

# Stratified Universalism: Access and Exclusion in Compulsory Education for Migrant Children--a Case Study of Guangzhou

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**Abstract:** The education of migrant children has always been a hot topic in the society. Guangzhou, as a place with large population, has issued relevant policies for the education of migrant children many times. By observing the current situation of compulsory education in Guangzhou from the perspective of migrant children's education, we can see the characteristics of "stratified universalism": on the one hand, in terms of education access qualification, the scope of compulsory education access in Guangzhou is constantly expanding, and education universality is reflected in cost, facilities and enrollment objects; On the other hand, in terms of education benefits, effect still exists. Social members with different identities obtain different education benefits compulsory education. Under the implementation of the point-admission and sponsorship fees this "stratification" is mainly realized through the "implicit exclusion", which is different from the previous household registration exclusion.

## 1. Introduction

Promoting education modernization is the basic target of the education reform at present stage. The basic demand of realizing this goal is the high quality equilibrium of compulsory education. China's Education Modernization 2035, issued by the CPC Central Committee and The State Council in 2019, clearly puts forward eight major development goals for education modernization in 2035, one of which is "to achieve high-quality and balanced compulsory education". Improving the quality of education and realizing educational equity have become two urgent issues in the reform of compulsory education in China at the present stage.

By the end of 2021, the permanent resident population of Guangzhou is 18.81 million, belonging to the megacity, in which the registered population accounts for 54% and the non-registered population accounts for 46%. Both the registered population and the non-registered population are very large. At the same time, the education resources of Guangzhou are limited, and the government has repeatedly issued policies to solve the problem of education resource allocation. The education of migrant children has also become the focus of social discussion. The problems of policy exclusion and education stratification at the stage of compulsory education are prominent and need to be solved urgently in the large cities where children with relocation congregate. At the same time, the academic circle has not reached a conclusion on how to understand the current situation of compulsory education in the overall aspect. In this regard, we try to use the concept of "stratified inclusive" and take Guangzhou as an example to analyze the specific characteristics of the current compulsory education.

## 2. Methodology

### 2.1 Research Method

At the same time of the rapid expansion of the scale of migrant workers group, its internal differentiation has taken place. Based on occupational classification and based on the status of possessing organizational, economic and cultural resources, he divided migrant workers into four groups: "private entrepreneurs", "self-employed migrant workers", "migrant workers" and "unemployed or unemployed migrant workers". According to its classification, the main object of

this study is the children of migrant workers, and it is limited to the compulsory education stage.

### **2.1.1 Field Study Method**

In the field survey, two urban villages with high concentration of floating population in Haizhu District were selected, namely Kangle Village and Lujiang Village. Both of them are typical urban villages completely surrounded by urban built-up areas in the central urban area, and are gathering areas for a large number of migrant workers. By visiting the communities where migrant workers live, we can get familiar with the living environment of migrant workers and understand the living environment of migrant workers' children. On the premise of obtaining the entry permit, I will observe the learning environment of migrant workers' children at the interviewees' residence.

### **2.1.2 Unstructured Interview Method**

The main subjects were interviewed through both offline and online methods. In this stage of the investigation, the group members through the off-line investigation focused on interviewing a junior high school next to the shop owner, Kangle village a second-hand bookstore owner, Lujiang village a Chaoshan hotel students and other objects. For the collation and analysis of interview materials, the team adopted the method of post-recording, and tried to faithfully record and present the events narrated by the interviewees, the examples enumerated and the time, place, people, behavior, views and mentality in the events. Online interview adopts the method of “acquaintance entry”, and obtains the school experience of the children of “acquaintance” through group members. Through unstructured interview, some typical cases are provided for this paper.

## **2.2 Research Hypothesis**

The concept of “Stratified Universalism” originates from the study of welfare system and welfare policy, and is mainly used to explore the “stratified effect” existing in the inclusive welfare policy. Li Mianguan and other scholars put forward that since the 21st century, China's welfare system has gradually entered the stage of “stratified inclusiveness”, which is defined as the granting of welfare eligibility on the basis of social stratification. There is still a certain gap between different groups, but within the same group is moving towards the equalization of social welfare.<sup>[1]</sup>

In the topic of education policy discussed in this research, some scholars have paid attention to the problem of “stratification” of education for children of migrant workers. Yang Li et al. pointed out the unbalanced social phenomenon in the development of compulsory education in cities and cities. Based on the grounded theory, they sorted out the interaction between social stratification and the alliance of social interest groups and educational resources. It is found that in social stratification, individuals (government, schools and individuals) with relatively strong social capital, economic capital and power capital will form alliances and exchange resources in various ways, resulting in huge differences in inter-school development.<sup>[2]</sup>In recent years, in the study of compulsory education in Shanghai, scholars found that the fairness of compulsory education in Shanghai was affected by endogenous motivation, the situation of the middle class and the gap between the rich and the poor, and finally presented in the form of education stratification.<sup>[3]</sup>

Hypothesis 1: If the existing education policies can make compulsory education in Guangzhou “affordable” in terms of fees, “equal” in terms of facilities, and “generous” in terms of education objects, then the compulsory education in Guangzhou will be inclusive.

Hypothesis 2: If students with different identities have significant differences in the way of obtaining compulsory education, educational experience and educational harvest, then compulsory education in Guangzhou has stratification effect.

Hypothesis 3: If the above two hypotheses are supported, then the current situation of compulsory education in Guangzhou is characterized by “stratified and inclusive”.

Based on this research idea, we will analyze the current situation of compulsory education in Guangzhou from the perspectives of inclusive and hierarchical effect by taking policy texts and interviews as materials, and focus on discussing the two issues of “inclusive growth” and “hierarchical dimension” respectively in the process of analysis.

### **3. Results and Discussion**

#### **3.1 The Doctrine of Universal Benefit in the Stage of Compulsory Education**

We define the “inclusive” of compulsory education stage as “affordable” in terms of fees, “equal” in terms of facilities, and “generous” in terms of education objects. This part discusses the realization of inclusive compulsory education in Guangzhou one by one from these three aspects:

##### **3.1.1 “Affordable” in Terms of Fees**

Living allowance: All districts of Guangzhou provide living allowance for boarding students from poor families receiving compulsory education every year. The subsidy standard is 1,000 yuan per primary school student and 1,250 yuan per junior middle school student.

Degree subsidy: On March 15, 2022, Guangzhou Education Bureau issued the notice on soliciting opinions on the Degree Subsidy Work Plan of Guangzhou Private Compulsory Education Schools (Draft for Soliciting Opinions) : For students studying in private compulsory education schools in Guangzhou with “equal nationality”, each district shall implement degree subsidies according to the standard of no less than 5,000 yuan per year for primary school students and no less than 6,000 yuan per year for junior middle school students. If the fee standard of a privately-run school that a student attends is higher than the financial subsidy standard, the difference shall be paid by the parents.

According to this, students who study in compulsory education schools in Guangzhou, if they study in private schools, will receive appropriate degree subsidies from the government. Although this plan is only a draft for public comment and has not been formally implemented, in general, the government's policy is towards the trend of “affordable” compulsory education fees.

##### **3.1.2 “Equal” in Terms of Facilities**

In terms of teachers: As early as 2015, Guangzhou issued Opinions on Further Promoting the Exchange and Rotation Work of Principals and Teachers of compulsory education Schools within the Region, requiring that “Teachers of public compulsory education schools who have been teaching in the same school for more than 9 consecutive years and school-level cadres who have been working in the same school for more than 2 terms should, in principle, exchange and rotation work within the region.” By 2020, 33,723 people qualify for exchange rotation in District 11, and 3515 principal teachers participate in exchange rotation, accounting for 10.42% of the exchange rotation, among which 1313 backbone teachers, accounting for 37.35% of the total number of exchange rotation. All met the province's annual requirements of 10 percent and 20 percent.” Sun, who is not a local resident, mentioned that “the policy is also balancing the gap between different schools, and excellent teachers will be transferred to four batches of schools”, which confirmed the text of the policy on teacher exchange rotation in Guangzhou.

##### **3.1.3 “Generous” in Terms of Education Objects**

Since 2010, when a points-based school admission system was introduced for non-resident children, the application requirements have been gradually relaxed. Take Haizhu District of Guangzhou as an example. Before 2016, Haizhu District stipulated that an applicant's father (single party) or mother (single party) must “hold valid residence permits in Guangdong Province continuously, have a legal and stable residence and occupation in the district, and have participated in the five insurance policies in Guangzhou for five consecutive years; There is no violation of the national family planning policy.” This “full five years” application threshold directly blocks out most migrant children. In 2017, the policy of Haizhu District also began to make a major adjustment, stipulating that people need to have legal and stable residence in Guangzhou, hold valid “Guangdong Residence Permit” in Guangzhou for at least one year, and meet one of the conditions of living in the local district, employment and entrepreneurship, and social insurance payment can apply.

In addition, the policy requires public schools to give certain degrees to non-local students, with the number of degrees set by each school and district. Sun, the interviewee, mentioned that “public

schools should give certain degrees to non-local students work hard to compete for these degrees.”

Generally speaking, with the development and change of compulsory education in Guangzhou and the policy of migrant children receiving compulsory education, according to the conditions and policies such as student achievement, family economic status, point system and nearby enrollment, there is no “no schooling” problem for migrant children in Guangzhou.

### **3.2 Stratification Effect of Compulsory Education Stage**

The concept of social exclusion was first proposed by French scholar Rene Lenoir in 1974 and has been widely used ever since. In Sociology, Giddens combined with the ideas of other scholars to give a relatively complete explanation of the concept of social exclusion: “Social exclusion” refers to the root cause of new inequality, which means to prevent individuals from having the opportunity open to the vast majority of the population by some means.<sup>[4]</sup>On the discussion of policy exclusion, David Easton mentioned in his essay *Political System: A Study of the State of Politics* that “the essence of a policy is to deny certain things to some people and allow others to possess them”.<sup>[5]</sup>As for the analysis of exclusion in educational policies, Han Yue pointed out that the exclusion problem beyond the expectation of the makers may occur in educational policies, resulting in implicit exclusion of policies, which implies the alliance relationship between the government and the beneficiaries, the conflict between the government and the beneficiaries and the conflicts between the beneficiaries and the beneficiaries.<sup>[6]</sup>

Following the central government's equity-oriented policy, Guangzhou has offered migrant children a chance to compete for educational resources by setting up points for school admission and other mechanisms. As two ways for migrant children to obtain public degrees, admission points and sponsorship fees play an important role in the enrollment of migrant children. However, the migrant children who can enter public schools in Guangzhou are mostly from families with higher socioeconomic status, no matter through admission screening points or sponsorship fees. Next, we try to discuss the specific implementation methods and impacts of the two methods.

#### **3.2.1 Point-Admission Policy**

The points-based enrollment policy was first introduced in Panyu District in 2010. Since 2017, it has been fully implemented in 11 administrative regions of Guangzhou, offering some public degrees or government-subsidized private degrees to children of migrant workers in the first grade of primary school or junior high school. After five years of practice, the number of migrant children receiving free compulsory education in public primary and secondary schools has been increased, but as in many cities that implement points-based enrollment, the logic of giving priority to locally registered children dominates. The public degree resources in Guangzhou will give priority to meet the schooling needs of children with household registration. Migrant children often need to obtain the remaining degrees through integral enrollment. Household registration is still the most important factor affecting children's schooling.

##### **3.2.1.1 Low Enrollment Coverage of Admission by Points**

Points-based admission is the only way for migrant children to attend public schools free of charge. However, academics estimate that in 2017, the number of points-based entry degrees reached only 17% of the children of migrant age, less than 20%. Based on the data collected from the Education Bureau and the media from 2020 to 2022, the calculation found that there was little difference with the data obtained by Wang Xiang and other scholars, with only a slight improvement. The current situation of low enrollment coverage by points has not been solved. As a result, other migrant children of school age have to pay their own way to attend private schools, or attend school selection and pay sponsorship fees to attend public schools.

It is worth noting that in recent years, the threshold for applying for point-based admission has been decreasing continuously. Although most of the children of migrant workers meet the requirements and can participate in the competition of point-based admission program, most of them just belong to the “accompanying race” and cannot attend public schools for free. Essentially, the contradiction between supply and demand of public education is transformed into the

competition of individual capital and ability of citizens. The apparent exclusion based on household registration status has gradually changed to the implicit exclusion based on economic and social conditions.

### **3.2.1.2 Points-Based Admission Reflects Class Preference**

In addition to housing, employment, social security and other basic indicators, there are also academic qualifications, skills and titles, investment and tax payment, voluntary services, science and technology patents and other indicators. This implies the government's assessment of individual endowments and contributions to the city, which is the city's shift from collective exclusion to individual exclusion of the floating population and their children, which weakens the stratification of household registration and shifts to economic and social stratification.

Unfair is sure to have, as far as I am concerned, this child enrolled in the government's basic income. Public schools have no hukou can also go to read, but you need a strong strength, your points you pay to the society how much, how much tax, for a lot of reasons. (Out-of-towner, male, 40, March 2022)

On the whole, the integral enrollment policy mainly takes legal and stable residence and employment, tax payment and insurance, and human capital as the screening criteria, excludes the floating population with low education level, employment in industries or units with weak labor security, and the floating population and their children with unstable living conditions, and divides the floating population into levels according to class. It is quite contradictory that the children with lower economic ability need to attend private schools at their own expense instead.

### **3.2.2 Pay Sponsorship Fees**

The phenomenon of “school choice fever” and “arbitrary charges” has existed for a long time. Despite the continuous introduction of government measures, the phenomenon has continued until now due to the purpose of financing by the government and schools. This essentially becomes a competition between family property status and socioeconomic status.

Those who do not have Guangzhou household registration cannot go to school. The school selection fee is tens of thousands of dollars. Who does not want their children to go to a good school? You asked me what I wanted, and I wanted it to be cheaper and not so expensive. (Out-of-towner, female, 35, March 2022)

The original intention of the introduction of school choice fee is to solve the problem of insufficient school funds and adjust the flow of students. Although the living standard and income of Chinese people continue to improve, the proportion of education consumption in family consumption expenditure continues to increase, but the constant rise of school choice fee puts migrant children with poor economic conditions in a disadvantageous position and becomes a “new threshold” to prevent them from entering public schools.

At present, our social economy has been developed to a certain extent, and the unequal distribution mode for migrant population adopted before due to the obvious scarcity of resources has been changed, so it is difficult to see explicit exclusion in the education policy of migrant children. However, even in today's Guangzhou, high-quality educational resources are still relatively scarce. As an independent interest body relative to the central government, the local government inevitably favors the interests of its local population when making policies. Overall, points-based admission provides a formal mechanism for integrating migrant children into the public education system, allowing migrant children to transition from loan to regular students, enhancing the legitimacy of the policy and avoiding explicit exclusion. However, through the analysis of point-based enrollment and sponsorship fees in Guangzhou, we find that point-based enrollment can only improve the situation of a small number of floating children whose families have better economic status and higher social class, and the high sponsorship fees are not affordable by ordinary families. Therefore, we draw a conclusion: The exclusion of migrant children has a tendency from explicit exclusion to implicit exclusion, institutional exclusion to class exclusion, which leads to the stratification based on the household registration system and social and economic status.

Under the background of continuous development of public education resources and declining education threshold, there are still differences between registered children and non-registered children in terms of educational attainment. This separation between household registration and economic society also has a significant impact on people's educational income. Due to the existence of these exclusions in the compulsory education stage, students have a stratification effect both in the compulsory education stage and the post-compulsory education stage, which is reflected in the different quality of education they receive in the process of studying, the different choice opportunities and scope when they go to college, and even the completely different performance in the future education expectations and career planning. Therefore, we can think that the current public education in Guangzhou has the nature of stratification and universal benefit.

#### **4. Conclusion**

At present, Chinese social construction is faced with two unavoidable problems, namely, the unbalanced development between regions and the short supply of public services in megacities. The living conditions of migrant workers in the places of residence caused by this problem has been attracting the attention of the society and the academic circle. One of the hot topics around this concern is the education of migrant children. As a major place of migration in the domestic population flow, Guangzhou has attracted batches of migrant workers and their children in recent decades. According to statistics, among the compulsory education students in Guangzhou in 2021, non-registered students account for 41.45%. The situation of such a large number of floating children receiving compulsory education is explored. It is an essential link in the discussion of issues such as social equity and educational modernization.

The results show that the education situation of migrant children in compulsory education stage in Guangzhou presents different trends in two dimensions. In terms of the access qualification of compulsory education, the access scope of compulsory education in Guangzhou has gradually expanded in the past two decades from the perspective of policy, and the threshold for migrant children to receive compulsory education in the place of residence has become lower from high. Based on the current situation of education, we analyzed the tuition fees and government subsidies of compulsory education in Guangzhou, the allocation of school equipment and the coverage of the educated population. The three results of fees, facilities, education objects are obtained, which proves the universality of education access qualification. However, from the specific situation of receiving compulsory education, there are still significant differences in the results obtained by students with different identities through compulsory education, that is, there is a stratification effect, and this “stratification” result is achieved by means of “exclusion”. We found that the implementation of the point-based enrollment policy in Guangzhou has transformed the phenomenon of exclusion in compulsory education from explicit exclusion to implicit exclusion. Under this background, we discussed the specific process of this transformation and presented this implicit exclusion from multiple dimensions by combining the interview materials. It is precisely these exclusion that makes compulsory education produce obvious stratification effect between non-registered students and non-registered students, and between non-registered students. As a result, they have different educational quality in the process of study, different choice opportunities and scope when enter a school of a higher grade, and even different educational expectations and career planning in the future. The above two trends interweave, making the current situation of compulsory education in Guangzhou has the characteristics of “stratified inclusive”.

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