Understanding the role of social support in rural-to-urban migrant children’s adaptation in Shanghai

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# Table of Content

Acknowledgements .................................................................................................................. 5  
Abstract .................................................................................................................................. 7  
Résumé ..................................................................................................................................... 9  

Chapter one Introduction ........................................................................................................ 11  
1.1 Purpose and justification for the study ........................................................................... 11  
1.2 Research topic ................................................................................................................ 16  
1.3 Structure of the thesis ...................................................................................................... 18  
1.4 References ........................................................................................................................ 22  

Chapter two Review of the literature ...................................................................................... 24  
2.1 Policy context for the study ............................................................................................ 24  
2.1.1 Macro policy context: Hukou and child welfare ....................................................... 24  
2.1.2 An overview of social work and community services in China ............................... 29  
2.2 Empirical studies on rural-to-urban migrant children in China ..................................... 36  
2.2.1 Emergence of migrant children and their demographic features ............................. 36  
2.2.2 Literature concerning migrant children’s well-being .............................................. 38  
2.3 Strength-based approach .................................................................................................. 44  
2.3.1 Theoretical considerations on adaptation and resilience ......................................... 44  
2.3.2 Empirical studies on immigrant children’s resilience and social support ............... 47  
2.3.3 Synthesis: gaps in the literature to be addressed in this thesis ............................... 49  
2.4 Conceptual framework informing the research .............................................................. 50  
2.5 References ....................................................................................................................... 55  

Chapter three Methodology .................................................................................................... 64  
3.1 Introduction ...................................................................................................................... 64  
3.2 Research design ............................................................................................................... 65  
3.3 Research site and description of research methods ....................................................... 68  
3.3.1 Study on migrant children’s experience .................................................................. 69  
3.3.2 Study on migrant families’ experience ..................................................................... 72  
3.3.3 A case study of community services in urban village ............................................ 73  
3.4 Ethic considerations .......................................................................................................... 75  
3.5 Plans for dissemination of results .................................................................................... 75  
3.6 References ....................................................................................................................... 76  

Chapter Four: Growing up in urban villages, Chinese children’s experience of rural-to-urban migration: stress, social support, and adaptation ...................................................... 78
6.1 Introduction ................................................................. 159
6.2 China’s internal rural-to-urban migration and the emergence of urban villages ......................................................... 160
6.3 Community service and social work development in China: A brief introduction ......................................................... 162
6.4 Social support for Chinese rural-to-urban migrant families .......................................................................................... 165
6.5 Documenting social services in an urban village through a case study ................................................................. 168
6.6 Examining social services in urban village: history, characteristics, and impact on social support ......................................................... 173
6.6.1 The emergence of social services for migrants in T village ................................................................. 174
6.6.2 A closer look at social services in T village: composition & characteristics ................................................................. 177
6.6.3 Characteristics of service delivery: Multiculturalism, flexibility & informality ................................................................. 180
6.6.4 Impact of social services on the social support of migrants in T village ................................................................. 183
6.7 Applying social support intervention for rural-to-urban migrants in urban village ................................................................. 188
6.8 Implications for social work in conducting community services in urban village ................................................................. 191
6.9 Conclusion .................................................................................. 194
6.10 References .................................................................................. 197
Chapter seven Conclusion........................................................................................................165
7.1 Findings................................................................................................................................165
7.2 Implication for theory, practice, policy and future research...........................................167
7.3 Conclusion............................................................................................................................172

Appendix ...................................................................................................................................174
1. Major policies on urban schooling of migrant children.......................................................174
2. Map of T village.....................................................................................................................175
3 Demographic description of participants in the first study .................................................177
4 Demographic features of participant families ......................................................................179
5 Parental Consent Form for children aged 10 to 14............................................................180
6 Minor Assent Form for children aged 10 to 14 .................................................................183
7 Consent Form for Interview Participants/访谈知情同意书 ...............................................185
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Abstract

Increasing numbers of children have been involved in China’s rural-to-urban migration that is occurring in the context of the country’s rapid urbanization. Many of them are brought to cities in hopes of a better life and their family’s upward social mobility, while they also have to face various challenges arising from their adaptation process. Little is known about how these children manage under such circumstances and how the process can be facilitated from a social work perspective. This dissertation draws upon different aspects of the concept of social support to explore how and where Chinese rural-to-urban migrant children and their families seek social support to strive for their objectives within cities. The ways in which social workers may enhance social support for migrant children and their families for successful adaptation and integration into urban society is also addressed.

This doctoral research included three interrelated qualitative studies, presented in the format of three articles describing the major findings. The thesis begins with an introduction of the theoretical and empirical underpinnings for the study, as well as the research methods. The first article explores urban experience of migrant children, focusing on how and where they seek for social support to manage their challenges arising from adaptation and development process. The second article draws upon extensive participant observation and ten in-depth family interviews, exploring how families experience transitions arising from migration and make adaptive choices for their children based on social support within and outside families. The last article presents a case study examining the social services available in the urban villages as a formal source of social support, focusing on how social work can enhance social support for migrant families through providing various community services. The thesis concludes by suggesting that the role of social support in rural-to-urban migrant children’s
adaptation should not be limited to only helping them go through the initial coping period, but should also enhance their life opportunities and acquisition of competencies in diverse socio-cultural contexts. Migrant children’s experience of social support is determined to a large extent by social support that their families can access and mobilize, which is shaped by the broad policy context that frame the formal supports for migrants and the socio-cultural context that influences migrants’ informal social networks and their help-seeking process. Social support intervention can be an effective means to enhance supportive resources for migrant families by integrating formal and informal social support to improve the structure and mobilization of migrants’ informal networks, and facilitating community support through social work practices.
Résumé

Un nombre croissant de jeunes sont impliqués dans la migration de milieux ruraux à urbains dans le contexte de l’urbanisation rapide qui se passe actuellement en Chine. La plupart de ces jeunes sont amenés par leurs familles en ville dans la quête d’une meilleure vie et une mobilité sociale pour l’unité familiale. Au cours du processus de la migration, les jeunes font face à une variété de défis qui déroulent de l’adaptation d’une nouvelle localité, un nouvel environnement d’école et des nouvelles relations – le tout dans un contexte de barrières institutionnelles. Malgré l’intérêt croissant dans l’adaptation et le bien-être de jeunes migrants en milieux urbain, par contre, peu d’études ont tenté de comprendre comment ces jeunes gèrent leur situation ni comment les travailleurs sociaux pourraient intervenir afin de faciliter le processus continue de ces jeunes dans leur poursuite de leurs objectifs à l’intérieur de la ville. Cette thèse applique différents aspects du concept de l’appui social à l’exploration de comment et où les jeunes migrants rural-à-urbain et leurs familles en Chine utilisent l’appui social dans leur processus d’adaptation. Les manières dans lesquelles les travailleurs sociaux pourraient augmenter l’appui social aux jeunes migrants et leurs familles dans le but d’une adaptation et intégration à la société urbaine sont aussi discutées.

Afin d’arriver à une compréhension profonde des expériences urbaines de jeunes migrants et le rôle de l’appui social dans leur processus d’adaptation, cette recherche doctorale a utilisé trois études qualitatives interreliées et présentées dans le forme de trois articles qui décrivent les résultats. La thèse commence avec une introduction aux bases théoriques et empiriques de cette étude, ainsi que les méthodes de recherche. Ensuite, le premier article explore les expériences des jeunes migrants en déménageant en ville et leur recherche de l’appui social de sources formelles et informelles, incluant la famille, l’école, les paires et la communauté/les voisins afin de satisfaire leurs besoins et répondre aux défis qui découlent des processus d’adaptation et de développement, basé sur des données
d’entrevues avec 18 jeunes migrants. Le deuxième article est basé sur l’observation participante et des entrevues avec 10 familles migrantes habitant un « village urbain » (enclave migrante) à Shanghai, discutant comment les familles vivent les transitions liée à la migration et font des choix adaptives pour leurs enfants dans le contexte de l’appui social auquel ils ont accès de l’intérieur de leurs familles élargies ainsi que d’autres sources extérieures. Le dernier article examine les services sociaux disponibles aux jeunes et aux familles migrants dans le village urbain, et comment ces services influencent l’accès des jeunes et des familles à l’appui social. Rassemblant ces résultats, la thèse conclut en suggérant que le rôle de l’appui social dans l’adaptation des enfants migrants ne devrait pas être limité à leur aidant à traverser la période initiale d’adaptation, mais devrait aussi offrir de meilleures opportunités et l’acquisition de compétences dans divers contextes socioculturels. L’expérience des jeunes migrants de l’appui social et directement liée aux expériences urbaines de leurs familles et est influencée par le niveau d’appui que leurs familles sont capables d’accéder et de mobiliser. L’intervention en appui social peut être un moyen efficace d’augmenter les ressources d’appui disponibles aux familles migrantes en intégrant l’appui social formel et informel et en facilitant l’appui communautaire par des pratiques en travail social.
Chapter one Introduction

Children migrating from rural to urban life have to negotiate different social, cultural and physical environments and face the challenges arising from mobility, acculturation, changes of family structure, and disrupted social capital networks. For children at risk, positive and accessible social support networks can play a vital role in dealing with adversity. This dissertation applies a qualitative research to explore how and where rural-to-urban migrant children in China seek for social support in their adaptation process, and how informal sources (including family, friends and community networks) as well as formal structures (such as school and professional services) can facilitate or impede their wellbeing, combining to influence their urban trajectories. This first chapter introduces the justification and objectives of the study, followed by an explanation of the thesis structure.

1.1 Purpose and justification for the study

Migration is far from new to Chinese people. There are many old Chinese proverbs showing a positive attitude towards migration or encouraging people to move, such as “A tree moved will die, people moved will live and prosper” (rennuohuo, shunuosi) or “A true man must have the will to go around the world” (haonanerzhizaisi fang). With the belief that moving can bring good life, Chinese people repeat the tradition generation after generation, in spite of the unknown challenges we might face ahead. I am one such migrant. I had the experience of immigrating to Canada, and when I moved back to China, I migrated to Shanghai, a major metropolitan of China that is far from my hometown city, starting another migration experience in my life. During my life related to migration, I have experienced many up and down moments, which eventually formed the initial motivation for me to study the phenomenon of migration in my doctoral study. I wanted to understand how
migration affects individuals’ life and families, and what we pay for migration.

The past thirty years have witnessed China’s massive waves of internal migration, resulting in the largest demographic shift in human history (Chan, 2008), and having fundamentally changed Chinese society in all economic and social aspects. This recent migration mainly involves people moving from poor rural areas to economically more developed urban places (see graph1 for the increase of urban population). Rural-to-urban migrants have contributed to the country’s fast economic growth and were at the forefront of China’s urbanization (Cai, & Fang, 2007). They also changed the dual structure of Chinese society and formed a new social group situated in between rural and urban residents—migrant workers who live and work in cities with rural residential status, essentially undocumented migrants who experience many of the same challenges observed among irregular migrants internationally. The emergence of migrant workers is considered as a by-product of China’s household registration system (hukou), which is used as an institutional instrument of the central government to control people’s move as well as allocation of job and resources (Chan & Zhang, 1999). Under the system, Chinese citizens were assigned either a rural or an urban hukou based on their registered residence. Urban residents were entitled to the state-run social and health services that were delivered by employers or ‘work unit’, while rural residents had to rely on their families and the rural collectives to provide social services. Local governments were responsible for providing people whose hukou was registered in its jurisdiction with daily needs and services. Once residents left their hukou origins, especially from rural to urban areas, they would also leave behind all of their rights and benefits (Cheng & Selden, 1994). Therefore, those rural-to-urban migrants who work and reside in cities without access to urban residents’ social welfare and services are called “migrant workers”, indicating an inferior status to their urban counterparts.
The recent national census reported that there were 261 million rural-to-urban migrants in 2010, approximately 20% of China’s population (NBS, 2011). Most of these migrants were concentrated in central and coastal provinces or provincial cities, such as Beijing, Shanghai, Guangdong, and Zhejiang (NBS, 2011). Despite the many economic miracles they have created in cities, their life in cities remained marginalized; migrants engage in low wage, unstable work, live in impoverished areas and enjoy far fewer social services than their urban counterparts. The popular image of a migrant worker is a young single man who travels from a poor rural area to the more economically developed coastal provinces in search of employment in factories, construction sites and service industries. Table 2 illustrates the major sectors for migrant employer. Table 3 describes age distribution among rural-to-urban migrants. Table 4 compares the average wage across the western, eastern, and central China. Although wages for most migrant workers have increased over the last five years, migrant workers generally earn less than local urban labour force.

Graph 1 Actual urban population versus population with an urban hukou in China—as a percentage of total population in China. (Source: National Bureau of Statistics)
Shanghai prides itself as the commercial and financial centre of China as well as an international commercial centre. It has experienced vast growth in both the economy and in its non-local population over the years. In 2013, Shanghai’s total GDP grew to 2.16 trillion yuan (US$353.9 billion) with GDP per capita of 90,092 yuan (US$14,547). Primary industries made up 0.6% of the economic activity in 2013, secondary 37.2%, and tertiary 62.2%. According to the national census, Shanghai is the place where the migrant population is most concentrated. There were about eight million non-local people in Shanghai in 2010, accounting for 39% of the whole
population (NBS, 2011). According to the Shanghai Statistics Bureau (SSB, 2014), the average length of time for rural-to-urban migrants to have resided in Shanghai at the time of their study was about eight years; the average number of household members is 2.3, with a ratio of male vs. female as 1.3:1. Most migrants come from neighbouring provinces, such as Anhui (37.5%), Jiangsu (13.4%), Sichuan (10.2%), Henan (7.5%), and Jiangxi (4.6%). In terms of educational background, 24.6% of migrants have only received primary schooling, 69% have attended junior or senior high school, and 6.4% have obtained college or higher degrees (SSB, 2014). Most migrants are working age, ranging from 16 to 60 (83.8%), with an average age of 32 years. In 2013, the per capita household income of migrant families was 29,707 yuan, compared to urban families with a per capita housing income of 43581 yuan. Wages account for 82.8% of migrant families’ income. Household per capita healthcare spending is 592 yuan, compared to urban households’ per capita spending of 1300 yuan and rural household per capita spending of 1181 yuan (SSB, 2014).

In recent years, more and more children have become involved in the migration process as people move with their entire household. It is estimated that more than one fourth of migrants move with their entire households. In 2010, the number of children who migrated with their parents reached 28.77 million, accounting for 11% of the whole migrant population (All China Women’s Federation, 2013). The concentration of children in Shanghai is even more striking; four out of every 10 children are migrant children (All China Women’s Federation, 2013). Beside the institutional barriers such as hukou registration restraining them from integrating into urban society, migrant children also suffer from their poor socioeconomic status. I have heard many stories of migrant children and adolescents struggling to achieve their dreams, something that resonates with me as a social work researcher. The unique conditions of Chinese rural-to-urban migrant children have also
begun to capture the attention of the academic community. However, as discussed later in the literature review, most research so far has focused on their education, such as enrolment rates and school adaptation. There is a lack of study in the field of social work to facilitate their urban experiences and well-being. My PhD research has aimed to document how these young people are affected by migration and explore what can be done by social workers to support them in the face of their difficult circumstances.

1.2 Research topic

In the Western literature, various studies have demonstrated that immigrant children are at higher risk for developing adjustment problems either as a direct result of immigration stress or indirectly due to parental distress and disrupted family context (Short & Johnston, 1997). Research investigating immigrant children’s adaptation has identified various factors that may either cause adjustment problems among young immigrants or, using a resilience framework of analysis, serve as protective factors in the adaptation of children and adolescents (Rumbaut, 1994; Fraser, Kirby, & Smokowski, 2004). Recent resilience research has placed more emphasis on exploring protective factors, something of benefit to the development of social work-style intervention plans that emphasize strengths-based practice, a typical approach in working with children and families that focuses on the competencies, possibilities and promise of families and communities rather than their deficiencies.

In exploring the protective factors inherent in children’s social contexts, social support has frequently emerged as an influential variable in children’s resilience and adaptation. The idea that effective social support acts as a buffer to stress is also an established concept in social services (Williams, Barclay, & Schmied, 2004). In general, social support can be broadly defined as the range
of significant interpersonal relationships that have an impact on an individual’s functioning (Schwarzer & Buchward, 2004). According to Lin, social support refers to “the perceived or actual instrumental and/or expressive provision supplied by the community, social networks, and confiding partners” (Lin, 1986: p. 18). This definition differentiates social support with its various functions; support from the community helps an individual’s social integration and provides a sense of belonging in the larger social structure. Support from social networks, including relationships with relatives, co-workers, and friends, provides the individual with a sense of bonding. Support from intimate and confiding relationships such as family members tend to be binding in the sense that one’s well-being is understood and shared by the partners. Despite various definitions, there is consensus that social support is a multidimensional construct, referring to the material, information, emotional support and social companionship arising from social relations that contribute to individuals’ psychological well-being and facilitate individuals’ overcoming of the difficulties that arise from external demands and challenges (Schwarzer & Buchward, 2004; Lin, 1986; Lopez & Salas, 2006).

Children’s needs arise in different contexts of family, school, and the wider arena of state policy. The application of the resilience framework is usually coupled with an ecological perspective, reflecting a desire to identify the ways in which those experiencing stress or difficulty can be supported through their social ecology such as family, peers, and neighbourhood (Fraser, Kirby, & Smokowski, 2004). In addition, the contents of social support include material assistance, emotional expression for love and care, resource and information sharing, and companion support, each essential for children’s normative development. Diverse people may provide the various forms of support in varied ways and at different times, but it is not likely that one single network provide all
four forms of support (Wellman & Hiscott, 1985). Studies that only address limited dimensions of social support fall short in expanding our understanding of the links between informal social networks and formal social service provision.

This study draws upon the different aspects of the concept of social support, to systematically examine social support for migrant children and their families in a comprehensive social and cultural context, and to explore ways of enhancing social support for migrant children and their families for healthy adaptation and the normative development of migrant children---achieving average level of development of children who are not affected by migration. My analyses are framed around these questions:

1. How do rural-to-urban migrant children experience social support when navigating their urban adaptation in the context of urban village?
2. How do Chinese migrant families experience transitions and what role does social support play in their constructing resilience?
3. What social services are available in urban villages to support migrant children and their families, and what are the implications for social work practices in conducting community-level social services for migrant children and their families in China?

1.3 Structure of the thesis

This is an article-based dissertation. The remainder of this thesis consists of six chapters. Chapter 2 reviews the theoretical and empirical literature upon which this study is based. I begin with an introduction of the policy context for the study, including the hukou system and the major policy shifts related to migration, child welfare, social welfare and community services for migrant populations, as well as China’s social work practices related to migrant population. This is followed
by a detailed examination of the empirical literature on rural-to-urban migrant children, focusing on their well-being and the social determinants of adaptation. Then I propose a conceptual framework for understanding social support for rural-to-urban migrant children in China, which emphasizes a strengths perspective and children’s needs for social support at different levels of their ecosystems within the Chinese socio-cultural context. Last, I provide a discussion of the gaps in the literature, which leads to a shift to reviewing the ways in which the current dissertation aims to address these gaps.

Chapter 3 describes the methodological approach and research design used in the study. The study is qualitative, emphasizing an emerging process of inquiry, collecting data in a setting natural to the people and place under study, and analyzing data in an inductive way to establish patterns of themes (Cresswell, 2007). In order to investigate the role social support plays in rural-to-urban migrant children’s urban adaptation and to achieve an in-depth understanding of how migrant children can be supported during the process, this study is constituted of three sub-studies that are interrelated. In the first study that focuses on migrant children’s perspectives, semi-structured interviews were done with 18 migrant children to unfold their urban experience, their future dreams and perceived social support, as well as the problems encountered in their adaption process. The second study places an emphasis on family experiences. Through in-depth interviews with 10 migrant families and participant observation, it explores how they experience transitions emerging from migration, and how these families strive to achieve adaptation by mobilizing various resources within and outside families. It also documents how the resilience process of families might influence their children’s urban trajectories. The last study is a case study of community services in an urban village, which involves key informant interviews, documentary analysis, and extensive participant
observation to investigate how the social services available in an urban village in Shanghai affect migrant children and their families’ accessing social support.

Chapter 4 is an article entitled “Growing up in an urban village: Chinese children’s experience of rural-to-urban migration, stress, social support and adaptation”. It presents the findings of the first study on migrant children’s urban experiences. This article explores migrant children’s perspectives on migration, adaptation, and social support. In particular, based on young people’s accounts of their experience of moving to the city, facing various challenges, and for some, seeking for social support from informal and formal sources, including families, schools, peers, and community/neighbours, we achieve an in-depth understanding of their resilience emerging from gradual adaptation to urban society. The analysis, based on first hand interviews with migrant children, aims to provide insights for professionals and researchers in developing appropriate interventions for migrant children as well as allocating resources in service provision by demonstrating the central role of an effective supportive network for children’s well-being, as well as the needs of migrant children for all kinds of social support from various sources to achieve resilience and growth in cities. The study also sheds light on how migrant children’s urban experiences are interrelated with family transitions and community interactions that are the focal issues in the other two studies.

Chapter 5 is a forthcoming article entitled “Rural-to-urban migration, family resilience, and policy framework for social support in China”. It outlines the findings from the study on family migration experience. Drawing on extensive participant observations and in-depth interviews with 10 migrant families in an urban village in Shanghai, we explore how families experience transitions arising from migration and make adaptive choices for their children based on the available resources

within and outside families, as well as how informal networks and culture influence these families’ processes of achieving resilience. We also offer a policy framework to support families involved in migration and to enhance migrant parents’ capabilities to provide care and support for their children.

Chapter 6 is an article entitled “Emerging social services in a Chinese urban village: Intervention for creating social support”. It uses a case study to investigate what social services are available for migrants in an urban village, and how social work profession can enhance social supports for migrant families through community services.

Chapter 7 summarizes the major findings of this study and implications for research, policy and practice, followed by an illustration of a social support intervention framework for migrant children in China. The strengths and limitation of this study as well as suggestions for future research are also discussed. It ends with a conclusion that the role of social support in rural-to-urban migrant children’s adaptation should not be limited to only help them go through the initial coping period, but should also enhance their life opportunities and acquisition of competencies in diverse socio-cultural contexts. Migrant children’s experience of social support is determined to a large extent by the social support that their families can access and mobilize, support which is shaped by the broad policy context that frame the formal supports for migrants and the socio-cultural context that influences migrants’ informal social networks and their help-seeking process. Social support intervention can be an effective means to enhance supportive resources for migrant families by integrating formal and informal social support to improve the structure and mobilization of migrants’ informal networks, and facilitating community support through social work practices.
1.4 References


Chapter two Review of the literature

This section provides an overview of the theoretical and empirical literature related to the study. The macro policy context in which the study is situated is first analyzed, followed by the review of empirical studies on migrant children in China and their well-being. Then the review is shifted to a strength-based approach and the resilience research on immigrant children. After a discussion on the gaps in the literature, a conceptual framework on understanding the social support for China’s rural-to-urban migrant children is proposed to guide the thesis.

2.1 Policy context for the study

In this section, macro policy context is analyzed and major policy shifts regarding migration are explored, including hukou system, child welfare, the development of community services and social work profession in China related to rural-to-urban migrants.

2.1.1 Macro policy context: Hukou and child welfare

Hukou

In the command economy of China, population mobility was forbidden and the hukou system was used as an institutional instrument of the central government to control people’s movements as well as the allocation of job and resources. According to the regulations issued by the National Congress in 1958, the total population was divided into rural and urban sub-populations, and residents were not allowed to work or live outside the administrative boundaries of their hukou without approval of the authorities (Chan & Zhang, 1999). The system attached a series of social benefits, such as education, health care, and social insurance to individual’s hukou jurisdiction (Cheng & Selden, 1994). Urban residents were entitled to the state-run health and social services that
were delivered by employers or the ‘work unit’, while rural residents had to rely on their families and the rural collectives to provide social services. Once residents left their place of hukou registration, they would also leave behind all of their social rights and benefits.

Since the late 1970s when China implemented more open economic policies, underemployed farmers left their rural lands to become migrant workers in cities, as a result of long-term rural economic failure and the attraction of industrial revival in the cities. They sought more job opportunities and higher incomes (Cai & Wang, 2007). Initial waves of migration consisted of mainly young males, who spent only part of the year away from their home village, returning home with their urban income. Responding to the increasing number of rural residents working in cities, in 1985, the Ministry of Public Security issued Temporary Rules on Migratory Population in Cities and Towns, allowing rural residents aged 16 and above who stayed in cities and towns for more than three months to apply for temporary residence permits. This policy provided the legal basis for temporary residence permit (zanzhuzheng), enabling “spontaneous” migration to urban areas without an official approval for residence and job changes. Meanwhile, a new category of urban hukou was created for some well-off rural migrants who wanted to have an urban residence and who were able to forego government food rations, called as the “self-supplied food grain” hukou (zilikoulianghukou). However, neither of the two forms of urban residency came with any urban welfare. These rural migrants were basically migrant workers who worked and resided in cities without local hukou and the entitlement of urban social welfare. Their status was temporary and inferior to urban residents (Chan & Zhang, 1999). Migrant workers were usually engaged in low-skilled, labour-intensive jobs that were unstable and low-paid.

With this adjustment in hukou registration and the relaxing of controls on population mobility,
the migration stream eventually extended from individuals to households, and the migrant pattern changed from individual, temporary moves to permanent, whole family migration (Shi, 2005). Since then, more and more children have migrated to cities with their parents. However, constrained by their rural hukou, the children of rural-to-urban migrants were excluded from many of the social welfare benefits enjoyed by their urban counterparts.

Child welfare

The provision of child welfare in China mainly involves three levels of laws and policies, namely, international, national, and provincial. At the international level, China has signed and ratified the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) and the United Nations Declaration of the Rights of the Children individually. The two documents aim at providing special care and protection for children and achieving world recognition of children’s human rights, claiming that children everywhere should have the right to survive, develop to the fullest, be protected from harmful influences, abuse, and exploitation, and participate fully in family, cultural, and social life (United Nations, 1959, 1989). At the national level, the 2001-2010 National Program of Action (NPA) for the Development of Children provides the main policy framework for implementing the CRC, outlining the national action to be taken to further promote healthy and sustainable child development in China. The NPA documents that the objectives of child development are centered in health, education, law protection and environment (Liu, 2005). In 2011, China released its new NPA for 2011-2020, which added child welfare into its main pillars, setting the stage for building a more comprehensive, systematic approach to child welfare work in the future. In addition, China is in process of developing several key child-welfare-specific policy frameworks, including the 12th National Plan of

With respect to children affected by migration, the State Council has released a series of opinions and regulations calling on the government to reduce discrimination against migrant children and improve their rights to education and to improve inter-ministerial coordination to support left-behind children. Since then, a number of municipal governments have introduced policies to improve access to compulsory education for migrant children (Dong, 2010).

Education as a social welfare is attached to an individual’s hukou. Under China’s hukou system and a decentralized education financial system, local governments are the primary resource of education that allocates educational resources based on the number of children registered as permanent residents within their jurisdiction. Once migrant children moved to urban areas out rural areas, it was hard for the government of their original places to transfer resources and meet the educational needs of these children. Meanwhile, as rural residents, there were no educational dollars allocated for them from the government in host cities (Guo, 2009; Liang & Chen, 2007). Thus a large number of migrant children were denied entry to public schools in cities and had to enrol in private migrant children’s schools\(^2\), which were uncertified privately run schools with significant lower quality in terms of facilities and human resources (Liang & Chen, 2007).

It takes the central government a long time to resolve the urban schooling of rural-to-urban migrant children. A series of policies and regulations have been released including the 1996 *Measures

\(^2\) Because rural-to-urban migrant children were excluded from urban public schools, private schools were created to respond to the demand for their education. The quality of these schools is discussed below.
for the Schooling of Children and Young People in the Urban Migrant Population (Trial Measure) issued by the State Education Commission and the 1998 Provisional Measure for the Schooling of Migrant Children and Young People issued jointly by the State Education Commission and the Ministry of Public Security which urged municipalities to accept migrant children age between six and 14 in state-run or privately-run migrant children’s schools under the status of temporary students (Kwong, 2004).

In order to further tackle the problems and address rural-to-urban migrant children’s needs for education, the State Council issued the Decision on Improving Education of Children of Rural Migrant Workers and forwarded the Decision to six ministries, including the Ministry of Education, the Ministry of Finance, the Ministry of Public Security, the Ministry of Development, the Central Secretary Office, and the Ministry of Labour and Social Security to tackle the problems together. Through the Decision, the central government shifted the responsibility for educating migrant children from the out-flowing rural areas to the receiving cities, with the focus on education within the state school system (Jiang et al., 2008). In 2006, the revised Compulsory Education Law was issued, which guaranteed the equal rights of migrant children to receive compulsory education in host cities at the level of national law. Important stipulations and policy changes from 1996 to 2010 are summarized in the appendix (Major policies on urban schooling of migrant children).

The level of access to education for migrant children has improved remarkably over the last few years. However, hukou still remains effective in limiting migrant children’s access to past compulsory education (i.e. secondary school and university) in cities. For example, the 2008 Working Regulations for the Enrolment of Regular High School Students stipulates that all candidates must take the university entrance exam in their place of hukou registration. Many migrant
children have to return to their hukou of origin for high school education and to take their university entrance exam there (Ming, 2009). In addition, since there are no universal implementation standards and local governments remain responsible for the majority of funding for education and other welfare, the overall social welfare situation for migrant children continues to vary substantially between provinces and cities. In some places, rural-to-urban migrant children are yet not given full and unfettered access to social services (Dong, 2010; Kwong, 2011).

2.1.2 An overview of social work and community services in China

Social work development

Social work plays an increasing important role in implementing various social policies in China, particularly in those regarding migrants’ welfare. As a profession, social work has a unique development path in China, in which a top-down approach was used and the government orchestrated the profession’s development (Xiong & Wang, 2007). In the 1920s, social work existed as a discipline in a few universities, such as Yanjin University of Nanjing (Chau & Liu, 2001). The subject was aborted in the early 1950s due to political ideology believing that no social problems would exist in a socialist system. However, in late 1970s, concomitant with the country’s enormous growth, there was a sweeping social and economic transformation, in which income inequality was intensified, and there were increasing social issues that the government had to face, such as massive lay-offs from previously state-owned enterprises workers, vulnerable rural-to-urban migrants and their children, and worsened societal disparities. Social work was revived in 1980s as a remedy to those social problems, as well as to respond to the situation in which traditional social service providers could not meet the increasing demands of service users (Xiong & Wang, 2007). In the
1980s, with the approval of the Ministry of Education four universities started the baccalaureate a program of social work and management. The number of schools offering such programs has increased from 10 in 1994 to about 250 in 2012 (Zou & Liu, 2012).

Social work was seen as a predominantly academic discipline before the mid-2000s. In 2009, the State Council approved the Master of Social Work programs (MSW), of which 61 are now in operation (Zou & Liu, 2012). In addition, in 1991, the Ministry of Civil Affairs (MCA), the entity responsible for social welfare, set up the China Association of Social Workers, which later joined the International Federation of Social Workers (IFSW). In 1994, with the support of the MCA and the Ministry of Education, the China Association of Social Work Education was established, which is also now a member of the International Association of Schools of Social Work (IASSW).

In 2006, the Ministry of Personnel and MCA issued “the Regulations of Evaluation of Social Work Professional Levels”, which publicized the government’s recognition of the profession and set out rules for its regulation, and social work was officially accredited as a vocation. Later that year, the Chinese Communist Party released an official document announcing social work as a key part of the mechanism to meet the needs for a harmonious society, and that social work positions were to be established within public system. In 2010, with the release of the National Mid-to-Long Term Talent Development Outline (Central Organizing Bureau, 2010), the central government identified the cultivation of highly skilled social work professionals (referred to as a “Social Work Talent Troop”) as a priority. The outline also set a target of generating three million “talents” in social work by 2020, which was modified by the Central Organizing Bureau to 1.45 million in the Mid-to-Long Term Plan of Social Work Professional Human Resources Establishment (2011-2020), with specific quotas for junior and senior social workers (Gao & Yin, 2014).
The MCA established a Department of Social Work in 2012 to ensure the smooth implementation of the policies. In Beijing, Shanghai, and Shenzhen, where local governments have actively responded to the central government’s commitment to social work development, efforts have been made to insert social work into the municipal social service system (Leung, 2013). Two major schemes were tested. One was to fund social work positions, in which social workers were deployed to different government service units, like seniors’ homes, orphanages, and hospitals, to provide social work services. The other scheme was through the funding of social work projects in which non-governmental social work service organizations bid for service contract through an open-tendering process. Project-purchasing scheme was first tested out in Shanghai and spread to other cities (Chan et al., 2009). Through the two purchasing scheme, municipal governments purchased social work services from local social work service organizations where social workers were recruited, trained and supervised, creatively helping to embed social work in the existing social service systems. By 2012, over 700 social work service organizations have been established throughout the country and more than 60,000 social work positions had been generated through initiatives taken mainly by municipal government (Leung, 2013).

Community services

It used to be the state’s responsibilities to take after urban residents’ welfare needs, and the work units (danwei) were responsible for providing a variety of welfare services ranging from housing, schooling, job placement, retirement, and medical needs. After the adoption of market-oriented economic policies, and with the related diminishing of job security within state-owned enterprises, danwei-based neighbourhoods diminished, along with collapse of the safety net that was traditionally
built into the employment. Meanwhile, geographic-based urban communities were emerging, where people of different occupations, socio-economic status and places of origins share the space. Community Neighbourhood Committees (CNC), instituted through the Urban Community Neighbourhood Committee Organization Act in 1989, were designated as the semi-governmental grass-root organizations at the bottom of urban administrative hierarchy to implement administrative duties and service provision at the level of communities (Xu & Chow, 2006).

Since the 1990s, and with the decline of the danwei system, policy makers have aimed to transform community-level administrative bodies into service delivery mechanisms. There was a national Community-Building Movement aiming to reorient urban communities to be responsible for organizing and delivering community services, transforming the previous ‘community of workers’ into ‘community of neighbours’ (Xu & Chow, 2006). In 1994, MCA, along with another 14 government ministries, jointly proposed the official definition of community services, “under government guidance, street-level organizations and the lower level of neighbourhood committee, are to address the various needs of the community by providing welfare services to residents” (MCA, 1995). The majority of community services targeted the general welfare population with a wide range including employment, housing, health care, elderly care, crime, prevention and education (i.e., there are employment training for laid-off workers, homecare for the elderly and the disables, services for children and adolescents, social assistance for the poor, services for veterans, etc.). It also provided residents with recreational activities, educational programs, as well as fee-charging services such as convenience stores (MCA, 1995). Community services thus were considered as an

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3 Above the CRCs is street-level government, usually representing 5,000 households and regulating local workshops, schools, nurseries, health clinics, stores, and community centres. Above street-level administration was city and district level administration.
alternative way of providing a supplemental safety net in urban areas, while the central government continued to supply the overall welfare infrastructure such as subsidized housing and medical benefits (Xu & Chow, 2006).

An important characteristic of community services is that the organization and implementation of services are overseen by CNCs. There are eight categories in CNC’s daily work, including civil affairs, youth development, adult training and education program, mediation (a means to solve family conflicts or neighbour disputes), safety in residential areas, environmental protection, implementation of government policy and Party directives, and family planning (in coordination with the State’s birth control and one child policy). These categories reflect how CNC carries out the administrative duties involved in providing community services while also complies with upper-level government administrative directives (Yan & Gao, 2007)

*Social services for rural-to-urban migrants*

In recent years, in accordance to the government’s commitment to facilitate the development of social work professional, there was an emerging trend of involving social workers into deliver community services through government’s purchasing projects (Yan & Gao, 2014). In Shanghai, social workers have been active in providing social services for migrant workers and their families in urban villages where the migrant population are most concentrated (Wen, 2013). Drawing on a previous case study, the first author of this article described a trial program conducted in Shanghai, in which social workers provided comprehensive social services to rural-to-urban migrants in an urban village through a 3-year project funded by local street-level government (Wen, 2013). It was
expected through this project,

“to improve the functioning of individuals as well as families through social work intervention such as casework, group work, and community activities; to build community capacity for mutual aid and problem-solving; and to mobilize community resources to improve community environment and well-being and enhance social integration.” (Wen, 2013, p. 64)

The local governments also expected to generate experience of governing migrant communities through collaborations with social workers (Wen, 2013). These efforts were just the initiatives as a response to the large number of migrant population and their increasing needs for community services. With the increasing number of urban villages in a few large cities, there was a lack of community services provided to migrant families and their children.

The state’s efforts to increase migrants’ social services and welfare are mostly seen in improving migrants’ social insurance that is attached to employment. For example, ‘Urban Five’ is the comprehensive employment-based social insurance program ranging from basic healthcare, basic old-age pensions, unemployment insurance, occupational injury insurance, and maternity benefits for working mothers (Xu, et al., 2011). Along this line, the State Council released the 2006 Opinion on Resolving the Problems Faced by Migrant Workers regulated the comprehensive support to rural-to-urban migrants from the state. It addressed the problems faced by rural migrant workers and proposed to resolve the problems of low wages and wage arrears, bring labour management of rural migrants in line with legal regulations, provide employment service, occupational training, social security, urban public services, and improve the safeguard mechanism that protects rural migrants’ rights and interests (the State Council, 2006).

The document spurred various programs at national or regional levels, aiming to improve the conditions of rural-to-urban migrants. For example, a national program named The Training Plan for
Rural Migrant Workers in 2003-2010 aiming to increase the income of rural households and improve overall quality of industry labour force was launched to provide guiding and vocational training to 60 million rural-to-urban migrants with government subsidies (Liu, 2010). This 8-year comprehensive program covering issues from worker training, funding sources, and incentives to intergovernmental and inter-institutional collaborations (Xu, et al., 2011). In the following year, another important training program, the Sunshine project, was initiated, aiming to provide training in rural tourism and nutrition, catering, and professional and business skills to ten million rural workers in poverty-stricken sending provinces. Training cost was shared by the central and provincial governments while training programs were implemented at the city level (Liu, 2010). Besides, a national data collection and monitoring system was established aiming to provide the governance of rural-to-urban migration (Liu, 2010).

The implementation of social policies regarding migrant population conducted by local government varied substantially in different places and cities. Shanghai, with concentrated migrant population, has provided comprehensive social insurance programs for rural migrant workers. Its municipal government releases the Declaration on Improving the Welfare for Rural Migrant Workers, ranging from wage, insurance, employment services, public services, residence-based registration for rural migrant workers (Xinhua News, 2006). Beijing and Qingdao offer rural migrant workers a pension program equivalent to benefits provided for urban residents. Yet other cities remain unenthusiastic about implementing and enforcing central government policies due to lack of incentives and obligations (Tan, 2000).
2.2 Empirical studies on rural-to-urban migrant children in China

2.2.1 Emergence of migrant children and their demographic features

Chinese rural-to-urban migrants seek for urban employment and a hope to build a better life for themselves and their families. The majority of this population group is aged between 16 and 40, indicating their decision of moving may involve children. While some may choose to leave their children behind in their hometown villages, with the relaxation of hukou system, more and more migrants bring their children along when they migrate, or to raise their city-born children in the urban areas. Thus, two groups of children are identified. One group, typically known as “left behind” children, are the children stay in the home villages while one or both of their parents migrate for work. The other group consists of those follow their parents to the cities, usually after being left behind for a couple of years, and those who were born in the cities while with no eventual hukou conversion (Xiong, 2010). It is not uncommon for a migrant household simultaneously to have both children “left-behind” and children who are brought to the cities (All China Women’s Federation, 2013).

Before 1998 when the Ministry of Education and the Ministry of Public Security jointly issued the “Provisional Measure for the Schooling of Migrant Children and Young People”, migrant children have been remained understudied compared to other migrant groups such as migrant workers (Duan & Liang, 2005). The group eventually drew increasing scholarly attention due to its continuous growing number and the unique situation faced by them. A common-used official definition is migrant children are the children of migrant workers, with a status of rural residents, accompanying their parents to reside in cities for more than six months (NBS, 2009).
It was estimated in 2000, there were more than 14 million children under the year of 14 residing in cities with rural *hukou*, accounting for 13.78% of the total rural-to-urban migrant population (Duan & Liang, 2005). The number reached 18.33 million in 2005, an estimation based on 2005 national 1% Population Sample Survey (Duan & Yang, 2008). The most recent survey on migrant children based on the 2010 sixth national census showed that the number of rural-to-urban migrant children under 18 year old was 28.77 million, and the number of left behind children was more than 60 million (All China Women’s Federation, 2013). The survey provided some interesting facts about the children of migrants: a large percentage of the children of migrants are left behind in their hometown villages in the care of relatives, there are 132 migrant boys for every 100 migrant girls in the cities, and migrant children had a longer average length of residence in cities at the time of the survey (3.74 year), indicating a trend of migrant children extending their stay in cities (All China Women’s Federation, 2013).

Besides, some health indicators showed that the physical condition of migrant children was not as good as their urban counterparts. For example, a survey on migrant children’s health care in nine cities showed that the under five year old mortality rate of migrant children as 1.3 and 1.9 times higher respectively than local urban children (Wang, 2004). In addition, the birth weight of migrant children was lower than that of urban children and they were more easily attacked by infections. Compared to urban children, migrant children had lower immunization and vaccination rates (Duan & Wang, 2010). Zou, Qu & Zhang (2005) explored migrant children’s participation in health care programs and pointed out that only 55% of migrant children joined health programs in a survey of 1,020 migrant children which was significantly lower than the participation of local children. Fifteen percent of migrant children were diagnosed as being in ‘weak’ physical condition, compared
to only 10% of the general population (Zou, Qu & Zhang, 2005).

2.2.2 Literature concerning migrant children’s well-being

Due to the constraints of their rural *hukou*, migrant children did not have equal access to education and other social services as their urban counterparts, which impacts on their normative development. A number of studies have demonstrated that migrant children experienced more problems in educational, psychological, and social development, compared to their urban counterparts (Zou, Qu & Zhang, 2005; Shen et al., 2007; Li, et al., 2008).

*Education*

Due to the particular dilemma faced by migrants in terms of their children’s education, scholars paid much attention to educational consequences for migrant children. Although migrant children’s school enrolment within compulsory education has improved significantly in recent years, according to a survey conducted by National Institute for Education Science in 2008, migrant children scored lower than urban children in high school completion and tended to have lower study motivation (National Institute for Educational Science, 2008). Scholars claimed that *hukou* system and the resulting education inequity were the main reasons for migrant children’s underdeveloped educational achievement in comparison to urban children (Kwong, 2004; Liang & Chen, 2007; Han, 2004; Guo, 2009). Ming (2009) examined different stages of policy contexts regarding rural-to-urban migration, and described migrant children and their families in Beijing and Shanghai adjust their expectations for education and future career according to the changing educational policies (Ming, 2009). Despite the changes in social policies form exclusion to inclusive, it was argued that the educational inequity has extended to many arenas of migrant children’s life and intensified their
disadvantages (Ming, 2009). The difficult situations faced by migrant children and their families were rooted in *hukou* system and education financing system, as well as continued encouraging increasing rural-urban discrepancy (Dong, 2010; Gao, 2010). From different perspectives, policy researchers suggested that policy defects and ineffective policy implementation prevented migrant children access equal educational opportunities, which reinforced their disadvantage (Guo, 2009; Li & Lin, 2005; Wei & Hou, 2010).

Besides the focus on educational policies, some compared public schools and substandard migrant children’s schools, and suggested that the conditions of migrant children’s schools had negative effects on migrant children’s well-being (Han, 2004; Jiang et al., 2008; Kwong, 2004). Wang (2008) investigated 55 migrant children’s schools in Beijing and found that most of the schools were not equipped with the necessary amenities and facilities for safety and health, lacking government inspection and funding, which impacted the physical, psychological, and academic development of migrant children (Wang, 2008). Others suggested that although migrant children’s schools provided a feasible option for migrant children’s schooling in cities, due to their flexible enrolment threshold and comparatively low tuition, they were plagued by the high turnover of students, less qualified teachers, poor school infrastructures and facilities and substandard curriculum. These schools actually reinforced the disadvantages of migrant children in education (Kwong, 2004). As a temporary alternative solution for migrant children’s schooling, most of the migrant children’s schools were eventually suspended and closed after 2008 when the State Council released the Circular on the Abolition of Tuition and Miscellaneous Fees for Students in Compulsory Education in Urban Areas (Dong, 2010; Gao, 2010).
Psychological well-being

As an important aspect of well-being, the psychological status of migrant children drew a lot of scholarly attention, concerning about the effects of migration on their psychological development. Some studies suggested that migrant children faced more problems in their psychological wellbeing due to environmental factors related to schools and families (Gu, et al, 2010; Han & Wu, 2010; Zhao, 2003). For example, Lin and her colleagues investigated the mental health of migrant children in Beijing and suggested that migrant children generally had more mental health problems than urban children. Specifically, they found girls in public schools and children with frequent move experiences were the two groups with higher risks of developing mental health problems (Lin, et al., 2009).

A few studies suggested that migrant children attending public schools tended to have better mental health than those in migrant children’s schools, particularly in terms of: self-confidence and sense of personal efficacy (Zou, et al., 2008); more positive self-awareness, lower levels of depression and isolation (Zeng, 2008; Zhou, 2008); openness to new experiences, self-control, and socialization (Wang & Zou, 2008). Specifically, Xuesong He and his colleagues (2008) suggested that schools’ regulations and atmosphere, teacher-students relationship and social support significantly influenced the mental health of migrant children in public schools. However, inconsistencies rose in the literature. Zhou (2006), in her study, found that students in migrant children’s schools tended to have less perceived discrimination and presented fewer symptoms of depression and feelings of loneliness (Zhou, 2006). Similarly, Han & Wu (2010) argued that migrant children attending public schools had more mental health problems than urban children and were more likely to develop problems such as anxiety, panic tendency, body symptoms, and sensitivity.
Besides, family is considered having great impact on migrant children’s overall development. A few studies have investigated the families of migrant children, and suggested that family’s economic, social and human capital impacted migrant children’s psychological well-being in some ways (Zhao, 2003; Shen, et al., 2007; Wang & Liu, 2008). Specifically, the lower a migrant families’ economic condition, the less their children had access to extra resources (i.e. tutors, reference books); the lower a migrant families’ human capital, the less likely that parents gave academic advice to their children; the less social capital had by migrant families, the less their children had useful information from outside sources. Consequently, limited family economic, human and social capital was positively associated with their children’s reduced self-esteem in relation to pride in their accomplishments (Shen, et al., 2007). Other studies investigated the parenting factors in migrant families, and suggested that migrant parents tended to have poor parent-child relationship, little parental involvement, and applying authoritarian parenting strategies that was characterized as harsh, restrictive, physically coercive, and domineering, which had negative impact on migrant children’s well-being (Zeng, 2012; Li, et al., 2008). Zhao (2003) suggested that migrants’ occupational status, limited housing conditions, and parent’s low education attainment impeded parent-child interactions, which had impact on the children’s academic performances and psychological well-being (Zhao, 2003). Besides, migrant children’s life satisfaction was influenced by parents’ extreme expectations on academic performance and by parents’ personality (Zhao & Li, 2010). However, a few studies suggested that migration may not only associated with negative effects; instead, children of migrant families presented good coping strategies when dealing with stressful events and a sense of responsibility in terms of taking care of siblings (Zou, Qu & Zhang, 2005; Chen, 2005).

As an important indicator of psychological well-being, social support has attracted much
research interest, and there is an increasing trend to study migrant children’s social support. Most of these studies use quantitative methods to examine the association of social support with children’s mental health problems, such as how perceived social support can mediate migration stress and contribute to psychological adaptation (Zeng, 2011; He, et al., 2008) or how it has positive effects on migrant children’s self-esteem (Zhao & Li, 2010) their school adaptation (Tan, 2010) or their life satisfaction (Yang, et al., 2009). However, there is a lack of in-depth, systematic study to understand migrant children’s social support that is unique from other migrant groups and how their social support can be enhanced.

Social integration

Due to sharp urban-rural differences, researchers who studied migrant children’s social integration suggested that migrant children had different pattern of social integration from that of their parents’ generation (Shi & Wang, 2007; Zhang, 2007). Xiong (2010) pointed out that a large percent of migrant children were actually born in cities and had strong desire to become urban citizens; however, their migrant status and limited social contacts led them to form a social group that was distinct to their rural counterparts and urban residents. Consequently, migrant children were more likely to develop deviant behaviours, being violent and anti-social than their urban counterparts (Xiong, 2010). Zeng (2012) suggested that societal influences including the attitudes of the host society towards rural newcomers, levels of social integration, supportive networks and public media, all have effects on migrant children’s socio-cultural adaptation, which in turn affected their psychological well-being (Zeng, 2012). Wang and her colleagues (2005) studied migrant children in three migrant children’s schools in Zhejiang province and found that high level of violence and
deviant behaviours among migrant children was associated with their self-concept formation (Wang, et al., 2005). Most of these studies focus on school settings to examine migrant children’s social integration. Wang & Gao (2010) pointed that urban villages as migrant enclaves characterized as crowded informal housing units and poor community infrastructures, and the built environment as well as community environment may have negative influences on migrant children’s socialization who lived there. However, given that about 69% migrant children lived with their families in migrant enclaves or urban villages (China Youth Research Centre, 2006), there is limited research investigating children’s experience of living in urban village and the contextual effects of urban villages.

Wrap up

The literature on migrant children mainly covers the fields of education, psychological well-being, and social integration. In education, the studies focus on education policies and their influence on migrant children’s access to urban schooling. As far as psychological well-being is concerned, the conditions of the schools enrolling migrant children and their families are examined. Although there is inconsistency in the literature concerning migrant children’s psychological status, the consensus is that this population is at higher risk of developing psychological problems and is at risk of poor long-term development, due to the adverse situation faced by them and limited support resources they are able to access. There are no studies conducted in community settings concerning the contextual influences of urban villages on migrant children’s psychological development. In a similar vein, limited studies are found in community setting on migrant children’s social integration.

Despite the growing number of studies on China’s rural-to-urban migrant children, most of them
take a problematic orientation to understanding migrant children’s urban experiences, in which migration is considered as an inherently negative experience and the strength of migrant children and migrant families are often ignored. In fact, the population of rural-to-urban migrants have strong resilient traits and inherent strength, given their desire of seeking for better lives in cities and the determination of overcoming adverse situations. Therefore, a study emphasizing the strength of migrant children and their families, as well as the crucial role of supportive relationships and resources, can make a meaningful contribution to the development of intervention plans and social work practices in applying the principle of “helping people help themselves”.

2.3 Strength-based approach

The strength perspective emphasizes helping people discover and use the resources within and around them. Practitioners help clients to discover their ability and power to realize the growth of a person or group or an improvement in their quality of life. In doing so, people acquire such benefits as greater problem-solving capabilities (Saleebey, 1992; Cohen, 1999). This section examines empirical studies on immigrant children that are based on the strength perspective. It starts with theoretical considerations on adaptation and resilience, followed by an examination of empirical studies on social support facilitating immigrant children’s resilience and positive adaptation.

2.3.1 Theoretical considerations on adaptation and resilience

The process of migration is potentially a severely stressful occurrence for children and their families (Garcia-Coll & Magnuson, 1997). Literature on immigrant children has demonstrated that migration increases the risk of adjustment problems for children either as a direct result of immigration stress or indirectly through parental distress and disrupted family context (Short & Johnston, 1997). However, empirical evidence shows that many immigrant children and adolescents
generally adapt just as healthy as, and sometimes even better than their host counterparts despite the stressful experience (Sam & Virta, 2003; Fuligni, 1997). The concept of resilience provides a framework for understanding the varied ways in which children do well in the face of adversity.

When children experience adversity such as poverty, child abuse, or exposure to violence or disaster, their development is threatened and the risk increases for developmental problems including substance abuse, educational failure, and delinquency. Studies have found that no single pathway leads to these developmental outcomes. Rather, it is the accumulation of risk, which is the sheer number of adversities and traumas confronted by children and families, that seems to disrupt normal developmental trajectories (Rutter, 2007).

Berry’s acculturation model illustrated how children and adolescents experience stress arising from migration (“acculturation stress”) and used different strategies that lead to different levels of adaptation outcomes. The model suggested that immigrants typically use a combination of four strategies to deal with the changes that take place as a result of migration: assimilation, separation or segregation, integration, and marginalization (Berry, 1997). Berry’s model is helpful in understanding the complexity of the adaptation process. In this model, immigrant youth are active agents responding to adaptation by adjusting their strategies, leading to different adaptation outcomes depending on social support and other available resources.

Other theoretical models have also been proposed to understand the process of migration and adaptation with a focus on resilience and strength. Laosa (1997) proposes the developmental model, illustrating the resilience of immigrant children and taking account of the important role of mediating factors such as individual characteristics of the child (i.e., developmental age, sex, temperament) and external factors (i.e. parental reactions and the larger cultural context) that have an impact on
children’s responses to stress and the effectiveness of those responses. The model highlights the interaction of variables that mediated the stresses of migration, adaptation, adjustment, and development over time for immigrant children (Laosa, 1989). These variables, each critical to a child’s development, include characteristics of the sending community, characteristics of the receiving community, the school context, and cognitive appraisal and coping (Laosa, 1997). Laosa’s approach emphasizes psychosocial environmental process as they occur over time and views the immigrant as a developing organism interacting reciprocally with the environment. Laosa also accounts for the particular point in the person’s life cycle when immigration takes place. In particular, the age upon arrival was important in understanding an immigrant child’s adaptation and adjustment process (Garcia-Coll & Magnuson, 1997).

Based on Laosa’s work, Garcia-Coll and Magnuson (1997) proposed a positive approach to the study of immigrant children and their adaption, focusing not just on the mal-adaptation of children but also on how the process of immigration can increase an individual’s repertoire of coping skills, facilitate the acquisition of new and different skills, and broaden opportunities as well as world views. Within the approach, migration was both a stressful and growth-enhancing experience, and adaptation not only meant that children achieve normative development while coping with the distress appeared in the initial period of migration, but a more gradual process of acquiring new competence and skills within diverse socio-cultural settings. Garcia-Coll & Magnuson (1997) also proposed the concept of bi-cultural competence—the ability to comfortable and capably interact in both ethnic and mainstream cultures, and argued that biculturalism has important ramifications for the second and third generation of immigrant families as well (Garcia-Coll & Magnuson, 1997). These theoretical considerations shed light on the interest of placing greater research emphasis on
identifying protective factors and conditions for resilience and positive adaptation outcomes.

2.3.2 Empirical studies on immigrant children’s resilience and social support

With the increasing notion of resilience as an interactive process that involves risk, protective factors, and competence, resilience research on immigrant children has shifted its focus to identify protective factors that shield children and adolescents from the negative effects of situations too often linked to migration (i.e. low socio-economic status, emotional stress). Resilience research embraces the idea of developing prevention programs and direct intervention to reduce maladaptive outcomes and enhance successful adaptation (Lou & Siantz, 1997).

In exploring the protective factors inherent in the children’s social context, social support has frequently emerged as an influential situational variable associated with enhanced psychological wellbeing and resilience (Oppdal, et al., 2004; Garcia-Coll & Magnuson, 2005). Social support can be broadly defined as the range of significant interpersonal relationships that have an impact on an individual’s functioning (Schwarzer & Buchward, 2004). Empirical evidence shows that social support can contribute to psychological well-being and improve quality of life either directly or as a stress buffering mechanism (Heaney & Israel, 2008; Armstrong, Bernie-Lefcovitch & Ungar, 2005). It is hypothesized that social support has a direct positive effect on physical or mental health, independent of stress level (Cohen & Will, 1985; Oppdal, Roysamb, & Sam, 2004). It is also suggested that social support exerts a buffering effect on stressful events or experiences. Thus, social support may facilitate the redefinition or reduction of perceived harm or threat, and may contribute to a person’s ability to cope with stressors (Cohen, 1992).

There are various forms of social support, such as material assistance, emotional expressions of
love and care, resource and information sharing, and companionship support, each essential for children’s overall development. Diverse people may provide these various forms of support in varied ways and at different times, but it is not likely that one single network provide all four forms of support (Wellman & Hiscott, 1985). A range of evidence suggests that supports from parents, peers, and outside family members help migrant youths withstand migration stress and facilitate their adaptive outcomes (Cauce, et al., 1994; Hebert, et al., 2004; Wong, 2008; Peterson, 1988; Ho, 1999; Wu, 2014).

Coleman (1988) suggested that family social support was associated with decreased likelihood of school dropout and better academic achievement of immigrant children and adolescents (Coleman, 1988). In a similar vein, Light (1988) found that parental support and control over their children in Korean-Asian immigrant families were largely responsible for the children’s success in the public school system. Studies have also suggested that social support networks at the family level can mediate the negative emotional and behavioural patterns associated with economic hardship in immigrant families and encourage parental warmth and acceptance, which then indirectly promote positive functioning in children’s adaptation (Lou & Siantz, 1997).

Besides supports generated from parent-child interactions, support arising from sources outside the immediate family or household, including neighbours, teachers and friends may be particularly important for migrant children as the parents are likely to face their own challenges and difficulties and experience weak network connections themselves, conditions that may limit their psychological availability to their children and their ability to provide support (Garcia-Coll & Magnuson, 1997). For instance, Wong (2008) found adolescents to be more likely to consider the ties with friends as more important than those parents or teachers, and the perceived support from peers provided a
strong buffer for immigrant youth to withstand the stress from migration experience and other systems. Alva (1991) reported that immigrant students who had positive school experiences with teachers and administrators and felt being cared by these adults tended to have better academic performance. Garcia-Coll & Szalacha (2004) observed that fellow immigrants in communities where young newcomers settle in were supportive of their emotional adjustment and helped them maintain positive aspirations by playing a role in preservation of cultural values, reinforcing parental authority, and serving as a buffer against hostile mainstream society.

2.3.3 Synthesis: gaps in the literature to be addressed in this thesis

Most of the studies on social support are conducted in western countries; there is a lack of studies in non-western settings like China where culture and social relations are distinct from those in western cultures. This difference has many implications for the study of social support. In addition, despite the extensive evidence of an association between social support and positive outcomes among immigrant children, most studies examine a single source of social support, failing to recognize the complex interplay of different sources of social support from different levels of the social contexts in which children are developing. Such attention to underlying mechanisms is essential to advancing research on social support and to designing appropriate prevention and intervention strategies to help migrant children overcome migration and developmental challenges. The present study addresses the gaps in literature by applying a conceptual framework of social support that recognizes the strengths and resilience of Chinese rural-to-urban migrant children and their families, emphasizing different levels and dimensions of social support as well as social and cultural influences on social support. This study also applies this framework to explore the ways in
which migrant children can be better supported in adapting to cities.

**2.4 Conceptual framework informing the research**

This conceptual framework combines the theories of migration, resilience, and social support to understand the role of social support in the process of migrant children’s urban adaptation and their well-being under the Chinese socio-cultural contexts. Graph 5 illustrates the structure of the framework.

![Diagram 5. The Conceptual framework to guide the research](image)

Early literature on migration adaptation usually employed a stress-coping framework, in which migration is often considered an inherently negative experience consisting of many stressful events that tax individuals’ coping capacity. During this process, children have little control over their migration, and they are more likely to be affected by acculturation stress, changes of family systems and disrupted social capital networks, a situation that increases the risk of developing psychological adjustment problems and poor long-term development (Ashworth, 1982; Short & Johnston, 1997). In recent years, with the advancements in psychology and prevention studies, researchers have
emphasized the more positive aspects of migration and children’s resilience, viewing the individual child as a developing organism interacting with environment, and resilience as the interactive outcomes of accumulated risk and protective factors with the developing child (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 1998; Fraser, Kirby, & Smokowski, 2004; Laosa, 1997). In addition, the particular point in a person’s life cycle when migration takes place plays a strong role (Rumbaut, 1994; Garcia-Coll & Magnuson, 1997). Therefore, migration can be simultaneously a stressful and growth enhancing experience, presenting children with both greater challenges and greater rewards. As the immediate strains of the migration experience subside, a gradual adaptation process begins, in which the child develops new competence and skills within a diverse socio-cultural settings and enhances their life opportunities (Garcia-Coll & Magnuson, 1997). Social support is an important contextual factor that can be operationalized during the process to enhance positive outcomes.

Theoretically, social support is a multidimensional construct that encompasses physical and instrumental assistance, attitude transmission, resource and information sharing, and emotional and psychological support (Lopez & Salas, 2006). Four types of social support are identified and commonly used in research, each essential for children’s normative development: emotional support, tangible support, informational support, and companion support (Heaney & Israel, 2008). Emotional support is defined as expressions of empathy, love, trust, and care. Tangible support encompasses the concrete and direct ways people assist others, including financial assistance, material goods, or services. Informational support is defined as advice, suggestions, and provision of general information, and companion support refers to social companionship consisting of activities providing affiliation and contact with others and brings people a sense of belonging.

Caplan’s proposal of formal/informal dimension of social support, in which informal social
support is distinguished from formal support that comes from formal system, including social services, organizations, schools, and professionals, brings potential for designing interventions based on social support. According to Caplan, informal supports are developed spontaneously from informal or naturally occurring systems, including family, friends, colleagues, and neighbours (Caplan, 1974). Support provided by informal networks may make a difference in the family’s ability to cope effectively with challenges (Peterson, 1988). This type of natural social support may in varying ways be supplemented by professional helping (Tracy & Whittaker, 1987). The various strategies that practitioners apply to mobilize or modify the support available to targeted populations and/or to alter the nature and structure of the social network can be considered as social support interventions. Such interventions aim to create social support resources or to enhance or sustain naturally existing social supports (Whittaker, et al., 2009). Family, as the core of a child’s micro-system, provides the immediate social environment in which dyadic interactions take place, leading to various developmental results. The community and the cultural environment, meanwhile, or the larger social environment, have an influence on a child’s immediate family experiences and systems-level family dynamics (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 1998).

Chinese socio-cultural context has unique influences on the construct of social support. Unlike many societies in West that are based on discrete organizations which are formed by individuals and have their own boundaries to define who is part of organization and who is not, Chinese society is relation-based, composed of overlapping networks of people linked together through differentially categorized social relations, in which individuals define themselves in reference of their relationships with others. (Fei, 1947; Gold, et al., 2002). Social networks, ‘guanxi’ in Chinese, provide individuals with social space incorporating individuals in economic, political, social and recreational activities.
Guanxi not only conveys instrumental transactions, can be accumulated and converted for economic, political, or symbolic purposes, as a concept embedded in Confucius culture, the sense of reciprocity and indebtedness and the affective function are the central components of guanxi (Yang, 1994).

Guanxi in Chinese society is structured based on Confucian ethics. Under Confucius thought, the family is the basic unit of Chinese society, forms the first level of social solidarity (Wang, 2001). Chinese people are born to a complex social guanxi formed by personal relationship based on blood or geographic connections, which can evolve over time (Fei, 1947; Yang & Hou, 1999). The primary relations are familial and kinship relations, followed by consanguineous relations, neighbours, friends, co-workers, and eventually, the voluntarily constructed relationships such as those between service providers and customers. At the family level, filial piety is emphasized, which requires parents to take responsibility for taking care of their children while children must show piety to their parents in return and provide care to aging parents (Yang, 2006). Extended families have the responsibility of providing general overall support to their members and the members have the responsibility of increasing wealth and resources of their overall families and clans.

As we can see, cultural influences have important implications when applying the conceptual framework of social support to understand the experiences of Chinese rural-to-urban migrant children and design potential interventions. For example, with Chinese familial traditions that emphasize children’s obedience to parents and senior people, children’s voices are often overlooked and their experiences are usually understood through a proxy—their parents or caregiver—instead of directly involving children and adolescents in research. This may impede migrant children from fully exercise social support, a deviation from social support tradition. As well, since migrant children are an important part of their family dynamics when migrating with their families, practices meant to
support children should not separated from supporting families and enhancing parents’ capacity to provide care to their children.

This conceptual framework addresses the cultural influences, which is essential for the design of potential interventions. For example, social interactions must be observed at family level for family is the basic unit of Chinese society. Since migrant children are an important part of their family dynamics when migrating with their families, practices meant to support children should not be separated from supporting families and enhancing parents’ capacity to provide care to their children. While with Chinese familial traditions that emphasize children’s obedience to parents and senior people, children’s voices are often overlooked and their experiences are usually understood through a proxy---their parents or caregivers-- instead of directly involving children and adolescents in research. This may impede migrant children from fully exercise social support, a deviation from social support tradition.
2.5 References


Chapter three Methodology

3.1 Introduction

This doctoral study aims to understand the role that social support plays in children’s migration experience, and how they can be better supported for a healthy adaptation and development through the lens of social support. The research consisted of three parts, starting with an investigation of migrant children’s experience of migration and social support, emphasizing migrant children’s well-being and an empowerment perspective. This will provide the basis for understanding migrant children’s resilience and potential intervention designs.

Based on the study on migrant children’s experience of social support, the second part of the research investigated families’ experiences, emphasizing how families experience transitions and mobilize resources to get through crisis. Children’s social support and well-being are embedded in and affected by this family experience. This part of the research examined social support for migrant children and their families within the broader social and cultural context, particularly against the background of the massive rural-to-urban migration waves that affected Chinese family function and structure as well as social interaction patterns in the society. Traditional informal networks based on kinship relationships and social groups sharing same geographic origins, which previously constituted the most important part of social support, are changing. Understanding the experiences of migrant families seeking social support provides good perspective in understanding the dynamics of social change and its impact on individuals and families.

The last part of the research emphasizes formal support and its effects on informal support of migrant families and their children. Our purpose is not only to understand but also to enhance social support for rural-to-urban migrant children in China. A social work perspective and an emphasis on
practices in study are especially important at this time when the new model of formal support networks, including the state, community, and the profession social work, is emerging.

3.2 Research design

A qualitative approach is most appropriate to such a study. Here, I quote from Creswell on the definition of qualitative research for the justification on my choice of applying qualitative methods in this study:

“Qualitative research begins with an assumption, a worldview, a possible use of a theoretical lens, and the study of research problems inquiring into the meaning individuals or groups ascribe to a social or human problem. To study this problem, qualitative researchers use an emerging qualitative approach to inquiry, the collection of data in a natural setting sensitive to the people and places under study, and data analysis that is inductive and establishes patterns or themes. The final written report or presentation includes the voices of participants, the reflexivity of the researcher, and a complex description and interpretation of the problem, and it extends the literature or signals a call for action.” (Cresswell, 2007, p37)

Similar to Cresswell’s description, my research experience was an evolving process that involved several changes and adjustments, each bringing me to a deeper understanding of what a qualitative study looks like. Initially, with an attempt to understand children as agents independent of their families and parents, I hoped to investigate migrant children’s experiences and proposed a research plan with only interviews with children and youth. After entering the field and making preparations for collecting data, I found the child-focused approach did not work. It was not enough to just investigate children’s experience if I hoped to understand their social support. Migrant children’s experience were closely related to their family trajectories - the children became migrant children because their families were on move. Many of them had to move back and forth between the country and the city due to their family’s evolving strategies of migration. And one of the important reasons for the whole households move was to seek a promising future for their children. Without knowing their family experience, I could not get a full picture of migrant children’s urban experiences. Neither
could I understand their social support and find ways to enhance their social support. So I adjusted my research proposal and included family interviews in my research project.

I had a lot of interactions with social workers when doing my fieldwork in the urban village---a migrant community context. The social workers gave me a lot of help in recruiting participants. To establish relationships with migrant children and their families, before recruitment, I also volunteered in a tutorial program conducted by the social workers in the village. During the interactions with social workers and migrant families, I came to realize that migrant families had various needs. Their informal networks in the urban village and what services they could access played a heavy role in determining to what extent their needs could be met. It also became apparent that current development of social work in China was a part of the context of my study. These ideas became clearer when I discussed with my committee who kept regular meetings with me throughout my data collection to provide timely supervision and advice through online Skype conference that helped me reduce the cost of meeting and the inconvenience due to different locations (Montreal & Shanghai). In the meeting with my committee, it was suggested that it might be necessary to include a stronger emphasis on social work practices and social services in my research. At that time, I have already finished my fieldwork and come back to school with the collected data, getting ready to analyze data and starting writing the thesis. Instead, I adjusted my plan again and decided to go back to China for another round of fieldwork and conducted a case study on social services in the urban village to expand my knowledge on social support for migrant children and their families.

Besides the adjustment in the research plan, I experienced a shift in my research site due to unexpected changes. Originally, I was introduced to an urban village where a three-year social service project for migrants has just been launched, a pilot project for the local government to
explore effective governance in migrant communities with the collaborations of social workers (Wen, 2013). I thought this would provide a good opportunity to observe and understand how social work was practiced in urban villages with a migration population. However, complicated situations emerged from the project implementation; social workers had a hard time to balance their official role of satisfying the demands of the local migrant community versus meeting the high hopes of local government for positive social outcomes and their simultaneous desire to control and monitor migrant communities. The project was suspended as a result of failing to pass the rigid evaluation requirements posed by the local government. Given the time constrains of doing a doctoral program, I had to shift to another urban village to conduct my research. Eventually, my research arrived at its final form---three interrelated studies including the interviews with migrant children in the context of community settings, family interviews in the context of household setting, and a case study of an urban village for an understanding of community services for migrant children and their families. The journey also brings me closer to the essence of social research----it is about real struggles in people’s lives; it should come from and inform real life.

This study consists of three interrelated parts, each responding to a specific set of research questions, attempting to achieve an in-depth understanding of how Chinese rural-to-urban migrant children and their families experience social support during their urban experiences and how this support can be enhanced. This study sought to answer the following questions:

(1) How do rural-to-urban migrant children experience social support when navigating their urban adaptation in the context of urban village?

(2) How do Chinese migrant families experience transitions and what role does social support play in their constructing resilience? And
What social services are available in urban villages to support migrant children and their families, and what are the implications for social work practices in conducting community-level social services for migrant children and their families in China?

I began with investigating children’s perspectives on their urban experiences and their experiences of social support by using semi-structured interviews and participant observation to elicit youths’ account of their experience, and their perception and perspectives related to social support. This gave me a basis to understand the external factors that could be influencing their adaptation to the city. Then I examined the experiences of their families and how their families’ experiences interrelated with the youth’s personal experience, affecting their experience of social support through in-depth interviews with family members including parents and children as well as participant observation. The focus was on the family’s story and the participants’ perspectives and meanings. Last, I analyzed the community services in the urban village where the children and their families lived, and the effects of these services on the lives of the children and their families by applying a case study to investigate the social support-related social services available for the migrant population in the urban village and to build an understanding of the effects of social services on the social support for migrant families and their children. This reflected a pragmatist’s approach, which emphasized a concern with application of the research results – documenting what works and finding solutions to the problem (Padgett, 2008). Only with this combination of perspectives could a complete picture of migrant children’s social relations, in which social support is embedded, be depicted.

3.3 Research site and description of research methods

   The research site was an urban village in Shanghai, a natural setting that was sensitive to
migrant children and their families and allowed our observation on family functioning, peer interaction, and neighbour networking. More importantly, urban villages represented a context where rural and urban culture intersected and sometimes conflicted, which had a major impact on migrant children’s socialization. To achieve an inside view and understand migrant children’s lived experiences in the urban village, I conducted fieldwork from March to June 2013 and again in July 2014 in T village, a typical urban village located within the southwest outer loop of Shanghai. According to the 2010 national census, there were more than 2,000 registered households in T village with a total of population of 7,000, and 93% of the residents were rural-to-urban migrants (NBS, 2011). Local residents native to the city were mostly landlords, farmers who became urban residents after their agricultural land was requisitioned for urban development. Migrants in the village were mainly employed as factory workers, construction workers, domestic helpers or cleaners, sales clerks or unlicensed drivers, or they were self-employed as small vendors or in garbage recycling. Most of the buildings in T village were substandard constructions, crowded with residents. A typical family consisting of a couple with children usually lived in a single room without private sanitation or kitchen facilities. Families relied on water from community wells for washing clothes and purchased drinking water from their landlords. There were businesses located in T village, including grocery stores, tailors, internet cafés, small factories, and warehouses (see appendix for pictures of T village).

3.3.1 Study on migrant children’s experience

Semi-structured interviews were used to investigate young people’s experiences as migrants to the city. In general, interviews provide an opportunity for participants to articulate how they experience, perceive, and understand a situation (or a series of situations) in their own words (Mason,
so they seemed a good method to elicit youths’ accounts on their experiences. During the study, a sample of 18 migrant youth between 10 and 14 years old, a mix of boys and girls (13:5) was recruited with the assistance of a local social work station through a community tutorial program provided by them. I asked to volunteer in the program for one session, which provided me the chances to let the participants and their parents understand who I am and what I am doing, a process of establishing trust between researchers and targeted research population. I started recruitment in the following sessions until the sample size reached theoretical saturation. The criteria for this sample were that they were attending either public or substandard private schools at the time of fieldwork and had been living in the current community with their parents for more than 6 months (see Appendix for a summary of participants’ profile). During the interviews, youth were invited to talk about how they perceive their relationships with parents, peers, and neighbours and, when they encounter problems, to whom they would turn to for help. They were also encouraged to talk about their perception for future and if they have plans to for their future dreams.

The interviews took place in the social work station or the community library depending on the participants’ preference. Both of these places represented an unthreatening setting with a few youths in the village around for recreational activities. The interviews first took the form of one researcher and one youth at a time. However, after a few interviews, I was told by the participants that they felt nervous when being asked questions during the interviews, even though they knew me well and were

4 According to our observation, patriarchal is an important characteristic shared by many migrant families, reflecting on the fact that sons are more likely to be brought to cities for better education and the daughters would be left behind if the families cannot afford to bring all children to city. This is consistent with the recent national survey on children affected by migration, showing the ratio between boys and girls among migrant children was 132:100 (All China Women’s Federation, 2013).

5 The social work station was set up in T village five years ago as a joint effort of a social work agency that is affiliated with Department of Social Work at East China University of Science and Technology in Shanghai and a Hong Kong-based Catholic charitable organization. Over the past five years, the social workers in the station have established good relationships with residents as a result of conducting family visits on a regular basis and providing services for residents.
very willing to share their experience. I realized this one-to-one asking and answering question form emphasizes the unequal power relations between the young participant and the adult researcher (Barnes, Williams, & Clarke, 2001) and may impede their participation in the research. So I changed the format to interview two youths at a time. During the interviews, the youths helped each other to clarify the questions, filled in missing information and formed an alliance without feeling nervous anymore. This format created a more natural setting for interviews that empowered the youths by having them feel their experience and perspectives were valued.

Participant observation was also used as part of data collection. Participant observation is an essential qualitative research tool within a community (Padgett, 2008), and was used through all three sub-studies, helping me understand the data in context as well as a complement to the data from the interviews. It is an open-ended method that places the researcher in the field to observe and understand the participants’ social world by experiencing the same events and situations as those experienced by informants (Creswell, 2007). My participant observation in T village was recorded through reflective observation notes following a chronological order. The guidelines for participant observation remained as open as possible, trying to reflect the reflexivity of the researcher as the research tool in the study site. The questions guiding the observation notes were: What experiences have I had today in the village? What are the specific things or phenomenon I have observed? Why do I think it is important and what is my interpretation to the specific thing/phenomenon?

Generally, data analysis was guided by the principles of grounded theory, which emphasizes a constant comparative method of data analysis—analyzing data, then going back to the data with questions and looking for more information, and then entering analysis again (Charmaz, 1998). When transcribing and organizing the data, I established a coding scheme for preliminary analysis.
By using Nvivo, I grouped the data according to different categories, such as from children and from adults, by family households, by age and gender, and by the types and sources of social support the participants were describing. After preliminary analysis, I discussed the finding with my committee. Then I developed coding categories inductively based on reading the transcripts several times and applied the codes across the interview data. Concurrently, I categorized groups of codes into larger themes while comparing and contrasting with the observation notes.

In order to address the issue of validity, I discussed the analysis process and the findings during meetings with committee members and enlisted the help of a researcher who had expertise in the field of studying various issues concerning China’s rural-to-urban migrant children. He independently coded a selection of several interview transcripts and discussed with me his coding strategies, which I found had a lot in common with mine. I also settled a few minor discrepancies through discussion.

3.3.2 Study on migrant families’ experience

I used in-depth interviews and participant observation to study migrant families’ experience. Based on parents’ willingness and their availability to participate, ten families were chosen among the families of the migrant youth who involved in semi-structured interviews with the criteria that families have at least one school-age child living with them in the city and that the families have been living in the community for more than six months. The participants for the family interviews consisted of 10 children (8 boys and 2 girls aged 10 to 14) and 15 parents (10 male & 5 female).6 Most of the adults were low wage earners working in factories, as domestic helpers, small business

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6 The gender imbalance in the sample partially contributes to the factor that migrants prefer to bring boys to cities rather than girls, and partially because the fathers are usually considered as the head of the families and more expressive than mothers in the interviews.
vendors, drivers, etc., with a household income below the Shanghai average (Shanghai Stats, 2013). Their educational backgrounds were low, with only two having completed senior high school. Most families had two or more children with at least one son, and there were four families who had left their daughters behind in the home village, reflecting a strong patriarchal tradition. The average number of years of these families living in Shanghai was 7.2, ranging from two to eleven years. No families lived with extended family members such as grandparents, but most of them maintained at least two or three close social contacts with either relatives or laoxiang (the rural network of people sharing close geographic origins and distant blood ties) (see appendix for the families’ profile).

Family interviews took place within family homes, often in the presence of both parents and the children, to create an atmosphere for family members to share family stories and feel family strength. During the interviews, parents were asked about their family’s migration experience: how they came to SH, found jobs, lived in the village, and brought their children with them, how they dealt with those transitions and where they would seek help in times of crisis and difficult situations, as well as their expectations for their children and their lives in SH. Children were not obliged to answer questions but encouraged to engage in their parents’ sharing family stories. Participant observation was used to provide the context of the family interviews.

3.3.3 A case study of community services in urban village

I used a case study to achieve an understanding of how the social services available in a Shanghai urban village for the migrant population affect social support for migrant families. The study involves a triangulation of data collection methods while staying within the community case-study tradition, namely: documentation (including policy documents and the written materials
found in the village related to service provision); key informant interviews including social workers, service providers, community workers, local government officials (n=11), and a focus group interview with social work interns who were involved in service delivery in T village (n=5); as well as the researcher’s observations.

Documentary analysis is the process of collecting and extracting written texts that are relevant to research. Documentary sources are a valuable source of information for research. They can include: published articles or reports; public documents; company documents or personal documents (Mogalakwe, 2006). The documents that were reviewed and analyzed in this project were mainly policy documents and written materials found in the village related to service provision. The aim of the documentary analysis was to facilitate context analysis.

In the key informant interviews, participants were asked to describe their work related to providing social services to the migrant population, and how they think their work has helped migrants in terms of enhancing their social support. The interviews with key informants took place at a place of convenience for the participants, for example, their workplace or a public space in the community.

I also conducted a brief survey of migrant families’ needs and their perception of community services in T village among 21 migrants, whose children have participated the tutorial program in the village conducted by a social work agency. The participants for the survey were recruited through the tutorial program. In order to avoid affecting their participation in service programs, the participants were asked to give anonymous responses, and the youth were asked to collect the questionnaires with their parents’ responses for me.

For the data analysis, I first explored possible themes when organizing and categorizing the data.
Then I identified more specific themes by comparing and contrasting the data that seemed connected or conflicted. Then I applied the themes to my observation and the reflections based on the observation to make connections. The findings eventually emerged from a triangulation process.

3.4 Ethic considerations

The youth, their parents as well as key informants were asked to sign an informed consent form before the interview, outlining the topic and objectives of the research, the format, and their rights to refuse to respond to any portion of the interview or to withdraw before completing the interview without negative consequence. For the interviews with the youth, I obtained both the youth’s and their parents’ consents. The consent forms were written in both in English and Chinese with my contact information to make sure the participants can communicate with me in case of any questions. A copy of the consent form was given to every participant (see appendix for sample consent forms). After this process, all interviews were audio-recorded and transcribed. McGill’s Research Ethics Board III reviewed the proposal and provided the permission for the research. The participants were also informed that they were able to review the recorded interviews and ask to destroy all recorded data. The participating youth and their families were given a gift worth of 30 yuan as the compensation.

3.5 Plans for dissemination of results

The results of this study will be disseminated through publications in scholarly journals and paper presentation at conferences. In addition, I will translate the three articles that present the major findings of my research into Chinese and share with social work professionals in China through journal publication and conference presentation.
3.6 References


Connecting text

The research questions addressed in this article are: (1) How do Chinese rural-to-urban migrant children experience social support when navigating their urban adaptation in the context of urban village?

Increasing numbers of Chinese children are brought from country to cities, facing challenges arising from adapting to a new locale, new school environment and new relations. They also have to deal with institutional discrimination and exclusion brought on by their rural hukou, a situation threatening their well-being and future development. Despite the extensive evidence of association between social support and positive outcomes of children with transnational migration experience, little is known about how Chinese rural-to-urban migrant children experience social support when navigating their adaptation to cities. This article explores migrant children’s experience of moving to the city, seeking for social support from informal and formal sources, including families, schools, peers, and community/neighbours to satisfy their needs and responding to the challenges arising from adaptation and development processes, based on firsthand interview data from eighteen migrant youth, which providing important insights for practitioners to develop potential intervention and appropriately allocate resources to facilitate migrant children’s healthy adaptation and enhance their well-being. Such research is also important for empowering migrant children from a strength-based perspective.
Chapter Four: Growing up in urban villages, Chinese children’s experience of rural-to-urban migration: stress, social support, and adaptation

4.1 Introduction

China’s internal rural-to-urban migration waves involve increasing numbers of children who have been brought to cities, causing compelling social issues. According to the National Bureau of Statistics, there were 225.42 million migrants in China by the end of 2008, and children under 14 accounted for 20.8% of the whole migrant population (NBS, 2009). The most recent national survey reported that among 261 million rural-to-urban migrants, there were 28.77 million rural-to-urban migrant children living in cities (All China Women’s Federation, 2013). The continuously growing population of migrant children has drawn increasing attention. However, under China’s household registration system (hukou), which is assigned at birth and designed to control rural-to-urban mobility, migrant children cannot enjoy the same access to education and other urban social services as their urban counterparts because of their rural resident status. A growing number of studies have demonstrated that, compared to their native urban counterparts, migrant children experience more psychological difficulties and are subjected to marginalization (Zhou, 2006; Wang, 2007; Han & Wu, 2010; Xiong, 2010).

Literature on transnational migration has demonstrated that migration has a profound impact on children’s wellbeing, increasing the risks of psychological problems and affecting their future performances in various social contexts (Pittman & Bowen, 1994; Garcia-Coll & Magnuson, 1997). Despite these risks, a number of protective factors have been identified that can shield children and adolescents from the negative effects of cultural change or conflict and other detrimental factors such
as low socio-economic status or disrupted social capital networks on their normative development (Stodolska, 2008; Schmid, 2001; Harker, 2001; Portes & Rumbaut, 2001). Particularly, support from parents, peers, and extended family members appears to help migrant youth withstand migration stress and facilitate positive developmental outcomes (Siantz, 1997; Cauce, et al., 1994; Hebert, et al., 2004).

Given the increasing number of migrant children, a limited number of intervention programs have been developed and conducted to facilitate their healthy adaptation in cities. Social work practitioners require empirical research evidence to guide their practices; research exploring protective factors and the enhancement of resilience can be very helpful in developing professional intervention. To promote the development of interventions for healthy adaptation of migrant children in cities, this article explore young people’s experience of moving to the city, facing various challenges, and how they seek for social support from informal and formal sources, including families, schools, peers, and community/neighbours. We documented the effects of social support on their well-being, which interrelates with the contextual influences of the urban village. We begin with a brief introduction of conceptual framework of resilience, social support, contextual effects of neighbourhood, and child development. Then we provide a review of the literature on Chinese migrant children’s well-being in the context of the country’s massive internal rural-to-urban migration waves before describing the research methodology. In our findings, we present children’s perspective on migration, their lived experience in urban village, and their perceived social support and its influences on their adaptation and resilience, before ending with a discussion and conclusion where we argue that the well-being of migrant children should be the shared responsibilities of families, communities, schools, and the state; failure to provide adequate support for migrant
children’s resilience and potential development will be a huge cost for the society and the country.

4.2 Resilience framework and social support

Migration, as a stressful life event, brings children and adolescents a number of challenges such as acculturation, changes of family systems and loss of significant bonds, as well as disrupted social networks. A typical approach to investigating immigrant children’s adaptation involves using a resilience framework, which attempts to identify risk and protective factors that influence children’s various developmental outcomes (Fraser, Kirby, & Smokowski, 2004). Risk factors are those influences that increase the likelihood of psychopathology in an individual, while protective factors are the internal and external resources that enable an individual to counter the effects of risk factors and promote positive developmental outcomes, helping children to prevail over adversity (Rutter, 2007). In research on immigrant children’s resilience, social support is a situational variable that is frequently considered to be a protective factor which moderates the effects of migration stress and facilitates adaptive outcomes (Oppedal, et al., 2004; Garcia-Coll, & Magnuson, 2005).

Social support, in a broad sense, refers to the material, information, emotional and companion support arising from social relations that contribute to individuals’ psychological wellbeing and facilitate individuals’ overcoming of the difficulties that arise from external demands and challenges (Schwarzer & Buchward, 2004; Lin, 1986). The quantity and quality of social support have been found to have a significant impact on immigrant mental health (Mui, 2001; Hovey & Magana, 2002). Social support is a multidimensional construct that encompasses physical and instrumental assistance, attitude transmission, resource and information sharing, and emotional and psychological support (Lopez & Salas, 2006). Four types of social support are identified and commonly used in research: emotional support, tangible support, informational support, and companion support (Heaney & Israel,
The functions of social support may vary with different forms and sources but, overall, they contribute to individuals’ psychological well-being and facilitate social outcomes, such as migrants’ social adaptation (Wong, 2008).

When applying resilience framework that emphasizes the relative balance of relative balance of socio-cultural risk and protective factors in children’s lives as they both combine to exert a tremendous force in shaping the social maps and life trajectories of children (Garbarino, 1995; Bowen & Chapman, 1996) in understanding China’s rural-to-urban migrant children’s well-being---migration and adaptation are viewed as a developmental process of children who after getting over the initial period of coping with stress, they may develop competency in diverse socio-cultural contexts and bi-cultural competence (Laosa, 1989; Garcia-Coll, & Magnuson, 1997). During the process, social support is an important contextual variable making differences on various developmental outcomes.

4.3 An overview of literature on Chinese rural-to-urban migrant children

This section first briefly introduces the context for the emergence of migrant children, including the institutional system that frames their current situation. Then it addresses the literature gaps for the present study by reviewing relevant studies on migrant children.

China’s rapid industrialization and urbanization have resulted in massive internal rural-to-urban migration. With the gradual changes of hukou registration and the relaxation in controlling population mobility, more and more households participate in the migration process and migrants extend the duration of their stay in the city. This changing pattern has brought more children to cities, referred to as migrant children. In a more official definition from the National Statistic Bureau, migrant children are the children of rural migrants, accompanying their parents to reside in cities for
more than six months (NBS, 2009). However, their hukou status remains rural residents. Before being brought to cities, many migrant children are left in the home villages to be cared for by extended family members as parents migrate to cities for work. These children are commonly referred to as “left behind children”. These two groups of children represent a unique phenomenon that emerged during China’s recent, massive rural-to-urban migration waves.

In China, social welfare provisions such as education are attached to the jurisdiction of an individual’s hukou registration. Migrant children are brought to cities in the hopes of securing better education and upward mobility opportunities; however, without urban hukou, until very recently, a large number of migrant children were denied entry into public schools in the city. Instead, they had to enrol in the so-called “migrant children’s schools”, which were uncertified privately run schools with significantly lower quality in terms of facilities and human resources (Wang, 2008), used as temporary alternative for migrant children’s schooling and most of them were eventually suspended and closed after 2008 when the State Council released the Circular on the Abolition of Tuition and Miscellaneous Fees for Students in Compulsory Education in Urban Areas. It took the central government a long time to figure out solutions for the urban schooling of rural-to-urban migrant children, and urban public schools now are required to accommodate migrant students for compulsory education. However, the delay in policy implementation perpetuates a harsh situation for migrant children that extends to other arenas of their life.

Before 1998 when the Ministry of Education and the Ministry of Public Security jointly issued the “Provisional Measure for the Schooling of Migrant Children and Young People”, migrant children have been remained understudied compared to other migrant groups such as migrant workers (Duan & Liang, 2005). The group eventually drew increasing scholarly attention due to its
continuous growing number and the unique situation faced by them. A number of studies demonstrate that, compared to their urban counterparts, migrant children experience more physical and psychological difficulties (Zou, Qu & Zhang, 2005; Shen et al., 2007; Li, et al., 2008). For example, a 2004 survey of migrant children’s health condition in nine cities stated that the mortality rate of migrant children under five years old as 1.3 and 1.9 times higher respectively than local urban children. As well, only 55% of migrant children participated in health care programs, significantly lower than urban children (Zou, Qu & Zhang, 2005). The most recent survey on migrant children, based on the sixth national census, stated that the wellbeing of migrant children is still likely to be threatened by various institutional, socio-cultural, and economic exclusions (All China Women’s Federation, 2013).

Institutional barriers, including hukou system and the existing education inequity were considered as the main reasons for migrant children’s underdeveloped educational achievement in comparison to urban children (Kwong, 2004; Han, 2004). It is argued that decentralized education system in which the local governments are the primary educational resources provider for the child whose hukou is registered in their jurisdiction makes it difficult for migrant children to access equal educational opportunities as they move to cities (Kwong, 2004; Guo, 2009). The charge of the extra tuition fee for migrant children’s urban schooling also makes it difficult for them to access quality educational resources (Liang, 2007; Guo, 2009)

Private migrant children’s schools that are plagued by the high turnover of students, less qualified teachers, poor school infrastructures and facilities and substandard curriculum have negative effects on migrant children’s well-being and reinforced the disadvantages of migrant children in education, although they provide a feasible option for migrant children’s schooling in
cities, given their flexible enrolment threshold and comparatively low tuition (Kwong, 2004).

Most of the studies on migrant children tend to employ a problem perspective to examine migrant children’s urban experience. For example, migrant children are at higher risks of developing psychological problems due to poor school environment (Zhou, 2006; Lin, et al., 2009; Han, & Wu, 2010), family SES and limited human and social capital (Zhao, 2003; Shen, et al., 2007; Zhao & Li, 2010; Zeng, 2012), institutional exclusion and social discrimination (Zou, et al., 2005; Wang, & Zou, 2008; Lin, et al., 2009). They tend to ignore the strength of migrant children and their families, as well as the crucial role of supportive relationships and resources. Among the handful of studies focusing on social support for migrant children, most use quantitative research methods, lacking the qualitative evidence that would emphasize children’s perspective and voices. Examples include Zeng’s studies on how perceived social support can mediate migration stress and contribute to psychological adaptation using a sample of 334 migrant children and 237 urban children (Zeng, 2011) and He’s study (2008) on the influences of school regulations and atmosphere, teacher-students relationship, and social support on migrant children’s mental health status with a sample of 510 migrant children.

To address this gap the in literature and to contribute to the development of social work interventions, this article draws on extensive participant observation and semi-structured interviews with eighteen youth in an urban village in Shanghai to understand migrant children’s perceived social support, how and where they seek support for their resilience and growth, and to emphasize children’s voice.

4.4 Research method

This article draws on a larger study on social support for Chinese rural-to-urban migrant
families and migrant children, involving semi-structured interviews, documentary analysis, and extensive participant observation during three months of fieldwork in a Shanghai urban village. The fieldwork took place in T village, a typical rural-urban migrant community located beside the southwest outer loop of Shanghai. T village has over 2,000 households and 93% of residents being rural-to-urban migrants. During the fieldwork, we accompanied social workers visiting migrant families. Reflective notes and photos were taken during the activities to record observations.

This article explored young people’s experiences based on the data mainly drawing on semi-structured interviews with eighteen migrant youth in an urban village in Shanghai, who were invited to talk about how they perceive their relationships with parents, peers, and neighbours, and when they encounter problems, to whom they would turn to for help, as well as our participant observations. The sample was recruited with the assistance of a local social work station. The participants include migrant youth between 10 and 14 years old, a mix of boys (13) and girls (5). The criteria for this sample were that they were currently attending school and had been living in the current community with their parents for more than half year. All interviews are audio-recorded with permission and transcribed verbatim. The study’s procedures were approved by the Research Ethics Board at McGill University.

During data analysis, a primary coding scheme was developed based upon a review of the literature. After preliminary analysis, we discussed the findings among the committee and with other researchers in the field. Then we identified specific codes and categorized them into larger themes while comparing and contrasting with our observation notes.

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7 According to our observation, patriarchal is an important characteristic shared by many migrant families, reflecting on the fact that sons are more likely to be brought to cities for better education and the daughters would be left behind if the families cannot afford to bring all children to city. This is consistent with the recent national survey on children affected by migration, showing the ratio between boys and girls among migrant children was 132:100 (All China Women’s Federation, 2013).
4.5 Findings

In this section, we reveal some of challenges faced by migrant youth in their adaptation to urban life, and the contextual effects of the urban village on their development. Despite the adversity, migrant children presented unique resilient characteristics, seeking social support from different supportive resources available to them and actively mobilizing social support for their urban adaptation. However, the dilemma created by family expectations and limited formal support framed by broad social context limited their future potentials.

4.5.1 Challenges arising from adaptation

Initial settling

Coming to cities was perceived by most migrant families in this study as moving to opportunities, yet it also posed tremendous challenges for children to adapt to the new environments, new schools, new friends, even new familial relationships. Wang (this and other names are pseudonym) still remembered feeling so excited at a supermarket seeing so many things that he had never seen before in his home village. While after the initial excitement diminished, most of the participants started feeling confused, even frustrated in the new place. Yu talked about how he had been the target of his peers’ teasing because of his hometown dialect, which made him felt isolated in school until he gradually acquired Mandarin. Ma got lost so many times that he was afraid of going outside during his first year in Shanghai. Xing mentioned the nightmare she had during her first few months in Shanghai. She thought this was because her bed was so different from the stove-warmed “kang” beds she slept in at her home in rural northern China. “Loneliness”, “missing old home in hometown”, “feeling depressed but have nobody to talk to” were emotions frequently mentioned by young people when they described their experiences of just arriving in Shanghai from home villages.
Besides the frustration encountered in the new place, migrant children had to face the departure with their primary caregivers. Many participants had been left behind in rural home villages before coming to Shanghai, being cared for by extended families, usually their grandparents. Tang mentioned that she hid herself on the day that her mother came to take her to Shanghai for she did not want to leave her grandparents and home village. She said,

_I cried all the way to Shanghai...I missed them (grandparents) so much that I cried in my quilt almost every night of the first month...I didn’t want to talk to my parents because I didn’t dare and felt strange with them. (Tang)_

Many migrant children harboured mixed feelings about reunification---initial happiness over reunification coupled with sadness and grief over losing the bond with previous caregivers. The feeling of loss would eventually go away when they re-established a bond with their parents. But if they have to move back to home villages and leave their parents again, the psychological cost would be huge for migrant children, which will affect their future psychological and social functioning.

_School adaptation_

Many migrant children are brought to cities for better education and expected to climb the social ladder through academic success. Adapting to urban schools thus became the most important part of their urban life. All participants mentioned that the level of education and the facilities of all urban schools, whether public or private, were very advanced compared to their rural home schools. However, the stress for adapting to the new schools was usually overlooked by parents and the teachers. Li mentioned that he used to be a top student in his rural school. However, after transferring to the school in Shanghai, he felt it was difficult to catch up in his studies due to different syllabus and his previous learning experience. He felt particularly difficult with the study of English, which he had barely learned at his previous school. The pressure was so big that Li experienced waking-up
in the mid of his sleep and difficulty of falling sleep again for some period of time, according to his accounts. The situation resulted his being tired and distracted at school. His parents thought he did not work hard enough and felt disappointed with him. Luckily for him, he eventually caught up with class, but he told me that it was very difficult because “you have to work twice as hard or more than other students and nobody out there can help you”. For those who did not manage to do well in school, their parents and teachers simply labelled them as ‘lazy’ or bad students, ignoring the difficulties in their adaptation process and providing little support for them.

Lived experience of migrant children in urban village

This was an excerpt from the observation notes made by one of the authors on her first day in T village, reflecting how different insiders’ and outsiders’ perceptions of an urban village might be.

My first day in T village started with a frustrating experience, which kept reminding me that T village was different from other urban communities, and I am only an outsider... I planned to visit a youth’s home, and I was already given the information of her address. But I could not find it by myself. The address didn’t give me a clue, and in fact, most of addresses I saw were randomly arranged and confusing. I felt like I was in a labyrinth! I ended up asking local residents to help me find the place. I was told later by the social workers that most of the units in T village were informally constructed. Even though the house numbers were assigned and arranged several times, the informal housing units kept increasing. As a result, the house numbers didn’t work here and only residents knew how to find the right places.

As a gateway leading rural migrants to enter the city, T village was a vibrant place attracting informal business due to its convenient location and its economic informality. Stores and informal factories could easily be found in T village. According to the official village committee, there were 78 family-scale factories and warehouses, which did not have legal permission and were not under any regulation. However, these factories and business increased community pollution and posed dangers to children in the village due to a physical environment with high risk of injury and incidents.
Moreover, due to its informal nature, most of the housing units in T village were poorly structured without individual sanitary facilities; there were insufficient sanitation and access to clean water to be shared by all residents. Deteriorating housing, lack of appropriate sanitation facilities and access to clean water increased health risks for all residents, especially for children who were vulnerable to the attack of infectious illness.

Safety became a major concern because the parents had to leave their children at home unsupervised due to long hour work, and the neighbours could neither provide effective supervision. According to the youth participants, their parents had to develop various strategies to reduce the time of their playing outside. Yang mentions that when he was a young child, he used to be locked in at home while his parents were away. He remembered when sometimes he woke up very early in the morning, he kept the TV on until his parents came back from work to keep his fears away. Now TV has become his best friend and he spends most of his time after school staying at home watching TV: “My parents think it is better than me going outside to hang out with bad kids or being hit by unlicensed motor vehicles.”

When describing their impression of T villages, most of the youths interviewed found it had little in common with the city. In their eyes, Shanghai was a big city full of highrises and clean streets with foreign people here and there, while T village was full of shabby housing units and surrounded by a polluted river. Guan was a nine-year-old boy when he came to Shanghai four years ago. He liked to help his parents doing tourist business in Puxi downtown areas, the central area of the city, a good chance for him to explore the real city instead of the shabby village. One of his favourite things was to spend sometime in the bookstores, reading books with peace and freedom. He thought people there were quiet and polite. On the contrary, these youths did not think T village
was like their home village neither. A few participants mentioned that they missed their home villages where there were less people but more trees and space for them to play.

Unlike official urban communities in Shanghai, there was a lack of basic community infrastructure in T village, such as recreational facilities and community centres. The youths had to carefully use the facilities in the neighbouring communities; otherwise, school was the only place they could play sports. On the contrary, the number of the commercial Internet cafés in T village kept increasing, making money by attracting children and adolescents without appropriate regulation. As few if not only options they had to spend spare time, the youths stayed in those Internet cafés in an atmosphere without any restrictions on access to internet pornography, online games, even child predators. Bi mentioned his experiences of being hooked up by a teenager who dropped out from school in those cafés. He said, “Most of the players were my age, but the owners did not care, as long as they can make money.” He eventually skipped classes and hung out with other teenagers until his parents caught him in one of the cafés. Many youth had similar experiences to that of Bi; for them the lack of facilities in T village, which was supposed to be the major setting for their socialization, threatened their normative development, and their parents being incapable of providing supervision intensified the situation, which pretty much reduced them to a ‘street corner’ society (Whyte, 1943).

4.5.2 Perceived social support

Bond with parents

Many participants mentioned when dealing with various difficulties, parents, friends, and the teachers gave them the most help. The main sources of social support perceived by them were family members, peers, and teachers. Among them, the supports from parents were perceived as the most
important, which satisfied most of their physical and material needs. The participants described their parents as the persons on whom they can rely, especially during times of crisis. Tao mentioned his experience of dealing with leukaemia and said, “…they (parents) went to almost all big hospitals in Shanghai for effective treatment. They borrowed a lot of money to save my life. They don’t talk to me much, but I can sense their care from what they did for me. I hope I can be as strong as them when growing up.”

Parents’ emotional and companion supports can be important for children’s psychological wellbeing when going through many transitions arising from migration. However, as mentioned before, migrant parents usually had to spend long hours working, which affected their ability to provide companionship to their children. Poor parenting skills also affected the parent-child relationship and the child’s perception of support from parents. Many participants mentioned that they seldom received this kind of support from their parents for “my parents are too busy talk to me” or “my parents just don’t understand me”. Most of the participants also mentioned they had experienced corporal punishment from their parents, affirming such things as that their parents “only know how to give us a lesson with sticks”. Ma said, “I hated my parents when they were beating me, even though I know they do it for my own good. They hold too many expectations of me, and I always disappoint them.”

Making new friends

In the absence of the parents, peers or siblings were migrant children’s main companion, and they would first go to friends seeking for emotional help. They would talk to friends when they felt lonely. When they talk with their friends, “the bad feeling will go away soon” (Yu). For them, friends
are “someone you can not only play with, but they show empathy and care when you are lonely or sad.” (Yan).

Migrant children who came to the city usually experienced disrupted friend networks. Making new friends and having someone to play with became the first step of their adaptation after their initial reluctance to stay in the city. However, it was not easy for the participants to make friends in new places. Their first new friends were usually from their families’ social contacts or laoxiang (the rural network of people sharing close geographic origins and distant ties) who spoke the same dialects and shared knowledge of the home village. Yu mentioned that his first friend in the urban village was from the same home village, who helped him out when Yu was being bullied by other kids in the village. They became good friends later, and Yu called his friend ‘big brother’ not only because his friend was two years older than him but also because the ‘brother’ would give him protection from others’ bullying. They hang out all the time, going to Internet cafés in the village and doing other things that their parents would not allow them to do if they knew. Yu’s friend ended up dropping out school and hanging out on the street with other teenagers. Yu said they were not good friends anymore because he wanted to finish school and go to university. For other participants, they found it difficult to maintain stable friend networks among migrant children. Yan mentioned losing contact with her best friend when she moved away from the village with her family. She felt sad that the more grown up she was, the fewer friends she would have. Friends play an important role in children’s socialization, especially when they start entering adolescence. However, the friendships migrant children have in cities are often fragile and unstable due to the households’ residential mobility.
Significant adults

Teachers were frequently mentioned by the participants as significant adults in their lives. Relationships with teachers largely determined the children’s school adaptation. Support from teachers was crucial for migrant children to achieve academic success, to boost their confidence to overcome difficulties, and to actively interact with other supportive resources. However, many participants mentioned that it was rare for them to access this kind of support. Lin was attending a private migrant children’s school. She said, “I really like my English teacher Hong and wanted to impress her by improving my grades in English. But she only taught us for a couple of months. She barely knew my name before she left for another school.” Lin mentioned her class had more than 50 students, and after the English teachers had been changed for five times in two years, she gradually lost her interest of learning English. For those attending public schools where class sizes were usually smaller and the teacher’s turnover was lower, they mentioned their status---migrant family background, different dialects, poor performances---made them lack confidence in interacting with teachers and trying to obtain necessary social support.

Extended family members such as uncles and nieces were mentioned as a source of social support in a few youths’ accounts. Guan mentioned his close relationship with his father’s younger brother who shared the shelter with his family before moving to another place for employment. The uncle used to take him to sightseeing the city and take care of him and his younger brother when his parents visited home villages for family affairs. One youth mentioned a social worker who had been working in his migrant children’s school. The social worker asked the students to write letters to her through a mailbox she called the rainbow box about things they would like to share, especially problems they had in their life. But the rainbow box did not last long because the social worker did
not work there anymore after some time. In recent years, there were social workers in T village who provided social services for migrant families, including conducting counselling and tutorial programs for migrant children. In those programs, social workers, with the assistance of volunteers from universities, arranged educational activities to facilitate the healthy development of migrant children. The youths mentioned they had good time participating in those programs; it was just that the time and the space provided for those programs were limited and their parents always reminded them not to bother social workers too much.

4.5.3 Migrant children’s resilience and their urban dreams

Most of the participants expressed their hope of being competitive in schools; however, due to the limited educational background of rural migrants, migrant children rarely received academic assistance and advice that were crucial for them to succeed in education from their parents or their family’s social contacts. Their families’ lack of social and educational resources became one of the major disadvantages of migrant children and impeded them further integrate into urban society. Wei was the top student in his class, and his dream was to become a student in Fudan University, a top university in Shanghai. He said,

*I work very hard because I know my parents put all their hope on me. They hope for me to go to a good university in Shanghai. Then I can become a Shanghai-ese. But you know, sometimes you still need others’ help. I am lucky that the son of our landlord (landlords are local natives) likes me and gives me a lot of help. He is a university student. I call him brother. He comes home every weekend. The brother often helps me with my studies and teaches me a lot of things.*

Wei said that he always hoped to visit the campus of Fudan University but that his parents were too busy to take him there.

Many participants tried as hard as Wei. Some of them had been living in the city for a long time or were even born in the city. However, they faced a dilemma when trying to settle down and explore
upward possibilities in cities: after compulsory education, they had to go back to their hukou of origin to be enrolled for high school education. If they stayed in the city, they had to give up high school education and the possibility of entering university, which was the only hope for migrant families to realize upward mobility in cities.

Liang was born to migrant parents in Shanghai thirteen years ago and had lived in Shanghai his whole life. He was talented in sports and had been working very hard on physical training for a few years in the hope of entering a special school for athletes, where did not require its students to have an urban hukou, so he could complete high school there and avoid returning to his hukou origin. However, he did not get into that school and ended up entering an ordinary junior high school, which meant that his efforts for continuing high school education in city were failed, and if he chose to stay in city after junior high school, he could not go to normal high schools and therefore could not take university exam. He would be very likely to end up with being an unlicensed taxi driver, as his father and many other his laoxiangs were doing for a living, which was far from his dream of becoming a university student who could explore his potential, especially given his talents and how hardworking he was. When asked about his ideas for his future, his response was that he was “just going to play it by ear” (zouyibusuanyibu).

Even facing the great uncertainty of whether these children would have to go back to their original villages for schooling, most of the participants expressed a strong desire to come back to the city for university education. For them, they had to overcome the difficulties of readjusting to their hometowns—a place with which they were no longer familiar after such a long time living in the city. Some mentioned the people they knew in home villages became less and less. Yan mentioned her recent visiting back experience as a disaster.
I got terrible allergy symptoms that lasted for 10 days, and I tried various medicines and can’t get out of it. At last, my grandma tried a traditional indigenous treatment—she put mud all through my body, and after two days, all the reds and swollen were gone! She said my body felt strange to the place and needed some time to get familiar again to my home village.

Like their urban counterparts, the migrant children in the village had different ideas about their future, and most of them perceived themselves as city residents rather than rural residents or farmers, an identity closer to that of their parents. They wanted to grow up to be a teacher, a policeman, managers, a company white collar worker… and neither their home villages nor T village were big enough to hold their future dreams. The youth felt it was only the city they were living in now that could give them so much potential. But they remained with an overriding concern: if they had to go back to their original home villages, they would have to readapt to the different environment and school curriculum, just as they had had to go through many years ago when they were brought to the city. The process required tremendous cognitive and psychological capabilities, which reduced their potential performances and reinforced their disadvantages in future competition for universities. Their potentials were strongly limited by the so-called ‘glass ceiling’, no matter how hard these migrant children worked and their families wished to climb the social ladder through personal efforts.

4.6 Discussion

This analysis is based on migrant youths’ own accounts articulating the migration stress they experienced and the challenges arising from their adapting to urban life, particularly leaving previous caregivers, living in segregated urban villages, and adapting to a new environment with sharp differences from their communities of origins. Migrant children are vulnerable for having no choices in the migration process, and it is important to hear their voice on their migration and adaptation experiences. Some of our findings echoed with the literature that argued that migrant children were
at risk, with migration stress and various adaptation challenges threatening their normative development and well-being.

First of all, the recently established child welfare policy framework, including the 2011-2020 National Program of Action (NPA) for the development of children, the Child Welfare Act, and the Five-Year National Plan on the Development of Social Work for Children, aims to develop a more universal community-based, family-focused child welfare services. In particular, the 2011-2020 NPA calls for equal access to education and urban social services for migrant children. However, there is a lack of guidance for actual implementation and measures to enhance migrant children’s welfare and protect their rights, providing social support when they encounter various challenges in their urban adaptation. Our findings suggest that migrant children tend to experience difficulties including leaving their previous caregivers, adapting to new environments and schools, and may be subject to institutional exclusion in their urban schooling. Specific interventions and supports are needed to help them meet their needs for achieving their normative development. In addition, children’s voices and perspectives should be included and emphasized in the design of services and intervention programs.

Second, migrant children’s resilience, which has not been effectively addressed in the literature, emerged from their interacting with various sources of social support. When facing adversity, migrant children developed strategies to seek, obtain, and mobilize social support for their needs in education, emotional security, and other aspects of development. The increasing consensus is that a natural supportive network that involves family, school, and neighbourhood is a premise for children’s normative development providing most of the social, spiritual, and economic support (Peterson, 1988). However, our findings revealed migrant children tend to experience limited sources
of social support, or may only have access to sources that fail to provide the necessary support. For example, although parents play the role of primary support providers, taking care of most of their children’s material needs, when they are affected by migration, parents may not be capable of providing necessary companion and emotional support, which are important for migrant children’s urban adaptation, particularly for their psychological well-being. Household poverty and parents being occupied by long hours of work intensified the situation. In addition, poor parent-child communications impede parents provide support for their children and migrant children’s perception of family support. Some of our findings exposed that migrant children were subject to maltreatment due to their parents’ lack of parenting skills. This can be an important area for social workers to develop intervention programs.

Last but not least, the urban village is the community setting in which a family functions and peer interactions take place; it has a major influence on migrant children’s socialization and development. However, our findings suggest that the built environment of urban villages and lack of basic community infrastructure and institutional resources not only had negative effects on health development of children, but made the urban villages a dangerous place for them with increased risk for injury and incidents. Without basic community infrastructure and recreational facilities, a lot of migrant children’s peer interactions take place in the toxic places like Internet cafés without effective adult supervision. Moreover, structural factors such as community poverty and residential instability affect social disorganization levels in the village and reinforce migrant families’ disadvantages in terms of providing appropriate supervision and support for their children’s normative development. Peer support and interactions in urban village may increase the risk of migrant children’s maladaptive outcomes and reduce migrant children to street teenagers. In this sense, urban village
could be a ‘street corner society’ for children and adolescents.

Moreover, the segregating feature of urban villages further limited their access to necessary social resources in the host society as well as formal support available to them and their families. Without effective and meaningful interactions with urban society, it is difficult for migrant children to take advantage of the city and realize their potentials. Therefore, we suggest that more research efforts should be elicited to understand the contextual effects of urban villages on migrant children’s development. The government department for city planning and management should take account of children’s well-being and safety when allocating resources for urban village innovation.

4.7 Conclusion

This study bears certain limitations due to the limited time and resources for conducting a doctoral study in a country different from the country of the home institution. For example, there were only 18 youth participants recruited from one urban village; it would be ideal if the study could have included youths from another urban village in SH. In addition, the imbalance of boys and girls in the sample indicated migrant families’ strong emphasis on patriarchal tradition—a reason for bringing boys rather than daughters to cities for better education and leaving girls behind in rural villages. The girls in our sample mentioned that they had to take more duties to help with housework and took care of their younger siblings. Given the limited number of the girls in our sample, it is not sufficient to depict the gender differences in children’s experience of migration. However, this is an important directive for future research and possible interventions, for parents’ preference for boys may be extended to other aspects of their children’s lives, significantly influencing girls’ urban trajectories.

This article makes an important contribution to the study of child welfare in China, for it
enhances our understanding of children’s perspective and voices, with implications for further quantitative studies investigating migrant children’s social support. I especially want to highlight here in the conclusion that social support at different levels with various functions are essential to enhancing migrant children’s resilience and turning migration into a growth-enhancing experience for migrant children. However, limited sources of social support, combined with the conditions of their families and the communities, prevents too many children from realizing their full potential in the city, at a huge cost for the cities and society at large. The well-being of migrant children should be the shared responsibilities of families, communities, schools, and the state.
4.8 References


The research questions addressed in this article are: (1) How do Chinese migrant families experience transitions and what role do social supports play in their constructing resilience experience?

Family, as the core of a child’s micro-system, provides the immediate social environment in which the reciprocal interaction between biology and the social context takes place, leading to various developmental results (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). A consistent finding in the literature is the central role that close and caring relationships in the micro-system play in fostering children’s development, adaptation, and ability to overcome life adversities, especially the role of a nurturing and supportive parent-child relationship (Pittman & Bowen, 1994; Wyman, et al, 1992). The previous article has examined migrant children’s perspective on their adaptation trajectories and their perceived social support, showing that limited family support is one of the challenges for their successful adaptation. Therefore, in the context of this study, it is important to explore how Chinese families experience transitions arising from migration, and how the experience affects parents’ capabilities to provide supports for their children. In particular, this article addresses how current policies frame the circumstances and shape these families’ resilience process. Jill Hanley, as the co-author of the article, was asked to review the early and most recent draft of the article and provide comments for revision. She did not write any portions of the text.
Chapter five Rural-to-urban migration, family resilience, and policy framework for social support in China


5.1 Introduction

Migration is often a family affair, a stressful life event that has an impact not only on individual members but also on family relations. Literature shows that while migration can sometimes lead to family dysfunction, other families adapt successfully (McCubbin, et al, 1995; Garcia, 2001). Family resilience – when a family taps into both internal and external resources to make adaptive choices and overcome adverse situations (Greeff & Holtzkamp, 2007) – is a useful framework for understanding a family’s experience of crisis or adversity (Walsh, 1996). In China, the focus of this article, more and more family households are participating in migration, generating challenges for many Chinese families; how do Chinese social policies support or inhibit these families’ resilience?

A recent national survey on rural-to-urban migration shows that the participation of family households increased 14.7% between 2008 and 2011, reaching a total of 32.79 million people migrating to cities with their families and accounting for 12.6% of all rural-to-urban migrants (NBS, 2011). Despite this increase of families involved in migration, the current literature on Chinese rural-to-urban migration mainly focuses on subpopulation groups: migrant children (Duan & Yang, 2008; Duan& Liang, 2004); left behind children (Wang, 2008; All China Women’s Federation, 2013); migrant workers (Cai, 2007; Yan, 2008); and migrants who return home (Liang, 2004). Little is known about how rural-to-urban migrant families cope with and adapt to their new environment as a unit nor how Chinese social policies support or hinder their adaptation.
Yet families – their structures stable over many generations and deeply influenced by Confucianism – are very important in Chinese society as the basic unit for social solidarity. Massive internal migration will unavoidably change Chinese families in many ways, a concern when changes to family systems and dynamics are associated with increases in education, health and social problems for children and adolescents (Zou, Qu, & Zhang, 2005; Zeng, 2012). It is important, therefore, for policymakers and social workers to better understand the experiences of families going through migration transitions if they hope to support families in mobilizing untapped resources, coping more effectively with migration-related stressors and providing better support for children.

5.2 Family resilience and social support: an overview of the literature

Family resilience provides a theoretical framework for understanding a family’s experience of transitions or crisis, referring to the capacity of a family to successfully manage challenging life circumstances and adapt in the face of change and crisis (Walsh, 1996). When encountering the stress and crisis of a new adaptation, families attempt to balance the demands placed upon them with their family capacities (such as family resources and coping behaviours) (Patterson, 1988). How families perceive change, as well as their skills and resources to cope with difficult experiences, are factors that determine their level of resiliency (Patterson, 1988; Walsh, 2002). In the context of migration, the stressful events that may interfere with family developmental stages are considered to be risk factors that may result in a crisis (Greeff & Holtzkamp, 2007). In order to adapt to its new situation, the family must change its internal functions and structures and forge personal and relational transformation and growth out of adversity (Walsh, 2002). During this process, how the family uses various resources from within and outside the family to make adaptive choices plays an important role in its adaptation process.
Social support consists of resources arising from interpersonal relationships. It is a multidimensional construct that encompasses physical and instrumental assistance, attitude transmission, resources and information sharing, and emotional and psychological support (Lopez & Salas, 2006). The presence of a support system (whether formal or informal) is a significant factor in the prevention and amelioration of family functional problems and remains one of the most significant predictors of successful coping (Silberberg, 2001; Cornille, 1993). Social support networks at the family level can mediate the negative emotional and behavioural patterns associated with economic hardship in immigrant families and encourage parental warmth and acceptance, which then indirectly promote positive functioning in children’s adaptation (Lou & Siantz, 1997). Jurich et al. (1993) suggested that informal helping networks are of crucial importance to the adjustment of migrant families.

The informal social support provided by family, friends and other members of informal social networks is essential in one’s life and associated with individuals’ psychological wellbeing. In China, informal social support is closely related to ‘guanxi’, a set of social networks of central importance in Chinese society. A person is born to a complex guanxi composed of personal relationships based on blood or geographical connections. Guanxi conveys instrumental functions while emphasizing reciprocal exchanges and sentimental feelings, shaped by the frequency of contact, the intensity of trustworthiness and reciprocal obligations (Yang, 1994). Guanxi has been demonstrated to be important in job searching and entrepreneurship growing up (Huang, 2008; Bian, 2013). Studies show that the emotional and material support provided by informal networks has positive effects on the physical and psychological health of people with chronic illness (Xiang, 2009). It is also suggested that informal support provided by community networks is important for the social
integration of marginalized groups such as disadvantaged youth, people in community correction, laid-off workers, and people with disabilities (Xu & Fang, 2004; Jing, 2012). Besides informal social support, there are also sources of **formal social support**, including social services, organization, schools and institutions, and professionals. In China, most formal support is regulated by policies and provided by government or para-public organizations (Hong & Yin, 2006).

### 5.3 Chinese families and migration

Chinese society is relation-based (Fei, 1947; Gold et al., 2002). Under the influence of Confucian ethics, the basic social solidarity is solidarity of family and clan, encompassing many social functions and interactions (Zhang & Xu, 2004; Wang, 2001). Families, traditionally viewed as a kinship group consisting of a nuclear family and various relatives, usually living in one household and functioning as a large unit, are self-sustaining; members have the responsibility of increasing the wealth and resources of their families while extended families and clan provide general support to nuclear families (Han, 2005; Zhang & Xu, 2004). Traditional Chinese families emphasize hierarchy, patriarchy, and filial piety and have remained relatively stable in structure until the recent changes brought by massive rural-to-urban migration waves (Deng & Xu, 2006; Yang, 2006). These beliefs about family have been challenged as families move from rural villages to urban cities. For this reason, it is essential to consider the family in trying to understand the dynamics of China’s rural-to-urban migration. However, among a handful studies on migrant households, only one focused on families’ experience of rural-to-urban move by describing twelve migrant families in Beijing (Chen, Wu, & Sung-Chan, 2012). Policy making needs more research evidence to provide support for the families affected in migration process.

### 5.4 Hukou: the institutional barrier

China’s *hukou* system was designed to control population mobility, especially rural-to-urban
movements (Cheng & Seldon, 1994). The system attached a series of social benefits, such as education, health care, and social insurance, to the jurisdiction of an individual’s hukou registration. Responding to the massive movement of rural labourers to cities that began in the early 1980s, the central government has been gradually relaxing hukou restrictions. However, the hukou’s constraints still exist. In big cities such as Beijing and Shanghai, migrant children have to return to their hukou of origin for high school education and to take university entrance exams (Xinhua News Agency, 2009). As school districts have different syllabi, these children are at a disadvantage.

5.5 Emerging formal support for migrant families

Policies concerning the welfare of rural-to-urban migrants have improved since 2000. For example, an employment-based social insurance system makes social welfare programs available for some sectors of the migrant population (Cheng, et al., 2014). The ‘Urban Five’ policy initiative – resisted when it was first implemented because of the mandatory contributions from both employers and employees – includes basic healthcare, basic elderly pensions, unemployment insurance, workers compensation for injury, and maternity benefits for working mothers (Xu, et al. 2011). And the overall social welfare situation for migrants continues to vary substantially between different provinces and cities. Shanghai and Chengdu have exceeded the central government’s minimal standards, providing comprehensive social insurance programs for migrant workers (Hu, 2006). Beijing and Qingdao offer migrant workers a pension program equivalent to benefits provided for urban residents. Yet other cities remain unenthusiastic about implementing and enforcing central government policies out of concerns of slowing down local economic growth (Tan, 2000).

In response to the State Council’s Opinion on Resolving the Problems Faced by Migrant Workers, Shanghai released the 2006 Municipal Opinion on Improving the Welfare for Rural Migrant
Workers, improving wages, insurance, employment services, and public services such as compulsory education for children, birth control and maternity services. This then spurred the creation of various programs providing services specifically for rural migrants and the enrolment of migrant children in urban schools has been significantly improved (Xinhua News, 2010). However, since many urban public services are neighbourhood- rather than employment-related, hukou continues to limit services available to rural migrants compared to their urban counterparts (Liu, 2010).

5.6 Listening to Chinese migrant families: research methodology

This article draws on a larger study on social support for Chinese rural-to-urban migrant families and migrant children, which involved interviews, extensive participation observation and documentary analysis during three months of fieldwork in an urban village, conducting family visits with local social workers.\(^8\) The site for the field work is T village\(^9\) located besides the southwest outer loop of Shanghai. T village is a typical migrant community, with over 2,000 households and 93% of residents being rural-to-urban migrants (Shanghai Stats, 2012). The data reported in this article comes from in-depth interviews with ten families recruited with the assistance of a local social work station through a community tutorial program for migrant children, with the criteria that families have at least one school-age child living with them in the city and that the families have been living in the community for more than six months. The family sample consisted of 10 children (8 boys and 2 girls aged 10 to 14) and 15 parents (10 male & 5 female). Most of the adults were low wage earners working in factories, as domestic helpers, small business vendors, drivers, etc., with a household income below the Shanghai average (Shanghai Stats, 2013). Their educational backgrounds were low, with only two having completed senior high school. Most families had two or

\(^8\) The data was collected in the context of a doctoral research.
\(^9\) This and all other names from the data in the article are pseudonyms.
more children with at least one son, and there were four families who had left their daughters behind in the home village, reflecting a strong patriarchal tradition. The average number of years of these families living in Shanghai was 7.2, ranging from two to eleven years. No families lived with extended family members such as grandparents, but most of them maintained at least two or three close social contacts with either relatives or laoxiang (the rural network of people sharing close geographic origins and distant blood ties).

Parents were interviewed about the family’s migration experience, why they live in the village, their social contacts, sources of support in times of crisis, their relationship with their children, and expectations of and for their children. Children were encouraged to talk about their perception of family migration experience. All interviews were audio-recorded with permission (children & parents) and transcribed. The study was approved by the Research Ethics Board III at McGill University.

5.7 Migrant families in Shanghai: resilience and the role of social support

In this section, based on the parents’ and the children’s accounts, we explore how families experience migration transitions, a process shaped by policy context and influenced by internal and external family factors. One family’s story is used to illustrate resilience as an evolving process involving families’ perception of crisis, culture and family beliefs, making adaptive choices for their children depending on available resources and social support, among which informal support plays a vital role. Other emerging themes include the characteristics of informal networks in the urban village and the limitations of informal/ formal social support for migrant families.

5.7.1 JT’s family story

One youth encountered through the research project, JT, was an eleven-year-old boy in the
midst of treatment for leukaemia. His father was a truck driver, and his mother a domestic helper. His parents had come to Shanghai six years ago from a neighbouring province, leaving their two children behind to be cared for by relatives. They planned to make some money and return but things changed two years ago when JT was diagnosed with leukaemia.

JT’s father described being shocked by this huge crisis and having no idea what to do. Treatment was unavailable in their hometown yet, as rural migrants, they barely had any health insurance in the city. They were advised to forego JT’s treatment in Shanghai because a family of ‘dagongde’ (labourers without stable income) could not afford the treatment and the cost would devastate them. JT’s father told me, “the anticipated cost for the whole treatment was about 500,000 CNY, but my wife and I only made less than 3,000 CNY per month and we have another son to raise. We might have had to give up the treatment for JT.” JT’s father told us that it was the support from his extended family that helped them face this huge crisis and allowed them to try to save JT’s life:

My father told me not to give up because this is about life. In order to help us, my father – already in his sixties – started again doing odd jobs (linggong). One of my brothers gave me the money he’d been saving for his marriage, and the other gave the money they had been saving to build their house. They told me these things can be done later, but saving life can’t be delayed. Without my families’ support, I don’t know if we would have made it.

When JT came to Shanghai for his treatment, his younger brother was left behind at his grandparents’ home. It was the first time JT was separated from his brother. He called his brother often and counted the days until his brother would come to Shanghai for the summer break. JT’s treatment required his brother to donate marrow, and JT was touched by his brother being brave enough to save his life. He mentioned that his brother was only nine years old and yet tried to control his fear, keeping himself from crying during the operation because that would only make their parents more sad.

This family presented unique resilient traits when facing huge family crisis. Even while facing
overwhelming financial pressures, JT’s father was able to remain optimistic in planning for the future management of debt.

As long as we keep trying, someday we will become better off. When I am capable in future, I will pay back the people who helped me... I record every loan. I also record all the renqing (reciprocal favours) given by laoxiang. When my son was in hospital, they came to visit with money and food... I will first pay for the loan from laoxiang. Then I will pay for the loan from my cousins. Last will be the loans from my brothers and sisters, and my parents. Clear reckoning keeps good relationship, even for brothers...

JT’s family, however, despite strong informal supports, still needed to seek out formal supports. But it was only possible with help of a social worker.

I have never thought of asking for social assistance until a social worker told me I should give it a try. I didn’t know where or how to apply. The social worker helped me prepare the documents and forms. Residency permits, employment permit, illness proof, a lot of materials. Without the help of the social worker, I don’t know if I could have made it.

Eventually, JT’s families received 1,000 CNY from the government but JT’s father thought it was a negative experience and would not try again. It was a lot of work for very little money and he felt a lot of judgement and disrespect from officials.

Once JT’s health was going better, his parents wanted him to stay in Shanghai so that he would be better cared for and could receive ongoing treatment. However, without a local hukou, they could not find nearby a school willing to enrol JT. The same social worker helped them, contacting the local education office to authorize JT’s enrolment in a nearby school. Without this help, JT would have had to return to his home village for school.

JT likes his school very much; he has made a lot of friends with whom to spend time and share his thoughts and feelings. But he doesn’t talk or interact much with his parents; they are traditional in parenting, showing little emotion towards their children. Now JT’s biggest hope is to be academically competitive enough to go to university in Shanghai. He wishes his brother could have the same opportunities by studying in Shanghai, but he knows his family cannot afford the expense
of raising two sons in the city. The most he can expect is his brother’s visit in summer, when they can go swimming and play together.

5.7.2 Informal social network as the source of social support

JT’s family story of resilience is just one example of the migration experiences of Chinese families. Other families experience different situations or crisis, but they share many points in common with JT’s, presenting unique resilient traits during the migration process. Migrant families hope their hard work will support their children in achieving upward social mobility through education. However, as rural-to-urban migrants, they are denied affordable access to healthcare, education, housing, and other services that are essential for a secure family life in the city. Informal supports become even more important under this scenario.

The support from informal networks constituted the major source of social support for migrant families in this study: accessible and trustworthy people who understood their personal situation, whose help came at a minimum cost and with little stigma. As Liang’s father said, “In crisis, one friend is one possible way-out. Migrants are away from families and relatives and can only rely on friends to help each other.” Such networks provided both moral and material support, such as basic goods and temporary accommodation, particularly important for recent migrants. Most families reported moving to T village because of connections with relatives or laoxiang.

Migrants in T village often categorized their social networks as follows: a primary network consisting of family members and relatives; a secondary network including laoxiang or colleagues; and a third level of network of neighbours and acquaintances. Informal support and assistance came mainly from primary and secondary networks. In particular, kinship-based networks were found to
be the central and strongest networks upon which people depended when encountering crisis or financial difficulties, making it very important to maintain good relationship with relatives and laoxiang. Xiao’s father described their experience after he lost his job due to an injury from a traffic accident two years ago:

I felt like the sky was falling down on me. I lost my job and I didn’t have any insurance. My wife and my three kids rely on me. I couldn’t stop worrying about how to support the family, even while I was in hospital. My laoxiang helped me out. They watched out for my children when my wife was taking care of me in hospital. They visited me in the hospital with food and money. When I recovered, I borrowed money from my cousin and other relatives and open a small business selling vegetables.

As a floating population, migrant families rely heavily on kinship or hometown social networks to guide them through new places and into specific occupations. Migrants in the village have high levels of bonding relationships with family, relatives or laoxiangs. Laoxiang offer opportunities for friendly socializing, allowing migrants to discuss common experiences, to express mutual affection, understanding and trust. Traditional Chinese families tend to be self-sustained; when nuclear families encounter crisis, extended families and clans have a responsibility to provide support, seen as an extension of self-support. Only when problems are too big for the family and the clan, would people turn to laoxiang. But migrant families remain vulnerable when encountering crisis because the current policy framework means they have to rely nearly exclusively on informal support, insufficient to lift them out of adversity.

5.7.3 The limits of informal support: homogenous social contacts

In the composition of its buildings and inhabitants, an urban village is essentially a village surrounded by the city, retaining numerous rural traditions. Many rural-to-urban migrants continue to live in a rural manner similar to that found in their home village, a “separation strategy of
acculturation” (Gui, Berry, & Zheng, 2011). They tend to limit their social contacts to a small circle. As with their rural counterparts, the migrants in this study tended to maintain a division between insider relationships (zijiren) and outsider relationships (bieren). Insiders included people who share blood or close geographic and township ties and are characterized as kind, trustworthy, caring, helpful and empathetic. Outsiders were people who were not so closely connected and were characterized as less worthy of trust and less reliable. The strong bonding relationship with homogenous contacts may actually limit migrants’ opportunities to establish social ties in their new locality and to access the more diverse support that can be essential for the long-term adaptation of children and families. However, unlike in rural places where neighbourhood relationships are very important, neighbours in the urban village – a place on the move – were just passing acquaintances.

People come and go in search of a living. As Yu’s parents said,

> We greet each other when we meet. And we keep good relationship with neighbours. After all, we are migrants. But we don’t really know each other, nor talk from our hearts. They are not like laoxiang, who we know each other’s backgrounds. Some neighbours just left for other places without telling us.

In general, the support available from informal networks was not enough to meet the complex needs of migrant families. Xu, for example, mentioned his frustration in looking for someone to help him with his English studies. Xu thought he could have been successful in English studies, if only his parents’ social contacts had been able to help him. Their own low education attainment made this impossible. So he wrote a composition in English: “My favourite relative is my uncle. He is an English teacher in my school. I like him very much because he can help me with my English studies.”

Xu shared that, although this uncle didn’t exist, he likes to dream about it. Many parents expressed stress related to their lack of social contacts who had ‘wenhua’ (education and sophisticated knowledge) to help their children to achieve academic success and integrate into the city. Wei was a
different example. He was the top student in his class, the one with the most impressive academic performance among our young participants. He attributed his success to the good relationship with his local native landlord’s son, who graduated from university and helped him with his study during weekends.

5.7.4 Insufficient formal support

Unlike JT’s family experience, most of the migrant families in this study had never received any formal supports in times of crisis. According to them, a lack of knowledge about available services and limited access to these services were the two main reasons they had never had any formal support. Most of them thought their migrant status disqualified them from local government support. Xiao’s father described his experience of trying to obtain proof of his disability, a requirement in applying to the local government fund for people with disabilities. Those responsible for the application process refused to help him and told him that if he wanted get money from the government without working hard, he should go back to where he came from. The experience of Xiao’s father revealed that institutional discrimination and people’s prejudice toward rural migrants are invisible barriers that exclude them from formal support.

Besides, culture plays an important role in influencing Chinese migrant families’ receiving social support. In the process of these migrant families striving for resilience, culture as an influential factor should be taken account. Many beliefs and hopes were related to traditional Chinese culture, helping them overcome adversity. For example, many parents longed for their child to be a dragon, to have a bright future (wangzicheng long), believing that their sacrifice and hard work were worthwhile. Their children’s success was the glory of the whole family clan. Xiao’s father talked
about having to endure fate if their problems could be overcome and said, “you wait for those days to pass... and I put a smile on every single day. “Despite enhancing extended family support in times of crisis, culture can also sometimes hinder migrants from receiving formal support, preventing resilience. Most of the families interviewed reported a preference of managing difficulties on their own rather than asking for external help. Lin’s parents said, “No families live an easy life. The others have their own difficulties and we should not bother them by bringing ours.” This reflects a passive help-seeking preference influenced by traditional Chinese culture based mainly on Confucianism with Taoist and Buddhist influences. Under these philosophies, reciprocity is always emphasized when one seeks help from others and “enduring adversity” is appreciated. The possible price of returning the favour prevents ones from actively seeking for help, especially when it is difficult to consider how to “return the favour”. Liang’s father said he had invited a social worker for dinner as a way to reciprocate the help for his child. After his thankful gesture was turned down by the social worker, he decided never to ask for help again because it was embarrassing. Similarly, JT’s father also mentioned his concerns related to the fact that he did not know how to pay back the social worker who had helped his family so much. As we can see, culturally influenced passive help-seeking patterns and a great concern for reciprocity make it difficult for migrant families to seek support from formal organizations.

Deeply rooted in hukou system and other institutional barriers, the current dilemma shared by all rural-to-urban migrant families is whether or not their children are able to continue staying in city and complete high school before taking university entrance exams. If they do not find a way to access urban high schools, they have to consider another possible family separation. Li’s father said, “we have left our daughter in home village, staying with her grandparents... When she reached the
age for primary school, there was no policy allowing migrant children to go to urban schools, so we had to leave her behind, and we have had a lot of guilt about her. We don’t want our son to repeat our daughter’s experience, being left behind too. But who knows the future? We have to play it by ear.”

5.8 Policy framework for supporting migrant families and fostering family resilience: Discussion

Most of the families interviewed for this study have been able to settle down in the city, their children attending local schools and earning an increased family income. They have achieved this success despite various adversities, including changes of family structure or financial crisis resulting from unprepared accidents or unemployment. These findings provide important insight into Chinese families’ resilience through examining migrant families’ experiences of transitions and trying to adapt to life in Shanghai. The accounts of the parents and their children describe how, when facing crisis, families usually manage to make adaptive choices after many shifts in perspectives according to available resources and social support. In documenting migrant families’ use of informal and formal supports, this study provides important perspectives for policy improvement.

First, although the hukou system is changing, this system, along with other institutional barriers, still frames the adverse situation faced by many migrant families. Limited by hukou registration, rural-to-urban migrants and their children do not enjoy the same essential services – such as health care, education, basic housing – as urban citizens. Many families live in impoverished urban villages (Ke & Li, 2001). They have to choose to leave young children behind in their hometown due to a lack of care giving capacity. Recent policy changes allow migrant children to study in public schools; however, due to the limitations imposed by the hukou system, as rural-to-urban migrant children reach middle-school age, they have to return to their hukou of origins to prepare and be competitive.
for high school and university, resulting again in family separation for migrants. If children choose to stay with their family in cities beyond primary school, they have to give up high school education and the possibility of entering university, which is the only hope for migrant families to realize upward social mobility in cities.

Second, current social policies leave rural-to-urban migrant families very vulnerable when facing family crisis. Lacking accessible formal supports such as health care and social assistance, these families have to solely rely on informal supports, insufficient to help them out of adversity. Although some welfare policies are changing, and rural migrants can now be covered with basic social insurance through employment, there are many barriers preventing them to access formal support. JT’s family’s experience of applying for social insurance and other families’ stories show that the disadvantages of rural migrants in receiving formal support come from not only a lack knowledge of available resources, but also the existence of invisible barriers such as process exclusion and discrimination toward rural migrants, preventing them from accessing and fully exploiting formal support.

Third, Chinese families have remained a stable self-sustained model for a long history. Nowadays, families face more difficulties and have begun using more diverse coping strategies within modern society. However, a lot of responsibilities are placed on families and challenges, such as caring for senior parents and parenting young children, are resolved within the regime of families given a lack of support from the state. Policies regarding providing support to vulnerable families and families in crisis are extremely important in fostering family resilience and allowing them to access formal support necessary to overcome of adversity. It is more effective with less social cost to prevent family dysfunction than to deal with problems resulted from disrupted families.
This study has implications for social workers and service providers for migrant families. As informal supports play an important role in migrant families’ resilience, social services for migrant families should focus more on enhancing their informal networks. As the findings show, migrants’ informal networks tend to be limited to a small circle. These families thus lack the diverse social capital necessary for entering into new social networks, organizations, institutional activities, and integrating into the host society. Services should not only provide direct support, but also help migrant families to establish horizontal networks and meaningful links to local people and urban society in order to meet their complex needs.

Culture is important for social work practice in China. In terms of help seeking, traditional Chinese culture based on a Confucian ideological system combined with traces of Taoist and Buddhist thoughts forms the philosophical basis of the relationship between seeking help and offering help (Wang, 2001). With Confucians, family tends to be self-sustained, and family members have responsibilities to help other members of extended families, considered as self-support. With the Taoist ideas that have more influence in ordinary people’s everyday life, people tend not to ask help as a form of self-respect. They must also consider the price of asking help—to return the favour someday (Fei, 1947; Wang, 2001). The findings of the study show that culture plays an influential role in rural-to-urban migrant families’ resilience, both as a risk factor impeding resilience and as protection facilitating adaptation outcomes. This study provides insights for bringing cultural awareness into social work practices with migrant population from different rural areas with different culture traditions. For example, people live in countryside tend to value kinships and close geographical relationships, and traditional ethical rules such as patriarchy and filial piety still have a powerful impact on their daily life; while the city represents diversity, changes, openness, and
economic advancement. Currently, Chinese social workers are debating the indigenization of this historically western profession. The rural-urban cultural sensitivities reflected in this study are an important perspective to include in the indigenization process of social work in China.

5.9 Conclusion

The experiences of rural-to-urban migrant families are just one example of how millions of Chinese families are coping as Chinese society undergoes unprecedented transformations. This article provides insights into Chinese rural-to-urban migrant families’ experiences, particularly how these families go through transitions arising from migration, interacting with various social supports within the particular cultural and social context, and eventually achieves adaptation. The study aims not only to provides important insight for policy improvement in terms of supporting vulnerable families in current China, but also to enrich family resilience research that are based on Western evidence by bringing in Chinese experiences.
5.10 References


The research questions addressed in this article are: (1) What social services are available in urban villages to support migrant children and their families and (2) What are the implications for social work practices in conducting community-level social services for migrant children and their families in China?

Large numbers of migrant families live in urban villages—the migrant enclaves within Chinese cities – and community services have emerged in a few urban villages in Shanghai. Our previous findings on family migration experience (Wen & Hanley, 2015) suggest that, despite the fact that informal social support plays an important role in the process of migrant families achieving resilience, these families tend to rely on informal social support that is heavily influenced by rural guanxi, which limits their integration into cities and cannot always provide the necessary support for their children. The reciprocal nature of guanxi can also prevent migrants from seeking formal support, due to their fear of not being able to return the favour, thereby reinforcing migrant families’ disadvantages in the city. To address this concern, the current article presents a case study examining the social services in a Shanghai urban village through the lens of social support, aiming to provide: (1) an understanding of how social services in urban villages impact migrant youth and their families’ social support and; (2) insight for the development of community-level social work practices to enhance social support for migrant children and their families.
Chapter Six Emerging social services in a Chinese urban village: intervention for creating social support

6.1 Introduction

Social support is essential for migrants in managing ongoing challenges arising from the migration process and in enhancing their psychological well-being (Ryan, et al., 2008; Lopez, & Salaz, 2006; Cauce, et al., 1994). Considering the complex needs of migrant families in adapting to urban life and the important role of social support in migrant youth’s psychological well-being and family resilience (Hebert, et al., 2004; Harker, 2001), social support has been recognized as a key concept for developing community services for migrant population (Greef & Holtzkamp, 2007; Simich, et al., 2005).

In China, recent years have witnessed an increasing number of social services and a wide range of programs promoted by policy changes and migration research for a more inclusive society for rural-to-urban migrants. Well-known examples include the Sunshine Project, providing accessible employment training to rural migrant workers, and the Rainbow program providing reproductive health services for female migrant workers (Liu, 2010; Xu, Guan & Yao, 2011). However, little is known about how social services impact migrants’ social support, particularly in the context of urban villages where social services may well be an effective means to help individuals and families to meet their needs. To address this gap in our knowledge, this article presents a case study of an urban village in Shanghai to examine the development of social services in urban villages and how these services impact social support for migrant children and their families. The questions to be answered in this article include: What social services are available in urban villages to support migrant children and their families, and what are the implications for social work practices in conducting
community-level social services for migrant children and their families in China?

We begin this article with a brief background on China’s rural-to-urban migration and the emergence of urban villages. Then we provide an overview of the literature on social support for Chinese migrant families and emerging social work practices in urban villages. Drawing on the findings from our case study in an urban village in Shanghai, we explore how social services are developed and delivered in urban villages and their impact on social supports for migrant children and their families. Based on the analysis of the impact of these services on migrant families’ social support, we propose a model for social support interventions in urban villages, offering recommendations for social work professionals in their practice with the Chinese rural-to-urban migrant population.

6.2 China’s internal rural-to-urban migration and the emergence of urban villages

China has been going through unprecedented urbanization since the economic reforms beginning in the 1980s and rural-to-urban migration lies at the core of the process. In the past thirty years the country’s urban population has grown by about 440 million and half this growth is attributable to rural-to-urban migration (Cai & Wang, 2007). Although migrants from rural areas move to cities in search of a better life, they find themselves caught up in rural-urban division and the limitations of hukou registration, an institutional instrument to control population mobility. Many of them can only take low-wage, long-hour physical work that is not attractive to local residents, while also being excluded from many of the social services that their urban counterparts enjoy. Many newcomers live in migrant enclaves, usually found in impoverished urban areas or city fringes, known as “urban villages” (Ke & Li, 2001).

“Urban village” is a literal translation of the Chinese chengzhongcun, or “villages in the city”,
describing rural villages that have been surrounded or otherwise encroached upon by urban expansion. As a by-product of China’s urbanization, urban villages occur during rapid city expansion in which farmland or villages on city fringes has been acquired by city government. Indigenous farmers give up farming and construct inexpensive housing units to rent to rural newcomers who do not have access to urban housing and cannot afford accommodation cost in cities (Song, Zenou, & Ding, 2008). Despite that local governments have been discouraging the growth of urban villages within their boundaries due to the potential threat to management and public security, the number of rural-to-urban migrants and their demands for affordable accommodations continue to rise in cities, especially in metropolises such as Beijing and Shanghai. While official statistics are difficult to obtain, according to Sun (2013) there were 189 urban villages in Beijing and 104 in Shanghai in 2013\textsuperscript{10}.

As newly emerged transitional urban communities, urban villages are under the administration of Neighbourhood or Village Committees, which are responsible for providing social services to its residents. However, due to the fact that most urban social services are attached to an urban resident status (\textit{hukou}), the neighbourhood committees did not have the mandate to provide social services to rural-to-urban migrants whose \textit{hukou} was not registered in their jurisdiction. Therefore, the provision of social services in urban village remains to a large extent unclear and informal (Gransow, 2011).

6.3 Community service and social work development in China: A brief introduction

In the planned economy of China, it was the state’s responsibilities to look after urban residents’ welfare needs, and work units were responsible for providing a variety of welfare services ranging from housing, schooling, job placement and retirement to medical needs. After the economic reform

\footnote{\textsuperscript{10} In governmental discourses, urban villages are often viewed as the by-product of urbanization and uncontrolled city planning, and the number is expected to be reduced and eventually diminished.}
toward a market economy in the 1980s, most state-owned enterprises experienced a decline and a community-based approach was used to cater for people’s welfare needs. Community services thus were considered an alternative way of providing a supplemental social safety net in urban areas, while the central government continued to supply the overall welfare infrastructure such as subsidized housing and medical benefits (Xu & Chow, 2006). In 1994, the Ministry of Civil Affairs (MCA), the entity in charge of the responsibility of social welfare, along with another 14 government ministries, proposed the official definition of community services: “under government guidance, street-level organizations and the lower level of neighbourhood committees are to address the various needs of the community by providing welfare services to residents” (MCA, 1995).

The majority of community services targeted the general welfare population with a wide range including employment, housing, health care, elderly care, crime, prevention and education, i.e., employment training for laid-off workers, homecare for the elderly and the disables, services for children and adolescents, social assistance for the poor, services for veteran, etc. It also provided residents with recreational activities, educational programs, as well as fee-charging services such as convenience stores (MCA, 1995). In recent years, social work has become more involved in community service system, as the government took top-down initiative to promote the development of social work as a profession in China (Guan, 2010).

Social work as a profession was introduced to China in the 1980s as a remedy to the many social problems emerging from the country’s fast economic growth and the enormous social and economic transformations, such as the massive lay-off of workers from previously state-owned enterprises, vulnerable rural-to-urban migrants and their children, increasing social disparities, etc. However, social work remained widely seen as an academic discipline before the mid-2000s. In the
1980s, with the approval of the Ministry of Education, four universities started baccalaureate programs in social work and management. Then social work education programs increased to more than 250 in 2012 (Gao & Yan, 2014). In 2006, the Ministry of Personnel and MCA issued “the Regulations of Evaluation of Social Work Professional Levels”, which publicized the government’s recognition and set out rules for its regulation, and social work was officially accredited as a vocation. Later that year, the Chinese Communist Party released an official document announcing social work as a key part of the mechanism to meet the needs for a harmonious society, and that social work positions were to be established within the public system. In 2010, with the release of the National Mid-to-Long Term Talent Development Outline (Central Organizing Bureau, 2010), the central government identified the cultivation of highly skilled social work professionals (referred to as a “Social Work Talent Troop”) as a priority.

In Beijing, Shanghai, and Shenzhen, where local governments have actively responded to the central government’s commitment to social work development, efforts have been made to install social work in the municipal social service system (Leung, 2013). Two major schemes were tested. One was to fund social work positions, in which social workers were deployed to different government service units, like seniors’ homes, orphanages, and hospitals, to provide social work services. The other scheme was through the funding of social work projects in which non-governmental social work service organizations bid for service contracts through an open-tendering process. Through the two purchasing schemes, municipal governments purchased social work services from local social work service organizations where social workers were recruited, trained and supervised, creatively helping to embed social work in the existing social service systems.
6.4 Social support for Chinese rural-to-urban migrant families

Theoretically, social support is a multidimensional construct that encompasses physical and instrumental assistance, attitude transmission, resource and information sharing, and emotional and psychological support (Lopez & Salas, 2006). Four types of social support are identified and commonly used in research: emotional support, instrumental/material support, informational support, and companion support (Heaney & Israel, 2008). Emotional support is defined as expressions of empathy, love, trust, and care. Instrumental/material support encompasses the concrete and direct ways people assist others, including financial assistance, material goods, or services. Informational support is defined as advice, suggestions, and provision of general information. And companion support refers to social companionship consisting of activities providing affiliation and contact with others, bringing people a sense of belonging (Heaney & Israel, 2008). The functions of social support may vary with different forms and sources but, overall, they contribute to individuals’ psychological well-being and facilitate social outcomes, such as migrants’ social adaptation (Wong, 2008).

Within the formal/informal dimension, informal support is identified as closely related to an individual’s social network, such as friends, family members, and colleagues, while formal support is provided by formal systems, including social services, organization, schools and institutions, and professionals (Caplan, 1974). The literature suggests that informal social support is of particular relevance for migrants, helping them to meet their immediate settlement needs, providing social participation opportunities and contributing to an enhanced mental health (Heaney & Israel, 2008). However, the interpersonal aid available through social networks is not enough given the complex needs of migrant families integrating to the host societies (Wen & Hanley, 2015; Neufeld, et al., 2002). Social programs and services are necessary to promote equal opportunities and a fair distribution of resources, especially for socially disadvantaged groups like migrants (Simich, et al.,
With an increasing number of Chinese migrant households moving to cities, substantial changes in policies have been made to include migrant labourers in urban welfare systems, including the Urban Five, which consisted of a series of work-related public insurance programs to improve migrant welfare: basic healthcare, old age pensions, unemployment insurance, workers compensation, and maternity benefits for working mothers (Xu, et al., 2011). In addition, the State Council’s 2006 Opinion on Resolving the Problems Faced by Migrant Workers regulated comprehensive support to rural-to-urban migrants from the state. It proposed to resolve the problems faced by rural migrant workers, including low wages and wage arrears, bringing the labour management of rural migrants into line with legal regulations, job-seeking services, occupational training, social security, urban public services, and improving safeguard mechanisms that protect rural migrants’ rights and interests (The State Council, 2006). While advances have been made in relation to migrants’ employment experiences, little has been done to address social support for migrant families, except migrant children’s access to compulsory education in cities and their primary health care in schools.

Education is a social entitlement attached to hukou registration, so children of rural-to-urban migrants used to be denied entry to the public education system in cities. Their education was considered the responsibility of the government of their hukou origin. But since the 1996 Measures for the Schooling of Children and Young People in the Urban Migrant Population\(^{11}\) and the 1998 Provisional Measure for the Schooling of Migrant Children and Young People\(^ {12}\), the urban public education system has slowly opened the door to accommodate migrant students in public schools for their compulsory education. In 2006, the revised Compulsory Education Law guaranteed the equal

\(^{11}\) Trial Measure issued by the State Education Commission  
\(^{12}\) Issued jointly by the State Education Commission and the Ministry of Public Security
rights of migrant children to receive compulsory education in host cities at the level of the state’s law. The State Council’s 2006 Opinion on Migrant Workers confirmed that the main responsibility of providing compulsory education for migrant children should lie with urban local governments.

Despite improved entitlements and access to formal supports for rural-to-urban migrants and their children, most formal supports are attached to employment. Studies on social services for rural-to-urban migrants suggest that with the changing pattern of migration – migration of entire households versus only individuals, their extended stay in the city, and the desire of the younger migrant generation to stay permanently in cities as urban residents – there is a growing need to promote social integration through community social services for rural-to-urban migrants (Guan, 2010; Xu, et al., 2011).

Social work practices started emerging in the urban villages of a few large cities as a response to the large number of migrant population and their increasing needs for community services. Drawing on a previous case study, the first author of this article described a trial program conducted in Shanghai, in which social workers provided comprehensive social services to rural-to-urban migrants in an urban village through a 3-year project funded by local street-level government (Wen, 2013). It was expected through this project,

“to improve the functioning of individuals as well as families through social work intervention such as casework, group work, and community activities; to build community capacity for mutual aid and problem-solving; and to mobilize community resources to improve community environment and well-being and enhance social integration.” (Wen, 2013, p. 64)

The project was also expected to provide trial experience for local government in governing migrant communities through collaborations with social workers (Wen, 2013). Gao (2011) described social work practices in an urban village in Yunnan province, exploring community services as a mean to
empower rural-to-urban migrants. The services included educational programs for migrant children, home visits with migrant families, services to promote migrants’ reproductive health and women’s maternal health, legal aid, employment counselling, workplace health and safety and food safety. It was suggested that community services should focus on the strength of migrants, helping them to improve their abilities and awareness to solve problems and improve social justice (Gao, 2011). In a third study, He (2011) described social services in an urban village in Guizhou, which focused on providing services for migrant children as an extension of social work services in migrant children’s schools.

With the increase of social services in urban village provided by social work professionals, however, there was a lack of systematic examination of the impact of these services through the lens of social support, particularly how community services affect migrant families’ access to social support in urban villages. This article addresses this gap in our knowledge by presenting a case study of an urban village in Shanghai, examining social services existing in urban village, and what implications can social work professionals draw for development of community-based social services for the internal migrant population in China?

6.5 Documenting social services in an urban village through a case study

We used a case study to examine the social services available in a Shanghai urban village for the migrant families, asking how these services affect social support for migrant families. T village was chosen as the research site due to its existing connections to a research network. T village is a typical urban village located besides the southwest outer loop of Shanghai with more than 90% of its residents being rural-to-urban migrants. The 2010 census showed that there were more than 2,000 registered households with a total population around 7,000. Migrants in the village are mainly
employed as factory workers, construction workers, cleaners, domestic helpers, small business vendors, drivers, garbage recyclers, salespeople, etc.

The study is a part of a larger study investigating social support for Chinese rural-to-urban migrant families and migrant children. It used a triangulation of data collection methods while staying within the community case-study tradition, namely: documentation (including policy documents and the written materials found in the village related to service provision); key informant interviews including social workers, service providers, community workers, local government officials (n=11), and a focus group interview with social work interns who were involved in service delivery in T village (n=5); as well as the researcher’s observations. The participants were asked to describe their work in T village and how their work was related to helping migrants and their families. We also conducted a brief survey of migrant families’ needs and their perception of community services in T village among 21 migrant parents whose children had participated the tutorial program in the village conducted by a social work agency. Some of their children also participated in our previous research.

6.6 Examining social services in urban village: history, characteristics, and impact on social support

Recent years have witnessed a rapid growth of social services in T village, which was influenced by government policies shifting to be more inclusive of rural-to-urban migrants and promoted by the nation-wide community building movement. The development of social services in T village was also shaped by various other factors, namely, the increasing social needs of

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13 In the early 1990s, MCA proposed using community development as a means to reform the model of social service provision, to revitalize public governance to meet new social demands, and to facilitate a harmonious society. The community building movement was initiated in 1999 when 26 urban districts across the country were selected by MCA to take part in an experiment of a different community building approach. Then, in 2000, the National Congress of the Communist Party of China and China’s State Council forwarded the MCA’s document “Opinions on the Urge toward Community Building in the Whole Country” to officialise the movement.
rural-to-urban migrants, the development of the social work profession and its increasing role in service provision system, as well as local government organizations’ inability to adapt to the demand for services for more diverse groups. In this section, we first examine the historical development of social services in T village, followed by a brief description of the characteristics of these services. Last, the impact of these services on different forms of social support is discussed.

6.6.1 The emergence of social services for migrants in T village

The emergence of social services in T village traced back to 2002 with a large-scale displacement and relocation of households, resulting in the establishment of the neighbourhood committee. Currently, there were three sectors involved in service provision in T village, each with a different emphasis: social work organizations, the neighbourhood committee, and the Migrant Administration Office (MAO). Social workers took the major responsibilities in providing services for migrants in the village, with government funding the major source of financial support for these services. The neighbourhood committee represented the government sector at the community level, collaborating with social workers in providing services to migrants in the village, while also overseeing general service provision in the village with the emphasis on community safety, environmental protection, and birth control and family planning. The MAO was responsible for migrant registration for the purposes of crime prevention. In brief, social workers emphasized meeting migrants’ needs through providing services, the neighbourhood committee emphasized administrative functions, while the MAO emphasized security.

As many urban villages existing in China’s metropolises, T village was not an official defined

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14 MAO is an extension of local police station in the communities where migrant population is concentrated, originally to strengthen the administration of floating population and reduce crime among migrants.
administrative unit, but a migrant enclave that transcended those geographic, social, administrative, and ideological boundaries to the established system. The place remained a rural village until the City of Shanghai annexed it, compensating the farmers for the loss of their farmland. The compensation received by these newly urban residents left them relatively well off, however, and many of them moved to more central parts of the cities, leaving their houses to be rented to the flood of rural migrants who were attracted to Shanghai by the employment opportunities emerging from city expansion. The built environment of T village was full of poorly constructed housing units with a lack of basic community infrastructure, such as community centres and recreational facilities for residents. With the growing number of residents in T village, in 2002, a neighbourhood committee was assigned by the urban government, meaning that T village came under official urban administration. The main responsibilities of the neighbourhood committee was to provide social services to the residents whose hukou was registered in T village, including recording household information, providing social assistance to needy families, visiting families of seniors without children and veterans, and supervising the community’s overall environment and safety. However, a large number of rural migrants who resided in the village without hukou registration were not included in the provision of social services by the neighbourhood committee.

It was not until the 2006 Shanghai municipal regulation on Improving Rural Migrant Workers’ Welfare – which explicitly called for the provision of public services to rural-to-urban migrants in terms of children’s education, health and epidemic prevention, family planning, and to promote migrants’ community participation – that the neighbourhood committee of T village realized the need to provide social services to migrants. However, with their mandate so tightly linked to hukou registration, the neighbourhood committee felt incapable of providing services to unregistered
migrants. This was why they considered introducing social work as a potentially effective way to provide services to migrants in T village. A member of the neighbourhood committee recalled the difficulty of working with migrants:

*It was very difficult to do family planning with migrants. They are required to get temporary resident permits from us. But it was not until before the 2010 Shanghai EXPO, when the municipal government promised to assign each registered household a ‘big gift set’ to appreciate the citizens’ compromises during the event, that we had most of the migrant households registered. In just one day, migrants were lining up before our office for registration in order to get the gift sets. Most of the time, they tried to hide from us and it took us so much time and resources dealing with migrants and we didn’t get credit for doing it. So we leave most of the work (provide services to migrants) to social workers.* (c8)

The situation led social work professionals to eventually take more responsibilities in T village community services. While the initiation of social services in T village for migrants relied largely on the match between available funding and migrants’ needs—the important criteria for social workers to decide if a service could be developed or not. Below was a description of the funding source of social services in T village from the direct of the board of a social work agency,

*Now the services we conducted in T village mainly came from the Shanghai Civil Affairs Bureau through a community bidding process. The rest is from an overseas NGO organization that hopes to facilitate the professional development of social workers on the Chinese mainland.* (B6)

The dilemma that social workers had to face during their work providing social services for migrants in the village was to deal with the mismatch of residents’ long-term needs and the limited duration of many funded projects. According to a social worker, “*most projects are funded for one year or maximum two. Even if we think it is necessary to continue certain services, we can’t do anything if the funding period ends.*”(A5)

Moreover, social workers had to balance between, on the one hand, government’s expectation of
inserting social work into the state’s service system (in order to ease social tensions and pursue expected social outcomes) versus, on the other, the needs of local migrant communities. In attempting to manage these competing demands, social workers often found their roles in providing services for migrants were modified. In the beginning of their intervention in T village, social workers needed the support of the neighbourhood committee to obtain local resources as well as apply for government funding. In return, they were expected to help the neighbourhood committee in their work of family planning. So as a practical solution, social workers started providing reproductive health services and maternal health services to migrant women. In the meantime, they helped collect migrants’ information for the neighbourhood committee to conduct family planning in the village. A social worker recalled that the initial service provision in T village was not an easy job for them:

*I think the trust building process was very important for our initial service provision. Migrants did not trust us at the beginning, thinking government sent us. We had to be patient to have them understand our work here was to help them. We arranged household visits to explain to them face-to-face, sending our many brochures about our work, and organized free outdoor movies and other activities. Eventually migrants in the village get familiar with us and are willing to share with us their concerns. (A2)*

Despite the various constrains, the services in T village expanded to more than 45 programs with a lot of variety, covering groups of individual youth, women and seniors, families and the community. Table 6 gives a brief overview of some social services in T village.

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<th>Table 6: Brief overview of social services in T village</th>
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6.6.2 A closer look at social services in T village: composition & characteristics

To provide an overview of the social services available in the urban village, in this section, I illustrate how services were provided in T village based on sub-group division and some of the characteristics that arise from service delivery.

Youth services accounted for the largest part of the social services in T village, ranging from health examination and health education programs, academic assistance programs, companionship, to character- or competence-building activities for children. Social workers were responsible for providing the majority of these services. The tutorial program, initiated by social workers in 2009, was one of the earliest programs and it is still in existence today, having conducted about 3,000 tutorial sessions in total. At the beginning of the program, social workers identified children’s education as the central need of many migrant families, and they tried to “break the ice” and establish relationships with migrants and eventually to involve other family members in services.
Youth services are targeted on migrant children’s well-being. Stated in the tutorial program brochure, the program served the needs of migrant families with children who lacked capacity and/or resources, and during the program social workers worked together with university students as volunteers to provide tutorials to migrant children to help them catch up with school studies. Besides the emphasis on the normative development of migrant children, a few programs included activities to help migrant children to adapt the local social and cultural environment, such as “A tour to EXPO” providing migrant children opportunities to explore and know more about the city, “The Growing Up Companion” allowing migrant children to interact with people from local urban communities and gain support from adults outside of their families, and “The Development Plan”, facilitating migrant children’s access to information and advice on their further education in cities and making feasible career plans based on their current choices. There were also a few programs that did not work directly with children but which provided help and counselling to parents, such as the “Happy Parent-Child Relationship Workshop”, and “Parent-Child Sports”. In those programs, parents and children were given opportunities to interact, facilitating healthy parent-child relationship.

**Services for women** mainly consisted of providing health services to migrant women. To address the situation that many migrant families tended to have more children, especially sons, despite the state’s One Child Policy, the project of “Care for Women” was established as another of the early programs,
trying to help migrant women in T village with their reproductive health and family planning. This type of service was mainly the responsibility of the neighbourhood committee, who had to comply with the nation’s family planning policy in their work duties. The activities of the project included profiling migrant women’s pregnancy information, giving lectures on reproductive and maternal health, and conducting related health examination for women. Besides, social workers conducted workshops and lectures, helping migrant women with young babies on early parenting.

To address the situation that a number of migrant women in T village were unemployed because of their caregiving responsibilities for families and children, a situation which led them to be isolated and marginalized, a few programs were developed by social workers that aimed to help migrant women expand their community-based social networks and offered self-support groups, such as the “Women’s Mutual Support Group” and the “Good Mother Club”.

*Services for migrant workers* were mainly targeted on the need of migrant workers’ for employment, helping them to find jobs, know their rights in workplaces, and be up-to-date with various welfare policies. The service provision involved the public service administration at the township level, the neighbourhood committee, and social workers. These kinds of services were also an important part in service provision in T village. For example, the project of “Accompanying Spring Breeze” (*song chunfengxingdong*), sponsored by the township government, was conducted every spring to disseminate local labour market information aiming to help unemployed migrant workers who were returning to the city after the spring festival to find new jobs. Besides various projects and lectures, several billboards in the village, jointly sponsored by social workers and the neighbourhood committee, were used to release updated policy and job information.

Realizing that many of the migrant workers in the village only interacted within their limited
social circles, social workers developed a few other programs, such as “Meet Your Fellow Villagers” or “Making New Friends”, to help migrant workers expand their networks and strengthen their interpersonal relations. During these programs, migrant workers learned skills to improve interpersonal communication and get to know more neighbours of the village.

**Services for families** in T village mainly consisted of “The Family Empowerment Plan”, jointly sponsored by a Hong Kong NGO and a university social work department, which aimed to help at-risk migrant families or those facing adversity to overcome crises and maintain family functions. In the program, social workers applied social work intervention methods, such as casework under professional supervision, to conduct the services. In addition, household visits in T village had been conducted on a regular base starting from 2010. Although the activities did not all involve service provision directly, they did help social workers to establish relationships with residents and to understand the needs of migrant families in the village. About 1,000 household visits have been conducted by social workers and social work students, which serve as a knowledge base for developing and delivering services in T village.

**Services for seniors** addressed seniors’ social and recreational needs. Due to the fact that there were only a limited number of senior people in T village, only one program, the “Senior Tai Chi Group”, has been offered in T village, which mainly consists of local senior people rather than migrant seniors. In addition, the Neighbourhood Committee provided a small room for the local senior residents to conduct self-arranged recreational activities, such as *Mah-jong*.

Other services did not have specific group focus. For example, some catered to residents’ recreational needs, such as annual celebrations for Spring festival or Lantern festival; some
concerned the community environment, such as community actions to reduce garbage or for environment protection; others concerned improving the community atmosphere and resources, such as the community library project and the community reading club. These services required the participation of the whole community and were usually conducted in the form of community work or collective action. The scope of the services in T village reflects the various needs of migrant families, particularly of parents and their children.

6.6.3 Characteristics of service delivery: Multiculturalism, flexibility & informality

Responding to the unique characteristics of T village as an urban village, with most of its inhabitants being rural-to-urban migrants, the main features presented in service delivery in T village included multiculturalism, flexibility, and informality. As a village within the city, T village experienced rural-urban cultural differences and even conflicts. Moreover, migrants came from different regions across the country, and their regional cultures varied to a large extent. Multiculturalism was therefore always a necessary element in the delivery of services in T village. It was frequently mentioned that it was a challenging task to communicate with residents who spoke different regional dialects. Here, a social worker describes her experience of “being forced to dine with a migrant family”.

*In one of my household visits, I come across a family having a big dinner to welcome their relatives from far away. I didn’t want to intrude but I found no way to leave, for they insisted that all passers-by were their guests and they would feel offended if I didn’t join the dinner. During the dinner, drinking a glass of Chinese wine was a must required by the host. Although it was against my professional requirements, I feel it’s important to respect their traditions and cultural code. (A4)*

To many migrants, it was important to not only understand their dialects but also to respect their
different cultural traditions in service delivery, given that rural culture had long been viewed as inferior to urban culture. Social workers therefore had to be flexible in their service delivery. One social worker described her experience at the beginning of conducting services in T village:

Most of our programs had very low participation rates at the beginning, and we found a lot of migrants had to work long hours and could hardly find time during weekdays to participate. We had to be flexible. So we changed our schedules and made some of the services available during the weekend, which helped increase participation to some extent. (A5)

Besides maintaining a flexible working schedule, social workers in T village have to adjust the delivery plans due to the high mobility and instability of migrant participants, and be prepared to unexpected situation in service delivery. For example, many migrant youth who participate the youth services may bring their younger siblings with them for they have to take care their younger sisters/brothers when their parents are at work. Social workers and volunteers then have to spare energy to look after these young children.

It is common for service delivery in T village to rely heavily on volunteer collaboration under the supervision of social workers. This is partly due to the tension brought on by limited budget and large service demands. However, the volunteers, mostly university students majoring in social work or related fields, may not get the necessary training before staring their volunteer work in T village. Despite their great enthusiasm, there were many occasions on which the volunteers did not seem professional or were unreliable in accomplishing their voluntary duties. One volunteer even mentioned,

As a freshman in social work, I hope to learn how to work with migrant population by volunteering in T village. But sometimes a social worker has to lead so many volunteers that I can’t get important instructions and in-work support. I feel incapable of doing the assigned work by myself. (F12)
Informality also comes from the service evaluation process. As most of the services are project-based services funded through a bidding process, the Civil Affair Department assigns a third party organization to conduct program evaluation, which is important for the renewal of some services. The social workers mentioned that they suffered from the fact that the evaluation process lacked standardized criteria and transparency. As one social worker said, “it is very intense before evaluation. We have to revise the reports for evaluation again and again. It largely depends on how well the reports are written and if the evaluator will be moved that we could pass the evaluation and get the funding to continue the project.” (A4)

6.6.4 Impact of social services on the social support of migrants in T village

Despite various constraints, these services have had a lot of impact on migrants’ social support, in terms of helping them meet immediate needs, enhance interpersonal relationships, link to external resources, and increase community cohesion.

Support for meeting immediate needs

The survey we conducted among migrant parents showed that they were most concerned about their children’s education, followed by the need for information regarding migration policies and migrant welfare, concerns about community safety, and the need for recreational activities. Service provision in T village was generally in line with parents’ concerns. Responding to migrants’ primary needs, the tutorial program, for example, aimed to provide academic assistance to migrant children as a remedy for their parents’ being unable to supervise their children’s studies. In my observations, the youth programs were most welcomed by migrant families for they satisfy migrants’ immediate
needs, as well as addressing the challenges faced by families and schools in boosting the children’s confidence to be academically competitive and integrate into the city. However, problems existed in this type of services; it was difficult to sustain the efforts required to meet migrants’ expressed needs, given the fact that most of the services were funded and conducted on a project basis. One social worker mentioned the conflicts between the limited resources of social workers and the massive demands of the client,

A migrant youth who participated our tutorial program improved his school performance a lot after. He did not get into the program this semester because of the program’s limited vacancies. However, his marks dropped because his parents could not provide supervision on his homework and help with subject studies, as what we did in the program. (A4)

Meeting the immediate needs of clients also risked encouraging dependence, which was not helpful in bringing about changes to migrant families’ current situations.

Support on interpersonal relations

A few programs worked on migrants’ interpersonal relations, aiming to enhance their community interactions and exchanges, such as women’s self-help groups, ‘meeting fellow villagers’ and the good mothers club. According to the social workers, these types of services seemed particularly suitable for migrants who tended to ask for help from families and fellow villagers as a way to strengthen social ties through reciprocity that was based on trust between each other. For migrants, support from these new informal networks had little cost, was convenient, and didn’t mean losing face. One social worker mentioned an example in the women’s self-help groups,

...Hu (pseudonym name) wanted to find a job but she had to stay at home taking care of the children. She got to know another women who were in a similar situation when participating in the women’s mutual support groups. They supported each other and found a way to start a small business doing cross-stitching and other handicraft artwork. They even started an e-shop to sell
According to the social worker, the women in the self-help groups helped each other with child pick-up, employment information, family relationships, and provided each other with emotional supports. These types of services helped migrants expand their networks in the village and have more interactions with neighbours, a situation that was helpful in building a common sense of neighbourhood and in mobilizing community resources.

**Helping migrants to connect with external resources**

Given that T village was relatively isolated, lacking the basic community resources and infrastructure that were common in other urban communities, a few programs (such as a community library project, a “growing up companion” plan) aimed to link residents to resources external to the village: a local legal aid service centre, nearby schools, volunteer organizations and enterprises. Through these programs, social workers put together the resources and strengths from different sources to change the infrastructure of T village and improve the community assets. As one service provider mentioned, “our capacity is limited, but we can work as the bridge of urban public services and the migrants in the village, helping them access those services.” (B6)

The community library started in 2011 as a community tendering and bidding project funded by local civil affair department. In this project, social workers, with the assistance of the neighbourhood committee, established a community library in T village by incorporating external resources, such as public libraries and university organizations. Now there were more than 2,000 books and a dozen newspapers and magazines free for migrant residents to read. Although the library was just a small room with limited stock of books, it offered easy access to migrants for their recreational activities. Moreover, the library had eventually become a public asset of the village. Certain youth services
were delivered in the library; migrants come there to chat and socialize. Residents voluntarily maintained the operation of the library, strengthening community ties and networks. For this type of service, besides the efforts of service providers, the attitude of the broader society toward migrants and the urban villages also contributed to its success. A social worker mentioned that it would have been difficult to conduct such services a few years ago when many people held prejudices against rural-to-urban migrants and resisted volunteering.

**Support for community organization**

As a village on the move, the temporal orientation of T village was more likely to point to the future rather than the present. Its physical community environment was a major concern of service providers in T village. The social workers mentioned that it was difficult to maintain a clean environment in the village because a lot of migrant residents considered themselves to be just living there temporarily and planned to move on to other places or go back to their home villages. So they showed little attachment to the village in which they were living. Also, a lot of migrants showed little interest in the overall good of the community or civic participation, which affected the overall community support available for the residents. As one service provider said, “*the residents in the village are like a bunch of sand. They need to be tied together as a community, and social services*
should serve as the string.” (D10)

Environmental protection was a part of daily administrative duties of the neighbourhood committee, and they organized a volunteer team among local residents, which expanded later to about 50 members, a mix of migrants and local residents. The members took shifts individually to patrol the village to prevent behaviours that jeopardized the community environment. They also got involved in organizing and participating in community activities to reduce trash, and increasing residents’ awareness about the need to keep the community environment clean. The volunteer team was just an initiative of community organizations in T village, which still required a lot of effort from social workers and other service providers. As one volunteer said,

…many migrants lack of a sense of community, and it’s difficult for them to participate in volunteer work given they have to work long hours to make a living. Some of them think they were sacrificing instead of volunteering when being asked to participate activities. (F12)

In sum, community services had had an impact on social support for migrants in T village, directly or indirectly, through meeting migrants’ immediate needs, enhancing their existing links and support exchange in village, incorporating new sources of support and mobilizing external resources to build community assets, or strengthening collective social network ties in village and social capital, which was essential for building a cohesive community supporting migrant families and benefiting healthy development of migrant children.

6.7 Applying social support intervention for rural-to-urban migrants in urban village

First of all, social work can be an influential power to enhance China rural-to-urban migrants’ social support as they face the structural and practical challenges in their urban life. Findings show that the types of social support needed by migrant families have different levels and functions; each
is essential for their social adaptation and psychological well-being. In community practice, four essential types of social support are identified, namely: support for meeting immediate needs; support for enhancing interpersonal relationships; support for linking to external resources; and support for increasing community cohesion. Social support intervention can be an effective community intervention approach to facilitate the various social supports for migrant families in an urban village. Intervention that focuses on migrants’ immediate needs and addresses the problems in their lives, such as children’s school enrolment and legal aid for labour rights, falls into the category of direct support intervention, which includes providing information, advice, as well as instrumental support, without involving changes to social network structure. For example, the youth services in T village provide academic assistance and companion support to make up for migrant families’ incapability to provide these types of social support for their children.

Social support exchange intervention includes actions to identify and mobilize existing informal sources of resources in migrant communities, in order to improve social support exchange. The supports brought by this level of intervention may include emotional support, information and advice, material aids, and instrumental support. An increased frequency of contact and reciprocity are expected with this level of social support intervention. The promotion of existing sources of support may cause improved resident interactions and the improvement of neighbourhood relationships and is thus particularly appropriate for urban villages where neighbour relationships are weak.

Like the women’s mutual support groups in T village, small, voluntary groups can be formed of individuals with common needs, interests and objectives, whose main purpose is to provide reciprocal help and solve shared problems. The members of mutual support groups can be migrants from different hukou origins who thus may offer new networks of interpersonal relationships within
the community that can cause structural and functional changes in migrants’ social support systems. However, social work professionals should be cautious that the structural basis of most social problems should be made explicit to the group involved in the intervention. While mutual support initiatives may help alleviate difficult conditions, structural changes are likely required to change the fundamental conditions of difficulty faced by rural-to-urban migrants.

**Social network intervention** changes the structure and functions of migrants’ informal support systems by incorporating new interpersonal relationships outside the communities and mobilizing diverse types of resources. This is particularly appropriate for migrants with limited social networks. Through this type of intervention, external resources can be incorporated to provide information about the city, instrumental assistance, emotional support, and opportunities for social participation. As in the Community Library project in T village, during the intervention, social workers should not only be the ‘bridge’ linking the urban village to external resources from larger urban society, but also the facilitator of the process of mobilizing external resources to build community assets. Migrants are also expected to be actively involved in the process and contribute to community asset building.

Support exchange and social network intervention can be viewed as the base for **community-level intervention**, which emphasizes migrants’ participation in the identification of collective needs, the development of strategies to address those needs, and the implementation of action to meet them. During this process, community cohesion is strengthened and community social capital is accumulated. Putnam (2003) conceived of social capital as a community-level resource and defined it as features of social organization such as networks, norms and social trust that facilitate cooperation for mutual benefit. Low levels of social capital may leave neighbours with no incentive to cooperate due to lack of a generalized sense of trust or sense of commonality. Community-level
intervention that emphasizes migrants’ participation and trust-building fosters collective efficacy and strengthens community cohesion, which directly and indirectly benefit the healthy development of migrant children and adolescents who live in urban villages with their families.

Despite the increasing sources of formal support in the urban village, the majority of migrant families tend to rely on their informal networks for social support, which is reciprocal, trustful, and without any feeling of losing face, compared to the formal source of social support. This fact is related to the current development stage of social work in China and social workers’ incapability to effectively provide social services in urban village; social work intervention depends on government resources to develop programs and many programs are project-based, relying on government approval for renewal. Given the circumstance and the complexity of the needs of migrant families, social work intervention should emphasize integrating formal and informal support, making connections between formal and informal supportive resources. That is, an increase in formal supports permits the enhancement of informal resources, social networks, and the ability of migrants to effectively solve problems and change their lives. Social services should go beyond meeting immediate needs and address migrant families’ long-term needs for social integration and empowerment, which stays consistent with social work principle of “helping people to help themselves”.

6.8 Implications for social work in conducting community services in urban village

Social work has been considered a major force in providing social services in urban villages, and developing social services for migrants in urban villages offers an important opportunity for developing social work’s unique identity that is distinct from other community workers. My findings suggest that social work practices still have room for improvement in conducting this task. As
mentioned in the literature review, social work is still considered a newly-developed discipline in China, which is influenced by the government’s top-down approach. This affects social workers’ performance in conducting community services in urban villages. The situation may limit social workers’ roles and potential to provide social services to rural-to-urban migrants who face hukou and other institutional discrimination and help them improve their overall lives in cities. As a profession upholding social justice and promoting social change, social work should try to seek balance in its professional mandates of helping marginalized and vulnerable groups and its reliance on government support. In conducting social services, social work professionals should keep in mind the structural nature of many migrant problems. The purposes of social support intervention is not only to enhance individuals’ social support, but also to bring about changes in the urban village.

Moreover, urban villages are transitional urban communities in which most residents are disadvantaged rural-to-urban migrants. The villages often lack necessary community resources and infrastructure and have low levels of community social organization. The literature shows that communities with structural disadvantages, such as residential instability, and that are deprived of important resources, may have negative effects on family practices and children’s development (Jencks & Mayer, 1990; Beyers, et al., 2003). Wu (2011) also suggests that family practices are more effective for children’s psychosocial adjustment within the context of cohesive neighbourhoods with higher levels of trust among residents and stronger social control over youth behaviours.

In contrast, a community that is socially disorganized tends to have high juvenile delinquency rate and presents less support for families (Rankin & Quane, 2002). The findings in my previous research echoes the literature that the built environment of urban villages and lack of basic community infrastructure and institutional resources not only impede healthy peer interactions
among migrant children, but increase their risks for injury and incidents, as well as reinforcing migrant families’ disadvantages in terms of providing appropriate supervision and support for their children’s normative development. Deeper facilitation of the accumulation of community social capital and enhancing community collectives is called for, which will strengthen supportive ties in urban village and facilitate social support exchanges. Given most of the inhabitants in urban villages are migrants who are on move, there is a lot of work for social workers while engaging in collaboration with the neighbourhood committee and other sectors involved in service provision to facilitate migrants’ self-organization and empowerment for the healthy development of urban village.

6.9 Conclusion

A limitation of the study is its attempt to achieve an understanding of community services in urban villages for rural-to-urban migrants through studying a single case. However, this study is expected to expand our knowledge on community services in urban villages, which to the best of our knowledge is very rare in literature. We also hope to inform social work practices for rural-to-urban migrants at the community level by proposing a social support intervention model with the differentiation of social support. We suggest that quantitative study on measuring the effects of each level of the social support intervention should be included into future research agenda.

With more migrant households on the move and urban villages becoming the gateway for migrants to integrate into the larger city, the need for more community services in urban villages to improve migrants’ welfare is growing. The development of community services for rural-to-urban migrants is still in preliminary stages, but it is urged on by migration-related policy shifts. Social workers will be able to make even greater contributions as their experience and influence grows. As one service provider said,

*The ultimate goal of our offering community services is essentially to help migrants improve*
their life in T village. And the key is to help them help themselves. Only when migrants can actively seek support for themselves and are able to mobilize their resources and networks to meet their various needs, will they find the way to integrate into the city. (B7)
6.10 References


Chapter seven Conclusion

This dissertation applies the concept of social support to investigate migrant children and their families’ urban experiences and the contextual influences on their well-being and rural-to-urban adaptation. This section summarizes some of the key findings emerging from the three stages of this research: interviews with migrant youth in the context of community settings for migrant children’s urban experience; family interviews in the context of households for family migration experience; and a case study in the context of an urban village for an understanding of community services for migrant population. The implications of these findings for social workers, policy makers, and researchers are also identified.

7.1 Findings

The first article focuses on migrant children’s perspective, unfolding their experience of moving to the city, facing adversity and challenges, for some, actively seek and mobilize social support in the context of urban village for achieving resilience and gradual adaptation. The ongoing challenges include leaving previous caregivers, adapting to a new urban environment and schools and facing institutional exclusion for education. The article suggests that social supports at different levels with various functions are essential for migrant children’s well-being. With adequate conditions and social support, migration can enhance migrant children’s growth and life opportunities; while limited sources and social support, combined with family conditions and community influences, prevent too many migrant children from realizing their potential in cities. These results provide important implications for social work practitioners and service providers in allocating resources to enhance social support for migrant children and developing intervention plans.

In the second article, I investigated the migration experience of families, which affects family
support for migrant children. The findings contribute to existing knowledge on migrant families’ resilience as an interactive process involving family dynamics and how family use the resources within and outside their family to make adaptive choices for their children. During this process, informal networks are considered the most influential factors for migrant families to achieve resilience, which are often influenced by rural guanxi and insufficient to help migrant children integrate into cities. Another contribution of this article is to document the influences of traditional Chinese culture on migrant families’ seeking help. This article proposes a policy framework to enhance migrant families’ social support, explicitly documenting the vulnerable situation faced by migrant families and the necessity of not only supporting migrant children but also supporting migrant families from a policy perspective.

The first two articles provide close examinations of migrant children and their families’ urban experiences, proposing that due to social, cultural, and institutional reasons, migrant families have to rely heavily on their informal networks that mainly consist of kinship relationships to obtain resources and necessary support. This situation disadvantages migrant children in their process of achieving resilience out of adversity. Moreover, their lack of meaningful interactions with local urban society limits their potential to achieve socio-cultural competence in diverse contexts and further integrate to the urban society, especially with their hope of achieving climbing social ladders through educational success.

In the third article, I explored the other source of social support for migrants—the community services available for them in urban village. The study contributes to the existing knowledge that the functions of social support vary with different type and sources, and that formal support can be integrated with the informal networks of migrant families. I propose that social support intervention
can be an effective approach in community services to enhance migrant families’ social support in urban villages, with implications for the future development of community-level social work practices among rural-to-urban migrants in China.

Overall, this dissertation research uses a lens of social support to investigate the urban adaptation of migrant children and their families and possible conditions for their healthy adaptation. It leads to the conclusion that the role of social support in rural-to-urban migrant children’s adaptation should not be limited to only help them go through the initial coping period, but should also enhance their life opportunities and acquisition of competencies in diverse socio-cultural contexts. Migrant children’s experience of social support is determined to a large extent by social support that their families can access and mobilize, which is shaped by the broad policy context that frame the formal supports for migrants and the socio-cultural context that influences migrants’ informal social networks and their help-seeking process. Social support intervention can be an effective means to enhance supportive resources for migrant families by integrating formal and informal social support to improve the structure and mobilization of migrants’ informal networks, and facilitating community support through social work practices.

7.2 Implication for theory, practice, policy and future research

Chinese rural-to-urban migrant children will play an important role in determining the future of China’s urban society. Given their rapid increase in numbers, their great vulnerability, and the lack of documentation of their experiences, their adaptation merits urgent systematic research attention. This dissertation research enriches the research on Chinese rural-to-urban migrant children and represents one of the pioneering efforts in facilitating their healthy adaptation through a social support framework.
One of the theory implications of the thesis is to propose promising practices for social support intervention for rural-to-urban migrant children that involves children, their families, and migrant communities. The multidimensional construct of social support is the core of the approach, which aims to address the situation of disrupted social networks faced by migrant children, their parents’ incapability to provide some forms of support, their lack of formal support due to institutional reasons, and a difficult community environment, which impedes them from seeking important resources. It takes into account families’ experiences of migration and transitions and the broader socio-cultural context that exert influences on migrant children’s urban experiences and social support. Due to the important influences of family migration experience on migrant children’s urban adaption and social support, as well as the important role of informal networks play in migrant families’ resilience, the approach suggests an emphasis on empowering families while protecting vulnerable children through different levels of interventions. Accordingly, four levels of intervention are identified:

1) Direct support: providing support (i.e., instrumental support) to targeted groups for their direct needs satisfaction, without changes to their social networks;

2) Social support exchange: the creation of new links between community members, or as a way to increasing and improving support exchange;

3) Social network intervention: new sources of support are incorporated into migrants’ social networks, with changes in network composition, and;

4) Community level intervention: improvement of community collective ties through community participation and organizations.

The approach also emphasizes the importance of applying social support intervention through
community practices with migrant population. Community practice, one form of macro practices, is considered an important part of social work practice. This macro orientation distinguishes itself from more clinical social work by applying practice skills to altering the behaviour patterns of community groups, organizations, and institutions or people’s relationships and interactions with these entities (Hardcastle, Powers & Wenocur, 1997). Direct support intervention in community practices provides immediate support to help migrants, especially vulnerable children and women in families. This type of intervention involves no change to migrants’ social network structure. When applying the interventions, social workers should bear in mind that lack of reciprocity and trust, and having little respect may impede migrants seek for formal support when applying this type of intervention.

Social support exchange intervention includes actions to identify and mobilize existing sources of resources in migrant communities, in order to improve social support exchange. An increased frequency of contact and reciprocity are expected with this level of social support intervention. Social work professionals see themselves as specialized consultants or counsellors, making efforts to increase, promote and improve the quality of support transactions that take place spontaneously in interpersonal interactions. This type of intervention focusing on the promotion of mutual aid groups is in line with the group-work tradition in social work. In conducting these types of intervention, social workers should be cautious that groups have their own dynamic and issues that can generate conflicts (Dominelli, 2004).

Social network intervention changes the structure and functions of migrants’ informal support systems by incorporating new interpersonal relationships outside the communities and mobilizing diverse types of resources. This type of intervention involves information, instrumental assistance, emotional support, and opportunities for social participation, emphasizing asset-building within the
community. Social workers are facilitators of migrants’ incorporating and mobilizing external resources to build community assets.

Community-level intervention emphasizes migrants’ participation in the identification of collective needs, the development of strategies to address those needs, and the implementation of action to meet them. At this level, social work professionals collaborate with migrants, learning about participants’ cultures, worldviews, and life struggles (Graham, 2002). The professionals’ skills, interests or plans are not imposed on the community; rather, professionals become a resource for migrant populations. The main aim of community intervention is not only the improvement of social support, but also the promotion of community empowerment and social change (Plaza, et al., 2006). The principles of the community work tradition in social work are therefore incorporated at this level of intervention. Table 7 summarizes the differential levels of the intervention.

Table 7. Differentiation of the levels of social support intervention

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Level of intervention</th>
<th>Changes in social support dimension</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Structure</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Direct support (support directly given to recipients)</td>
<td>No changes in the social network</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Functions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Information &amp; advice</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Instrumental support</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social support exchange</td>
<td>Increased frequency of contact</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Increased reciprocity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Increased quality of support exchanges</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Emotional support</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Information &amp; advice</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Instrumental support &amp; Material aid</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social network intervention</td>
<td>Incorporation of multiple new sources of support</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Changes in network composition</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Less density and dispersion</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Information &amp; advice</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Instrumental support</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Emotional support</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Increased potential support exchanges</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Community level interventions</td>
<td>Strengthening of social network ties</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Increased quality of support exchanges</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Increased level of community collectives &amp; social capital</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Mobilization of community resources to change</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The framework suggests an empowerment perspective, which emphasizes fostering the capacity of not only migrant children but also their families and their community to establish important social capital and assets and to provide care and support for migrant children. At the individual level, the interventions should emphasize making up the disrupted social networks of migrant children, enhancing their opportunities to have meaningful interactions with local urban societies, and boosting their abilities to seek and mobilize social support. At the family level, migrant families should be empowered by realizing their own strength and capacities and intervention should focus on fostering families’ capacity to establish and mobilize resources within and outside the family to achieve resilience against crisis and to satisfy their needs for urban adaptation. In addition, family service programs should aim to help parents to develop alternative parenting skills to effectively interact and communicate with their children as well as to provide supervision and care. At the neighbourhood level, community intervention should aim to enhance interactions and support exchange within the community and with local urban society, to foster the culture of mutual support and create a sense of collective awareness and efficacy, building a community for migrants instead of a migrant community. Last, interventions should focus on integrating formal support with informal support for rural-to-urban migrants, enhancing reciprocity and respect in the helping relations, and helping migrants develop sustainable social support resources.

This study has some limitations related to the constraints of conducting a doctoral study with limited resources. First of all, the sample is recruited from one urban village and may lack of geographic diversity. Given that rural-to-urban migrants are a phenomenon across the whole country and the situation in Shanghai has some unique characteristics, it would be more convincing for the results if the sample is extended to other cities with similarly high concentrations of migrants. In
addition, the study falls short in exploring the gender differences in the experience of migration. Moreover, the researcher has not fully integrated into the village and developed deeper connections with migrant community due to time limitations. There was also no independent documentation for the effectiveness of social support interventions existing in the community, relying instead on respondents’ perspectives and self-reporting. Last, the study is done in a cross-language context, involving much language translation (by the researcher) between English (the language of the PhD program) and Mandarin (the language spoken by the researcher and the participants). Although this might enrich our analysis by adding different cultural perspectives, some of the more nuanced meanings held in the original interviews might have been lost during the analysis.

This dissertation research also points to future research directions. First, to close the gap between “what we know” and “what we do”, transitional research is needed to transform knowledge into a best practice model. As family support is the core of social support interventions that aims to enhance various social support functions at the family level, we should promote culturally-sensitive family-based social work practices for migrant children. We should also further explore the use of social support concepts that fit the Chinese socio-cultural context in constructing professional helping relations that emphasize mutual respect and trust.

7.3 Conclusion

In conclusion, social support has proven to be a promising concept in both conceptual and practical terms. The promotion of both informal and formal social support has demonstrated great potential as an innovative approach in social work practice and social policy in encouraging the adaptation and well-being of rural-to-urban migrant children. This study also contributes to our understanding of how social support operates in a non-western context, which emphasizes
differentiation and reciprocity in social relations. As our profession seeks best practice models for promoting healthier development of children and youth, especially those from vulnerable families and communities, social support intervention should be considered a viable and promising strategy with potentially high effectiveness and efficiency.
## Appendix

### 1. Major policies on urban schooling of migrant children

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date of issuance</th>
<th>Regulations/law</th>
<th>Main stipulations</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| 2 April 1996     | Measures for the schooling of children and young people in the urban migrant population | ● School-age migrant children should study in the public schools in the destination areas in a temporary basis  
● The administration department of education in out-flowing areas should be responsible in restricting children mobilizing to other places that are not their registered residence. |
| 2 March 1998     | Provisional measures for the schooling of migrant children and young people       | ● The main responsibility for education of migrant children should remain in the out-flowing areas.  
● Urban public schools should accommodate migrant students with the charge of “transient student fees”.  
● Allow social entities to set up migrant children school. |
| 29 May 2001      | Decision of the state council on the development and reform of elementary education | ● Place first reliance on administration by governments in the places of migration, and first reliance on full-time government-run elementary and secondary schools.  
● To waive miscellaneous and textbook fees and to subsidize accommodation fees for boarding school students with financial difficulties in |
| 30 Sept. 2003    | Opinions on further improving the work of compulsory education for the children of migrant workers in cities | ● Guarantee migrant children’s rights to education—hosting cities should take the main responsibility for providing compulsory education for migrant children.  
● Reduce or waive fees to make migrants pay the same tuition fees as locals.  
● Support and inspect migrant children schools. |
| 29 June 2006     | Compulsory education law of the PRC (2006 revised)                              | Local governments should provide an “equal education environment” for local and migrant children  |
| 12 August 2008   | Circular of the state council on the abolition of tuition and miscellaneous fees for students in compulsory education in urban areas | ● Abolish miscellaneous and textbook fees for students in compulsory education in the urban areas.  
● Local governments at different levels should provide adequate educational funds for migrant children |
| 30 March 2011    | Outline for China's National Act for medium and long-term education reform and development (2010-2020) | The task of ensuring equal compulsory education for children living with migrant parents in cities shall be ensured primarily by local governments and allotted to public primary and middle schools. |
2. Map of T village
### 3 Demographic description of participants in the first study

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Education</th>
<th>School type</th>
<th>Place of \textit{hukou} registration</th>
<th>Years in SH</th>
<th>Father’s occupation</th>
<th>Mother’s occupation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A1</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>Primary school 3rd grade</td>
<td>Private</td>
<td>Anhui prov.</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>Part time factory worker</td>
<td>Domestic worker</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A2</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>Primary school 3rd grade</td>
<td>Private</td>
<td>Henan prov.</td>
<td>Born in SH</td>
<td>Small business/vendor</td>
<td>Small business/vendor</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A3</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>Primary 5th grade</td>
<td>Public</td>
<td>Jilin prov.</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>Unlicensed vehicle driver</td>
<td>Part time domestic worker</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A4</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>Primary 4th grade</td>
<td>Public</td>
<td>Anhui</td>
<td>Born in SH</td>
<td>Small business</td>
<td>Small business</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A5</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>Secondary school 1st grade</td>
<td>Public</td>
<td>Henan prov.</td>
<td>Born in SH</td>
<td>Small business</td>
<td>Unemployed stay-at-home mom</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A6</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>Secondary school 1st grade</td>
<td>Public</td>
<td>Anhui prov.</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>Taxi driver</td>
<td>Hotel cleaner</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A7</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>Primary 5th grade</td>
<td>Private</td>
<td>Henan prov.</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>Small business</td>
<td>Unemployed stay-at-home mom</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A8</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>Primary school 4th grade</td>
<td>Private</td>
<td>Yunnan prov.</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>Part time factory worker</td>
<td>Full time factory worker</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A9</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>Primary school 4th grade</td>
<td>Private</td>
<td>Guangxi prov.</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>Small business/vendor</td>
<td>Small business/vendor</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A10</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>Primary school 5th grade</td>
<td>Public</td>
<td>Anhui prov.</td>
<td>Born in SH</td>
<td>Small business</td>
<td>Unemployed stay-at-home mom</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A11</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>Primary school 5th grade</td>
<td>Public</td>
<td>Shandong prov.</td>
<td>Born in SH</td>
<td>Small business</td>
<td>Small business</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A12</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>Secondary school 1st grade</td>
<td>Public</td>
<td>Sichuan prov.</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>Full time factory worker</td>
<td>Full time factory worker</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A13</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>Primary school 3rd grade</td>
<td>Public</td>
<td>Hubei prov.</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>Small business/vendor</td>
<td>Small business/vendor</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A14</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>Secondary school 1st</td>
<td>Public</td>
<td>Sichuan prov.</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>Full time factory worker</td>
<td>Domestic worker</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>grade</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
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<td>---</td>
<td>---</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A15</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>Secondary school 1st grade</td>
<td>Public</td>
<td>Sichuan prov.</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>Technician</td>
<td>Domestic worker</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A16</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>Primary school 5th grade</td>
<td>Private</td>
<td>Shandong prov.</td>
<td>Born in SH</td>
<td>Unlicensed vehicle driver</td>
<td>Unlicensed vehicle driver</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A17</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>Primary school 4th grade</td>
<td>Private</td>
<td>Anhui prov.</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>Full time factory worker</td>
<td>Full time factory worker</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A18</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>Primary school 5th grade</td>
<td>Public</td>
<td>Anhui prov.</td>
<td>Born in SH</td>
<td>Driver</td>
<td>Sales</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
**4 Demographic features of participant families**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Monthly household income (yuan)</th>
<th>Family structure</th>
<th>Place of hukou registration</th>
<th>Years in SH</th>
<th>Father’s education</th>
<th>Mother’s education</th>
<th>Family close social contact in SH</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>F1</td>
<td>2,000-3,000</td>
<td>4 (two sons, the younger one is left behind)</td>
<td>Anhui</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>Driver</td>
<td>Domestic helper</td>
<td>5 relatives and 7-8 laoxiang</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>F2</td>
<td>1,000-2,000</td>
<td>4 (a son and a daughter)</td>
<td>Anhui</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>Factory worker</td>
<td>Domestic helper</td>
<td>No friends in the village, only 2 relatives but moved out later</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>F3</td>
<td>6,000-7,000</td>
<td>4(a son and a daughter)</td>
<td>Henan</td>
<td>More than 10</td>
<td>Vendor for small business</td>
<td>Vendor for small business</td>
<td>More than 10, mostly family members</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>F4</td>
<td>2,000-3,000</td>
<td>4 (two sons)</td>
<td>Anhui</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>Driver</td>
<td>Sales</td>
<td>3 relatives, 2 laoxiang, landlord and a few other local friends</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>F5</td>
<td>2,000-3,000</td>
<td>4 (a son and a daughter)</td>
<td>Yunnan</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>Factory worker</td>
<td>Factory worker</td>
<td>1 relative</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>F6</td>
<td>2,000-3,000</td>
<td>3(a son)</td>
<td>Shandong</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>Unlicensed motor driver</td>
<td>Unlicense d motor driver</td>
<td>2 laoxiang, no relatives</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>F7</td>
<td>2,000-3,000</td>
<td>4 (an older sister left behind)</td>
<td>Sichuan</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>Factory worker</td>
<td>Domestic worker</td>
<td>4 relatives and 2 laoxiang</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>F8</td>
<td>4,000-5,000</td>
<td>7 (4 siblings: an older sister is left behind, a younger sister, and 2 younger brothers)</td>
<td>Henan</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>Small business</td>
<td>Housewife</td>
<td>More than 10, including laoxiang, landlord and other local friends</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>F9</td>
<td>2,000-3,000</td>
<td>5 (2 siblings: an older sister left behind, a younger brother)</td>
<td>Hubei</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>Vendor</td>
<td>Vendor</td>
<td>2 relatives and 7-8 laoxiang</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>F10</td>
<td>4,000-5,000</td>
<td>4(a son and a daughter)</td>
<td>Sichuan</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>Technician</td>
<td>Domestic helper</td>
<td>3 relatives and 3 laoxiang</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
5 Parental Consent Form for children aged 10 to 14

Understanding the role of social support in the adaptation process of migrant youth in the context of a migrant community in Shanghai

Description of the research

This research project aims to understand the role of social support in the adaptation process of children of migrant families here in Shanghai. I would like to explore the supportive resources available in community available for your child, and understand how your child experiences support in his / her day to day life in the community and how this experiences influences your child’s adapting to life in Shanghai.

I will be asking your child to talk about the important relationships with families, friends, and neighbours, and if they feel supported from these relationships, and if the experience of support help his/ her adapting to life in Shanghai. The talk will take place in the social work station or the community library during weekend or other time preferred by you and your child.

Rights of the participant

This process will take one or two times, in a total of maximum 2 hours.

Your child’s participation in this research is voluntary. Your child is under no obligation to participate. S/he has the right of not answering any question that s/he prefers not to answer. You and your child will be able to refuse to participate at any time or to stop participation without penalty. There are no expected harms for your child to participating. Your child does not have to answer any questions that feel uncomfortable to him/her.

The information provided in the interview will be kept confidential and all reporting will be anonymous. To make sure that I heard things properly, only with your child’s permission, I may audio-record our dialogue. Your child can review the tapes and ask that all of the recording or any piece of these tapes be destroyed. These records will be kept in a secure location that is only accessible to the researcher and will be destroyed at the completion of this study. The interview will be transcribed and coded in order to protect confidentiality. Your contact information will be kept in a separate location from the interview transcription and will only be available to the researcher.

Although your child will not receive direct benefits, the process will help me to understand how youth can be better supported when they are adapting and adjusting to different environment. I need your help and support in order to do this research. Thank you for considering the request.

Please feel free to respond yes or no to any of the following questions.

Yes____ no_____ I give my permission for my child to participate in this study

Yes____ no_____ I give the researcher permission to audio record interview with my child.
Yes____ no_____ I give the researcher permission to keep audio recordings and to use them for data collecting purposes.

The result of the study will be used for dissertation purposes and will be shared with a broader academic and public audience. Please let me know if you would like a copy of the final results.

If you have any questions, please call me at 13482214449 or contact me by e-mail at ya.wen@mail.mcgill.ca

Date ________________________________________________

Participant Name ______________________________________

Participant Signature __________________________________

Ya Wen __________

If you have any questions or concerns about your rights or welfare as a participant in this research study, please contact the McGill Ethics Officer at 514-398-6831 or lynda.mcneil@mcgill.ca.

访谈知情同意书
尊敬的家长:
您好！

我叫文雅，是加拿大麦吉尔大学社会工作学院的博士研究生。我目前在进行一项上海外来人口和家庭社会适应的研究，旨在帮助外来人员及子女更好的融入当地社会、社区。如果您同意的话，我想邀请您的孩子参加一到两次大约一小时的访谈。访谈的内容将严格保密，涉及您孩子的个人资料、他人或场所的名称将用化名代替。本研究仅供学术使用。为了更好的记录访谈的内容，谈话将会被录音，录音资料会被妥善保管，研究完成后将及时销毁。如果您需要的话，我将会提供一份录音资料的复件给您。访谈将在完全自愿的基础上进行，在访谈过程中您的孩子可以提出任何问题，也可以随时停止访谈，我会随时尊重他/她的意愿和感受。

如果您完全了解了本知情同意书的内容，并同意您的孩子参加这项研究，请在知情同意书下方划线处签名。如果有与本研究相关的问题，请您随时和我联系。电话: 13482214449. 电邮: ya.wen@mail.mcgill.ca

受访者签名___________

日期_________________
If you have any questions or concerns about your rights or welfare as a participant in this research study, please contact the McGill Ethics Officer at 514-398-6831 or lynda.mcneil@mcgill.ca.
I would like to know what you do with your families, friends, and neighbours in your daily life in the community. I am curious to know the important persons in your life who have given you most of the supports, and how the people and the experience influence your life in Shanghai.

If you agree to be a part of my research, I will invite to have a meeting with me, asking you to talk about your relationships with families, friends, and neighbours, and if you feel supported from these relationships, and if the experience of support does help in your life in Shanghai. You do not have to answer any question if you prefer not to. You can also ask my questions, and I will answer you as to my friend. The meeting will take place in the community center, a place is in walking distance from your home. If you have not been the place, your parents will walk you there. The meeting with me will last about two hours.

In order to these things, I first need to have your permission.

If you agree to help me, you should know that all of the information you share with me will be kept confidential. This means that your parents and neighbours in the community won’t know what you have said. To make sure that I heard you properly, I may audio-record our dialogue, but I may do so only with your permission. You can listen to the recording if you would like. You can ask that all of the recording or any part of the tape be destroyed. I will keep all of the recordings in a locked cabinet that only I can open. You should also know that if you decide not to be in my study, it is fine, there will be no consequence for saying ‘no’. I need to get the permission from you and your parents before you can participate.

Although you will not receive direct benefits, the process will help me to understand how youth can be better supported when they are adapting and adjusting to different environment. I need your help in order to do this research. Thank you for considering the request.

Please feel free to choose yes or no to any of the following questions.

Yes____ no____ I agree to participate in this study

Yes____ no____ I will let the researcher to audio record our talk.

If you have any questions about the study, please ask your parents to call me at 13482214449 or contact me by email at ya.wen@mail.mcgill.ca

Date ________________________________________________

Participant Name ______________________________________

Participant Signature ________________________________
Ya Wen _______________
未成年人访谈知情同意书

_______ 同学：

你好！

我叫文雅，现在是加拿大麦吉尔大学社会工作学院的博士研究生。和你一样，我也需要完成作业，其中一个作业是研究和你一样从农村老家来到上海读书并和父母生活在一起的孩子。我想了解你们在上海的日常生活，以及你们平时喜欢和哪些人交往。我的研究希望能帮助和你一样的外来子女得到更多的帮助，更好的在上海成长。我的研究需要和你进行一到两次访谈，每次不会超过一个小时，访谈会在社工站或图书馆进行。

如果你愿意帮助我，参与到我的研究，请在下面签下你的名字。为了能够让你参与到我的研究，我还需要在你同意的基础上得到了你父母的许可。你的参与完全是自愿的，如果你觉得不愿意或不确定，请告诉我，我会尊重你的意愿。如果在访谈的过程中你觉得必要终止，你可以随时告诉我，同样，我会尊重你的意愿。我们的谈话将会录音，这只是为了更好地记下你告诉我的信息。你可以要求保留一份你的录音资料，也可以要求我删除你给予的所有信息，如果这是你的意愿。

如果你完全了解了本知情同意书的内容，并同意参加这项研究，请在知情同意书下方划线处签名。如果有与本研究相关的问题，请你或你的父母随时和我联系。电话：13482214449。电邮：ya.wen@mail.mcgill.ca

受访者签名__________
日期________________

研究者签名__________

最后感谢你的合作！

If you have any questions or concerns about your rights or welfare as a participant in this research study, please contact the McGill Ethics Officer at 514-398-6831 or lynda.mcneil@mcgill.ca.
This research aims to understand the role of social support in the adaptation process of children of migrant families in Shanghai. This research is part of my dissertation as a doctoral student in the School of Social Work at McGill University. Dr. Wendy Thomson supervises me doctoral study. We would like to explore the supportive resources in the community available for the youth and understand how social support influences the youth adapting to life in Shanghai. I would like you to participate in an interview for about one hour to discuss these issues. This will help us to understand how youth can be better supported when they are adapting and adjusting to different environments.

The information provided in the interview will be kept confidential and all reporting will be anonymous. During the interview, to make sure that I hear things properly, I would like to audio-record our dialogue. I will do so only with your permission. The result of the study will be used for dissertation purposes and will be shared with a broader academic and public audience. Any of your identical information will be kept confidential and replaced with pseudonyms.

If you agree to be part of this project, please sign the consent form. You are free at any time to refuse to answer particular questions or to withdraw from the research. If you have any questions or concerns about your rights or welfare as a participant in this research study, please contact the McGill Ethics Officer at 514-398-6831 or lynda.mcneil@mcgill.ca.

If you have any questions, you can contact me, Ya Wen (at 13482214449 or by email at ya.wen@mail.mcgill.ca), or my supervisor, Wendy Thomson at 514-398-7068 or by email to wendy.thomson@mcgill.ca.
Thank you for your help with this research.
感谢您对本项研究的支持。

Ya Wen
PhD Candidate
School of Social Work at McGill University 加拿大麦吉尔大学社会工作学院