social phenomena and helps to further and deepen our understanding of the social world. The benefits of the qualitative approach are that the information is richer and deeper insight is gained into the phenomenon under study. Thus qualitative research aims to have comprehensive understanding of a specific field of study. This study employed qualitative research in order to learn migrant children's experience in urban China and their perspectives on their own life. Therefore, with the help of the qualitative research method, the in-depth understanding of migrant children's world, such as the reasons behind some behavior of migrant children was gained.

4.2.3 Participatory technique

The UN Convention of the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) in 1989 specifies in its Article 12 that children have the right to express their opinion on matters and decisions that affect them directly. It promotes the idea that children be involved, informed, consulted and heard. Thus the interest in involving children as active participants and co-researchers has dramatically increased since then (Sinclair, 2004) and a wealth of literature on children's active role in research has been produced (Boyden & Ennew, 1997; Hill, 1997). However, the social phenomenon of migrant

children in China is different from others. According to the Chinese White Paper (1991), China stated that "to eat their fill and dress warmly were the fundamental demands of the Chinese people who had long suffered cold and hunger". Under this view, children's right to express themselves freely is meaningless in poverty and unstable social environment. Although people have increased their living standard with the help of the continuous economic development in China for around thirty years, Chinese societies still rank social and economic rights, such as the right to economic development, over individuals' political and civil rights, which means that the rights of children's participation and expressing views freely around the things affecting them will be postponed compared with the issues of efficient production in China.

In this study, although children was not included from the beginning of the research process due to the short time of fieldwork, the right of expression for the participants was emphasized and they were involved in making some decisions, as deciding when and what they wanted to talk to me about and which photos they wanted to explain. However, when using participatory technique, a lot of challenges were encountered since children are not used to express their view freely and make their own decision in China. For example, all participants were asked to choose their own names for the research (see Naming method), but it was difficult for some children to make a decision. I had to spend a long time to encourage them and talk about the cartoons they like or things they prefer to be able to choose nicknames. In this study, with the help of participatory technique, the participants were perceived as experts in their own life. They were involved in all the process at the fieldwork and their interests were maintained through the research process.

4.2.4 The researcher's role

The researcher's role is to form a caring relationship with participants, encourage them to interact freely and create knowledge jointly with the participants (Carter & Little, 2007). As a researcher, I was fully aware of the vulnerability of children due to adult-child power inequalities in the research setting, specially the migrant children. In China, adults usually have a large degree of control over the conditions under which any study of children takes place. Therefore, I tried to minimize the power imbalance in this study in different ways. Firstly, starting from the first day, I dressed causal by wearing T-shirt and jeans. I used easy and simple language to talk with them and at later stage of the fieldwork, I adapted to their language and chose the words

they often used and spoke in the way they spoke. On the first interview day, I was quite nervous and talked fast with children, trying to ask the questions I had prepared. Listening to the tape-recorded interviews, I realized the same evening that this made children nervous as well. When communicating with children from the next day, I listened to them and followed them, avoiding to lead the conversation. Mandell (1988) discussed that changing the researchers' appearance, speech and dress could minimize the power imbalance. Secondly, children were perceived as experts in their life rather than simply participants in the research. They were involved in the decision-making process. In the current study, children played an active role in decisions on their participation and when, where and how the fieldwork was conducted. Even in the semi-structured visual interviews, children decided what to talk about and their interest emerged through shared discussion. Therefore, the power between me and the participants was shared. Finally, considering the language abilities of children, proper research methods were used to tailor the need of the participants. Drawing and photography techniques empowered children and helped address the problem of power differentials. However, I am fully aware that as a researcher, I have power over my participants on writing since I will decide which data will be included in the final thesis. During this process, I am trying to look for patterns, and meanwhile be as objective as possible.

4.3 Research site and accessibility

When selecting a research site, many factors should be considered. Accessing migrant children in institutional settings can be difficult. According to Ennew *et al* ((2009, p. 2.6) "information about vulnerable children, such as migrant children, may be kept secret or some adults who work with children may not want to attract the attention of outsiders". Corsaro and Molinary (2008) also pointed out that adult gatekeepers have varying degree of control over the activities of children and access to the research site. This means that researchers must gain the cooperation of a range of different gatekeepers, such as principals before having access to discuss the research directly with migrant children.

Taking all these factors into account, at pre-field work stage, I had decided to use Benxi, a medium-sized city in Liaoning Province, as my research site since my sister is a teacher in a local primary school there and it is my hometown as well. This could potentially help me to access the participants. However, I found out that there were few migrant families willing to

participate in the research after arriving in Benxi. After careful reconsideration about the situation and discussion with my two sisters and friends, I changed to Shenyang as my research site. Shenyang is a suitable research site because Shenyang is the capital and largest city of Liaoning Province and is, as mentioned, the transport and commercial center in northeast China. Therefore, Shenyang has attracted migrants from surrounding regions: approximately 11% of Shenyang's population is migrants in 2006 (National Bureau of Statistics, 2006). Another reason for choosing this site was because one of my sister's friends works at a local primary school. This helped me to gain the trust from teachers and parents in the school and get access to the target groups.

In the public school in China, migrant children join in different grades or classrooms based on their academic level. With the help of my sister's friend, I got the opportunity to give the detailed research plans to two more teachers. After my explanation, I gained permission to conduct the research in their classes, which fits my purpose of recruiting participants from different ages. I thus ended up with doing research in Grade one, Grade four and Grade five.

4.3.1 Research location

When designing a research project, it is important to remember that the research location might affect what children will talk about (Backett-Milburn & McKie, 1999). Two places were used in conducting research with children: schools and homes. Although generating data at schools was more efficient than at homes, different problems emerged when doing research with children in a school setting. In the beginning, I used the classroom as the interview place due to the crowded staff rooms and corridor. However, the teachers were always sitting in the classroom correcting students' homework. I felt very embarrassed to ask them to leave. Moreover, I was fully aware that children perceived me as a teacher and felt pressured to give their answers to my research questions. Thus, it was very difficult for children to express their views freely inside the class room. After having reassured the children that unlike homework, there were no right or wrong answers for the research questions, and that their opinions were the only requirement since they are the experts in their own life, I asked the children to decide where they wanted to conduct the interviews. The schoolyard was their choice. It supported children to change their mood from study to physical exercises or activities and at the same time gave children some control over the environment. Inside the classroom Chinese children are disciplined: they have to sit properly and

use inside voice, and only talk when they are called. In the schoolyard, however, they are running, shouting, and playing. I personally experienced this big difference. Therefore, by letting children select an appropriate place, children are empowered to express their perspectives in school settings.

Using children's home as a location can empower children since the home is considered as a personal and familiar space for them on the one hand, on the other hand researchers can enrich the data by observing the family's living condition and things happening during the visit. However, when conducting research with migrant children at their homes, I also encountered different challenges. Finding a private and quiet space at the home was problematic due to the financial restrictions of migrant families (see confidentiality, privacy and protection Issues section). Some parents insisted on being present during meetings with migrant children and even interfered in the research process since "they do not see a problem about staying to listen and even some parents think it is polite to stay" (Alderson & Morrow, 2011, p. 38) In this case, I could do little to limit the parents' involvement in the interviews.

Household visit needs making pre-arrangements. Migrant families have been facing difficult situations. Some migrant parents were in the stage of finding a job, losing employment or having health issues. They were often under pressure to struggle with different tasks. Bearing this in mind, there is no wonder that some of the migrant parents were quite busy and rescheduled the appointments several times. One parent forgot the arranged appointments and she was leaving when I arrived at her home. Thus, unfortunately, I ended up only visiting two migrant children's homes during the fieldwork.

4.4 Sample selection

All the students of the three accessible classes were given the shorted project description and informed consent forms and were asked to bring home to their parents. Children are from three different grades. I did the presentation in each of the three classes in the simple language with short sentences and pictures to explain the aims, methods, process and the topic of the research and the usage of data we generate. All children were told that the participation was voluntary and anonymous and that they were allowed to withdraw from the research at any time. I confirmed their understanding by asking them to repeat the research questions since Ennew *et al* (2009, p.

2.20) emphasize that "a simple but effective technique is to ask people to repeat back to the researcher what they have been told about the research and the methods that will be used".

The participants were selected by the guideline of the aim of the research and through purposive and random ways. Children and parents were given two days to consider if they wanted to participate in the study. During these two waiting days, I was sitting in these three classrooms as an observer. Some children left deep impression on me with their good expression ability when they answered the questions or gave a speech. Therefore, five migrant children and two local children were selected based on purpose. All the other participants were selected randomly.

A total of 23 migrant children (14 boys and 9 girls) and 19 local children (12 boys and 7 girls) participated in this study. Since one of the aims of the research is to compare the family condition of migrant children to their counterparts, local children's attitudes and behaviors are helpful to better understand everyday life of migrant children. Therefore, it is necessary to involve local children in the research. The age range of the participants was purposely set, between 6 years and 13 years old, enabling to have diverse views on the subject under study. In order to increase my understanding of the children's socio-cultural context and gain multiple perspectives on the impact of migration on children and their coping strategies to the new environment in cities as competent social actors, parents of all participants and three teachers were also recruited in the research.

4.5 Methods used in generating data

This sub-chapter describes all the research methods employed during the fieldwork. Ennew *et al* (2009, p 2.13) mentioned that "researchers are responsible for protecting all research participants from any emotional or physical harm". Therefore, when conducting research with migrant children, the proper research methods should be used for avoiding harming them. Bearing this in mind I chose to include local children in the research. In this way I not only gained some references of the situation and lived experiences of migrant children, but it also helped prevent an emphasis on a potential difference between them and the other children. The research methods were chosen because of research questions and ethical consideration when conduct research with migrant children as well. Moreover, the debate over 'child-friendly' methods was taken into account. Although children are competent social actors, some children have limited vocabulary and short-time concentration span. I combined traditional methods, such as

participant observations and interviews, with techniques that are reckoned more suitable for children. Punch (2002) suggests that this helps not to patronize children with so-called child-friendly techniques. In addition, in order to achieve mutual understanding, the use of one method is insufficient to produce reliable results (Ennew *et al.*, 2009). Thus, using a variety of methods is helpful to cross-check data (Lucchini, 1996) and prevents biases arising from overreliance on one method (Ennew & Morrow, 1994).

In the context of this study, the main methods in generating data with migrant children were drawings, photographs and the semi-structured visual interviews. Migrant children were asked to draw pictures and take photos over the given themes. Semi-structured visual interviews were organized after each activity. In order to gain multiple perspectives, the same methods were also used with local children. Three teachers were interviewed and questionnaires were used for both local and migrant parents at the end of the fieldwork after informal dialogues with some parents. The methods can be grouped into four stages, explained in the following sections. The information about participants and research methods is presented in Table 1.

Migrant children	Local children	Methods
23	19	Naming Neighborhood walk Drawing Photographs Semi-structured visual interviews Participant observation Field notes Informal dialogue
2		Household visit
46 parents	38 parents	Questionnaires Informal dialogue (not all parents)
3 teachers		In-depth interviews Informal dialogue

Table 1. Profile of participants and research methods

4.5.1 Stage 1: Icebreaking period and establishing trust

In stage 1, the methods of naming and neighborhood walk were used. This helped me to build rapport and foster friendships with the research participants. In China, children are not allowed to

express their perspectives freely in class. Usually students need to be called in order to have the opportunity to answer the questions. Under this educational model it is hard for migrant children to express their views freely. Thus, the naming method protected migrant children from fear of any harm since they knew that no one could recognize them in this study. Neighborhood walk method successfully addressed the power imbalance issue and at the same time helped to build good rapport which was important for them to be able to talk about their real condition to a stranger.

Naming

Ennew *et al* (2009, p. 2.13) mentioned that "researchers are responsible for protecting all research participants from any emotional or physical harm". During the fieldwork, I realized that migrant children in China were in a disadvantaged position compared with local children. The friends left behind were greatly missed and it was often hard to keep in touch with. Also not having friends in the new communities was difficult to cope with. Moreover, schools were the main surroundings to develop social networks and new friends were hard to make within the limited network. In addition, during the informal dialogue with three teachers, two teachers mentioned that migrant children's academic score were lower than the average. Bearing in mind the importance of educational achievements in China, this may indicate that migrant children encounter prejudice or are stigmatized. Therefore, the naming method was applied at the beginning of the research in order to avoid stigmatizing. All participants (children, teachers, and parents) were told that data generation was anonymous and each child was asked to pick up a name for himself/herself. Although some children were happy to do it, others were reluctant, as mentioned. After discussion with those who were unwilling, their suggestion of using the color and pattern of their clothes was accepted. This reconfirmed children's rights of free expression since they knew that no one could recognize them even though they participated in this study.

Neighborhood walk

Migrant children were asked to show me their classroom, schoolyard and neighborhood areas. I believed that this may help me to get familiar to the school environment of migrant children and at same time it empowers children since they lead the way and I do not know anything about this area. However, I felt they were very nervous when they were asked to show me around on my third day at school. Even though, they led me physically, they behaved like they were about to

run away at any time. I thought this was not a suitable method for the study at the beginning. However, after realizing that the classroom was not a suitable place for interviews or discussion with children, I changed to schoolyard as the interview place according to children's decision. When it was the second time that children showed me their schoolyard, they were relaxed. Based on their first experience, most of the children now understood what the purpose of the neighborhood walk was and what was going to happen. There is a tree on a corner of the schoolyard. Most of children did not talk about it during the first neighborhood walk, but on the contrary many children mentioned that children were not allowed to climb on this tree on the second time. Compared with the first time, the children talked more on the second time. Moreover, the interviews and discussion went very well on the schoolyard. Therefore, neighborhood walk method gave me an opportunity to start to build good relationship with children.

4.5.2 Stage 2: Knowing further of participants in aspects of research questions

In stage 2, the methods of drawings and photographs were used to provide a deeper understanding of the life of migrant children. Some of the migrant children had limited language skills and expression abilities. Sometimes, they needed to repeat or restructure several times their sentences in order to express their view clearly or answer the research questions. Using non-language based methods were not only a fun and useful approach to engage them in research, but also enhanced the child's ability to communicate his or her perspectives to the adult researcher "at the point of data-gathering" (Hill, 1997, p. 180). In this study, drawings and photographs were utilized to gain children's view on migration of migrant children. These research methods were important for children to overcome literacy and language barriers on one hand and on the other hand they were helpful to make abstract concepts more accessible. The use of visual representations provides children with an opportunity to understand the information and give them more control over the research process (Johnson, 2008). In order to address the power relationship between the researcher and the researched, children decided what they wished to portray or what they would like to photograph within the given themes. During the interviews or discussion, they decided what to tell or how to tell it. This gave children more control over their form of expression, unlike an interview situation (Shaver *et al.*, 1993).

Drawings

Punch (2002, p. 331) argued that using drawing with children is creative, fun and "can encourage children to be more actively involved in the research." Due to the power relation between children and teachers in China, drawing technique was used to open up an informal conversation. The research aims are to gain migrant children's past experiences of transferring from the school in the village to the school in the city and their feeling of staying at the school in urban China and in the new city environment. These are abstract concepts which may be hard for children to understand or illustrate, as opposed to talking about real events. Moreover, after informal dialogue with migrant children, I realized that some migrant children had complex experiences, such as suffering from the economic hardships of their families. It may bring emotional discomfort to some of migrant children to directly elaborate their experience without the help of drawing technique. Thus, migrant children were asked to draw their schools both in the village and city; their life both in the village and city; the things they often did either in the village or city; and the friends they often played with. This helped me to know their prior history of school transfer and their personal feelings about going to schools.

Individual semi-structured visual interview was followed on the second day after the drawing tasks, a method discussed further below. Engaging children in the drawing technique can produce very revealing data in the fieldwork (Veale, 2005). One migrant child drew that he was alone at home and his mum came home in the dark. This migrant child is not a very talkative kid. He usually replied my questions in words not sentences. With his picture, he talked with me about 20 minutes. I realized that most of time after the school he was waiting alone at home, waiting for his mother who usually came back late at night. The drawing method was applied to local children as well. They were asked to draw their life in the city and friends at the school, which was helpful to discover potential differences between the everyday lives of local children and migrant children.

However, drawings are not an easy and natural method to use with children as it depends on children's actual ability to draw (Punch, 2002). One migrant girl drew a few flowers, and then told me that she did not know how to draw others. I also found the similar flowers on her pencil case. She was obviously very fond of drawing this kind of flowers and had practiced a lot. In addition, using the drawing method, the researcher is faced with the challenge of separating facts

from fiction. Another local girl drew the princess of Snow White and told me about this classic story and a local boy drew the cartoon images from one of the most popular cartoon movies in China named Xi Yangyang He Hui Tailang. These children were so engaged in these stories and movies: they dressed in T-shirts with these cartoon pictures or used pencils or backpacks with similar images. This was easier for me to figure out that they were not talking about their own life. However, some children were harder for me to distinguish that if they were telling the fact or making stories. I had to ask more questions in order to clear my mind.

Photographs

Both migrant children and local children were given disposal cameras to enable multiple listening to migrant children's life in the city. They were asked to take photos of the things or persons they like and dislike, such as their friends and the things or persons important for them. The children could take as many or as few pictures as they wished. All the pictures were developed, resulting in 219 images. These pictures were later used in one-on-one semi-structured visual interviews. This activity was set on the third week of my fieldwork. Children were getting used to me at that time and they were allowed to keep the disposal cameras from Tuesday to next Monday, including one weekend. I was conscious of the fact that the home, as a private setting, does not readily open itself to outsiders. In this way children took some photographs of their life at home which was hard for me to observe. One local girl took photos of two cars owned by her family which is not very common in China. She also took picture of one bedroom at her home used as her ballet dance exercise. On the contrary, one migrant girl took photos of her home consisting of one room and three persons inside. With the photography technique, I was able to see this vivid difference.

The photographic method is "a fun way for children to express themselves and it did not depend on children's ability or their perceived ability to depict an image" (Punch, 2002, p. 333). Almost all the participants were excited with the disposal cameras when I gave them. They played with cameras and discussed it with their friends. With simple instruction, all children were able to use the cameras. Some children who were not very good at drawing felt very motivated by this activity and were eager to show me their final products. One migrant boy who only drew some mountains in the drawing activity took a picture of his breakfast he made for himself. He fried eggs with soy bean sauce and reheated the steamed buns which were made by his father. His

father is a long-distance truck driver and often away from home for two to three days. His mother remains in the rural village, doing the agricultural work. His pictures facilitated fruitful discussions about his life in the city.

In this study, photography was a process in which children were in control and as a researcher I did not need to interfere which gives children more agency and independence in the research process. Photography generated by the participants captured specific moments, including their daily routines and events, which enlarged the empirical understanding of children's lives and activities in the urban China. Thus, the photography method revealed more complex and in-depth information, leading me to new ideas and thoughts about the children's way of perceiving their environment (Cook & Hess, 2007).

Even though photographs presented straightforward empirical truths, children's image-making was shaped by such factors as their skills and by children's interpretation of the research task. Some children's photographs were hard to tell what the main focus was. Even in the interview, some children forgot the purpose for taking some of the pictures. Moreover, some children did not understand the research task correctly, such as taking pictures of a lot of the toys. One local boy was fascinated with dinosaurs. He can name many kinds of dinosaurs and he taught me the name for each of them during the interview. However, even though their photographs did not tell me much, this is a sign of agency and participation.

4.5.3 Stage 3: Gaining a deeper understanding of migrant children and their views

In stage 3, the method of semi-structured visual interviews was used to gain in-depth understanding of migrant children's lives and perspectives. Unlike a structured interview, semi-structured interview is open, allowing new ideas to be brought up during the interview as a result of what the interviewee says. In order to avoid of growing tired quickly by simply talking about what they know during the process or struggling for words to accurately express their views, two semi-structured visual interviews were organized respectively after the drawing and photograph activities. According to Kvale (Kvale, 1996), the interview has the capacity to draw the researcher and the informant as co-producers of knowledge. Visual interviews have the additional advantage of fostering rapport and easing the strangeness of a one-on-one encounter by giving respondents something tangible to focus on (Clark-Ibanez, 2004).

Semi-structured visual interviews

The pictures and photographs done by children were used as prompts in one-on-one semi-structured visual interviews to explore in a collaborative way the meaning of the images. I began the interviews with general questions, asking them what they did last night and about the snack I had made for them. I then asked the children how they decided what to depict or photograph. After that we took their drawings or pictures in the order it was taken and they told me about what the meaning was and what significance they held. I used open questions to allow the children to express themselves freely. I also adopted the method of "ignorance of age" in the interview (Solberg, 1996) to be open-minded and listen to their saying. Solberg recommended to put great emphasis on the situational contexts within which children act so that researchers move our attention away from "being" to "doing" (p. 54). In this context, age did not restrict how I understood the social worlds that children experienced. Overall I tried to maintain a free and natural conversational flow, allowing children to select their own relevancies and level of detail while sometimes asking for further explanation about elements I found to be of special interest. To guide me in the conversations, I used an interview guide (see appendix I and II). At the end of the interviews, I asked some prepared questions related to my research questions which had not been discussed in the previous conversation but I made sure that transaction was as smooth as possible. The research questions were kept short and easy for them to understand, agreeing with Kvale and Brickmann (2009) that the problems of interviewers asking long and complicated questions may be aggravated in interviews with children. Each interview lasted approximately thirty minutes and was recorded under children's permission. The semi-structured interview method helped me to have a very wide range of my participants' views on the study topic.

However, semi-structured interviews are associated with disadvantages as well like any other method. When interviews are conducted in a school setting, children may see the interview as part of doing school work and treat interviewers as some kind of teacher. These result in children behaving in their best school manner and answering research questions in the way that they think researchers want to hear rather than engaging in a thoughtful conversation. This happened to me when I was interviewing one migrant child. He started to answer the research questions which I had not asked him yet. I figured out that he had asked the migrant child who did the interview the previous day about the research questions. I reassured him that research questions are not

homework which has right or wrong answers and that their opinions were the only requirement since they were experts in their own life.

As mentioned, the decision to do the interviews at the schoolyard was made by the children. The interviews went very well, except for the weather. It was hot during my fieldwork period. The temperature reached more than 30 Celsius degrees in most of days. Even though I kept providing bottled water for children, they were exhausted after the interviews.

4.5.4 Stage 4: Contextualizing the lives of migrant children by listening to teachers and parents

In order to get more information and understand better the situation of migrant children in the urban China, I did in-depth interviews with three teachers, questionnaires with both migrant parents and local parents and household visit of migrant children's home. These methods were used when the time was suitable for the participants.

In-depth interview with teachers

The in-depth interviews were conducted individually with the three teachers of the classes engaged in my research. All of my participants were from the classes of these three teachers. Two teachers have known some of their students more than four years and they understood them quite well. An interview guide (see appendix III) based on the objectives of the study was used to lead the direction in the interview process but teachers were allowed to interact at any time. The teacher of Grade four mentioned that the school started to recruiting migrant children in 2005. At the beginning, migrant children were charged for 1000 RMB (161 US$) as sponsor fees. Due to changes in Chinese government's policy, it is free for migrant children to register at school. However, it was still hard for migrant children to get school access since migrant families had to rent or buy an apartment within the school district and had lived there for three years before school registration. Migrant families often kept mobile due to the employment opportunity. Most of migrant children in her class were one to two years older than their counterparts. In order to save the time and avoid losing the important information, all the interviews were recorded. The in-depth interview increased my understanding of the children's socio-cultural context on the one hand, on the other hand it helped me to obtain different views on impact of family migration on migrant children.

Questionnaires

The guide for semi-structured interviews was prepared before the fieldwork for parents of both local and migrant children. However, some parents were very busy and some parents' work location was far from the school. I had to take the train back to my home town at 15:45 since the next train was not until 20:56, which made it even harder to find the suitable time for interviews. Usually in the morning, I spent some time to talk with parents when they dropped off their kids. In this way, I gained a little bit information about the families. At the end of the fieldwork, I used the questionnaires (see appendix IV) for both parents of local and migrant children in order to have more information in different views. Questionnaires are one of data generation methods which allow for the generation of data from large numbers of people (Langdridge & Hagger-Johnson, 2009). In this study, questionnaires proved to be an effective technique which helped me to generate many useful and interesting data quickly.

Household visit

Abebe (2009, p. 455) argued that the household visit method is a way of gaining knowledge of "assets, networks and social relationships". I planned to visit homes of both migrant and local children to understand the living conditions and friendships of migrant children in the city. However, due to the complicated situations that migrant families are facing, I only had the opportunities to visit two households of migrant children (see research location section). Visiting households did tell me a lot of information about migrant children, such as financial situations.

4.5.5 Methods of participant observation, informal dialogue and field notes

The methods of participant observation, informal dialogue and field notes were throughout the fieldwork.

Participant observation, informal dialogue and field notes

Participant observation is a method to observe and interpret children's experiences and perspectives. It involves the researcher spending considerable time with children in the field, in order to build rapport and establish initial trust, before being accepted by them and becoming sensitive to the complexities of children's everyday experiences (O' Reilly *et al.*, 2013). I observed children's daily activities at school by for instance sitting at the back of the classrooms during the lessons. In the schoolyard during the break time, I observed how children played and I was later able to join in their games or activities as well. I ate lunch together with the children,

and thus got the opportunity to have informal chats with them as well as observe how children interacted with each other when teachers were absent. I also observed how children acted in the afternoon activities at school. Children usually behaved in a more relaxed way in these settings compared to the interview setting.

Participant observation was a very useful technique for generating data since it enhanced the quality of information by observing the natural way of their behaving, the social environment under study and interaction between participants. I did not include group discussions or group interviews in my study. Participant observation helped to compensate this shortcoming. Kjørholt *et al* (2005, p. 179) discussed that "Observation and participation in children's daily life in early childhood centers is then a valuable tool to get deeper insight into the unspoken words". It revealed the important features of children's experience at the school. While observing, I took the opportunities to talk with them in an informal way. For instance, I learned about the paper card games of migrant children; how to make the paper card; how to play the game and what kind of skills were required to win. I also realized that there were differences in the games played between local and migrant children.

The last week of the fieldwork, I also used informal dialogue to ask some research questions or confirm my understanding with children. During the fieldwork, I took detailed notes which the audio recorder could not catch. I wrote down notes on things that caught my attention or children's body language or facial expressions. Field notes also worked as a reminder about the things I did not have time to ask.

4.6 Language

The fieldwork was conducted in Mandarin, which is the national language of China, including all the interviews, questionnaires, informal dialogues and field notes. Mandarin is my mother tongue so I did not employ an interpreter in the field. However, I had to adapt to the local way of children talking in order to remove the teachers' label from me. By using my mother tongue as the communication tool, it helped me understand the children better.

4.7 Ethical concerns

The ethical complexities of working with children have been addressed by several authors. Christensen (2004, p. 172) argued that "it is important to explore ideas about the exchanges

between the participants in the research and also the set of ethical values, such as confidentiality that underscores the work we do". Abebe and Bessell (2014, p. 126) expressed their views that "it is essential to ensure that research with children is ethical and respectful of children's rights and views". It is significant to consider the ethical issues in any research with children. I will discuss the ethical issues related to this study which I paid particular attention to.

Seeking Consent

Ennew *et al* (2009) pointed out that informed consent means that a participant has agreed to participate in research with understanding of research process, such as objectives and the usage of data. Ennew *et al* (2009, p. 2.6) argued that "it is not always easy to make contact with children to find out about their lives and opinions". Migrant children in China are seen as powerless and vulnerable since they are very mobile due to their parents in search of work opportunities and their personal and family circumstances. However, they are fully capable of giving their informed consent. The ability to give informed consent depends on the quality of the explanation (Bogolub & Thomas, 2005), thus I did presentations to explain the research project to migrant children, their parents and teachers. Children were told that the informed consent should be freely given by them in light of their own interests.

However, one of the ethical dilemmas I faced was that some migrant children gave me their own consent to participate but parents refused to allow their children to take part. I realized that migration for most migrant families meant a change in their socio-economic circumstances, sometimes for the better, but often for the worse. Migrant parents worried about their family circumstances and thus limited children's participation. Hart and Lansdown (2002, p. 10) argued that "adults remain the major barrier to effective participation by children". However, as researchers, we should inform them, involve them and respect their decision since "ethical research involves informing and respecting everyone concerned and it can be harder for adults who feel disrespected to respect children" (Alderson & Morrow, 2011, p. 108). In this case, I tried the verbal consent with a respectful attitude instead of written consent. When talking with them, I made sure that all the written materials were ready to answer any of their questions. Moreover, the teachers gave me a lot of help on encouraging parents to participate.

Confidentiality, Privacy and Protection Issues

Confidentiality and privacy are vital ethical concerns in research with migrant children. If researchers can not address these issues properly, concern about children's safety may raise. All the data generated from children were kept confidential and children were informed of the right to confidentiality before participating in the research. Ennew *et al* (2009, p. 2.6) argued that "it is unreasonable to expect people to provide truthful information if they fear personal reprisals, disadvantages, publicity or embarrassment". I also got migrant children's permission to use their photos and drawings. Moreover, in order to protect migrant children, I did not collect any real names since "names are irrelevant to most social research" (Ennew *et al.*, 2009, p. 2.22) and their school's identity was undisclosed in this report. All notes were kept out of the reach of others to be destroyed after the analysis and write-up.

Abebe (2009) discussed that one of the difficulties is maintaining privacy and confidentiality in research with children. During the semi-structured interviews for this study, teachers often sit in classrooms or parents insisted on presenting where interviews were being held as Abebe (2009, p. 457) discussed that it was "both a-cultural and an awkward way to ask people to give privacy". From Christensen's experience (2004, p. 171) in the fieldwork, we know that "children are concerned with and cherish the privacy of an interview and they are aware of the possible exploitation of information". After I discussed with children, they decided to change to schoolyard as the interview location site.

Migrant children are vulnerable. They might experience unhappiness or even difficulties during the migration. One migrant boy moved to this school six months ago. His deskmate often took his stuff, such as the pencil box or eraser. He was quite upset during the interview and did not want to talk more. In this stressful and sensitive case, I could gain insightful thoughts but respecting personal privacy and bringing no harm to migrant children were prioritized. Therefore, as a researcher, I did not ask further questions or use other methods to probe more information with respect to his difficult accounts.

Respect and Equality

Anderson and Morrow (2011, p. 36) discussed that "Ethics emphasizes respect, rights and equality". Migrant children in China are the most powerless members of the society and do not receive enough respect from adults. Usually they are separated from decision making. The lack

of power and respect prevented them from expressing their views or describing their experiences. Abebe (2009, p. 58) argued that "Negotiating unequal power relations is a central aspect of ethical research". O' Kane (2008, p. 120) said that "researchers face great challenges in finding ways to break down the power imbalance between adults and children". In current study, the rights-based research was applied with migrant children to empower them by reducing the central role of researchers. Migrant children were involved at different stages of the research process and I did not laugh at them or correct their answers at any time since "in rights-based research every child is a success, every child has dignity and is worthy of respect" (Ennew *et al.*, 2009, p. 2.9). The accessible languages and a friendly manner were employed during the fieldwork in order to show my respect and interest in their opinions and world views. Furthermore, the proper methods were used to empower migrant children to express their ideas which helped to address the power imbalance. For example, the photography method gave migrant children more control over the interview. It took more or less a week to build the rapport with the children. Children started to come to me for talk or asking help after one week of my fieldwork.

Reciprocity

In regard to reciprocity there is a crucial debate about the properness of giving money or other incentives to participants for their involvement in research (Ennew *et al.*, 2009). I agreed with Pham *et al* (2005) that research is a two-way street and the researcher cannot just take due to the valuable time of local people. It is better to give migrant children payments as appreciation for their involvement. Alderson and Morrow (2011, p. 69) argued that "payment may be made in kind instead of in cash, such as pencils and notebooks" due to different local situations. The teachers mentioned that migrant children lacked of home education since their parents did not buy the extra study materials for them to do at home. Therefore, I bought different workbooks for children. However, most migrant families lived in poverty and migrant children did not often receive gifts or money. In fear of stimulating children to participate and to say what they think that I want to hear, I gave the workbooks at the end of research stage without any warning at the initial stage.

4.8 Challenges of the study

One of my greatest challenges on the field was time constraints. I arrived in Shenyang in middle of June, which was the end of semester in China. Children were quite busy in preparing the final exams of the semester. In order to avoid disturbing children's normal daily life, I was always struggling to find the suitable meeting times with my participants. Almost everyday children had to take some small tests, such as an English vocabulary test, a test for reciting the Chinese texts, or a mathematics test. Children were in different moods if they were asked to do the interviews. Usually I went through their schedule first and then let them decide the time that they would like to participate in the interviews. However, it was difficult to keep the schedule time since there was always something happening. We had to reschedule the interview for another day. This wasted a lot of my time. Moreover, individual semi-structured interviews were heavily used in this study as data generating methods which were time-consuming. In addition, most migrant parents worked for long hours and some migrant families even had to work on weekends. They did not often drop off their kids or pick up them at the school. Most of times, they went to school or were back home by themselves. Finding the time to talk with them was one of the major tasks for me. In addition, I had to follow the train schedules to go back to my hometown. In short, I always felt time pressure in the field.

Also another challenge which I encountered in the field had to do with the drawing activity. Children from the fifth grade were the first group to do this activity. They were asked to do this activity at home after the instruction was given and they could take some colored pencils I supplied if they wished. However, some children did not do it due to the stressful study at home. According to their parents' requests, children had to prepare for the term's final exams rather than to do drawings at home. This happened to children from the fourth grade, as well. I had to cancel my original plan and be flexible. Children who did not do the drawing activity did the work in the classrooms. The problem was that the other children disturbed them. Some children were watching my participants and the others were talking with them. One child suggested my participant to color in different colors for his drawing. This influenced the quality of the drawings. I had to talk quietly with the other kids and ask them to focus on their own tasks in order to reduce their impact on my participants.

The last challenge I would like to discuss in this paper was the power relations. Based on the Chinese culture, children are required to show respect to teachers. They listen to teachers and follow their instructions without any further discussion. It was very hard for me to make children feel comfortable around me. I addressed this issue in different ways, such as changing the way of dress and multiple research methods (see the researcher's role). After one week, children started to realize that I never give them homework or time-out, never criticize them but I were there to help them, discuss with them and let them make decision. They started to get used to me around them and removed teacher's label from me. This is the reason that the main research was conducted after the first week of my fieldwork.

4.9 Data transcription and analysis

According to Kvale and Brinkmann (2009), it is significant to conduct data transcription since researchers may benefit from this process by learning more of the social and emotional aspects surrounding the interviews. In this study, all audio recordings of interviews were listened to and transcribed into detailed words in English. Also all the field notes were went through and transcribed into English as well. Data provided rich information of children's everyday life and perspectives on impact of family migration on children in urban China. Moreover, data transcription helped me to have an overview of the data generated from the field.

After transcription, the information was categorized according to different research questions. With the help of participant observation, it helped me to deeply understand the research under consideration, assisted my analysis of the findings and allowed the themes to emerge.

CHAPTER 5: SOCIO-ECONOMIC BACKGROUND OF RURAL FAMILIES IN URBAN CHINA

5.1 Introduction

This chapter presents the differences in socio-economic conditions between local and migrant children. It also describes the everyday lives of migrant and local children in order to explore migrant children's perspectives on their life after family migration. The socio-economic barrier for migrant children's integration will be discussed, and at the end of the chapter, I will focus on the migrant children's coping strategies to adapt to the socio-economic hardship they encounter.

5.2 Differences in socio-economic and material conditions

As I discussed in chapter 2, migrant parents usually do not receive equal treatment in urban China compared with local parents. As Zhu *et al* (2009, p. 4) discussed, the document released by the Ministry of Labor emphasizes the principle of "local job seekers first, migrants second". Moreover, without an urban local *hukou*, migrant parents do not get any support or benefits from the host government. Chen's (2011) study demonstrates that most Chinese migrants work as low-wage labors in cities. Furthermore, they often experience the delayed payment of their salary (Peng, 2010). According to the Labor Law of China, the maximum working hours are 44 hours each week, while 89.8% of migrant workers work more than this weekly (National Bureau of Statistics of China, 2010). As a result, migrant children usually live in a relatively poor living condition.

5.2.1 Family income

The study includes 23 migrant children (14 boys and 9 girls) with a rural *hukou* and 19 local children (12 boys and 7 girls) with a local *hukou*. The family composition among the migrants was quite diverse. Fourteen children had migrated with both of their parents. Three migrant children came to the city with their mothers while their father worked in other cities. Three migrant children lived with one parent (either mother or father) and their grandparents. One migrant girl lived with her aunt's family and two migrant boys had migrated to the city with their fathers and their mothers were still in the rural areas. For local children, four children lived either

with their mothers or fathers due to the divorces of their parents. However, most of the local children received a lot of care from their grandparents.

The results of questionnaires with both of migrant parents and local parents show a big disparity on their economic conditions. As shown in Table 2, only one migrant family earned more than 3000 RMB (480 US$) each month but there were 16 local families received more than 3000 RMB income each month. Among 23 migrant families, most of them gained less than 2000 RMB (320 US$) each month. However, none of 19 local families fell into this category.

	Family income/each month		
	Less than 2000 RMB	2000RMB – 3000 RMB	More than 3000 RMB
Migrant children	12	10	1
Local children	0	3	16

Table 2 Family income of participants (1 RMB = 0.16 US$)

Some researchers found similar results about the migrant family's financial conditions. Chan (2009, p. 29-30) discussed that migrant workers normally earn less than their urban counterparts. Li *et al* (2006) found that in China 13% of migrants worked for large companies, such as government-owned business, foreign joint-adventure, while 74% of urban residents were employed in these sections. People working in these large companies usually enjoy a good working environment, pension scheme and insurance plans. According to the study of Li and Li (2007), migrant workers' income is much lower than urban workers whereas their working hours are longer. There are various reasons causing the big difference on family income among the participant families in this study as well. Of the 23 migrant families, almost half of the families depended on one parent's work income, the fathers in most cases. Five mothers worked occasionally to increase their family income. Three parents worked before but have stopped working a long time ago. Four parents have never taken any paid professions. However, almost all the local children received financial aids from both parents even if the parents were divorced. The only exception was one local boy who had not met his mother for a quite long time. But this boy was taken care of by his grandparents which may indicate that he probably received some economical help from them.

During the fieldwork, I realized that most children understood their family's financial condition. Indicating this are the excerpts from two children in the semi-structured interviews:

> "*The school just organized a trip to another city in May* [of 2014]. *We can wear the clothes we like. Unlike here, we have to wear the school uniform for most of times. I really wanted to join but my mum said that I could not because we do not have money.*"

> (Xiaohong, migrant girl, age 12)

> "*One of my friends is participating in the after-school programs. He is learning to play taekwondo. I like it very much, and then no one would dare to hit me. When my mum finds a job, I will go as well.*"

> (Xiaoyu, migrant boy, age 10)

These excerpts show that migrant children are aware of the financial situation of their families. When they talked about this during the interviews, they were not sad, which may indicate that migrant children accept or get used to their family's economic situation. These excerpts also reveal that migrant children want to participate in the class activities and learn new skills. Thus, although their families' economic situation has prevented them from participating, migrant children are active in their life. The migrant children's economic situation stood in stark contrast to the local children, as illustrated by the excerpt of Yuanyuan:

> "*Yes, I have pocket money but I do not really spend them. See, this is my money* [she takes out some money from her pocket and shows me]. *I have it for a long time. If I want to buy anything, my mum will buy it for me. Once I wanted to buy jumping candies, my mum bought a huge bag with different flavors. I still have some at home. My mum said I only can eat one or two each day.*"

> (Yuanyuan, local girl, age 8)

Although Yuanyuan did not mention her family economic situation, I can see that she does not need to bother how much money she has. She usually gets the things she wants.

Moreover, some children are also fully aware of their classmates' family economic situation. While children were eating lunch around the table, a local boy talked about a migrant boy sitting next to him.

> "*He never joined the lunch program offered by the school. We have different choices: meat and vegetables with rice plus steamed eggs, meat and vegetables with rice but without steamed eggs, and only vegetables with rice. The cheapest one is vegetables with rice, but he cannot afford it. He brings the food from home to school every day*".

(Jin, local boy, age 9)

The photos taken by the young participants demonstrate a clear difference on the economic condition between local and migrant children as well. For instance, three local children photographed their family luxury dinners including fish, beef, chicken and vegetables, while one migrant child took photos of his family dinner with only two vegetables as shown in the figure 6.

        (a) Local   (b) Migrant

Figure 6. Dinners served in the local and migrant families

The cases above indicate that the financial income determines the different lives of migrant and local children. Migrant children were eager to enhance their abilities by learning new skills but parental income situation prevented this from happening while local children enjoyed financial freedom which may increase the possibilities of healthy emotional and physical development. In the long run, parental income may put migrant children in a disadvantaged position as well.

5.2.2 Housing condition

Housing condition is another factor that differentiates local and migrant children in my study. Only one migrant family had been able to buy their own house in the city. Fifteen migrant families rented apartments within the school district. Most of their rented apartments were small, and only five migrant children mentioned that they had their own bedrooms in the interviews, and Lin was not among them.

> "*I do not have my own bedroom and I live with my parents. But my brother has his own bedroom. I want to sleep with him. My mum disagreed since my brother needs to wake up very early in the morning for his work.*"

(Lin, migrant boy, age 11)

I visited two rented apartments of migrant families. Both of these two apartments have only one room stuffed with many boxes. Some boxes blocked part of the window which made the room a bit dark. The mothers gave me a brief introduction of their apartments when I asked.

> "*Our apartment is 9m^2.The houses in this areas are expensive for renting, but we have to live here in order to get a place for my child in the school. The child can go to school by walking. There are several bus stops nearby which are convenient for my husband to go to work as well.*"

(Huizi's mother, migrant girl, age 8)

> "*The rent for our apartment is quite high. The size of the apartment is about 15m^2. We do not have other options because we had to move. The building we lived in before was going to be torn down. This is the second time for us to move. If we can find cheaper housing in this area, we will move again.*"

(Xiaoge's mother, migrant boy, age 13)

Among all the migrant families in this study, three migrant children lived at their relatives' houses. Two families lived in temporary houses at the construction site since their fathers worked there and two migrant children lived in dormitories provided by their fathers' employers. Almost all the migrant children mentioned that the current apartments were not their first

residencies after they had migrated to the city due to the frequent changing of parents' job or financial issues, etc. More than half of the migrant children mentioned that they did not like relocating when interviewed.

> "I do not like relocating. I cannot find the things I need. Last time, when we moved here, I could not find my homework for school, but I had done my homework. My teacher was upset with me and she thought that I did not do my homework. [That] I used it as an excuse."

(Leilei, migrant boy, age 11)

> "No, I dislike relocating from one place to another. I have to help my mother with moving furniture and stuff. Sometimes, I cannot go to school because of that."

(Yixing, migrant boy, age 11)

> "After moving here, I do not have friends to play with. At my previous place, I have three best friends and we often played together. Here I do not know the children among the neighbors. I feel quite lonely."

(Baiyan, migrant girl, age 9)

The empirical data shows that 13 out of 19 local families in the study have bought their own house in the city. All of these houses are located in the school district. The school is in the developed area of the city with many commercial streets and several big shopping malls. As mentioned before by the migrant parents, the houses in the school district are expensive. One local boy was quite proud of his family house, which has two floors. He took 16 photos with the disposal camera, 13 showing his house, which is big and modernly renovated. Two local children lived at their grandparents' houses and the others rented their apartments. Three local children also mentioned their experience of moving. Tiantian was glad that her family moved to a bigger and better house.

> "I do not remember when I moved to here, but I remember that we had lived close to my father's workplace before. After we bought this house, we moved here. The house is larger than before."

(Tiantian, local girl, age 12)

The interviews show that migrant children and local children had different experiences of moving due to their different purposes of relocation. For migrant children's families, moving was usually forced because of their financial reasons or job relocation. This involuntary relocation may reinforce the feeling of insecurity and instability to migrant children. Thus, migrant children had unpleasant experience with that. Local children's families changed houses voluntarily in order to improve their housing condition. The new houses are bigger or better than the previous ones which brought excitement and happiness to local children.

In the present study, almost all the migrant families stated that buying a house was a huge expenditure for the families which they could not afford. Some parents mentioned that renting an apartment cost most of their family income and they never thought of buying a house. Previous research has showed that the housing situation of migrant families in China is a serious problem which deserves to be addressed. Most of the migrants lived in densely populated places with low level of sanitary situations (Duan & Zhou, 2001; Wan, 1995). Li *et al* (2006) found that more than thirty migrant workers lived in only one single room in a storehouse without necessary facilities, such as windows or showers.

In contrast to migrant parents' perspectives, local parents considered buying a house as an investment. They could help their children more with the increased value of the properties or might give the houses to their children as gifts at a later stage. The different abilities and perspectives of migrant parents and local parents on housing are another element contributing to different lives of migrant and local children.

Family socio-economic condition is linked with children through many ways. From the interviews, this seemed to be an important issue that migrant children encountered. Migration for most families meant a change in their socio-economic circumstances. It was hard for migrant parents to find suitable work in the new environment. Some parents had to work under poor working conditions in order to financially support their families. Some families had only one member in employment which impacted the quality of their lives. Thus, the economic condition was stressful for migrant families.

5.3 Everyday lives of migrant and local children

Migrant children's everyday life in urban China is an important factor indicating migrant children's experience in a new environment after family migration. According to the data generated from the fieldwork, most of the migrant children have lived in Shenyang for more than three years. Some migrant children did not remember when their families had migrated to Shenyang but they did remember which grade they had started in the school.

With the drawing method, migrant children were asked where they like the most to live, in the city or their hometown. Eleven of total 23 migrant children clearly indicated that they like their villages better than the city. Reasons mentioned were, for instance, more friends, their close relatives, more flowers, and less polluted air in their hometown. A migrant girl said that:

> *"I have a lot of friends in the villages of Jinzhou and I can play with them outside. Here I only have three friends and my mum does not allow me to play with them outside. She needs to watch me outside but she does not have time."*

(Pingping, migrant girl, age 8)

In a big city, like Shenyang, child trafficking is not a non-existing phenomenon. Most parents do not let children play outside without adults' supervision. Usually urban children's grandparents take the responsibility of taking care of them after school, but migrant children's grandparents are often left in their rural hometowns. On the contrary, in a village, residents normally know each other and there are less people coming from outside of the village. It is safer for children to play outside unsupervised.

One migrant boy named Bai (12 years old) drew both pictures of rural live and urban life (see Figure 7 and 8), explaining the drawings:

Figure 7: The picture was drawn by Bai, a 12-year-old migrant boy, about his rural live

Bai: This is my hometown. My grandmother raises some farm animals, like chicken, ducks. [And] *we have a dog.*

Interviewer: Where is the dog?

Bai: We have one, [But] *I do not know how to draw him. He is brown and its size is like this* [using hands to show the size]. *It has long hair and its ears are like this* [using hands to show the hanging ears]. *My mum said it cannot live with me here. My grandmother needs its guarding to her farm and house.*

Interviewer: What are these?

Bai: These are the fields of our family. We have wheat, corn and a big apple tree too. I like to pick apples to eat. Our fields are big, and I can play hide and seek there with my friends. My mum used to say that I can play there after harvest time.

Figure 8: The picture was drawn by Bai, a 12-year-old migrant boy, about his urban live

Interviewer: What is this building?

Bai: This is the building I am living now.

Interviewer: Is this you?

Bai: Yes.

Interviewer: What are you doing?

Bai: Watching TV and waiting for my mum. My mum usually comes home very late from her work. This is her.

Interviewer: Who is she?

Bai: She is my mum

Interviewer: Why is there black color around her?

Bai: She is coming home in the dark.

Interviewer: What kind of job is she doing?

Bai: She sells clothes. Sometimes, she comes home with food. We will eat together.

Interviewer: Does your father often stay at home?

Bai: No, he is a long distance truck driver. He comes back every two to three days. I am alone at home.

From the participant observation, I realized that Bai is a very quiet boy. However, he talked 20 minutes about his hometown with me. From the boy's detailed description and body language, I could feel his great affection for his hometown. On the contrary, when discussing his picture about urban life, he did not talk until I asked him. From the interview, I also got the chance to know that Bai often cooked for himself since most of time after the school he was waiting alone at home. He knew how to cook rice, meat with eggplants, tomatoes with eggs, and soybean sauces with chicken.

For migrant children, it is difficult to keep in touch with friends, families and grandparents in the villages. The new school was the main place to develop social networks and it was difficult to make new friends within the limited social network. Thus, during the migration process, migrant children lost great parts of their social networks. Social networks play an important role in facilitating the lives of migrant children by providing information on receiving schools and aiding integration. Due to the long working hours of migrant parents and lack of social networks, the lives of migrant children in cities were often marked by solitude, such as this migrant boy Bai. However, migrant children took this opportunity to learn to live their lives on their own, for instance, by cooking and taking care of themselves. Thus, they became more independent which is not only important for self-care, but also allows them to feel empowered.

During the semi-structured interviews, seven migrant children confirmed that they liked living in the city. Qianhui (migrant girl, age 8) mentioned that "people in the city are clean and dress nicely and neatly". Peng (migrant boy, age 13) told me that

> *"I can learn a lot here. In Beitai we do not have class every day and we almost do not have English at all. The teachers here are better as well".*

A migrant girl, named Wenwen (age 8), also liked to live in the city with her parents since in her village she had to walk more than thirty minutes from home to school. Her parents sold vegetables at a local market every day. She drew a picture of things she usually did in the city (see Figure 9).

Figure 9: The picture drawn by Wenwen, an eight-year-old migrant girl, about the things she usually does in the city.

"This is the vegetable stall of my family. This is Aunt Zhang's vegetable stall. Look! Our stall is bigger than her stall [the right side one belongs to Wenwen's family]. *I am happy for that …and even proud of my mum. Our stall is located on the second position to the entrance door of the market building* [the entrance is shown in brown color in the picture], *which is the best position in the market. My sister* [age 5] *and I often play together around the vegetable stall in the market when there are not a lot of customers. Here is the clock of the market and I can see the time at our stall. Every day I have to be in the market with my parents at 7:00 am in the morning, and people start to buy vegetables at that time. The market closes at 8:30 in the evening. I eat both breakfast and dinner there for most of times. This is a yellow table. We eat at this table, but my sister and I can sleep on it when we are very tired. Do you see the clothes hanging here? This is mine and this is my sister's. My mum washed them yesterday. My mum asks me to help her with selling vegetables because I can do better math than her".*

Her family migrated to Shenyang almost three years ago. She was talkative and expressed her thought clearly. The clock in the market caught my interest because it appeared in the picture and was mentioned in the interview as well. She was sensitive to the time because she kept watching it to see if it was time to go home. Even though one can understand that it is difficult for her to wake up before seven o'clock in the morning and go to bed after half past eight almost every day, there was no indication that she was living a hard life in the interview. On the contrary, she was happy with her urban life. The only thing she mentioned that she disliked was the cold water in the market. This was the reason that she did not like to help her parents cleaning the vegetables.

Same as Wenwen, Peng (migrant boy, age 13) also liked to go to his father's working place after school.

"I am alone with my father in Shenyang. My father works as a hair dresser in the downtown. After school, I usually eat dinner in the salon where he works… My father teaches me how to cut hair sometimes but he is not allowed me to cut his hair".

Among the other five migrant children, three stated that they liked both the city and hometown and the last two had not clear opinions on which place they liked.

Local children also participated in both drawing and photography methods. They were asked to draw their life in the city and friends at the school or take photos of things or persons they like or dislike. Below are some excerpts from local children, demonstrating the wide range of activities that they are involved in:

"I will go home with Ruirui [a local girl] *to play today. I will have dinner at her home also. My mum will pick me up at 19:00 today. She is my best friend and I often go to her home. Sometimes, we go to swimming together".*

(Xiaotan, local girl, age 6)

"Library or Shenyang Book Town is the place I often visit. I always do roller skate there since they are quite close to my grandmother's house. I love reading. Last year, the library organized the reading contest and I got the second prize".

(Ren, local girl, age 9)

Data generated about the everyday lives and activities of migrant and local children reveal some interesting differences. Migrant children usually went to school in the morning and went back home or to parents' working places after school each day. Except for their school homework, they usually watched TV or played at home with or without parents' supervision. Local children spent their afternoons in different places based on their interests with the help of parents' arrangement, such as visiting friends' homes, visiting the library, taking Middle-school English classes and basketball training. Therefore, local children and migrant children were differentiated in after-school activities. Local children participated in paid activities related to school work or talent development with adult supervision. Local parents have high expectations on their children. They compete with each other on their children's schooling, and the phenomenon of mutual competition is relatively serious among them. This phenomenon further increases the gap between local children and migrant children. Migrant children were excluded from extracurricular activities due to several reasons. Migrant parents did not have time to focus on after-school activities. Because of economic conditions or limitations of knowledge, migrant parents also did not have the ability to take care of after-school activities. However, unlike local children, migrant children managed to gain more informal knowledge from participating in their parents' work place, which might enhance their livelihood possibilities in the future.

5.4 Socio-economic barriers for migrant children's integration

All migrant children encounter some challenges when adapting to a new environment, regardless of where they are from and what experiences they have. Adjustment to a new environment and new culture can present unique challenges for migrant children (McCarthy, 1998). Family migration could encounter significant socio-economic challenges. This is particularly true for migrants without local social status, who are denied access to support and protection service. Thus, migrant children's family socio-economic status in a host society has great influence on migrant children's social lives.

5.4.1 Social exclusion: the household registration system

Kabeer (2000) argued that social rules define people who can have access to resources from those who cannot, in which ways and to what degree, and determine people's membership and entitlement. In the context of China, the household registration system allocates social resources and appoints people's identities. In the case of this study, as discussed in previous chapters, the household registration system distinguishes urban children who can enjoy the benefit of urban resources from migrant children who cannot, and it also limits migrant children to change their identities from the rural to the urban. Migrant people could change their identities from rural to urban with certain requirements, such as buying a house in the city with full payment. However, according to Guo (2010) and supported by the findings of this study, there are few rural people who can meet all the requirements for a household transformation. During the interview, the teacher of Grade five mentioned that:

> *"The household registration system determines that children with rural status are different from urban children. There are special migrant schools in Shenyang. Even though migrant children study at our school, they still cannot go to middle school in the city. They have to return back to their villages for their study in middle school. Moreover, they cannot attend the university entrance exam here".*

The local population seemed conscious about the different treatments of local and migrants. Xiaode's (local boy, age 9) mother dropped him off and picked him up at school every day, and one day she told me that:

"The household registration system has existed for many years. Under this law, some resources are accessible for us. The migrant children are not entitled to these. They are treated differently".

Moreover, as I discussed before, the urban school has additional procedures for enrolment. In order to get a place in this school, most migrant children had to live in the school district three years before applying for the school. Thus, barriers created by the household registration system reinforce the difference and separation of local and migrant children. The unequal treatment received by migrant children contributes to the exclusion of them in Shenyang.

5.4.2 Economic exclusion

The family economic condition directly decides children's living environment and educational resources. Under the household registration system, the social status of migrants strongly influences their economic situation because it determines their opportunities for employment. Many migrants have to accept jobs with unfair conditions and low salary (see the previous part of this chapter).

In the current study, as discussed in the previous part, twelve migrant families earned less than 2000 RMB (320 US$) each month, which was regarded as a poor economic situation by the teacher. Ten families gained more than 2000 but less than 3000 RMB (480 US$) and the teacher indicated that this amount of money could only afford the basic living costs in Shenyang. Although parents did not need to pay tuition for children in primary school, there were still some other expenses for their study, such as textbooks, exercise books, stationery and school uniform. Besides expenditure on education, parents also needed to spend money on accommodation and food.

The empirical data shows the family economic condition of migrant children was a huge barrier for their integration. During the school break time, local children often played badminton or basketball but migrant children was not able to play with local children since they did not have the money to buy the bats or to improve their sports skills to play with (see the socializing experience of migrant children in leisure time in chapter 7). At lunch time, a large amount of migrant children did not join in the school lunch programs. After-school programs are expensive in China and most of migrant children did not participate in this kind of programs. Even if

migrant children lived close to local children, they could not invite them to their home due to small size of their houses. Migrant parents could not let their children to participate in some of the school activities which required extra costs or materials in order to avoid the extra economic burden. The teacher of Grade five told me that school just organized the activity of airplane model contest.

> *"There are 52 students participated in the airplane model contest but none of them were migrant children. For this contest, participants were required to pay 400 RMB (70 US$) for the materials. Migrant children do not have many opportunities to develop their hobbies as local children do due to the financial situation of their families. This is educational inequality for them".*

Here is an excerpt from an interview during a household visit to a migrant family:

> *"My daughter is doing good job at school. I knew it was not easy for her since as parents, we could not give her a lot of help on her study. She loves singing and can sing many songs. She learned singing basically from TV programs. If we get more money, I love to pay for the professional training for her".*

> (Huizi's mother migrant girl, age 8)

Local children played games and participated in activities together. Gradually they formed their own groups based on their interests. Migrant children did not have the economic resources to get involved in the activities that local children did. Although migrant children also constructed their own cultural group, they could not play with local children together. A relation between children is built on shared interests and how much time they spend together. Therefore, it was not urban children's intention to exclude migrant children, but the lower standard of living conditions prevented migrant children from integrating in the new society with local children. When migrant children were separated from local children's regular activities, an invisible line was gradually drawn between the two groups of children.

5.5 Migrant children's coping strategies to adapt to socio-economic hardship

Some migrant children in this study bore many responsibilities in their families. This is similar to what Abebe (2007, p. 83) found in Ethiopia, that "when families live in economically precarious

situation, adults must engage in alternative livelihood strategies, partly by transferring the burden of domestic work to children". In the Chinese context, families perceive it as normal for their children to participate in the family's responsibilities in rural areas. Most migrant children were from rural parts of China. Migrant children utilized their agency by adopting a variety of strategies to cope with family socio-economic hardship. They constantly got involved in taking care of younger siblings as well as seniors in the family. They also took some family responsibilities, such as doing household chores or earning money. Migrant children were able to take over some of the parents' tasks when parents were absent by for instance cooking meals. Thus, the migrant children are social actors and use their agency to change the condition around them for a better life. Here are some quotes of interviews that show their coping strategies in the new environment.

> *"My mother works as a cook in the restaurant in Shenyang. She finishes her work at 10pm. I usually do my homework in the restaurant she works. I help her with cleaning before she finishes her work for the day".*
>
> (Yixing, migrant boy, age 11)
>
> *"My parents are very busy with their work here. After we moved here, I have to do a lot of things by myself. I wash my clothes, wipe the floor, boil the water, clean the house and prepare my lunch* [and] *other things".*
>
> (Xiaohong, migrant girl, age 12)

During the photo interviews, one of Chen's photos (migrant boy, age 13) caught my attention. He portrayed some food which he had made for his breakfast. He told me that:

> *"My father is a long distance truck driver. He usually comes home every three days. My mother is still in the village taking care of our farm. I was alone last night. This is the breakfast I cooked for myself this morning".*

Although Chen is the oldest participant in my study, he is still a child. He has to take care of himself without adult supervision quite often in order to cope with his family's migration. Chen was not alone among my migrant participants. Migrant boy, Bai (age 12), also stayed alone at home sometimes. He managed to build a good relationship and trust with the owner of a small

shop close to his house, and he was allowed to take some food with later payment when his parents were not home.

Social and economic structures of the host society had great impact on migrant children's lives. It is noteworthy that every migrant child made some effort to cope. The cases above indicate that some migrant children helped their parents in their spare time and some had to take different family responsibilities at expense of their time for study or rest, such as preparing meals and washing clothes, in order to support their parents to earn money. Moreover, migrant children made best use of limited resources by buying food with later payment and playing self-made paper cards, as discussed later, in order to solve the problem of lack of money. They also learned informal capacities in order to take care of themselves. Thus, they not only depend on adults for care, they also provide care to others in the household. Therefore, in order to cope with family's socio-economic hardship, migrant children did not passively receive and undergo uncomfortable procedures. Rather, they made great coping effort to face this stressful situation.

CHAPTER 6: SCHOOL EDUCATION OF MIGRANT CHIDLREN

6.1 Introduction

Education plays an important role in everyone's life since it often sets the groundwork for future successes. This chapter presents the formal education of migrant children in urban China. I start with the school experience of migrant and local children and then the integration barriers related to school education for migrant children will be discussed.

6.2 The school experience of migrant and local children in Shenyang

Ackers & Stalford (2004) argued that children's experiences of migration are affected by their experiences of the educational systems in their host society. The school where I did fieldwork has been working on improving migrant children's educational situation. All migrant children joined in different grades or classrooms with local students based on their academic level instead of studying separately in one classroom. This arrangement was helpful for children to learn from each other. The school also set a rule that migrant children should be treated equally. I did interviews with three teachers who are responsible for the overall development of students in their class. The head teacher of Grade four claimed that she *"did not treat local students with preference and all the students including migrant children were given the same chance to join in the school programs or class activities regardless of their origins"*. About the academic scores of migrant children, the teachers shared the same opinions: Migrant children were usually attentive in class and finished their homework on time. However, academic scores of migrant children ranked below average. There might be several reasons for this: Some migrant children's study has been interrupted due to the frequent relocation of migrant families. Moreover, the quality of education in rural areas in China is lower than those in urban areas due to political prioritization and uneven distribution of educational resources. Also in China, home study is considered as of equal importance as school study. Most of the migrant children lacked home study due to migrant parents' abilities or lack of time. The head teacher of Grade five mentioned that:

> *"It is difficult for me to apply only one standard to the teaching, since all the migrant children came from different education and family backgrounds. I have to take each individual's needs into account. Also the age difference made the class situation more*

complicated since many migrant parents had postponed their children's schooling due to various reasons".

The head teacher of Grade one summed up some of the causes of delaying schooling for migrant students in her class:

"Some migrant children could not catch up with other students and had to retake the previous grade again. And some migrant parents sent children to school late due to the family financial restrains or school registration problems. One migrant girl in my class had to stop one year to take care of her grandmother who broke her leg since no adults were available in her family".

In this case, this migrant girl was not only as a caretaker, but also as a caregiver. Becker (Becker, cited in Evans, 2014, p. 1895) defines young caregivers as "children provide care to another family member on a regular basis with significant caring tasks". Caregivers are different from children doing some domestic tasks, since they undertake a wider range of household work which is more time consuming. This may result in negative outcomes for children, such as the migrant girl mentioned by the teacher who had to undertake caring responsibility at the expense of her schooling.

Migrant parents gave me their perspectives on school education. Most of them were satisfied with the quality of education in Shenyang. Xiaoge's mother talked about this during my household visiting.

"The quality of education here is much better than that in our village. Lessons were often canceled because of sick teachers or other reasons in the village. In Shenyang, there is a strong competition. Teachers are working very hard. Once my son's teacher had a stomachache with pale face, she used a triangle ruler to support her and continued to teach. Teachers here are working harder unlike our village".

(Xiaoge's mother, migrant boy, age 13)

However, migrant parents complained that the registration regulation of the school is unfair to their children. Some migrant children had to wait a long time to get a place in school. Below are the excerpts from two migrant parents during informal dialogues.

"We have to live in the school district for three years before [our child] *got a place in the school. But we did not know this regulation before moving here. My daughter was lucky since she was small when we migrated here. She got the place in the school on time after we had been here for three years. Now we dare not relocate since she will face this problem again. One of the migrant girls in her class has been waiting for about two years".*

(Meng's mother, migrant girl, age 9)

"School registration has prevented children from going to school at their proper age. My son has waited for one and half year to get a place in school. Now he is one year older than most students in his class".

(Gang's father, migrant boy, age 8)

Migrant children were asked in the semi-structured interviews whether they like the school in the city or in their hometown. Most migrant children mentioned that the infrastructure and facilities of the urban school were much better than those in the rural schools. According to the participants, the urban school is bigger, newer and more beautiful compared to the rural schools. Migrant children also mentioned that their present school has a library, kitchen, computer room, and special relax places in the playground in contrast to their previous schools. This is illustrated by Si and Leilei, as they both drew their past and present schools and talked about them in the interviews.

"The school building in the hometown is very old and going to fall down. See, there are a lot of cracks on the building. I was very worried. The building here has four floors and is very strong. I like the school here".

(Si, migrant girl, age 9)

"We are learning computer now. We have computer lessons once a week in the computer room. After lessons, we are allowed to play some computer games. I like car racing games. In my hometown, the school does not have a computer room and I do not have computer lessons there either".

Some migrant children mentioned that the quality of education in Shenyang is higher than their hometown schools. The curriculum is diverse and they can learn different knowledge and skills. Most hometown schools my participants had attended did not have subjects on English, computer and arts. One hometown school even did not have physical education. Gang (migrant boy, age 8) mentioned in the interview:

"The primary school in my village does not have playground so I never had lessons of physical education there. I learned this lesson after my family moved here".

Six migrant children indicated that the lessons in urban school are taught in a fun way. Pingping (migrant girl, age 8) said that she liked the mental mathematics games with the time limits. Meng (migrant girl, age 9) told me:

"We learned poems in the English lesson today: The person who wrote a book is called a writer; if you need a service please call a waiter… It is interesting".

The quotes above reveal that both infrastructure and quality of education are better in the urban school than rural schools. More importantly, they also indicate that migrant children did not receive proper education in their villages, laying a good foundation for their future study. This could explain why the academic scores of migrant children are below the average, making it a structural issue rather than an individual problem.

When asked about the teachers in the urban school, almost all the migrant children indicated that the teachers are nice and they like them. Three migrant children used the word "parents" to describe the relationship between them and their teachers. I think that they learned it from the books they were using. However, when asked children's perspectives about how difficult of lessons in the urban school are, 16 migrant children confirmed that the lessons in the urban school are more difficult than those in the villages. In the interview, Chen (migrant boy, age 13) was sad and expressed his feeling:

"The lessons here are very difficult. Some lessons I did not learn before in my hometown. Even though I had Chinese lessons before, here I have to write essays. When I write an essay, I make a lot of mistakes on Chinese characters. I am not good at that. The teachers

do not like me because of my poor academic score. They only like the student, like Yuyu because she studies very well. When I speak English, the teacher said she could not understand me. I do not like English at all".

Chen was not the only migrant kid experiencing difficulty on urban school education. Baiyan (migrant girl, age 9) talked with me about her thoughts of teachers.

"Teacher Li is quite nice. Sometimes, she calls my name to answer questions in the class. If I do not know, she will teach me after the class. But Teacher Wang did not explain to me the way how to answer the questions but only asked me to redo it again and again".

Due to the rules of school registration and migration, migrant children's educational trajectories are delayed and they might also forget the knowledge learned previously. Moreover, migrant children are the ones who have to pay the price for the educational divergence between rural and urban schools. Thus, some of the migrant children were struggling at school. From my observation, some teachers focused on children's personal development rather than only teaching the lessons. However, some teachers paid great attention to the courses they taught and praised only the students who achieved excellent scores in the respective courses. This did not show the direct discrimination of migrant children since it also applied to urban children who did not have the good academic achievement as well.

The local children who participated in this study were also asked to talk about their school lives. Most local children mentioned that they like the school and considered their school big and beautiful with new paints. Three local children emphasized that the playground was what they liked most about the school due to the renovated football field. When asked about teachers, most local children mentioned that the teachers in the school were nice, but 12 of them did say that the teachers were strict. Yulin (local boy, age 9) said that:

"In my school, we should walk quietly in the corridors but once I chased my friends on the stairs and run in the corridors. The teacher called my mum in school to talk about this".

About the study, most local children stated that it was not hard for them to understand the lessons but complained that there was so much homework to do.

"We have a lot of homework each day, and especially now we have to study for the final exams. Each week, we need to write an essay. Today we have two exercise papers for mathematics, one exercise paper for English, we also need to recite Chinese text and finish our science project".

(Yang, local girl, age 10)

Some local children talked about the school activities, such as the parties of the International Children's Day or the talent show, however none of the migrant children showed interest in this during the interviews.

"I love to participate in all the school activities. I hosted the party of the International Children's Day for my class last year [2013] *and this year* [2014]. *I also joined in the Chinese Speech Contest in April* [2014] *and got the second prize".*

(Ren, local girl, age 9)

"I like singing. I participated in all the activities related to singing. I have studied to learn singing since I was four years old".

(Yuanyuan, local girl, age 8)

Based on the interviews with the teachers, I learned that schools took action to improve migrant children's education condition and tried to treat them equally with local students. However, as matter of the fact, migrant children did not receive equal education as local students due to different reasons such as migration politics on a structural level or the resulting financial difficulties of migrant families.

To sum up, although sharing the similar language and same nationality, migrant children receive relatively different educational experience compared to local children. Local children quite enjoy their study lives at the school except for complaints about homework. However, many migrant children have poor academic achievements at the school as a result of poor school resources and low teacher quality in rural schools. Due to the regulation of migration and school registration, migrant children's rights to education have been postponed and thus they have not been able to have continuous education. Some migrant children have to sacrifice their schooling to be

caregivers. Therefore, it is difficult for migrant children to catch up with the local children. In addition, unlike local children receiving well-balanced education, migrant children participate in less school activities, which also influences their school experience.

6.3 Educational barriers for migrant children's integration

Formal education plays an important role on people's development in the post-industrialized and urban China. It may be difficult for people to get access to formal employment or be included in social groups without education. Thus for migrant children, issues related to education are significant barriers for them to integrate into the host society.

6.3.1 Migrant parents' educational level

Parental expectations and educational levels have a close relationship on children's education and development (Wang & Fu, 2004). Most migrant parents have lower educational background. Official data show that 64% of migrant workers in China only gained secondary education and 10% only completed primary education (National Bureau of Statistics of China, 2010). Moreover, migrant parents often spend limited or insufficient time in their children's education due to their lack of education background (Han, 2005).

In the context of this study, as shown in Table 3, the educational level of migrant parents is much lower than that of local parents. 13 fathers among 23 completed middle school and six fathers only received elementary education. Three migrant fathers finished study at high school or secondary school and only one father graduated from college or university. Local fathers received much higher education compared with their counterparts. Except for four fathers with high school or secondary school education, all others graduated from college or university.

	Elementary School	Middle School	High School or Secondary School	College or University
Migrant Father	6	13	3	1
Migrant Mother	5	16	2	0
Local Father	0	0	4	15
Local Mother	0	0	6	13

Table 3 Parents' educational level

Migrant fathers' educational level was higher than migrant mothers. Sixteen migrant mothers completed middle school study and five received elementary school education. Only two held high school or secondary school diploma. On the contrary, the data show that there is not big difference on educational level between local mothers and fathers. Six local mothers graduated from high school or secondary school and thirteen completed college or university study. In China, as educational resources are distributed unevenly between cities and villages, migrants from villages usually get poorer resources, thus have lower educational completion (Jin & Liu, 2011).

Most migrant parents believed that education was important for their children but most of them did not have the knowledge, skills or time to help their children. Fifteen migrant parents expressed their concern about this.

> *"We only graduated from middle school. We do want to help her with her study, but most of times we do not know how to do it. Her homework is difficult for us. My daughter has to depend on herself".*

(Meng's mother, migrant girl, age 9)

> *"We are selling vegetables at a market. Each morning, we leave our home around 6:30 and go back home at 9:00 in the evening. We do not have time to supervise her study. After home, we are exhausted so we seldom check her homework".*

(Wenwen's father, migrant girl, age 8)

During interviews, eighteen migrant children indicated that they would ask for help from their friends, classmates or teachers when having problems in study, as Yixing, for instance:

> *"My parents could not help with my study. If I have questions, I have to ask my classmates or teachers".*

(Yixing, migrant boy, age 11)

Only five migrant children said that their parents or aunt helped them address the questions in their study. The teachers mentioned that migrant children lacked home education, which is considered as important as school education in China. Migrant parents had neither the time nor

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the ability to teach and tutor their children at home which partially resulted in their poor school performance. Academic scores of migrant children ranked below the average indicated by the empirical data.

Moreover, migrant parents were not able to set up a plan or strategy for their children's education. They failed to identify their children's educational needs. Instead, they criticized migrant children when they received a low score. Six migrant children indicated their experience of being beaten due to low scores in examinations, as the excerpt of Xiaoge illustrates:

> *"I dare not talk about my examination performance at home. Once I failed in the English test, my parents beat me. I told them that I do not know how to learn English and I do not like learning English but they did not listen to me".*

(Xiaoge, migrant boy, age 13)

In addition, although most of the migrant parents believed that education played an important role in their children's lives, they did not pay equal attention to it as local parents did. The teacher of Grade one said that only few migrant parents had ever contacted her in order to know their children's behavior or performance at school while local parents took any opportunity to discuss their children's progress at school with her. She complained about the limited cooperation she got from migrant parents.

> *"This semester, less than half of the migrant parents joined in the parents meeting. I understand that migrant parents are busy with work. But you know, we only hold the parents meeting twice a year. The parents meeting is a good chance to know what the children have learned at school, what your child is good at, what you child needs to work more on. It is also an opportunity to get to know other parents and know what other kids are doing. I feel migrant parents do not pay enough attention to their children's education".*

Migrant parents have great influence on their children's integration in the new environment. Due to structural problems, they could not spend more time on children's education and were unable to assist their children in learning and developing social skills. Thus, their abilities and ignorance

to education brought negative effect on children's school lives which led to integration difficulties for migrant children.

6.3.2 School barriers for migrant children's integration

Schools serve a number of functions in our society beyond transmitting academic knowledge and skills. Schools are also the places for social interaction of children, promoting culture, and developing good values. Migrant children at school age spend many time at school, thus their school experience has great impact on their experience of migration (Reynolds, 2008). Since schools serve as the means of integration for newcomer children (Candappa, cited in Archambault, 2010), they have the responsibilities to help students with different backgrounds to build positive relationships among them. Migration not only changes the living location for children, but also changes other aspects of their daily lives. Schools should offer orientation programs or transition programs for new students to help them adapt to a new environment. Most importantly, they should provide different educational plans or strategies based on needs of children with different backgrounds. School members, such as teachers and assistants, also play an important role to make each student feel included with caring attitude and inclusive education. Each student is unique. They should be respected and should not be adjusted based on their background.

In the current study, schools and teachers did help migrant children cope with various difficulties. All migrant children were grouped with local children according to their academic scores. After first joining the urban school, migrant children faced different obstacles. The teacher of Grade four recalled:

> *"At the beginning time, migrant children often forgot to follow the school rules. I can understand that. Rules are different in schools between rural and urban areas. They were late for the school and talked with loud voice inside classrooms or school corridors. Some migrant children spoke dirty words. The most common mistakes they did were forgetting to do their homework or to bring homework back to school. As a teacher, I understand their situation. I repeated to remind them what they should do and guide them in the right direction".*

However, from my observation some inequalities and disadvantages that migrant children experienced were not addressed by the schools or their teachers. The urban school emphasizes the children's academic scores. Students who have been selected as subject representatives or class leaders are students with excellent academic achievement. Small tests were held almost every day, while big tests were held monthly or every second month. After each big exam, a list is published, containing all students' names and scores. In China this is considered as a stimulus to encourage students to study hard since they can easily see whether they make progress or not by comparing with the results for previous exams. Ranking students' scores is a hot topic in China. Some people believe that students' score or performance is an objective reality. The core idea of Chinese education is competition. So schools should educate children to face their scores properly but not to avoid them. Some people believe that the ranking system might cause harm or discrimination to students, especially those whose study performance is lower than average. This may result in hurting their self-esteem. However, it is unfair for migrant children with a relatively lower educational background to compete with local children. This may put migrant children in a difficult position to integrate into the school environment. Six migrant children had strong feeling against the exams and ranking system that the school was doing.

> *"I do not like exams but we have so many at the school. I was very nervous yesterday* [They had exams the day before this interview]. *We should spend more time on learning"*.
>
> (Bai, migrant boy, age 12)

I met Xiaohong by chance, sitting on a stair that was not often used by children. She explained to me that:

> *"I did not do good job in the exams. I feel ashamed and dare not to talk with my classmates. I worry they will laugh at or tease me so I am waiting here until they all leave and go home* [she got results for some exams].
>
> (Xiaohong, migrant girl, age 12)

In addition, schools focused on improving migrant children's achievement in the examinations but often ignored to necessity to develop their abilities or potentials, as seen in the example of Baiyan (migrant girl, age 9). When she did some questions wrong in a mathematics exam, the

teacher did not use time to find out why she made mistakes and if she understood the theories behind. Rather the teacher asked her to redo the same questions five times. In this sense, Baiyan just copied the answers five times without thinking it.

The school often organized different kinds of activities such as the airplane model contest previously mentioned. During my fieldwork, I experienced the English speech contest. A party was held two weeks before the fieldwork to celebrate the International Children's Day. I got the opportunity to look through many photos taken on different activities. I realized that these activities only addressed to students who studied well or received related training before. Most of the migrant children did not have the abilities to perform. Thus, although the teachers seem aware of the necessity of including the migrant children, the school failed to include children of different backgrounds in these activities. Therefore, education-related factors did not open opportunities and include migrant children in the new environment.

CHAPTER 7: SOCIO-CULTURAL EVERYDAY LIVES OF MIGRANT CHILDREN

7.1. Introduction

Socio-cultural factors are important forces within cultures and societies that affect the thoughts, feeling and behaviors. In this chapter, I will talk about the socializing experience of migrant children in their spare time, focusing on friendships and activities for the development of we-ness. After that, cultural barriers for migrant children's integration will be presented.

7.2 The socializing experience of migrant children in leisure time

Socialization is particularly important for children. Socializing means "coming into contact with others and exchanging everyday small talk" (Enli & Thumim, 2012, p. 2). According to Qvortrup (cited in Adler & Adler, 1998), school is one of the main institutions in shaping childhood, where children socialize to society. Therefore, classmates in school are the main sources for children to socialize to society. In this section, I will discuss how migrant children socialize with others in school or after school under the cultural diversity.

7.2.1 Friends and friendships

Friends and friendships play a very important role in the life of children. Children learn to interact with friends in a healthy, positive and productive manner. Corsaro (1985) discussed that children improve their social skills by regular playing with their friends, while Gaskins (2006) argued that friendships are a culturally specific form of providing children with close daily social interaction with other children. For migrant children, peer relations are significant aspects of their social inclusion. My empirical data shows that most migrant children considered that friends are important in constructing their school experience in their new urban environment, as illustrated by these quotes, expressing their view on the importance of friends and friendships.

> "I have four friends at school. We like to sit on that bench. [She uses her finger to point the bench which is not far from us]. They are all my best friends. We play together all the time…I feel alone if I do not have someone to play with.
>
> (Si, migrant girl, age 9)
>
> "I like all my friends very much. Last time, I lost the key to my home. One of my friends helped me find it at the playground".

(Xiaoyu, migrant boy, age 10)

Some migrant children mentioned that having friends makes them happy and comfortable.

"Bo is my friend, and my best friend. She is from the same village I come from. My mum also knew her mum. At school, we often play together. It is sad that she did not come to school today. I hope she will come tomorrow [she shows a cheerful and happy face]*".*

(Huizi, migrant girl, age 8)

The excerpts indicate that friends and friendship are important for the migrant children. After migrant children come to the urban city, everything is unfamiliar to them: new school, new classmates, new rules and even new socio-spatial environment. Friendships make them feel less lonely in the new environment since they have someone to play with and be with. They spend time together, share ideas and have fun with their friends. They also seek help or comfort from their friends. Thus, friendships make their lives more interesting and make them more comfortable in the new environment. They enjoy having friends and friendships have become part of their school lives. Therefore, friendships are the most important social relationships for them and they plays important role in the healthy development of migrant children in the new community.

7.2.2 The development of we-ness through activities

Many studies have shown that migrant children in urban China are discriminated by the people in the cities. For example, Feng argued (2007) that when living in an urban society with a rural identity, migrant people are at high risk of being set apart from urban people. Because of their rural lifestyles, rural accents and different kinds of values, migrant people often suffer various forms of discrimination from other groups in the cities. "It is not uncommon for migrants to experience unpleasant social encounters such as verbal disrespect, deliberate avoidance or being looked down upon by the urban residents" (Guo, cited in Wong *et al.*, 2007). However, from interviews and participation observation, I did not find that my local participants were discriminating their migrant peers. Local children talked to migrant children in the same way that they talked to other local children. Moreover, they expressed the same feeling to migrant children that they had to local children. It might be that migrant children are less discriminated because of the positive changes in the Chinese government policies and schools' attitudes

towards educating migrant children. Probably of particular importance is it that migrant children are now integrated with local children in the same classes. When asked who they liked to play with, migrant children or local children, most of the children indicated that they liked to play with both. However, when asked who they often played with, most local children named other local children, as for instance in the case of Hui:

> *"I like playing with both of migrant children and local children, but I play badminton with Jun* [local boy] *a lot since we go to badminton training class every Wednesday together"*.

> (Hui, local boy, age 10)

From participation observation, I noticed that during break time most migrant boys played self-made paper cards. They spontaneously divided into a few groups and tried to defeat the opponents. When they found they could not win in their group, they changed to play with others. Almost all the migrant boys had many paper cards in their pockets. Some migrant girls joined them as well while others stood next to them watching. Local children did seldom participate, but rather participated in other activities. The older local children usually played basketball. Four of my local participates often played badminton together. Some played skipping rope. Some boys talked about an action movie that they had watched a couple of days before (China was showing the movie *Transformers 4* at that time), and pretended to be the movie characters. Although the children stated that they had no preferences in regards to whom to play with, I noticed that migrant children and local children did not play with each other. While observing, I asked local children why they did not play paper cards, Yulin (local boy, age 9) responded:

> *"I do not like it. It is not an interesting game. I do not want to play it every day like them. I think it is boring to play it"*.

When I asked migrant children why they did not join in the activities, such as basketball or rope skipping, Peng (migrant boy, age 13) told me that:

> *"They can do it very well* [he turns around and watches the children playing basketball]... *I tried it before but I do not know how to play, I mean I can play but I am not very good at that"*.

Friends play an important role in the successful integration of migrant children to a new environment. Based on my observation, local children and migrant children "naturally" separated at break time, having parallel play at school. Several factors influenced the choice of children of whom to play with. Personal skills are important, as seen in the case of Peng who felt that he did not master basketball very well. The children want to participate in activities they are familiar with and feel that they master. Thus the skills of playing different games help establish and maintain friendships. As already mentioned, all local children participated in various organized extra-curricular activities after school, such as Taekwondo, basketball, football, piano, flute and ballet dance. From my empirical data, more than half of the local participants joined in more than two after-school activities. However, as also mentioned above, migrant families could not afford such activities. Thus, their children did not have the chance to learn how to play piano or basketball as the urban children did. Except for one migrant girl who did traditional Chinese dance, none of migrant children participated in this kind of after-school programs. Therefore, migrant children did not have the skills to play with local children. Moreover, local children joined in different non-organized activities after school as well. For example, they watched movies or visited airplane museums while the school was organizing airplane model contest. Local children shared similar topics or ideas so that they had something to talk about. Migrant children did not participate in these activities. Gradually local children formed their own peer group based on interests. Lacking these skills and socio-cultural references, it became hard for migrant children to integrate and build relations with local children. Rather, they preferred socializing with other migrant children with whom they often shared skills and socio-cultural references.

In the context of this study, migrant children constantly constructed their social relationships at school in their own way. They did not have fixed friends to play with all the time and they changed based on different conditions. However, migrant children often spontaneously played hand-made paper card together which was cheap and required other skills to play, often achieved when they resided in the rural areas, which can be explained by the sameness discussed by Nilsen (2005), introducing the concept "we-ness". Migrant children shared the similar knowledge, interests, family financial condition and backgrounds. It was easy for them to get along with each other and gradually they built up more fun and understanding. Some migrant

children even showed a degree of a common understanding and solidarity among them. Thus, migrant children established social relationship by constructing a sense of we-ness.

7.3. Cultural barriers for migrant children's integration

Culture consists of many societal aspects, such as language, customs, values, norms and rules, etc. Through culture, members of a particular society share values. Crocker *et al* (1998, p. 5) argued that "some attribute or characteristic that conveys a social identity could be devalued in a particular social context". In other words, some cultural aspects are normal in one society but may be unacceptable in other societies. In this section, I will explore how the socio-cultural backgrounds of the migrant children are devalued in the urban school.

7.3.1 Language

Proficiency in the language of host society can lead migrant children into mainstream education and enlarge their possibility for success (McCarthy, 1998). Thus, the ability to speak the host language properly is an important factor for migrant children to integrate in a new environment. Everyone speaks with an accent, which may particularly relate to a group of speakers. Gluszek and Dovidio (2010) discuss that an accent forms a part of a speakers' social identity and delivers an amount of social information. Therefore, the way of speaking a language may distinguish migrant children from local children. In the context of my study, although all migrant participants spoke Mandarin which was the language in the school, some of them spoke with a strong regional accent. As China is a big country, the accents from some regions easily cause misunderstanding for people from other areas, or are even difficult to understand. The empirical data revealed that some migrant children felt excluded on arrival due to the language barriers. It was difficult for them to build a close relationship with others and integrate into the new environment. Here are some excerpts from participants:

> *"After I started the school, I did not like going to school. I cried almost every day because other children laughed at me when I talked. So I dared not to talk to others at that time. I am learning the way people speak here".*

(Pingping, migrant girl, age 8)

When asked, Pingping spoke a sentence in her dialect. The sentence was kept in a rising tone, sounding like singing a song. The dialect is understandable for local children but spoken in a

different way. Thus, I would not consider it as strong discrimination when both migrant and local children joked on her dialect. However, the laughing did bring an embarrassing feeling to her.

> *"In my dialect, people cannot distinguish the sounds of "L" and "N". Sometimes, I talked about something but they understood in the other way. Even my teacher misunderstood me sometimes".*

> (Leilei, migrant boy, age 11)

Migrant children experienced exclusion after starting the urban school because of not speaking the local dialect. They felt bored by the social isolation and did not feel comfortable to participate in the class activities. Being a passive student, it was hard to integrate into the new group. However, from my observations, the condition was improving at the time of my fieldwork. Almost all the migrant children could speak the local dialect, although not perfectly but totally understandable.

7.3.2 Dress

In China, as elsewhere, personal dress presents a significant signal about one's identity and social status, as argued by De La Haye and Wilson (1999). It not only conveys simple meaning, such as one's sense for fashion and the things one likes, but also indicates complicate situation, for examples, one's financial circumstance and the kind of person one is. In this study, migrant children, mostly girls, frequently referred to local people's hairstyle, clothing and other accessories, such as necklaces and backpacks. They thought local children's hair was smart and fashionable, and that their clothes were clean and modern like the image promoted in the television. Several local girls wore jewels, such as bracelets, to school which was admired by migrant children. On the contrary, the dressing of migrant children was described as old, poor quality and unmatched on colors or designs both by local children and migrant children themselves. Here are some quotes about children's opinion of migrant children's dressing style.

> *"The color of Guoguo's* [migrant boy] *pants is so ugly. It is green color but not proper green, and it is like the color of chicken stools. Also his pants look torn".*

> (Xiaoyu, migrant boy, age 10)

"I do not like my clothes and it is easy to tear. My classmates dress very beautifully and neatly. I want to have the same clothes that Xiaotan [local girl] *wears today, which has a cartoon image".*

(Pingping, migrant girl, age 8)

Local parents have sufficient economic resources to buy quality, trendy and popular clothes for their children. Some migrant children shared clothes with siblings and some bought low quality clothes due to economic constraints. Moreover, migrant children lacked knowledge on dressing since they were less exposed to fashion. Their overall dressing style looked rustic and less comfortable. In this sense, dressing style brought migrant children a feeling of difference which constrained them to integrate.

7.4. The coping strategies in the socio-cultural lives of migrant children

Except for lack of socioeconomic resources, migrant children sometimes were facing more difficult circumstances in urban China. Qianhui is a migrant girl at eight years old. She lived with her parents in Shenyang. She is a quiet girl and not very active even during the break. Once she told her friend that her parents had quarreled at home the day before. When she was talking, I could feel she was fearful and worried. An eight-year old girl could not do anything when she saw her parents quarrelling. She could not talk about this to her relatives since they were still living in her hometown, and thus lacked the social network to be able to ask for help from others. I could understand it was very difficult for her. She decided to express her feelings of fear and helplessness to her friends at school. This can be perceived as a coping strategy, using peer networks to confide and seek advice and comfort.

It was hot summer time when I did the fieldwork in China. Because of the hot weather, the school did not require students to wear uniform during that period. Many students changed clothes every day. From my observation, Lin (migrant boy, age 11) wore a blue T-shirt at least for two weeks. A group of students teased him at lunch time. Some students commented the color of the T-shirt. Some students laughed at the strange smell of the T-shirt. Lin responded that his mother wanted him to wear this every day. Although the other students doubted him, they did not continue this topic. During the interview, I got the opportunity to talk this with him.

Interviewer: You have a very nice T-shirt? Is this your favorite T-shirt?

Lin: Yes.

Interviewer: Do you like the color of blue?

Lin: Yes.

Interviewer: I also like blue. You wear this every day because you like it or your mum…?

Lin: Mm… I want to wear it. I do not like the other T-shirts I have. But I told them that my mum asked me to wear this, [so] *they would stop teasing me.*

From the interview, I knew that Lin did not have many options on choosing T-shirts. Some of his shirts were big for him since he got them from his older brother. When his classmates tried to push him down by teasing him, he found his way to push them back.

Two migrant children I mentioned before spoke their regional dialects on arrival at the urban school. These migrant children were actively learning the way people speak in Shenyang as coping strategies to avoiding the embarrassing feeling and misunderstanding.

Migrant children were also affected by socio-cultural structures after family migration. While migrant children actively created their own culture and lived their everyday lives, different coping strategies were adopted by migrant children when facing these circumstances: They developed effective social networks to cope with emotional stress; they made up an excuse for stopping teasing; they changed the way of speaking to adapt to the new environment; and they also managed to have parallel play relationship alongside the locals. Thus in order to cope with socio-cultural difficulties, migrant children took a very active approach to the obstacles they face in their lives, bringing with them a variety of coping strategies. In sum: Most of the migrant children in this study lived bearable lives in the city and they were happy to go to school.

CHAPTER 8: SUMMARY, CONCLUGING REMARKS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

8.1 Introduction

This chapter wraps up my thesis. Firstly, my research objectives, theoretical perspectives and methodology are summarized. After that, the main findings of the thesis are discussed. At the end of the chapter, some recommendations related to the findings will be given for further research.

8.2 Summary of the study

The study has been conducted in a primary school in China. 23 migrant children and 19 local children participated in my fieldwork. All the parents of participants and three teachers were also included. In order to gain children's perspectives on their experience of family migration, multiple methods were used to generate data, including participant observation, semi-structured interviews, questionnaire, drawing, photographs, in-depth interviews, and household visit.

This study has been examining migrant children's experience with family migration in urban China and their coping strategies in a new environment from multiple perspectives. Firstly, the study explored the family conditions of migrant children in the city compared with that of local children. Secondly, the study examined the impact of Chinese educational system on migrant children. How do the problems associated with educational benefits exclude migrant children in a new community? Thirdly, the study detected migrant children's coping strategies in order to adapt to a new environment. Finally, the study explored the social and cultural integration of migrant children in a new community. Do they feel a sense of belonging in the new environment?

Social studies of childhood are the overall theoretical framework for this research. Based on the social studies of childhood, the study recognized that children are active social actors, active in the construction of their own lives and things around them, and not only the passive receivers of social development (James & Prout, 1990). Furthermore, according to UNCRC, the research was conducted with migrant children's own rights and interest. Their own direct voices as the main perspectives were included in the research in order to understand the impact of family migration on them.

In line with the social studies of childhood, structuration theory was applied into my research as well. Migrant children as a social group lived their lives under different social structures. These social structures have great influence on their lives as pointed out by Giddens (1984) that social structures shape children's practices. This study made an attempt to understand how social structures in the urban environment influenced migrant children's lives and as active social actors how migrant children exercised their agency to cope with new challenges. For example, their economic structure did not allow them to buy expensive sports equipment to play at school. Migrant children were able to exercise their agency in the restricted social structure by playing cheap self-made paper cards to overcome their financial constraints. In the study, migrant children's agency was emphasized.

8.3 The main findings of the study

8.3.1 Migrant children's daily lives

Concerning the situation of contemporary migrant children, this study found the household registration system in China creates significant distinctions between the urban and the rural in terms of economy, social status, and culture. In other words, the unequal relations between the urban and the rural areas, produced by the household registration system, made rural migrant people receive a lower social status and fewer social resources than their urban counterparts. Migrant parents mainly exchanged their labor with low and unstable wages without rights and protection when they were employed. Some of them even could not find the employment. As a result, this forced their children to live in degrading conditions.

The empirical material of this study indicates that migrant children's lives were more difficult than those of local children. When they were not in the school, migrant children stayed at home very often without adults' supervision. They also did household chores or helped at their parents' working place until late bedtime. On the contrary, local children spent less time on chores and tasks within the family but more time on individual projects, for instance participating in extra-curricular activities. The constrained condition prevented migrant children to have an equal opportunity to enjoy and experience what urban children did in their daily life.

School experience did not lift migrant children from the difficulties they encountered in the new environment but put them in a more disadvantaged position. The Chinese government has made

great effort to allow migrant children to attend public schools in cites without extra payment. However, local school set up additional requirements for school registration. It was unfair for migrant children to wait for three years before school registration due to frequent relocation of their families. Results also show that migrant children were difficult to catch up the local children and their academic achievement was ranked below average.

Another important finding is that migrant children received less discrimination from local children unlike cases reported elsewhere (Feng, 2007; Xing-hua & Yang, 2008). None of local children expressed their feelings about migrant children with negative words. However, migrant children did not play with local children together due to different skills and capacities, adopted primarily in their hometowns. They however feel they lack the skills and abilities to participate in the games of the local children. All local children participated in various after-school programs but none of migrant children did so except for one migrant girl. Migrant children did not have the skills to play with local children. However, migrant children succeeded in building up friendship with other migrant children to construct a sense of we-ness (Nilsen, 2005). They played parallel on the playground with local children.

The study further revealed that the restricted structures that migrant children lived within did not push migrant children down. They adapted different coping strategies to make their lives better in the new environment. They took care of younger siblings as well as seniors in the family. They did household chores and cooked meals. They even participated in the activity of earning money for their families. Beyond the physical housework, migrant children also did their best to solve the problems related to emotional stress. Without parental supervision, they took care of themselves at home or managed to buy food with later payment. They expressed their fearful and worried feeling about parents' quarrel to their friends in order to use peer network to confide since no relatives were around. They used the images of their mum as the excuse to fight back when other children doubted their family financial condition.

8.3.2 Migrant children's integration into a new environment

The issue of the integration of migrant children into a new environment is very complicated. As pointed out by Devine (2009, p. 523), migrant children are "exposed to challenges of identity and belonging that neither their parents nor their uni-cultural peers have to struggle with in the same way". My study findings highlighted that there are a number of factors preventing the migrant

children's integration into a new community. One of the crucial factors was the socio-economic conditions of migrant families. Their socio-economic status has had significant impacts on their integration and adaptation in the urban school. The rural social identity excluded migrant parents and children to enjoy the social benefits of urban resources. It was almost impossible for them to change their identities from the rural to the urban. As a result of their social rural status, it was hard for migrant parents to find a job or they were employed with unfair condition and low salary. An effort has been made to compare family monthly income of local children with migrant children. The comparison showed that migrant children's family economic condition was much lower than that of local children. With the financial advantages, local children participated in different kinds of activities, but migrant children could not. In other words, family economic condition of migrant children was a huge barrier for their integration into the new environment.

The next factor was related to education. Both migrant parents' educational level and school system affected the migrant children's adaptability in the urban school. With regard to educational level, it was much higher of local parents than of migrant parents. Migrant parents did not have the ability to teach or tutor their children on school homework. They also often failed to identify their children's educational needs and help them with strategic plans. Migrant parents' educational level brought negative impact on children's school lives which resulted in integration difficulties for migrant children.

On the other hand, results showed that the Chinese urban school did not take their responsibilities to help migrant children's integration into a new environment. Migrant children came to the urban school with low educational background. The school did not provide different educational plans based on needs of these migrant children. On the contrary, school overemphasized students' academic achievement, and the organized activities only addressed students who studied well or received the related professional training before, which brought feelings of inferiority among the migrant children. Thus, it was hard for them to integrate in the new school environment.

The study further indicated that some socio-cultural aspects formed the third contributing factor that prevented migrant children from integrating into the new urban school. Proficiency in the host society's language facilitated migrant children's integration and improper pronunciation of

the language brought special challenges for them. However, influence of language was limited to the first months in the urban school. Moreover, migrant children's dressing style influenced their integration experiences. Some migrant children wore hand-me-down clothes or clothes with poor quality, while local children were exposed to fashion and had a more modern taste on dressing. Due to the socio-cultural difference, the overall of their dressing style looked less comfortable and rustic compared with their counterparts, which led to feeling of difference for migrant children, preventing them from integrating.

The restricted situation prohibited migrant children from integration with urban children, which gradually drew a line between the two groups. In this sense, local children did not separate migrant children from them on purpose but the process of separation was occurred gradually between the two groups. Besides going to the same school, migrant children did not really integrate or belong to the urban group.

8.3.3. Childhoods are socially constructed

According to Laoire *et al* (2010), the universal models of childhood are based on idealized western norms and do not reveal childhoods in the global south. The prevailing western concept of childhood suggests that childhood should be within a family, home, school and playground. They should study and play, and not work or take on responsibilities that are perceived as belonging to the adult world. My study illustrates that although both migrant children and local children do go to school and live within a family at home, they have quite different everyday lives and different childhoods. Punch (2003) asserted that we should recognize childhood as being both a social and cultural construction and that a diversity of childhoods exist both within and between cultures. As I mentioned before, Giddens's social structure concepts argued that individual's lives are decided by the particular society in which we live and by the particular social group to which we belong.

In the context of this study, due to the *Hukou* registration system, migrant children did not have the same rights as local children, neither to education nor to the same social and economic resources. Some of them had been waiting for more than one year to get their access to the school. They lived in relatively smaller houses. After school, most of them had to help with house chores with or without adult supervision. Migrant children seldom had opportunities to participate in after-school activities. On the contrary, local children could easily get their spaces

in school by living in the school district. Moreover, their families had less economic pressure compared with those of migrant children. Local children were the center of their families and did not need to be bothered with other responsibilities. Thus, they could concentrate on their study. In addition, local children had many opportunities to develop their potential talents with parental support. Migrant children compensated with their own games and their own way of playing. They also found excitement in participating in their parents' work, replacing local children's organized study with informal practical skills learning. They presented higher degrees of agency in the family and school. Migrant children are indeed active agents in the formation of their own culture and lives.

Therefore, migrant children did not have an equal opportunity to enjoy and experience what urban children did in their daily life. Due to the strong competition in China, urban parents of this generation are enthusiastic about having their young children participate in all kinds of after-school programs, ranging from arts or sports, such as piano, basketball, to academic, such as Middle-school English which may prepare their children for their future. The constrained condition prevented migrant children from cultivating the same interests as urban children, which gradually drew a line between the two groups. Thus, due to the time, place of residence, and social, economic and political factors, migrant children's childhoods were constructed differently from the childhoods of local children, which showed that childhoods were constructed socially. I agree with the argument of James and Prout (1990) that childhoods are constructed based on ideas of a society. These ideas vary with time and space in different societies.

8.4 Conclusion

My fieldwork, empirical material and theoretical analysis reveal that family migration has serious impact on migrant children's everyday lives. Migrant children live a different life in urban China compared with local children. The social status is a main factor preventing them from enjoying rights and integrating in the urban city. It also affects migrant children's life in a fundamental way and shapes their opportunities in education. During their migration process, migrant children lose their social networks and also receive less care and supervision from adults which results in feeling of solitude and exclusion in the new environment. Although the physical and social environments of migrant families are relatively unfavorable in general, migrant

children utilize their agency by adopting a variety of strategies to cope with family migration in order to make their life better in the city. They do the housework to support their parents earning money in order to improve their family's financial situation. They play games which involve little cost. They also participate in their parents' work to learn practical skills. Migrant children, as social actors, actively construct their own lives in a new environment. This study finding also indicates that migrant children receive less discrimination in the city compared with previous studies, which shows that the Chinese government has worked on solving structure problems in a right direction.

8.5 Some suggestion and Recommendation

The Chinese government, as the duty bearer, should take active responsibility for the equal social status of their entire population. The social status should not be influenced by geographical differences. The household registration system must be reformed. All children living in the same place should have the same rights to health, education service, and social benefits. The educational resources should be allocated evenly between urban and rural areas in order to allow fair and equal competition. A new school registration system giving equal status to urban and rural residents should be established. The interests of migrant children must be given more serious attentions. We cannot protect urban people's benefits by sacrificing migrant children's lives. This will lift the current living standard of migrant children in cities and protect their right. Addressing the issues of migrant children successfully is important to Chinese society's sustainable development.

Schools should open their doors to migrant children without any additional requirements. However, they should not only provide migrant children with formal education, but also initiate free or affordable extra-curricular and social programs, aiming at increasing their sense of belonging. Friends and peers play an important role in their integrating into a new environment. Schools should provide more opportunities for them to make friends with both local children and migrant children. Migrant children should not be judged or treated based on their academic achievements at schools. Teachers should treat all children equally regardless of their background. Schools should encourage urban children to be more open-minded to their migrant classmates.

Migrant parents contribute to the social development of migrant children and their support helps migrant children to succeed in adaptation to the urban life. Migrant parents should create opportunities for their children to explore in the new and challenging environment. Migrant parents should remain good relationship with their children. They should spend more time with their children and enhance communications with them. Migrant parents should have higher educational expectation for their children and help them overcome the difficulties they encounter in their study. In short, migrant parents should invest more effort in child caregiving, and hence promote their positive healthy development.

Finally some words on the topics of research to explore further in the future. Firstly, as my study shows that the household registration policy is the most significant factor contributing to the social and economic differences between local and migration family, it would be interesting to conduct both quantitative and qualitative research to reveal the effects of the household registration reform, which was just launched in July 2014, on migrant children. Some improvements on migrant children's life are expected, however the extent could only be known after carrying out some field research works.

Secondly, China is developing at different paces in different regions. There are some big cities such as Beijing and Shanghai are treating migrant works and children with different local policies. It is an interesting topic to check how the variations of local policies influence migrant children's integration experiences.

Thirdly, my study could be contrasted with the studies on migrant children performed in other countries such as Devine's work in Ireland (Devine, 2009). By doing that the factors played by different cultures could be revealed.

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APPENDIXES

Appendix I: Semi-structured interview guide for migrant children

1. **Life experience in Shenyang**

   - How old are you?

   - How many people are there in your family?

   - Where are your parents working?

   - How far do you live from school?

   - Do you share the same bedroom with your parents or do you have your own bedroom?

   - Where have you been lived?

   - When did you move to Shenyang? Do you like this city?

   - Do you like your life in the city now?

   - How do you feel about being away from your relatives and friends in your home village?

   - Which one do you like most, this city or your hometown?

   - In your opinion, what is the difference between people in the city and in your hometown? Do you see any difference between local children and migrant children?

   - What are the difficulties you have met here and how did you solve them?

   - How many friends do you have in the city? Where did they come from? Why are they your friends? How did you make friends? Who do you often play with?

   - Do you think it is important to have friends here?

   - What do you usually do after school?

   - What do you usually do on the weekends? Do you often stay at home or do you often go outside on weekends?

   - Do your parents spend times with you on weekends? If yes, how many hours each day?

   - Do you have pocket money? How much do you have? How often do you receive pocket money from your parents? What do you usually do or buy with my pocket money?

   - Have you ever relocated in the city? Do you like relocating?

2. **Educational experience in Shenyang**

   - How did you feel when you just started the school here?

- Which school do you like most, the school in your hometown or in the city?

- What is the difference between schools in your hometown and in the city?

- Do you like this school? Do you like going to school?

- In the school, have you ever been treated differently?

- Do you like the teachers here? Do they often talk with you? Describe the relationship between you and teachers.

- Do you like your school in the city?

- What do you think about the lessons in urban school? Are they easy or difficult compared with lessons in your hometown?

- What are the difficulties you have met in your study and who did you ask for help? How did you solve them?

- Are you parents satisfied with your school performance or academic score? Why? How did your parents help you with your study?

- What do you think about the exams at the school?

- Do you like participating in school activities?

- What do you do after school? For example, household chores, homework, play or study.

- Do you join in any after-school activities? Such as drawing class, piano lessons or basketball club.

- Do you join in the school lunch programs?

- After having migrated to cities, did you wait long time to be admitted by the school? If yes, how long had you waited?

- After having migrated to cities, did you study in other primary schools? If yes, what are the names of the schools, and how long had you studied there?

Appendix II: Semi-structured interview guide for local children

1. **Life experience in Shenyang**

   - How old are you?

   - How many people are there in your family?

   - Where are your parents working?

   - How far do you live from school?

   - Do you share the same bedroom with your parents or do you have your own bedroom?

   - Where have you been lived?

   - Do you like your life here?

   - What are the difficulties you have met here and how did you solve them?

   - How many friends do you have? Where did they come from? Why are they your friends? How did you make friends?

   - Do you like play with migrant children or local children? Who do you often play with?

   - Do you think it is important to have friends?

   - What do you usually do after school?

   - What do you usually do on the weekends? Do you often stay at home or do you often go outside on weekends?

   - Do your parents spend times with you on weekends? If yes, how many hours each day?

   - Do you have pocket money? How much do you have? How often do you receive pocket money from your parents? What do you usually do or buy with my pocket money?

   - Have you ever relocated in the city? Do you like relocating?

2. **Educational experience in Shenyang**

   - Do you like this school? Do you like going to the school?

   - In the school, have you ever been treated unequally?

   - Do you like the teachers here? Do they often talk with you? Describe the relationship between you and teachers.

   - What are the difficulties you have met in your study and who did you ask for help? How did you solve them?

- Are you parents satisfied with your school performance or academic score? Why? How did your parents help you with your study?
- What is your feeling about the exams at the school?
- Do you like participating in school activities?
- What do you do after school? For example, household chores, homework, play or study.
- Do you join in any after-school activities? Such as drawing class, piano lessons or basketball club.
- Do you join in the school lunch programs?

Appendix III: In-depth interview guide for teachers

- How many are there migrant children in your class?
- As far as you know, what are the registration requirements for both local children and migrant children? Do migrant children need to wait for a place at school? How long do they usually wait for?
- Does the household registration system have any impact on migrant children?
- What is the living standard in Shenyang?
- What is the local parents' attitude towards their children's education?
- What is the migrant parents' attitude towards their children's education?
- Do you treat migrant children and local children differently?
- Why are some migrant children older than their classmates?
- How about migrant children and local children's academic scores?
- Do both of migrant children and local children participate in school activities?
- Do local children get along with migrant children?
- Are migrant children often absent from school?
- What are the difficulties for migrant children to study in your school?
- Do migrant children and local children complete their homework on time?

Appendix IV: Questionnaires for local parents and migrant parents

Children name:　　　　　　　　　**Age:**　　　　　　　　　**Gender:**

1. Father's occupation:　　　　　　　　　Mother's occupation:

2. Father's educational level

   A: Elementary School　　　　　　　　　B: Middle School

   C: High School or Secondary School　　　　D: College or University

3. Mother's educational level

   A: Elementary School　　　　　　　　　B: Middle School

   C: High School or Secondary School　　　　D: College or University

4. Family income

   A: Less than 2000 RMB　　　B: 2000RMB – 3000 RMB　　　C: More than 3000 RMB

5. Children's family living condition

   A: Bought a house　　　　　B: Rent a house　　　　C: Living in relative's house
   D: Employer's dormitory　　　E: others (please specify:　　　　　　　)

6. What do you think buying a house in the city?

7. What is father's working condition in the city?

   A: Constantly work　　　　　　　　　B: Occasionally work

   C: Unemployment　　　　　　　　　　D: Never work

8. What is mother's working condition in the city?

   A: Constantly work　　　　　　　　　B: Occasionally work

C: Unemployment   D: Never work

9. How do you describe school education in the city and in your hometown if applies to you?

10. Are you satisfied with the curriculum or school education in the city?

11. How long had your child waited to get a place at the school?

12. Do you think education is important for your child?

13. Do you help with your child's study? Why?