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The education of migrant children and China's future: The urban left behind. Holly H. Ming. New York, NY: Routledge, 2013. 236pp., (hardback), 145\$, ISBN: 978-0-415-63034-4.

This book offers a vivid and rich portrait of the migration and educational experiences, as well as career prospects, of second-generation migrant youth in China. It might be seen as a culmination of the author's previous dissertation fieldwork and the five-year action research projects organized by the Youth Foundation where the author works. As a longitudinal study, the book is able to examine the life trajectories of migrant children over different time periods and present a holistic picture of the migrant children's lives both at school and beyond. In the first part, it explores how they experienced the city, describing their migration histories, neighborhoods, homes and schools, their interactions with the locals as well as their self-identities. In the second part, the book goes on to look at the migrant students' further schooling options and career aspirations, the structural obstacles preventing the fulfillment of these wishes, and how migrant families responded to institutional constraints on their future opportunities.

As a Chinese native and a scholar of education, I found many of the stories described in the book familiar, with much of the information on migrant children having been covered in the Chinese literature. However, a unique feature of the book is the comparative lens built into the research design. First of all, the data is rich enough to allow the author to compare and contrast migrant students with the local city youngsters. The differences in life experiences and educational needs between second-generation migrant children and similarly aged first-generation migrant youths are also given due attention towards the end of the book. Secondly, drawing upon survey data from three middle schools (one public school and two migrant schools) in Beijing and one public middle school in Shanghai, the book makes possible a multi-dimensional comparison of migrant students not only across school types, but also across the two biggest cities in China which receive the largest number of migrants from all over the

country. Thirdly, what struck me most is an explicit comparison between the domestic migrant children in China and the cross-border, cross-culture “*international*” (original emphasis, p. 10) migrants in other parts of the world. Although the author acknowledges the uniqueness of the Chinese *hukou* household registration system and its impact on the rural migrant students in China, she nonetheless discusses Chinese migrants’ relation to the city in parallel to the international immigrants’ acculturation and integration in the host country. This probably has to do with the author’s personal experience of growing up with migrant parents in Hong Kong and participating in a second-generation Asian-American culture while studying in the US.

For me, the most enjoyable part of the book is the discussion on migrant children’s identity in Chapter II. Here the author draws upon ethnic identity concepts in the international immigration literature to develop a unique analysis of identity formation for the Chinese migrant students. For example, she finds that the Chinese migrant students tended to label all fellow migrants *waidiren* as the “in group,” even though they were not necessarily from the same village or province, due to their common destiny of being excluded from the urban school system. As the US experiences illustrated, forms of exclusion from the mainstream society ended up heightening group consciousness and creating a “reactive ethnicity.” Similarly, with the gradual understanding of the *hukou* system and how it restricted their educational and other opportunities in the city, the Chinese migrant children developed an enhanced sense of their outsider’s status as they moved to the higher grades in middle school. The author’s argument that migrant students in China “have adopted a ‘pan-migrant’ identity, one closely related to the concept of ‘reactive ethnicity’ in the international second-generation migration literature” (p. 10) is both convincing and original, something that is missing from the abundant Chinese literature on migrant children’s identity.

A possible weakness of the book is that most of the Chinese sources cited in the book are from newspapers, websites, or policy documents, with few scholarly articles or books. This could be an obvious defect for the book, accounting for its lack of “insider’s” knowledge on Chinese migrant children. However, I was particularly intrigued by the author’s ways of candidly acknowledging her “outsider’s” stance. In the *Preface*, the author describes her personal background and makes clear her “foreignness” in the Chinese setting, an important starting

point for qualitative research. In the *Epilogue*, she returns to her positioning as an outsider in the research: “The problems faced by migrant students seemed painfully obvious, and the unfairness of their situations seemed almost ridiculous, but most children and adults—migrant or local—were oblivious to them. It was as if people had become so used to living in this environment that they no longer ‘saw,’ at least not with their brains and hearts. Only when an outsider like me asked some ‘obvious’ questions did they see the problems face-to-face, and begin to be concerned or actually do something about them” (p. 196). It is at this point that I realized the urgency and significance of dialogue and interaction between Chinese-native researchers like myself and the “culturally other” whose outsider perspective may bring about unique insights by making the familiar strange.

As a final note, I was deeply impressed with the “solution-based narrative” (p. 193) the author offered in the book: “my goal was to understand the issues facing migrant families in Chinese cities, and to provide information that could inspire or improve practical programs to serve them” (p. xxiii). Indeed, the thorough list of recommended government-based policy initiatives or service programs included in the final chapter constitutes another unique contribution to the literature on Chinese migrant children. The book will serve as a valuable resource to Chinese educators, school leaders, education scholars and policy makers, as well as non-Chinese readers who wish to understand and do something about the issue of migrant children in China.

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