

# The impact of social integration on school adaption of migrating children in middle school grades

Li Quanhan<sup>1,a\*</sup>, Qi Yanning<sup>2,b</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Guangdong Ocean University, 1 Haidao, Machang District, Zhanjiang City, Guangdong Province, China

<sup>2</sup>Shanghai University of Finance and Economics Zhejiang College, No.99, Huancheng South Road, Jindong District, Jinhua City, Zhejiang Province, China

<sup>a</sup>liquanhan1@stu.gdou.edu.cn, <sup>b</sup>Yuzunene7@gmail.com

\*Corresponding author: liquanhan1@stu.gdou.edu.cn

These authors contributed equally to this work

**Abstract:** As an important driving force of urbanization in China, how to promote the social integration of migrating population has always been an important issue. In this paper, we study the social integration of migrating children and its impact on their school adaptation by using a qualitative research method based on the perspective of psychological identity. Taking a middle school in Zhanjiang as an example, we conducted in-depth interviews with ten junior high school students and organized the data into a table to analyze them in conjunction with the interview content. It was found that social ties with teachers and classmates could help migrating children integrate better into school, but parents did not play a role in migrating children's school adjustment. In addition, migrant children's performance would be different for personal reasons even though they had adapted to school.

**Keywords:** migrating children. social integration. psychological identity

## 1. Background

Since the reform and opening up until recent years, the number and scale of China's migrating population have been growing continuously, influenced by the state's encouragement policy like "comprehensively relaxing the conditions for settling in large cities with a resident population of 3-5 million in urban areas", the general trend of the national migrating population has been accelerating since 1982 until 2010, and the total number of migrating population grew from 30 million to 260 million. Although the trend of growth in the scale and number of population movements has slowed down since 2011, the upward trend continues. In 2016, the national migrating population decreased by about 1.71 million compared with 2015, and then returned to increase, reaching about 375 million people in 2021.1 At the same time, the growth of migrating population also drives the growth of migrating children. The number of migrating children grew rapidly between 2000 and 2010, increasing to 35.81 million in 2010, with migrating children accounting for 12.8% of children nationwide. Although the size of migrating children decreased in the 2015 population sample survey results compared to 2010, their share in the national child population remained largely unchanged.2 However, As an important driving force of urbanization, how to better integrate into the destination cities is still a problem for the migrating population.

Based on the fact that the number of migrant children has gradually expanded with the expansion of the migrant population in recent years, whether migrant children can adapt well to school during following their parents' mobility has become an important issue. And school adjustment can have an impact on the learning, daily life, mental health and social adjustment of migrant children. As for "school adjustment", it has been analyzed and argued in five dimensions by some Chinese professors: academic adjustment, teacher-student relationship, peer relationship, emotional adjustment, and behavioral problems. The results show that school adjustment of migrant children is significantly lower than that of

<sup>1</sup> National Bureau of Statistics website: "Seventh National Census Bulletin (No. 7)," [http://www.stats.gov.cn/xxgk/sjfb/zxfb2020/202105/t20210511\\_1817202.html](http://www.stats.gov.cn/xxgk/sjfb/zxfb2020/202105/t20210511_1817202.html), last accessed August 13, 2021.

<sup>2</sup> National Health and Wellness Commission of the People's Republic of China, "China's Mobile Population Development Report 2018 Content Summary," <http://www.nhc.gov.cn/wjw/xwdt/201812/a32a43b225a740c4bff8f2168b0e9688.shtml>, last accessed August 2021 13.

local children, and migrant children are more likely to have emotional and behavioral problems than local children, and also, they are more influenced by teachers, families and the overall school environment (Jiang Yinghui, 2011). In the current situation, migrant children who have moved with their parents face more difficulties in school life than local students who are stable in school education.

The large number of population movements has brought to society issues related to the social inclusion of migrating populations and has given rise to a related field of research on social inclusion. Studies by relevant scholars point out that social inclusion of new immigrants in urban areas consists of four aspects: economic inclusion, cultural adaptation, social adaptation, and identity (Wang Jing, 2020). With the increasing scale of migrating population and the gradually improvement and popularization of the education system, etc., today's migrating people is more easily accepted by local residents than it was thirty years ago (Dong Lifeng, 2007). The social inclusion situation today is more optimistic, and the migrant population can integrate more naturally and easily into the social groups in the destination areas. Meanwhile, locals are more tolerant and understanding of the migrant people.

With the gradual expansion of the number of migrant children, the social inclusion and school adjustment of this group has become an issue of great concern today. migrating children are not only an important part of the migrant population, but also occupy an important position in the group of educated people. For the migrating population, only after having a strong sense of identity and belonging to the destination place in terms of psychological identity can real social integration be achieved (Yang Juhua, 2015). However, there are few studies with the perspective of psychological identity in the current research, and most of them focus on objective points. In this paper, we focus on the social support aspect, and study the influence of three factors, namely, teachers, parents and peer relationships, on the psychological aspects of social integration of migrating children. Further research to understand the mechanisms of the effect of social integration on school adjustment of migrating children is the main issue of this study.

At the same time, previous studies have focused on large cities, and the biggest problem faced by migrating children is the difference from local children arising from the household registration system, which has led to the emergence of new characteristics of migrating children, named "returning children" and "re-migrating children" (Han Jialing, Zhang Yannan, and Liu Yue, 2020). However, there is a lack of research on migrating children in small cities that are not restricted by the household registration system. In this paper, we will take Zhanjiang City, Guangdong Province as an example, interview ten rural-urban migrating children in a junior high school in Zhanjiang City and compile a table of relevant results. Eventually, the research results will be analyzed and discussed, to find out the mechanism of the effect of social inclusion on migrant children, which may provide relevant references for future educational problems of migrant children. What's more, it may have theoretical reference value and practical significance for the future inclusion of migrant population and the improvement of school adaptation of migrant children.

## **2. Research methodology**

### **2.1. Research objects**

Guangdong Province is among the top provinces in China in terms of the number of migrant population each year due to its fast developed economy. As an important province with frequent population movements, the educational development of migrant children is of great concern. However, this research has mainly focused on migrant children in large cities, while less research has been conducted on migrant children who move to smaller cities. In this study, the main research objects are ten middle school students from X Middle School in Zhanjiang City, Guangdong Province. The proportion of mobile children in this secondary school who are local in the class is about 90%. Among them, six were grade 2 of junior high school students and four were grade 3 of junior high school students. The school was selected on the basis of the following two points: locating in the combination of urban and rural areas and has a large proportion of migrant children, which is representative and convincing; closing to the researchers, which is convenient for return visits and data collection. The research method of this study is a case study in qualitative research, in which relevant empirical information is obtained through participant observation and interviews, and finally the case situation will be presented in the form of a table, followed by specific analysis.

## 2.2. Interview content

The content of the interviews in this study mainly draws on Zhou et al.'s (2013) experience in analyzing indicators of school inclusion, and interviews are conducted in terms of collective identity in subjective inclusion and teacher-student relationship, peer relationship, and academic performance in objective inclusion, in addition, we have also expanded the research perspective by adding factors regarding parents' social support for migrant children.

## 2.3. Statistical criteria

The interview criteria were divided into four main areas: basic situation, causes of social inclusion, social inclusion, and class recognition. The basic conditions include gender, origin, migration, parents, school boarding, time of arrival in Zhanjiang, and grade level. The causes of social inclusion mainly include parents' spiritual encouragement, parents' degree of concern, frequency of meeting with parents, frequency of phone calls with parents, content of communication with parents, frequency of communication with teachers, content of communication with teachers, and feeling of getting along with classmates. Social integration mainly included urban identity, sense of belonging to their home rural areas, the willing of continue studying in high school in Zhanjiang City, the willing of stay in Zhanjiang City, their feelings about high school, sense of belonging to high school, views on teachers compared with once schools. Class recognition mainly includes identification with the class, class cohesion, class atmosphere, studying atmosphere, class inner inclusion, and recent grades of final examination.

## 3. Results

### 3.1. Personal and parental information

A total of 10 migrating children were interviewed, including 4 students in grade 9, 3 boys and 1 girl, and 6 students in grade 8, 4 boys and 2 girls. One class from A1 to B6, one class from C1 to C3, and one class from D1 to D3. The mobility situation is from the rural areas of Zhanjiang City to the urban areas of Zhanjiang City. Six of them live with their parents in the urban city, four of them live with their parents in other rural areas, and one of them lives in the city but still stays in school by herself for the reason of her parents don't have time to look after her. As for the time of movement, five of them started moving from rural to urban in the seventh grade, and the other five of them move since the elementary school, including two in the first grade, one in the third grade, one in the fourth grade, and one in the sixth grade of elementary school.

Variable	Interview Objects									
	A1	B4	B5	B6	C1	C2	C3	D1	D2	D3
No.										
Gender	M	M	F	M	M	M	F	F	M	M
Origin	Sui Xi	Lei Zhou	Sui Xi							
Migration	R->U	R->U	R->U	R->U	R->U	R->U	R->U	R->U	R->U	R->U
Live With Parents	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	No	No	Yes	Yes	Yes
Boarding	Yes	Yes	No	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	No	No
Time Of Coming	7 Grade	6 Grade	4 Grade	1 Grade	7 Grade	7 Grade	7 Grade	1 Grade	7 Grade	3 Grade
Grade	9	9	9	9	8	8	8	8	8	8

### 3.2. Situation description of social inclusion

#### 3.2.1. Causes of social inclusion

The causes of social inclusion of migrating children differed in parents, teachers, and classmates. Table 2 shows the communication between migrating children and their parents, teachers, and classmates:

(1) In terms of parents' spiritual encouragement, parents are mentally helpful to their children.

(2) The degree of parents' concern for their children is different, with half of them caring a lot about their children, and the others, 4 of them, care about their children to an average degree, and 1 of them, nearly do not care about their children.

(3) The main content of communication with parents is study, except for those whose parents nearly don't care, 5 of them sometimes ask about life during the communication process.

(4) As for the frequency of communication with parents, since students are divided into residential students and day students, there are two ways of communication with parents: telephone communication and face-to-face communication. Since residential students usually go home only once a month, so the frequency of communication with parents is once a month, while they can communicate with parents by telephone every two weeks. The day students who live with their parents always meet and talk with them face to face on a daily life.

(5) In terms of the frequency of communication with teachers, teachers at school communicate with each student more or less frequently, with 4 students communicating frequently or occasionally and 2 students communicating infrequently.

(6) The main content of communication with teachers is study, in addition, there are three migrating children had communicated about their lives with their teachers. In general, parents are mainly concerned about their children's studies, and their lives are secondary to their parents. Meanwhile, on the teachers' side, the main concern is also the study aspect, and less attention is paid to the students' life aspect.

(7) In terms of getting along with their classmates, three migrating children have good relationships with their classmates, except for three mobile children who have good relationships with only boys but general relationships with girls, and 4 migrating children who have only a few good friends in the class and general relationships with other classmates.

### **3.2.2. Social inclusion**

Mobile children showed differences in social integration. Table 3 shows the degree of social integration of migrating children: (1) In terms of urban identity, three of the migrating children identified themselves as urbanites, half of them were semi-identified, and two did not identify. (2) Half of them have a strong sense of belonging in rural areas, 3 are moderate and 2 are weak. (3) Of the similarities between the current school and the rural school, all of them think it is similar except one thinks it is completely different and one has never stayed in a rural school. (4) All migrating children are willing to continue their education in Zhanjiang. (5) As to whether they are willing to stay in Zhanjiang in the future, only 3 of them are willing, while the remaining 4 are not willing and 3 are not sure. (6) In terms of their feelings about the school, 2 students thought the school management was too strict, 5 students felt good and 3 students felt normal. (7) Regarding the sense of belonging to the school, 6 students had a strong sense of belonging, 3 had a moderate sense of belonging, and 1 had a weak sense of belonging. (8) In terms of perceptions of teachers, 6 students liked their teachers and 4 of them partially liked their teachers. In general, migrating children generally have doubts about their identity, not sure whether they are rural or urban people, at the same time, there are differences in their views about school, but all want to continue studying in the city.

### **3.3. Fact sheet on school adaptation**

Table 4 shows specific differences in school adjustment among migrating children:

In terms of class identification, D1 to D3 migrating children reported semi-identification, while all others identified.

In terms of class cohesion, the migrating children in the same class felt the same about their class, with A1 to B6 perceiving class cohesion as strong, C1 to C3 is general, and D1 to D3 as weak.

In terms of class integration, only one migrating child perceived it as semi-integrated, while the rest perceived it as integrated into the class.

In terms of class atmosphere, half of A1 to B6 thought the class atmosphere was good and half thought the class atmosphere was average, with C1 to C3 thought the class atmosphere was good, and D1 to D3 thought the class atmosphere was average.

In terms of studying atmosphere, migrating children in the same class have the same feelings about the learning atmosphere, A1 to B6 consider Liberal Arts to be active and Science to be average, C1 to C3 consider the class atmosphere to be active, and D1 to D3 consider the class atmosphere to be average.

In terms of recent final grades, one ranked first, one ranked second, three ranked top 5, one ranked top 10, two ranked around 20, and two ranked around 40.

In general, migrating children are better integrated by different factors. Teachers play a role in helping migrating children to adapt to school, and students who communicate frequently with teachers are better integrated into the classroom. At the same time, parents were not able to help migrant children integrate well into the classroom, since there were significant differences in the performance of students with the same level of parental attention. In terms of relationships with classmates, interpersonal relationships in the classroom play a significant role in helping migrating children to adapt to school and to integrate better into the classroom.

#### 4. Discussion

In this study, it was found that the main social integration process of migrating children was school integration, and migrating children preferred to stay in the city to continue their studies. This is in contrast to the situation of migrating children in Shanghai, the closer they get to the Senior high school entrance examination, the lower the probability that Shanghai's migrating children will stay in Shanghai to study, mainly because the household registration system is such that migrating children have to consider returning to their place of origin to study (Lu Jinfei, 2020). In contrast, migrating children in Zhanjiang do not differ from local children because of the restrictions of the household registration system. They do not have to consider returning to their place of outflow to study, allowing local migrating children to be better integrated into schools, and the difference between these two situations may make a difference in the subsequent social integration of migrating children. However, the school integration of migrating children does not lead to the integration of migrating children into the city; migrating children mainly live in school and do not really enter the urban society, and previous studies also found that the social relationships of migrating children are mainly based on traditional blood and local ties (Zhuang Xi, 2013). As migrating children have fewer ties with the city, they rely on their previous interpersonal networks to determine their identity, and do not reach a level of identification with the city's identity. The children who had strong feelings for their hometown and identified with their urban identity mainly thought that they were familiar with their surroundings and had good feelings, so they identified with their urban identity. In the interviews, it was also found that migrating children's attachment to their hometowns is mainly based on their relatives in their hometowns, and this conflict between their blood ties and the city may be the reason why they have a ordinary sense of urban identity and stray between urban and rural people. The emergence of the "in-between" situation is the same as Bai Yunfei(2009), except that Zhanjiang does not have the household registration system that exists in Beijing, and the interviews revealed that there is no exclusion between urban and migrating students in the classroom, but this double marginalization still occurs. However, this situation does not affect the migrating children's adjustment to school.

In the interview, when asked why they felt a sense of belonging to the school, the responses of the migrating children basically revolved around the relationship between teachers and classmates. Among the migrating child who had a weak sense of belonging to the school was mainly because of his strict family environment, since the family connection is more important to him than school. Although the teachers' concern can increase his sense of belonging to the school, the impact is not as great as other migrating children. So it can be said that the psychological support of teachers has an important impact on the adjustment of mobile children to school. And the influence of parents on their children is not evident in the process of school integration. During the interviews, some migrating children indicated that although their parents had given them suggestions, they did not follow all their parents' advice, and were more influenced by their teachers. This absence of parents' concern in the lives of migrating children has also been shown to lead to a reduced impact of the family environment on the social integration of migrating children. (Zhuo Ran, Ge Lujia, 2015).

In terms of getting along with classmates, although migrating children may not get along well with every classmate in the class, they basically have their own social circles. In the interviews, it was found that the migrating children were integrated into the class basically because other students took the initiative to talk to them and motivated them to integrate into the class. Although D1 to D3 did not have as high a sense of identification with the class, they all felt that they were integrated into the class. The difference is that in terms of achievement, the migrating children said in the interview that they do had studied, but they gave up halfway because of their own foundation or other reasons such as the teaching style of the teachers, although they wanted to achieve good results, although they did not differ too much from other migrant children in terms of integration in school.

As China's urbanization accelerates, more and more migrant populations are being created, hoping that these children can be helped to obtain a better education, and the issue of school integration for

migrant children is coming to the fore. Schools that pay more attention to students getting along and communicating with each other, pay more attention to the psychological state of migrant children, and promote friendly classroom communication, and families that are more actively involved and guided in alleviating their children's adjustment difficulties, will be able to help migrant children better adapt to their new environment and integrate into it.

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Variable	Interview Objects									
No.	A1	B4	B5	B6	C1	C2	C3	D1	D2	D3
Parents' Encouragement	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Parental Concern	Normally	Usually	Usually	Normally	Usually	Normally	Usually	Usually	Normally	Never
Main Content (Parents)	Life & Study	Study	Study	Life & Study	Study	Study	Life & Study	Life & Study	Life & Study	None
Meeting Frequency (Parents)	Monthly	Monthly	Daily	Daily	Monthly	Monthly	Monthly	Daily	Daily	Daily
Phone Call Frequency	Once 2 Weeks	Once 2 Weeks	None	None	Once 2 Weeks	Once 2 Weeks	Once 2 Weeks	None	None	None
Communication With Teachers	Infrequently	Frequently	Frequently	Frequently	Frequently	Occasionally	Occasionally	Occasionally	Infrequently	Occasionally
Main Content (Teachers)	Study	Study	Life & Study	Study	Study	Study	Life & Study	Life & Study	Study	Study
Class Interpersonal Relationship	Poor	General	Poor	Good	General	Good	Poor	Good	Poor	General

Variable	Interview Objects									
No.	A1	B4	B5	B6	C1	C2	C3	D1	D2	D3
Identification Of City	Semi-Identified	Semi-Identified	Identified	Yes	Yes	Identified	Semi-Identified	Semi-Identified	Semi-Identified	Identified
Identification With The Countryside	Weak	Strong	Normal	Strong	Strong	Strong	Normal	No	Strong	Normal
Similarities Of Previous School	Similar	Similar	Different	Similar	Similar	Similar	Similar	No Experience	Similar	Similar
Willing Of Staying	No	Yes	Yes	No	No	Not Sure	Not Sure	No	Not Sure	Yes
Feelings About The School	Strict	Good	Good	Normal	Normal	Good	Strict	Good	Normal	Good
Sense Of Belonging To The School	Normal	Normal	Strong	Strong	Weak	Strong	Normal	Strong	Strong	Strong
Willing Of Studying In Zhanjiang	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Perceptions Of Teachers	Normal	Like	Like	Like	Like	Like	Like	Normal	Normal	Normal

Variable	Interview Objects									
No.	A1	B4	B5	B6	C1	C2	C3	D1	D2	D3
<i>Class Identification</i>	<i>Yes</i>	<i>Yes</i>	<i>Yes</i>	<i>Yes</i>	<i>Yes</i>	<i>Yes</i>	<i>Yes</i>	<i>Semi-Identified</i>	<i>Semi-Identified</i>	<i>Semi-Identified</i>
<i>Class Cohesion</i>	<i>Strong</i>	<i>Strong</i>	<i>Strong</i>	<i>Strong</i>	<i>General</i>	<i>General</i>	<i>General</i>	<i>Weak</i>	<i>Weak</i>	<i>Weak</i>
<i>Class Atmosphere</i>	<i>Normal</i>	<i>Good</i>	<i>Good</i>	<i>Normal</i>	<i>Good</i>	<i>Good</i>	<i>Good</i>	<i>Normal</i>	<i>Normal</i>	<i>Normal</i>
<i>Class Integration</i>	<i>Good</i>	<i>Good</i>	<i>Good</i>	<i>Good</i>	<i>Good</i>	<i>Good</i>	<i>Normal</i>	<i>Good</i>	<i>Good</i>	<i>Good</i>
<i>Studying Atmosphere</i>	<i>Liberal Arts Are Active Science Is General</i>	<i>Active</i>	<i>Active</i>	<i>Active</i>	<i>General</i>	<i>General</i>	<i>General</i>			
<i>Recent Final Grades</i>	<i>Top5</i>	<i>Top40</i>	<i>Top5</i>	<i>Top1</i>	<i>Top20</i>	<i>Top20</i>	<i>Top10</i>	<i>Top5</i>	<i>Top2</i>	<i>Top40</i>