



**Navigating Social Divisions: Rural-Urban Hierarchies and
Children's Friendships in a Chinese Primary School**

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Declaration

I, Boyang Yin, confirm that the Thesis is my own work. I am aware of the University's Guidance on the Use of Unfair Means (www.sheffield.ac.uk/ssid/unfair-means). This work has not been previously been presented for an award at this, or any other, university.

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I still remember the first article I ever wrote about mobile migrant workers. It was during my last year of primary school, and my family had just moved to a suburban area where even the streetlights hadn't been fully installed yet. Back then, every morning on my way to school, I would see the migrant workers already starting their hard work, helping to build the city. Finally, one morning, I stepped outside and noticed that the streetlights were working, the apartment buildings in front of us were finished, but the migrant workers were gone. They had never enjoyed the city in the way I did. That's when I wrote my first article about them, which I titled: 'The City Lights Do Not Belong to Them'. Years later, I was glad to collaborate with migrant families on this research and to know that despite the ongoing challenges many continue to endure, their living conditions are gradually improving.

These years have been truly incredible, and I'm also excited for the years ahead and all the possibilities they hold. To close this acknowledgment, and as a tribute to my time and adventures in the UK while looking ahead to a new, brighter future, I'd like to borrow the spell used to open the Marauder's Map in *Harry Potter*: 'I solemnly swear that I am up to no good'.

Abstract

In 2022, approximately 295.62 million rural-urban migrant workers migrated from rural to urban areas for improved jobs and education in China (National Bureau of Statistics of China, 2023). While migration and education studies often prioritise international over internal migrants, China's rural-urban hierarchies uniquely position rural migrants as disadvantaged and socially stigmatised. This is especially pronounced in educational contexts, where the prevailing ideology of urban superiority entrenches biases, further marginalizing rural migrant children within urban schools. Friendships, which can be exclusionary and socially patterned, can also be crucial for fostering children's resilience and inclusion. Drawing on literature from the Sociology of Children's friendship, 'New' Sociology of Childhood, Migration Studies, Education Studies, and Intersectionality, this research explores rural migrant and urban children's friendships, examining how migration experiences, socioeconomic status, gender, and language (accents) intersect, and how adult (parents, grandparents, teachers) and educational values shape children's friendships.

This research, conducted over eight months, was situated in a primary school that accommodates both local urban families and rural migrant families. Using a qualitative ethnographic case study approach, the research employed multiple methods, including participant observation, paired interviews with children, teachers, parents, and grandparents, and children's social map drawings, to explore children's friendships and migration.

The research reveals that the children's friendships in the study are shaped by the intersection of migration experiences, gender, and language (accents). In China, the rural is often understood as undesirable, a backward site of identity, culture, and lifestyle. Urban school values, practices and stereotypes thus frequently frame it as a marker of backwardness, potentially stigmatising rural migrant children. However, data suggest that children exercise agency by utilizing rural heritage and culture, gendered activities, play practices, and language (accent) as resources to navigate and transform these social divides, fostering friendships. Also, within the rural-urban hierarchy, teachers interact in different ways, sometimes reinforcing the hierarchy while also employing strategies such as promoting collective friendships and emphasizing unity among classmates to mitigate discrimination and support migrant children's friendships. Parents and grandparents influence children's friendships by promoting inclusion while also fostering children's friendships within smaller, more homogeneous circles that share similar migration experiences.

Content

Declaration	2
Acknowledgements.....	3
Abstract	5
List of Figures	9
Chapter 1. Introduction.....	10
1.1 Introduction	10
1.2 Research Background and Importance	11
1.3 Research Questions and Research Design	19
1.4 Thesis Structure.....	23
Chapter 2. Literature Review	26
2.1 Internal Migration in China	26
2.1.1 Rural-Urban hierarchies and stigmatisation.....	26
2.1.2 Grandparents’ migration as an adaptive family strategy	33
2.2 Primary Education in China.....	37
2.2.1 Primary Education in China: Policy and Core Values.....	37
2.2.2 Inequality in education.....	39
2.3. Children’ s friendships	46
2.3.1 The ‘New’ Sociology of Childhood Paradigm	46
2.3.2 Sociology of Friendships.....	50
2.3.3 Friendships and Social Divisions.....	53
2.4 Intersectionality.....	57
2.4.1 Introduction of intersectionality	57
2.4.2 Additive and Constitutive Approaches	59
2.4.3 Intersectionality in the internal migrant China context	61
2.5 Conclusion.....	62
Chapter 3. Methodology.....	64
3.1 Introduction	64
3.2. Ontological and Epistemological Considerations	65
3.3 Research design: an ethnographic case study in a Chinese primary school	66
3.3.1 Why an ethnographic case study approach?.....	66
3.3.2 The research context: selection and access in the research setting	69
3.4 Fieldwork	75
3.4.1. Sampling.....	75

3.4.2 Data Collection	78
3.5. Ethical Considerations.....	88
3.6 Reflexivity	94
3.7 Data management and analysis	104
3.8 Conclusion.....	107
Chapter 4. Children’ s understandings and practices of friendship in contexts of social difference.....	109
4.1 Introduction	109
4.2 Children’ s Friendship Values.....	109
4.3 Children’ s Friendships Practices	117
4.4 Conclusion.....	137
Chapter 5 Children’ s Friendships in School Settings	140
5.1. Introduction	140
5.2. Teachers’ Understanding of Children’ s Friendships	141
5.3. School Environment and Children's Friendships	151
5.4 Teachers’ Approaches in Supporting and Shaping Children’ s Friendships.....	162
5.5 Conclusion.....	176
Chapter 6. Parents and Children’ s Friendships.....	179
6.1 Introduction	179
6.2. Parents’ Understanding of Their Children’ s Friendships	180
6.2.1 The tension between academic commitments and friendships	180
6.2.2 Friendship for Practical Help	184
6.2.3. Friendships as Pathways for Developing Social Skills.....	187
6.3. Parents’ Inclusionary Boundary Practices.....	191
6.3.1 Displaying Family for Inclusion.....	192
6.3.2 ‘Tolerance’ in Maintaining Children’ s Friendships	203
6.4. Parents’ Exclusionary Work for Children’ s Friendships	205
6.5 Conclusion.....	217
Chapter 7. Conclusion	219
7.1 Introduction	219
7.2 Research Questions and Findings.....	220
7.3 Conceptual Contributions to Literature	232
7.4 Reflections and Limitations of Methodology and Positionality	240
7.5. Potential for Future Research	242
7.6 Conclusion.....	244
References.....	246
Appendix 1. Information Sheet for the School	294
Appendix 2. Information Sheet for Teachers.....	301

Appendix 3. Information Sheet for Parents (Child to Participate)	308
Appendix 4. Information Sheet for Parents (Parent Interview).....	317
Appendix 5. Information Sheet for Children	326
Appendix 6. Consent Form for the School	331
Appendix 7. Consent Form for the Teachers (for Observation).....	332
Appendix 8. Consent Form for the Teachers (for Interview)	334
Appendix 9. Consent Form for Parents (Child to Participate).....	336
Appendix 10. Consent Form for Parents (Interview).....	339
Appendix 11. Consent Form for Children	341
Appendix 12. Interview Schedule with Teachers	343
Appendix 13. Interview schedule for parents.....	345
Appendix 14. Interview Schedule for Children	347
Appendix 15. Participant Demographic Sheet for teachers (English version)	349
Appendix 16. Participant Demographic Sheet for parents (English version)	350
Appendix 17. Ethics Approval letter	351
Appendix 18. Children's Profiles	354
Appendix 19. Teachers' Profiles.....	358
Appendix 20. Parents' and Grandparents' Profiles	359
Appendix 21. Codebook.....	362

List of Figures

- Figure 1. The school map
- Figure 2. The photo of the playground
- Figure 3. The photo of the school's backyard
- Figure 4. The art and music rooms
- Figure 5. The art and music rooms
- Figure 6. The route of children sending notes
- Figure 7. A drawing by Ziyi
- Figure 8. A drawing by Shige
- Figure 9. A drawing by Tianyi
- Figure 10. A drawing by Shihao
- Figure 11. Yiyou's waffle
- Figure 12. A drawing by Shiyun
- Figure 13. A drawing by Yixia
- Figure 14. A drawing by Chengxi
- Figure 15. A drawing by Yubao
- Figure 16. A drawing by Siyu

Chapter 1. Introduction

1.1 Introduction

My research interest was ignited by my experience teaching migrant children. During my final year of college and throughout the pandemic, I was involved in supporting both rural-to-urban migrant and urban children in primary schools, as well as contributing to an NGO focused on migrant children's education. I can vividly recall the preparatory training sessions before teaching rural migrant children, where slides featuring a glass of beer underscored the serious psychological challenges many migrant children face. I remember I was told that rural migrant children had difficulties building friendships and maintaining positive relationships with their peers in urban schools. There was a migrant boy who used that glass of beer in the slide to heat other boys' heads. This act was both a reflection and a reinforcement of the long-existing stigma against the rural migrant population in Chinese society. The instructors of that training program emphasised the need and urgency for us as teachers to teach migrant children how to interact with classmates and friends properly and the need for sensitivity and caution in our approach while working with migrant children. However, in my interactions with migrant children, while I observed certain struggles stemming from uneven educational resources, such as a rural girl who had never used English audio tapes and who faced challenges with oral expression, I did not perceive that rural migrant children had difficulties in their interactions with urban children. More commonly, I witnessed both rural migrant children and urban children's capabilities, kindness and resilience to negotiate differences and interpret the meanings of 'coming from rural areas' differently from media reports and what adult colleagues have shared with me and thus form friendships across different social divisions.

Building on these experiences, my research investigates the friendships of both rural migrant children and urban children in primary schools in China. As internal migration in China continues to rise, the dynamics of migrant children's friendships and their integration into urban environments have become critical issues of both public and academic interest (e.g. Mao and Zhu, 2023; Zhang and Luo, 2016). The scholarly discourse has identified a range of influencing factors, including accent, gender, and identity (e.g. Dong, 2018; Liu, 2013). Yet, this body of work remains fragmented due to the lack of an integral framework and has yet to adequately integrate the firsthand experiences and perspectives of the children themselves. Recent studies have increasingly explored children's friendships across socially and ethnically diverse

contexts (e.g., Streelasky, 2022; Scholtz and Gilligan, 2016), children's strategies and agency in forming friendships (e.g., Blazek, 2011), and the influence of adults, such as teachers and parents, on children's friendships (e.g., Ahn, 2011; Vincent, Neal and Iqbal, 2016), as well as the impact of the educational system and values (e.g., Assan, 2023).

This research aims to integrate these perspectives to offer a comprehensive understanding of the complexities surrounding children's friendships in primary schools in China. This chapter presents a comprehensive review of the research context and background, defines the study's objectives and research questions, and outlines the thesis structure.

1.2 Research Background and Importance

This section introduces the background and context of rural-to-urban migration and migrant children in China, highlighting why these issues have garnered significant public and academic attention. Initially, it provides an overview of internal migration in China, including an examination of the migrant population and the institutional barriers they encounter. The chapter then delves into the Chinese primary education system, addressing the legal framework governing access to education, the exam-oriented culture, and the hierarchical nature of schools while also discussing the educational challenges and academic performance difficulties faced by migrant children. Finally, the chapter explores the dynamics of migrant children's friendships, emphasising the need for academic investigation into this area.

Background of Internal Migration in China

In China, hukou, which refers to household registration, was first introduced in the 1950s to categorize individuals as either rural or urban residents (rural or urban hukou) based on their family's registered place of origin (Chan and Zhang, 1999). People's access to social welfare, including education and healthcare, could be closely tied to their hukou status. Services were typically designed to be accessed in one's area of hukou registration, which meant that migrants might not find these benefits automatically extended to them in a new location. Generally, the range of available benefits could vary significantly, often differing between urban and rural registrations. The system was initially established to regulate migration and ensure that farmers remained on agricultural land, thereby safeguarding the nation's food production. However, in 1970s, the Opening Up and Reform policy led to increased migration, as

the government needed construction workers to support urbanisation and attract foreign investment, while rural residents migrated to cities for better job opportunities (Li and Zuo, 2018). According to data from the National Bureau of Statistics, the total number of migrant workers in China reached 295.62 million in 2022 (National Bureau of Statistics of China, 2023). A significant number of migrant families migrated with their children, who subsequently came to be referred to as migrant children in both academic and policy-related discussions (Bai, Ling and Sun, 2012). In response to the persistent challenges confronting rural migrants in China, non-governmental organizations (NGOs) have emerged as crucial support systems for migrant families. Through services such as tutoring programs, vocational training, and legal aid, NGOs work to mitigate educational, social, and economic disparities, ultimately helping migrant children secure quality education and successfully integrate into urban schools. Additionally, migrant families turn to these organizations for assistance and to connect with other migrants, as they advocate for policy changes, raise public awareness about migrant rights, and foster community networks that provide emotional and social support (Yang, 2020; Miao, 2024).

According to the 2022 Migrant Worker Monitoring Survey Report by the National Bureau of Statistics, the overwhelming majority of migrant workers (99.5%) are employed in secondary and tertiary industries, with over half (51.7%) working in the tertiary sector. Among the six major employment sectors, manufacturing employs the largest share of migrant workers (27.4%), followed by construction (17.7%), wholesale and retail (12.5%), resident services, repair, and other services (11.9%), transportation, storage, and postal services (6.8%), and accommodation and catering (6.1%). Notably, the proportions of migrant workers in manufacturing, wholesale and retail, and resident services have all increased compared to the previous year. The average monthly wage of migrant workers rose to 4,615 yuan in 2022, up 4.1% from the previous year. Despite this steady growth in wages, income levels remain relatively low, with significant disparities across sectors and regions. Wage growth is more pronounced in eastern China, although all regions have experienced consistent increases in migrant worker earnings (National Bureau of Statistics, 2023).

The educational profile of migrant workers has also improved considerably compared to earlier generations. According to the 2022 National Bureau of Statistics report, while those with a junior high school education still constitute the majority (55.2%), there is a notable presence of workers with higher qualifications: 17.0% have a senior high

school education, and 13.7% have attained a Junior College degree or higher. This latter group, representing those with tertiary education, has seen a significant increase of 1.1 percentage points from the previous year.

The increase in rural-to-urban migration has led to a growing number of children relocating with their parents, who are collectively referred to as 'migrant children'. The education and well-being of these children have become a pivotal factor influencing their parents' decision to either remain in the city or return to their hometowns. As Woodman's (2017) research indicates, many migrant parents perceive their own limited social mobility as a consequence of their 'lack of culture'. This concept of 'culture' encompasses not only formal educational qualifications but also broader cultural capital necessary for urban life. Consequently, they place strong hopes on their children's educational success and career success in cities. Moreover, as large numbers of children migrate to urban areas, often due to their parents' work or self-employment, grandparents frequently migrate to provide childcare. This role is influenced by increased female labour force participation and policies on childcare for working mothers (Berkovitch and Manor, 2023; Zhao and Huang, 2018). The interaction between neoliberal individualism and grandparenting creates tensions and adaptations within family structures. As suggested by Airey and colleagues (2022), neoliberalism, emphasizing self-reliance and economic productivity, pressures individuals to succeed independently, often leading to dual-income households that require grandparents to assume caregiving roles. The migration of elderly grandparents is a significant aspect of China's large-scale domestic migration as well, and research shows that most elderly migrants migrate to assist the second generation, especially with childcare. However, research suggests that grandparents, being less accustomed to new urban environments than younger generations, often experience 'subordinate integration' (Kahil, Iqbal and Maghbouleh, 2022, p.3). Research by Kahil and colleagues (2022) has found that limited economic opportunities make it difficult for migrated grandparents to achieve financial stability, leading to dependence on their children, who are more successful in securing employment. As a result, grandparents normally have to defer to their children in family decision-making. This shift creates tension as grandparents struggle to maintain the patriarchal or matriarchal roles that once defined their status and authority, particularly in matters concerning their grandchildren's education and integration.

In addition to familial challenges, migrant children also encounter significant difficulties in enrolling in urban schools and in their academic performance. These issues, which will be explored in the following section, are characterised by challenges related to accessing educational resources, integrating into urban school systems, and achieving academic success.

Rural Migrant Children's Education in Urban Primary Schools

In China, the formal education system spans 12 years and comprises six years of primary school, three years of middle school, and three years of high school (Sun, 2022). The first nine years (primary and middle school education) are compulsory. Both the government and parents are legally obligated to ensure that children complete these mandatory years of education (Sun, 2022). The hukou (household registration) system constitutes the fundamental gateway to public compulsory education in China, directly tying a child's school eligibility to their registered place of residence. Within cities, this principle is reinforced through the 'nearby enrolment' policy, which mandates that admission to specific public schools is determined by the combination of a student's hukou location and their family's legally registered property address (Zhou and Cheung, 2017; Li and Sun, 2021). Therefore, purchasing property within the catchment zone of a high-performing school enables a family to transfer their hukou to that address, subsequently securing a placement at that desirable institution. Consequently, intense competition for access to elite public schools channels into the real estate market, inflating prices of properties located in premium school districts. These sought after properties are known as 'school district housing' (Li and Sun, 2021). Ultimately, the phenomenon of school district housing represents a direct capitalisation of superior public educational resources, systematically linked to and mediated by the intertwined structures of hukou and property ownership.

During the initial phases of internal migration in China, the absence of a local urban hukou systematically excluded migrant children from urban public schools. This institutional barrier caused widespread enrolment difficulties and led to disproportionately high dropout rates within this population (Feng, 2003). According to Feng (2003) since the late 1990s, an increasing number of private schools specifically built for rural migrant children were built and known as 'migrant schools' in China. However, private migrant schools often operate with lower standards than their public counterparts. This is visible in their resource use, such as relying on second-hand desks and chairs acquired from public institutions. Furthermore, cost-cutting measures

lead to overcrowded classrooms and the hiring of many teachers who lack the necessary educational and teaching certifications (Yao, 2010; Li and Yang, 2011).

To further promote social equity and inclusion, in 2001, the Chinese government issued the Two Mainlines (liangweizhu) policy to enhance equal access to urban primary schools for both migrant and urban children (Qian and Walker, 2015). The 'Two Mainlines' policy consists of two key components: integrating migrant children into the public school system and prioritizing public schools as the primary option for their education. This approach seeks to decrease reliance on private, often substandard, migrant schools, thereby ensuring that migrant children receive an education comparable to their urban peers. This initiative is part of a broader strategy to manage the challenges of rapid urbanisation and the growing population of migrant families in cities.

The persistent regional disparities in educational resource allocation across China have contributed to substantial academic preparedness gaps among migrant children prior to their transition to urban school systems. According to research of Xu (2022), disparities in educational development between urban and rural China are reflected in both teaching staff and infrastructure. Urban primary schools maintain a higher student-teacher ratio (18.8) compared to rural institutions (14.6), against a national average of 17.1. Infrastructure gaps are equally evident, with urban schools possessing more mathematics-specific computers (1065.1 vs 956.4) and multimedia classrooms (200.6 vs 191.0) per institution, consistently exceeding national averages and highlighting persistent resource allocation inequalities. Furthermore, the unequal distribution extends within cities and counties, as evidenced by the categorization of schools into key and non-key institutions. Key schools, mostly in urban areas, receive more funding and staff, reinforcing disparities in educational opportunities (Liu, 2014). This segregated system aimed to concentrate limited resources on a select number of promising schools with the expectation that these schools would quickly develop into first-class institutions. According to Hu (2012), the key-school policy was formally repealed by the new Compulsory Education Law of 2006, a measure intended to encourage the balanced development of compulsory education. However, despite these efforts, disparities persist between schools, particularly between urban centre schools and those on the outskirts and rural regions, which predominantly accommodate children from working-class and rural migrant families.

Therefore, even being enrolled in public schools, migrant children still struggle academically due to the poor quality of education they receive in rural areas. A significant number of rural schools in China struggle with persistent underfunding, a shortage of teaching staff, and outdated resources, which results in students being inadequately prepared for the more advanced and competitive urban schools. For instance, a study by Zheng (2018) found that the writing proficiency deficits observed in migrant students upon their enrolment in urban public schools are significantly exacerbated by their prior learning conditions. These conditions include the subpar teaching resources and administrative disorganization in migrant schools, combined with the restricted availability of reading materials in their family homes. Chen, Xu and Xu (2021) further finds that rural migrant children typically struggle with English, particularly in listening and speaking skills. This challenge is linked to the lack of English teachers and resources in rural areas, especially in kindergartens, primary schools, and even libraries, when compared to urban areas. Despite gaining access to better educational facilities in the cities, the foundational gaps in rural education remain a significant barrier to their academic success. Poor academic performance also significantly affects rural migrant children's forming and maintaining peer friendships in urban schools. For example, research by Liu (2018) found that struggling to keep up academically often causes rural migrant children to feel inferior and leads to discrimination by their peers. further indicates that migrant children's academic performance significantly influences their social integration, with those achieving poorer results reporting fewer friendships and experiencing heightened social anxiety compared to urban peers. This academic disadvantage intensifies their sense of alienation within classroom environments. Therefore, the following section will provide a more detailed analysis of migrant children's friendships.

Migrant Children's Friendships in China

In recent years, Chinese media has increasingly reported on the social difficulties migrant children face in forming friendships with their urban peers. Reports from social media platforms Nanfengchuang (2023) and *China Newsweek* (2021) have highlighted several incidents that underscore these concerns. For example, a series of articles in *China Newsweek* (2021) detailed cases where migrant children in cities like Beijing were systematically excluded from social activities, such as group projects and extracurricular events, because of perceived differences in their background, status, or education compared to local urban children. A prominent incident reported in the series of *China Newsweek* (2021) involved a migrant student in Guangzhou who was

bullied and ostracised after being unable to keep up with the academic standards of his peers, resulting in severe emotional distress and a drop in self-esteem. Additionally, the *Nanfengchuang* (2023) covered a story about a school in Shenzhen where migrant children faced widespread social isolation, which led to a marked increase in anxiety and depression among these students. These incidents have fuelled media concern, highlighting the broader issue of social integration and the need for more effective measures to address the issue of social inclusion and exclusion of rural migrant children.

In reaction to the concerns highlighted by media reports, researchers have undertaken studies to evaluate the friendships of rural migrant children. However, these studies predominantly apply specific criteria to 'assess' the friendships of migrant children, often concluding that rural migrant children struggle to form friendships. For example, Li and Rose (2017) conducted a comprehensive study on the psychological impact of social exclusion, finding that in urban schools, rural migrant children often suffer from elevated levels of anxiety and depression. Their research involved detailed interviews with parents and teachers, revealing that these children frequently experience bullying and exclusion from peer activities, which significantly impacts their mental health. Similarly, Chen (2014) explored the inclusion experiences of rural migrant children within urban settings and concluded that their social networks are often limited, attributing this to cultural and socioeconomic disparities. The study suggests that rural migrant children encounter considerable obstacles in forming enduring friendships, particularly when interacting with urban peers. In a similar vein, Zeng, Zhang and Zhou (2019) evaluated the quality of friendships among migrant children, finding that most relationships were based more on proximity than on shared emotional or psychological connections. These studies contribute to the prevailing narrative that rural migrant children face challenges in developing deep, supportive friendships. However, these studies often apply a standardized framework of what constitutes friendship, assessing migrant children's social relationships against a norm that may not fully capture the diverse ways in which these children forge connections. By emphasizing the difficulties and deficiencies rural migrant children experience, such studies tend to overlook the resilience and adaptive strategies these children employ in navigating their social worlds. Consequently, they overlook the complexity of children's friendships, which often diverge from the notions of friendship from adults and the stigmatisation towards rural migrant children. This oversight contributes to the contrasting narrative I presented earlier in this chapter, where NGOs and schools depict rural migrant and

urban children as deficient in forming friendships with peers from diverse backgrounds, which contradicts some of my real-world observations that show these children have their own wisdom and strategies for building friendships. Therefore, it underscores the importance of recognizing children's agency and the need to explore the context and openness of what friendships are experienced by rural migrant and urban children.

Scholars have also highlighted that socioeconomic disparities often hinder social integration for, especially migrant children and those from lower-income families who may lack access to extracurricular activities and social events essential for forming friendships (Kustatscher, 2015; Darmody and Smyth, 2017). Ridge (2011) observed that such financial constraints lead to exclusion from group activities, exacerbating feelings of isolation. Similarly, Zhang and Luo (2016) observed that the stress of adjusting to new cultural and educational environments can prevent migrant children from effectively connecting with local peers, leading to social alienation. Also, the migration experience itself further complicates social integration, as poverty and a lack of extracurricular activity resources may worsen the situation. Additionally, rural students often face stigmatisation due to strong accents, which can contribute to their marginalisation (Dong, 2018; Dong, 2009).

Recent studies have also explored the diversity of friendships among migrant children, seeking to understand the variations in their social experiences. However, these studies often engage with children beyond the fourth grade, assuming that older children, due to their greater literacy and cognitive abilities, are more suited for surveys and interviews (e.g. Zhang, 2018; Cheng et al., 2007). For instance, Zhu et al. (2013), in a comparative study of 603 migrant children and 312 local children using questionnaires, found significant disparities in peer relationships between the two groups. Their results further revealed that the social development of migrant children was particularly susceptible to negative parental behaviours such as rejection and denial. These studies often imposed a predefined, adult-centric definition of 'friendship,' thereby overlooking the diverse lived experiences of young migrant children. Their unique perspectives remain underexplored, as an emphasis on literacy and age frequently excludes them from research participation. Such research, while valuable, inadvertently limits the scope of understanding by focusing predominantly on older children, thereby neglecting the potential richness and variety of friendships among younger migrant children and devaluing their roles as active agents in their social world. This age-based focus fails to acknowledge that younger migrant children

may navigate their social environments in distinct ways, forming friendships that reflect their unique experiences and perspectives. Furthermore, there is a lack of a comprehensive framework that brings together the diverse factors influencing these children's friendships, such as language, migration experience, gender, and the broader social and educational contexts in which they operate.

Therefore, my current research, grounded in the intersectionality framework (Crenshaw, 1989), is essential as it highlights the overlapping and interconnected effects of migration experiences, gender, and migration status on migrant children's friendships. This approach offers a comprehensive lens through which to understand the complexities of social inequalities, as noted by Bassel and Emejulu (2010). Additionally, by incorporating the 'new' sociology of childhood (Matthews, 2007), my study emphasizes children's agency and the cultural meanings embedded in their friendships. Research of, for example, Mizen and Ofosu-Kusi (2010), Deegan (1993) and Streelasky (2022) suggests that children's friendships should not be viewed as homogeneous or individualized but should be situated within their social contexts. Therefore, my research aims to dehomogenize and demarginalize migrant children's experiences, contributing to a deeper, context-specific understanding of rural migrant and urban children's friendships.

1.3 Research Questions and Research Design

Research Aims and Research Questions

Given the above discussions, rural migrant children's experiences with friendships are shaped by the specific Chinese context, including their migration experiences, language (accent), and gender. However, existing studies often fail to integrate these factors cohesively and lack a comprehensive framework. To address this gap, this study will utilise an intersectionality framework, which examines the simultaneous and interacting effects of various social factors, such as gender and migration status, on social inequalities (Crenshaw, 1989). This approach aims to provide a more holistic understanding and novel insights into the dynamics of migrant children's friendships.

As has been discussed, rural migrant children's strategies for forming friendships are often overlooked in academic studies. This neglect may arise from methodological limitations, as surveys frequently exclude young children and rely on adult-centric definitions of friendship, disregarding children's own perspectives and interpretations.

This oversight adds to the stigmatisation of migrant children. To address this gap, my study employs the 'new' sociology of childhood paradigm, which highlights children's agency in interpreting their social worlds (Matthews, 2007) and within specific social and cultural contexts.

Furthermore, this study will incorporate sociological perspectives on friendship, highlighting the influence of contextual factors such as family and educational settings while acknowledging the importance of maintaining openness to the diverse nature of friendship (Adams and Allan, 1998; Bagwell and Schmidt, 2011).

Supported by the theoretical stances above, the research will investigate migrant children's friendships and address the following research questions:

Research Question 1: What are rural migrant and urban children's experiences of friendships in school? How do internal, rural-to-urban migrant and urban children understand and negotiate their friendships within primary school settings?

Research Question 2: How does the intersection of rural-urban migrant status, gender and language (particularly accent) influence migrant children's friendship and their friendship strategies?

Research Question 3: How are migrant children's friendships shaped by adult worlds - parents, grandparents, teaching staff - and wider educational policy contexts and social inequalities?

Research Design and Methods

Since the study aims to investigate children's friendships, a qualitative research approach is deemed appropriate for examining migrant children's friendships in their daily interactions. This method highlights the children's active role, allowing researchers to explore how individuals engage in the process of constructing and redefining meanings through everyday experiences (Konstantoni, 2010, p.8).

The study used an ethnographic case study approach in the outskirts of Beijing. As the capital city of China, the cross-provincial mobility of Beijing's migrant population is more pronounced than in other cities, which presents a more salient cultural, social, economic and linguistic diversity (Liu, Liu and Yu, 2017). I based my research on one Grade 3 class within the case study school for eight months, and data will be collected

through participant observation, interviews and social maps from children. During my fieldwork, I conducted observations in one class where I immersed myself in the classroom and got to know the children, teachers and parents of the children in the class. I closely followed school routines, observing children's relationships, behaviours and interactions as well as chatting with children and their teachers in different places around the school to try to understand children's experiences of friendship. Data generated from participant observation mainly consisted of field notes and reflexive diary. Accordingly, participant observation facilitated me to generate findings towards Research Questions 1,2 and 3.

To explore in greater depth how adults' perspectives and values shape children's behaviour of friendships, semi-structured interviews were conducted with 7 educational staff (class teachers, school principals and head teachers). Interviews with educational staff were centred on both their understanding and the schools' management towards children's friendships. I also conducted 13 interviews with parents and grandparents of the children in the class. I interviewed both migrant and rural migrant parents and grandparents with a gender mix of both males and females. The rationale behind interviewing parents was to focus more on their perspectives of their children's friendship experiences both inside and outside the school setting. The interviews with parents and teaching staff facilitated me to generate findings towards Research Question 3.

To understand children's friendships, I also conducted semi-structured interviews with children. The interviews were paired with the help of the class teacher to make sure the pairs were carefully planned and would not involve close friends so as to be more neutral and avoid any potential upset or competition between established friendships (Vincent, Neal and Iqbal, 2018). I conducted 19 pairs of interviews with a total of 38 child participants, and the interviews focused on children's understanding of friendships and the situations that confused me during observation. During the interviews with children, participatory approaches based on drawing and discussing social maps were also employed to guarantee the children's rights to fully participate in the research and also facilitate the triangulation of data (Vincent, Neal and Iqbal, 2018). As my research seeks to understand children's friendships, social maps were employed along with interviews with children, with the idea that children draw themselves in the centre of the paper with their friends surrounding them; the spacing of the pictures will present the degrees of emotional closeness (Vincent, Neal and Iqbal,

2018). Children's interviews and drawings also help in generating research findings towards Research Questions 1 and 2 as to how children's friendships and hierarchy within the group are influenced by the intersection of socioeconomic background, migration status, gender, and language.

Since the research data were collected in China and were originally in Chinese, I translated the material after transcribing the interviews. The data generated was examined using thematic analysis, which involved analysing the generated themes and patterns within the data associated with a phenomenon (Braun and Clarke, 2006). After reading the data intensely, using NVivo, I organised the data systematically into themes, categories, and codes. Then, following the suggestion of Thomas (2011), the process of analysis was three-fold: understanding the case phenomenon, discerning differences across themes, and exploring connections between the emerging themes.

Terminology

In this thesis, the term 'rural migrant' refers to individuals who originate from rural areas and are registered under the rural hukou system. This classification is based on China's household registration system (hukou), which classifies rural and urban populations, shaping access to social services, employment opportunities, and legal rights in urban areas. Despite variations in migration experiences and degrees of urban integration, for the purposes of this study, 'rural migrant' will be used consistently to describe individuals with rural hukou, regardless of their length of stay in Beijing. This includes a small group of children who were born and raised in Beijing but are unable to acquire a Beijing hukou due to their parents' occupations, which do not grant Beijing hukou status. These children, while growing up in an urban environment, are still significantly influenced by their parents' rural hukou status, particularly in the school system, where their access to resources is often constrained. Additionally, as expressed in interviews, these families identify strongly with a rural identity and migration status, shaped by their rural origins. As such, these individuals are also categorized as 'rural migrants' and 'rural migrant children' in this study.

Similarly, the terms 'urban children,' 'urban parents,' and 'urban grandparents' represent individuals who were born and reside in Beijing with a local urban hukou. This categorization is used to differentiate long-term urban residents with formal legal status in Beijing from rural migrants who lack such status.

I recognize that these categorizations are necessarily reductive and may not fully encapsulate the complexities of individual experiences, social mobility, or identity formation. However, they serve as analytical constructs to facilitate discussion and conceptual clarity within the scope of this research. Therefore, for the consistency and convenience of the reading of the study, this research uses 'rural migrant children' and 'urban children' for clarity.

1.4 Thesis Structure

This thesis is divided into seven chapters. Following this introduction, Chapter 2 reviews the literature on children's friendships, education, and migration studies, positioning this research within intersectional approaches and defining the critical gaps it aims to bridge. It reviews discussions on four key areas: internal migration in China, the educational landscape, children's friendships, and intersectionality. The reviewed literature highlights that the hukou system and language differences are significant sources of discrimination, contributing to the stigmatisation of migrant children and reinforcing social divisions. It also discusses the underexplored factors influencing discrimination in educational settings, including the experiences of migrant children and urban working-class children. Additionally, the chapter reviews the role of adults, particularly migrant grandparents, in shaping children's social relationships, noting gaps in understanding their impact on grandchildren's friendships. This chapter proposes a robust analytical framework that integrates the 'new' sociology of childhood with intersectionality. Prioritizes children's agency, this framework analyses how the confluence of migration experience, socioeconomic status, gender, and language shapes children's friendships.

Drawing on eight months of intensive ethnography at a primary school, Chapter 3 details the study's methodological design employed to investigate the proposed research questions. It explains the rationale for using an ethnographic case study methodology and justifies the selection of the research setting, participants, data collection and analysis methods. Additionally, the chapter includes a reflective account of my experiences navigating multiple roles in the research environment and details how I applied ethical principles in practice within the Chinese context.

This thesis comprises three empirical chapters which respond to the three research questions. Chapter 4, based on data gathered through observations, social maps, and

interviews with children, primarily examines children's perceptions of friendships and their strategies for forming them. It also explores how the intersectionality of migration experience, language, and gender shape their experiences. This chapter highlights that children's friendships necessitate significant emotional support and comfort and are a crucial aspect of their school lives. Additionally, this chapter discusses how children understand and interpret 'rural' and 'migration' differently from adults, framing these social categories positively in the context of building and maintaining friendships.

Chapter 5 explores how educational settings influence children's friendships, focusing on teachers' beliefs and the broader school environment. It shows how teachers, guided by the principles of Quality Education (Li, 2012), value supportive friendships to foster collective values and positive interactions. However, teachers acknowledge that such relationships are not always achievable, especially under neoliberal pressures that emphasize academic success. When idealized supportive friendships are not possible, teachers focus on fostering unity and collective identity through strategies like seating arrangements and class leader systems. The chapter also reveals how these practices inadvertently marginalize rural migrant children, as teachers often rely on academically stronger students for leadership roles, leaving migrant children with fewer opportunities. It highlights how school activities aimed at promoting inclusivity may still marginalize disadvantaged students. Also, this chapter reveals how children's agency in friendships complicates these dynamics, challenging the adult-imposed views of friendships.

Chapter 6 focuses on the inclusionary and exclusionary boundary work (Rollock et al., 2011) employed by parents and grandparents to shape children's friendships. It explores how parents invest considerable effort in fostering children's friendships and ensuring they form equitable relationships. The chapter highlights the role of 'family display' (Walsh, 2018), with parents using strategies such as correcting accents, displaying material possessions, and adhering to specific dress codes to assert legitimacy and protect their children's social standing. It also reveals how these inclusionary practices are often complemented by exclusionary ones, where parents guide children's friendships by steering them towards certain peers and avoiding others whom they consider less suitable.

Chapter 7 summarizes the thesis' core findings and highlight the key academic contributions made to four intersecting fields: the sociology of children's friendship,

educational studies, migration studies, and intersectionality research. It reflects on how the study advances the understanding of how children navigate friendships in diverse contexts, particularly within the rural-urban hierarchy. The chapter also critically examines the research methods used, especially those employed in education settings with young children and individuals from rural and urban backgrounds, offering insights into the challenges and advantages of these approaches. Furthermore, it addresses the limitations of the study, acknowledges areas for further exploration, and provides recommendations for future research that could build upon the findings and expand the scope of inquiry in these areas.

Chapter 2. Literature Review

This literature review chapter reviews the existing research on migration and children's friendships while also outlining the conceptual framework for my study. Building on the discussions presented in the Introduction, my research investigates the friendships of rural migrant and urban children within educational settings in China. Consequently, this chapter integrates discussions from four key areas: internal migration in China, the educational landscape and related debates in China, children's friendships, and intersectionality.

This chapter consists of four sections. The first section reviews the background of internal migration in China, highlighting the cultural hierarchy linked to the rural-urban divide. It reviews how individuals with rural hukou are perceived as 'second-class citizens,' with their accents often serving as symbolic markers of stigmatisation. This section also explores migration patterns in China, particularly the strategy of grandparents migrating as part of a family strategy. The second section explores China's educational landscape and debates, reviewing literature on educational values and inequalities to demonstrate the cultural exclusion of migrant children from the education system. The third section introduces the 'new' sociology of childhood and reviews the literature on children's friendships, highlighting the social divisions shaping these relationships. The final section reviews the application of intersectionality as an analytical framework for analysing the friendships between rural migrant and urban children in China.

2.1 Internal Migration in China

2.1.1 Rural-Urban hierarchies and stigmatisation

Hukou System

As noted in the previous chapter, the hukou system, developed in the 1950s, functions as a household registration mechanism that categorizes citizens as either rural or urban residents, thereby establishing two distinct forms of citizenship (Chan, 2015). The hukou system not only controls migration and resource allocation but also institutionalised a rural-urban divide that reinforces social hierarchies and inequalities and thus has long been a subject of scholarly interest due to its impact on social stratification and the stigmatisation of rural residents (Song, 2014; Solinger, 1999).

The hukou system creates and perpetuates a rigid social structure where urban residents have privileged access to public services, leading to a hierarchy of citizenship. One of the foundational studies on the hukou system, Solinger's (1999) work explores citizenship and migration in urban China and provides a detailed analysis of how the hukou system has constructed this hierarchy. She contends that, since the 1980s, more developed regions in China have increasingly depended on domestic peasants as a labour force while simultaneously denying them the basic rights typically afforded by international standards of citizenship. Further, Kelly (2008, p.25) argues that citizenship in China exists on a spectrum, with rural villagers frequently positioned somewhere between subjects and citizens, and urban dwellers also experiencing varying degrees of citizen status. Building on Kelly's (2008) work, Liang (2012, p. 24) developed the concept of 'multi-layered Chinese citizenship' to describe the stratification of citizenship within China's hukou system, under which individuals are accorded differing levels of rights and entitlements. Within this framework, urban hukou holders are granted a more direct and less restricted access to social services like education, healthcare, and housing, facilitating their integration into urban life. By contrast, rural migrants often referred to as 'second-class citizens' face structural barriers that limit their access to the same range of opportunities and public goods. Frequently employed in low-wage and informal sectors, they are also often excluded from urban welfare programs and legal protections, which in turn reinforces their marginalised position and restricts possibilities for socioeconomic advancement. Liang's (2012) framework highlights the entrenched social stratification within urban areas, where rural migrants, despite living and working in cities, remain excluded from full citizenship and the associated benefits. According to Liang (2012), this exclusion is not only legal but also deeply social and cultural, as rural migrants are often stigmatised and discriminated against in urban settings based on their different citizenship status. Moreover, Jakimów (2012; 2015) examines how the hukou system reinforces a rigid social structure. The research identifies a structural disparity wherein urban residents enjoy superior access to public services such as housing, healthcare, education, and employment, while rural residents face systematic marginalization. Jakimów contends that this division is not merely administrative but is imbued with significant social stigma. Jakimów (2012) also argued that rural migrants seeking better economic opportunities in cities face systematic exclusion; beyond being relegated to low-status employment, they are systematically barred from the social welfare entitlements and legal protections guaranteed to their urban counterparts, thereby perpetuating a deeply embedded social hierarchy. Through this lens, Jakimów's works

(2012; 2015) emphasise that the hukou system is both a legal and social construct that systematically disenfranchises rural migrants, a notion that echoes Liang's concept of 'multi-layered Chinese citizenship.' By focusing on the social consequences of this system, Jakimów deepens the understanding of the enduring inequalities within Chinese society, demonstrating how the hukou system continues to shape the lives of the rural migrant population and their place in the urban hierarchy. Therefore, the works of Solinger (1999), Kelly (2008), Liang (2012) and Jakimów (2012, 2015) reinforced a perception of rural residents as 'second-class citizens', a notion that has been extensively explored in the literature (e.g., Liu, 2020; Chen, Lu and Xu, 2015).

The rural-urban division in China is not only reinforced by the hukou system but also exacerbated by market forces, which together intensify the stigmatization of rural residents. As Hertel and Zhai (2006) highlight, the rise of market economies in China has deepened existing inequalities, with the result that rural migrants particularly disadvantaged. Hertel and Zhai (2006) explain that market forces are the economic factors that affect the supply and demand for goods, services, and labour in a market-driven economy. In China's economic reforms, these forces have created competitive urban labour markets that prioritise flexibility and efficiency, often at the expense of rural migrants. The hukou system interacts with these market dynamics by channelling rural migrants into low-status, low-wage jobs that are vital to urban economies but offer limited opportunities for upward mobility. As a result, rural migrants are trapped in precarious employment situations where they are exploited as a cheap labour force but remain excluded from the benefits that urban residents receive. These rural migrants, often confined to low-paying and precarious jobs, are systematically excluded from urban social welfare programs, which remain largely reserved for urban hukou holders. This exclusion is indicative of a broader social injustice, where rural migrants are denied the social rights and protections enjoyed by urban residents, perpetuating their status as 'second-class citizens' (Li, 2013; Qiao, 2010). Market forces have thus compounded the inequities embedded within the hukou system, reinforcing the socioeconomic barriers that rural migrants face.

The stigma attached to rural hukou holders is further entrenched by their economic marginalisation, which is exacerbated by market-driven inequalities. Scholars like Nie (2006) have emphasized the psychological impact of this hukou-related stigmatization. The persistent categorization and marginalization of rural hukou holders foster a deep sense of inferiority and social alienation among rural migrants. This stigmatization is

not simply a byproduct of economic disparity but is firmly embedded in the social identity of rural hukou holders, who are often perceived as less civilised or modern compared to their urban counterparts (Nie, 2006). In this context, both the hukou system and market forces work in tandem to maintain and deepen the rural-urban division, reinforcing the marginalised status of rural migrants and perpetuating their stigmatisation within urban society. Lui (2016) and Chen (2013) investigated how the hukou system, in conjunction with other social markers like social class, gender, and ethnicity, reinforces social hierarchies in China. Their research shows that the hukou system does not operate in isolation but interacts with these additional social dimensions to perpetuate stratification. Specifically, Lui (2016) reveals that female rural migrants often face additional gender-based barriers. This dynamic is further complicated by cultural and ethnic identity, as Chen (2013) observed that ethnic minority migrants may experience unique psychological distress stemming from the conflict between their traditional cultures and the modern urban environment, distinct from their Han Chinese rural migrant counterparts. Therefore, the work of Lui (2016) and Chen (2013) demonstrated the potential of how hukou as a citizenship status can intersect with other social divisions to reinforce inequalities.

The studies above illustrated that the hukou system serves as citizenship in China and primarily contributes to the rural-urban divide by creating a rigid social hierarchy, where urban residents have superior access to resources and opportunities while rural migrants face systemic exclusion and limited access to benefits. Therefore, the studies establish that the hukou system has developed beyond its original function as a household registration mechanism and now functions to perpetuate social inequalities. The disparities in access to resources and income, exacerbated by market forces, have intensified the marginalisation of rural residents, reinforcing their identity as 'second-class citizens.' This entrenched inequality has become a profound source of psychological distress for rural populations.

In addition to the hukou system, language and accent also operate as a social marker and a source of stigmatisation. The next section analyses how accent functions as both a symbol of cultural distinction and a factor in social stratification within the rural-urban divide.

Language and accent

Language has also long been a focus of research about migration. Language itself contains such as spoken and written forms (Roberts and Street, 2017). Scholars also relate language to the sociology of language, which explores how social class influences the use of language (e.g. Bernstein, 1971; Streib, 2011). In China, children are encouraged to speak Mandarin (Putonghua, the pronunciation more relates to dialect in Beijing, which refers to no accent at all in China), however, Mandarin education was less proliferated in rural China, especially two decades ago, therefore speaking Mandarin has been regarded as a symbol of receiving higher level of education as well as a stereotyped marker of being rural residents (Xu, 2019). Accordingly, in China, both migrant and non-migrant children share Chinese as their language; it is the accent and the sociology of language that set them apart. For example, Li (2012) and Dong (2016) found that most migrant children are unwilling to communicate with others because they are worried that their accents cannot be understood.

Accent, as a key component of language variation, significantly influences the formation of identity, as even subtle differences in accent can swiftly reveal one's social background (Dong, 2018; Dollmann, Kogan and Weißmann, 2024). As Mandarin education was initially more concentrated in urban areas and schools, it developed a symbolic function, often being perceived as indicative of an individual's urban background or formal educational experience (Wang and Yuan, 2013). The unequal allocation of educational resources leads to a marked stratification in identities shaped by these resources. For instance, Dong (2018) has found that migrant children navigate identity formation in light of language challenges, while local children's perspectives highlight the negotiation of identities through access to identity-building resources, which are themselves stratified. She further noted that accent also serves as a basis for discrimination and reflects teachers' perspectives, where educators often perceive migrant children as unaware of social distinctions but insist on integrating them into the mainstream by adopting standardised language use. Apart from migrant children who may face discrimination due to their accents, Xu (2021) also suggests that local accents in megacities can sometimes be a source of pride, highlighting the hierarchical nature of dialects within urban environments. She found that in cities such as Beijing, Shanghai, and Guangzhou, local accents carry significant cultural value and are often associated with ownership of property; therefore, for migrants in cities like Beijing, owning property remains a distant aspiration due to prohibitively high real estate prices. Consequently, Xu (2021) suggests that fluency in the Beijing accent can

subconsciously convey local status and imply ancestral wealth passed down over generations. As a result, people's accents can contribute to discrimination in China, reinforcing divisions based on rural-urban distinctions and local-non-local identities within megacities.

The relationship between language, social legitimacy, and hierarchy can also be found in the work of Oakleigh Welply. Welply's (2017, 2020) research underscores how language proficiency among migrant children functions not only as a tool for integration but also as a marker of legitimacy and acceptance within the dominant society (Welply, 2017, 2020). Her work (Welply, 2017) resonates with Pierre Bourdieu's concept of *language as symbolic power*, which highlights how language is not merely a neutral medium of communication but a socially embedded resource that reflects and reinforces power dynamics (Bourdieu, 1991). In the context of migration, this means that children who master the host country's language are more likely to be perceived as legitimate members of society, while those who struggle with linguistic proficiency may face marginalization. Welply's (2020) research, particularly in France and England, illustrates how national policies construct linguistic ability as a prerequisite for inclusion, often framing non-fluent migrant children as deficient rather than recognizing multilingualism as an asset. Furthermore, Bourdieu's (1993) notion of the *linguistic market* explains why certain accents, dialects, or speech patterns are valued over others, influencing migrant children's social mobility. The linguistic market refers to the social and cultural system in which different forms of language are exchanged and assigned varying levels of prestige or value (Bourdieu, 1993). Just as economic markets assign value to goods based on demand and supply, the linguistic market determines which ways of speaking are considered legitimate, respected, or desirable, often privileging the language forms of dominant social groups. This hierarchy can influence access to power, resources, and opportunities, reinforcing social inequalities. In the context of China, even if rural migrant children speak Chinese fluently, their accent and the symbolic associations tied to it such as coming from a well-educated family or living in an affluent neighbourhood can still lead to discrimination if their speech deviates from the dominant linguistic norm, which is standard Mandarin. This situation perpetuates systemic inequalities, as language proficiency by itself does not ensure full integration but is instead shaped by social perceptions and power structures.

In addition to accent, the use of language can also intersect with social class that presents people's 'culture' in China. Woodman (2017) suggests that 'culture' can

indicate both formal education experience and certificate as well as 'common sense' in China that are more privileges the urban, educated middle class. As a result, migrant populations have been disadvantaged by a lack of 'culture' rooted in the enduring disparities of educational equity between rural and urban regions. This has impacted their ability to secure employment and has underscored the importance of prioritising cultural education for their children. For instance, Bernstein's (1970, 1971) research emphasized how language use reflects individuals' social class positioning. He suggested that access to different language codes is influenced by one's family's background, with middle-class children using an elaborated code, preferred in formal and educational settings, while working-class children tend to use a restricted code. The elaborated code, associated with higher socioeconomic status, is marked by more detailed and sophisticated vocabulary, while the restricted code is informal, colloquial, and regionally specific, often linked to lower socioeconomic groups. Echoed with the work of Bernstein (1970, 1971), Streib (2011) explored the role of language in shaping social dynamics, particularly in different social class contexts. Streib (2011) found that middle-class children often offered more detailed explanations. These children were also more confident in taking control of conversations, sometimes interrupting others in socially accepted ways, which allowed them to assert power. As a result, working-class children often found themselves marginalized in these interactions, as their voices were less prominent in these exchanges of power and discourse.

The studies discussed above revealed literature around hukou and accent as social markers and sources of stigmatisation towards migrants. However, both hukou and language (accent) typically function as visible and audible factors in the context of discrimination (an individual's hukou status can be viewed in the household registration booklet). While analysing the way racism towards Gypsy children in the British context, Bhopal (2006, p. 211) suggests that in schools, racism was not explicitly recognized as such because it did not conform to conventional notions of racial discrimination based on visible differences in skin colour. Instead, the racialization of Gypsy children was rendered invisible, positioning them as a white 'other' within predominantly white schools. Similarly, in the Chinese context, hukou and the way of using language act as visible and audible markers of social division, as hukou status is visible in citizens' identification cards, yet research on rural-urban disparities frequently generalises these groups without addressing internal variations or intersecting social divisions. Therefore, there are still gaps in understanding other less recognised factors contributing to social relationships such as friendships as well as processes of

exclusion. Accordingly, racialization and discrimination (e.g., hukou and accent discrimination in China) operate through cultural and political factors rather than being based solely on phenotypic characteristics. These forms of discrimination cannot be reduced or 'naturalized' to physical and audible features alone, as they are deeply embedded in cultural, social, and linguistic practices that shape how individuals are perceived and treated.

As has been discussed in the previous chapter, migration at the household level has evolved into an adaptive strategy for families whose grandparents migrated for caring in the context of internal migration in China. In the next section, the literature will be reviewed in terms of the importance of grandparents' migration.

2.1.2 Grandparents' migration as an adaptive family strategy

As mentioned in the Introduction, older Chinese individuals primarily migrate for 'family reasons,' particularly to care for their children who have migrated elsewhere and/or to meet their own elderly care needs (Qi, 2018; Zhao and Huang, 2018). In doing so, they become an integral part of their children's lives.

Scholars (e.g. Dowling, 2021; Berkovitch and Manor, 2022) have observed that the involvement of grandparents in caregiving is significantly shaped by the rising participation of women in the workforce and societal policies related to childcare, especially when mothers are employed. This dynamic is shaped by the processes of modernization and the neoliberal emphasis on individualization. The intersection of neoliberal individualism and grandparenting highlights notable tensions and adaptations within family structures. Neoliberalism, which emphasizes self-reliance, personal responsibility, and economic productivity, exerts considerable pressure on individuals to achieve success independently. This often leads to the necessity of dual-income households, thereby placing critical caregiving responsibilities on grandparents (e.g., Low and Goh, 2015; Zhao, 2024).

Grandparenting practices and the significance of being a grandparent are dynamic, varying considerably across different societies and even evolving within the same cultural context over time. Arber and Timonen (2012) argue that grandparenting is a dynamic and active practice, continuously shaped by everyday interactions and negotiations within the family. This perspective challenges the notion that grandparenting is solely defined by cultural norms, instead emphasising the relational

aspect of the role. May, Mason, and Clarke (2012) contribute to this understanding by highlighting the ambivalence grandparents often experience. They note that grandparents are expected to provide emotional support and financial assistance to their grandchildren, playing a crucial role in maintaining family stability and traditions. However, this expectation is complicated by the simultaneous demand that grandparents refrain from interfering in their adult children's parenting decisions. This dual expectation reflects broader neoliberal ideals that prioritise individual autonomy and parental independence, creating a tension that grandparents must navigate. Leitner (2003) also observed and discussed this tension, noting that grandparents often find themselves in a challenging position as they balance the desire to be supportive with the need to respect boundaries. The frustration that arises from these conflicting responsibilities is a central aspect of the ambivalence that May and colleagues (2012) describe. Arber and Timonen (2012) take this analysis further by emphasising that grandparenting is not merely about fulfilling societal expectations; it involves a complex negotiation of relationships where the agency of each party, grandparents, adult children, and grandchildren plays a crucial role. This negotiated nature of intergenerational relationships reveals the extent to which broader societal norms, such as the emphasis on good parenting practices and individual independence, intersect with the lived experiences of grandparents. May, Mason, and Clarke (2012) suggest that these societal expectations can sometimes clash with the reality of grandparental involvement, complicating the role further. Therefore, as compellingly argued by Arber and Timonen (2012), understanding grandparenting necessitates recognizing it as an evolving practice intricately woven into the relational dynamics of family life.

Kahil and colleagues (2022) further explored these dynamics in the field of migration studies of the role of grandparents in Canadian refugee resettlement. Different from grandparent migrants who migrated voluntarily or based on family strategy in China, following the Syrian war, the displacement of grandparents in Canadian refugee resettlement is forced. Their studies (Kahil, Iqbal, and Maghbouleh, 2022) examine how grandmothers perceive their authority and status as being diminished within the Canadian integration framework, which places them in different and often subordinate roles in the homes of their younger relatives. Additionally, the broader societal context affords greater autonomy to the younger generations. This particular case illustrates a broader phenomenon of 'subordinate integration' (Kahil, Iqbal, and Maghbouleh, 2022, p.3), which is

... a concept that describes the partial inclusion of certain newcomers into the economic, social, and political life of the receiving country. Those who experience subordinate integration may not necessarily experience downward assimilation: the integration of some immigrants into the underclass of their host country due to low levels of social and economic mobility. Yet, their integration into the host country is undermined, limited, or incomplete compared with other newcomers, co-ethnics, and even other family members due to the negative evaluation of their personhood or potentiality. (Kahil, Iqbal, and Maghbouleh, 2022, p.3).

This research indicates that, upon arriving in Canada, grandmothers were unable to replicate the matriarchal household structure that had once defined their status and control in Syria. Instead, their roles within the family were significantly weakened due to the process of subordinate integration and the challenges of ageing. This undermined their ability to make independent financial decisions or contributions. As forced migrants resettled as refugees with permanent residency in Canada, these grandmothers faced numerous barriers, including health issues and prolonged unemployment, which further obstructed their integration into Canadian society and heightened their sense of social disposability. Additionally, the difficulties faced by their children in establishing themselves in the new country further eroded the grandmothers' traditional roles, leading to a situation where both generations experienced reduced authority and increased dependency (Kahil, Iqbal, and Maghbouleh, 2022).

In China, grandparents often provide essential care, guidance, and emotional support in the absence of parents who have migrated for economic opportunities. This caregiving role is deeply rooted in traditional values emphasising filial piety and family cohesion, which is particularly significant given the constraints imposed by the hukou system, which limits access to public services based on geographic location (Xu and Huang, 2022). Despite their pivotal role, migrant grandparents face substantial challenges, including financial strain, health issues, and the difficulties of adapting to shifting family dynamics. Zhao and Huang (2018) highlight that these caregivers bear

a considerable burden as they navigate these pressures. Their contributions are vital for maintaining family continuity and the well-being of their grandchildren, yet these challenges underscore broader socio-economic inequalities and the strains within family structures.

China's accelerated urbanization has prompted substantial rural-urban migration, leading many young parents to relocate to cities for economic opportunities. This transition has been facilitated by intergenerational caregiving arrangements, with grandparents frequently joining the household to provide essential childcare (Zhao and Huang, 2018). Grandparents play a crucial role in ensuring grandchildren's emotional stability and providing continuity amidst the dislocation of migration. Their support allows parents to fully engage in the labour market without the added burden of childcare. For example, Guo and Ngai (2021) have found that this caregiving role is deeply rooted in traditional values emphasising filial piety and family cohesion, which is particularly significant given the constraints imposed by the hukou system, which limits access to public services based on geographic location. Despite their pivotal role, similar to Syrian refugee grandmothers, migrant grandparents in China face substantial challenges, including financial strain, health issues, and the difficulties of adapting to shifting family dynamics. Qi (2018) highlight that these caregivers bear a considerable burden as they navigate these pressures. Their contributions are vital for maintaining family continuity and the well-being of their grandchildren, yet these challenges underscore broader socio-economic inequalities and the strains within family structures.

However, the older generation faces significant challenges in adapting to urban life, including navigating unfamiliar social environments and coping with the heightened cost of living. In China, the migration of grandparents often functions as a familial strategy, yet their roles remain ambiguous and multifaceted, blending the identities of migrants, caregivers, dependents, and workers. Despite the crucial support they provide, the subordinate integration of these grandparents remains underexplored, with limited scholarly attention directed toward their involvement in their grandchildren's education and friendship formation. The concept of subordinate integration (Kahil, Iqbal, and Maghbouleh, 2022) advances our understanding by treating integration not as a binary outcome but as a conditional and incomplete process. This gap in the literature underscores the need for further research into how

the integration challenges faced by grandparents shape their capacity to support their grandchildren's educational outcomes in urban contexts.

In the next section, the literature will be reviewed with a focus on the educational context in China, including an examination of educational values and inequalities within the education system.

2.2 Primary Education in China

2.2.1 Primary Education in China: Policy and Core Values

The *2001 Decision on Deepening Education Reform and Promoting Quality-Oriented Education* (*Shenke renshi suzhi jiaoyu de zhongyaoxing*) marked an emphasis of China's education approach to a student-centred, holistic model of Quality Education (Ministry of Education of the People's Republic of China, 2005). The 2001 reform reconceptualised educational aims as encompassing not only creativity, critical thinking, and social skills, but also the fostering of moral, psychological, and aesthetic capacities. Quality education aims to cultivate well-rounded individuals by balancing academic knowledge with social responsibility, emotional intelligence, and social skills, which are assumed to equip students for personal growth and societal contributions in an evolving global landscape (Li, 2012).

Quality education in China focuses on children's mental health, helping them develop social and emotional intelligence to foster resilience against bullying, abuse, and misbehaviour (Xu, Fu and Xi, 2014). In the primary school education system, Li's research about textbooks (2012) and quality education in China has found that the concept of social ability is manifested in the value of collectivism in textbooks. In Li's research (2012), she found that in PEP English textbooks in China, stories and pictures showed being a friend to others as a valuable skill. For example, a story in the textbook portrays children showing kindness by visiting a friend in illness, bringing gifts, and helping their friend with schoolwork.

In addition, China's Quality Education takes a nationally oriented approach, focusing on shaping individuals not only for personal success but also to contribute to the country's development (Dello-Iacovo, 2009). Lin (2011) and Jiang (2009) emphasize the traditional belief that self-cultivation, family harmony, national governance, and global peace are interconnected, reinforcing the link between moral character and national prosperity. As a mandatory part of primary education, moral education ma

China's longstanding emphasis on ethical development while addressing external influences like materialism and individualism. Brownell (2009) highlights how national pride is cultivated through narratives like China's Olympic journey, fostering both patriotism and international awareness. Additionally, recent educational reforms increasingly emphasize understanding cultural differences, particularly between China and the West (Li, 2012). For example, Li (2012) found that both primary schools and the government have recognized that urban lifestyles depicted in Chinese textbooks, which often associated with 'Western-style' elements such as foods and furniture that represent the ideal middle-class lifestyle in China. Also, primary schools have increasingly focused on fostering national and cultural pride among students. This has been achieved by organising activities that celebrate traditional Chinese festivals to instil a stronger sense of cultural identity and confidence (e.g. Mao, 2009; Xu, 2024).

The core values of Quality Education can also be manifested as art and sports abilities, which refer to 'suzhi' (quality) in Chinese rather than exam-oriented in response to the knowledge economy (Lin, 2011). Anagnost (2004) suggested that a body's worth is defined by the skills recognized as intellectual assets in a knowledge-driven economy. *Suzhi*, as Anagnost (2004) explained, distinguishes the dependence of one social class on manual work from another's reliance on cognitive labour. According to Li (2012), the preference for *suzhi* (quality) and knowledge is reflected in textbooks, where middle-class professions such as teachers and doctors that are knowledge rather than physical labour-based are often highlighted as ideal career choices for students. Wu (2012) adds that extracurricular activities involving art and sports are highly valued by Chinese families. This emphasis on well-rounded development is a response to the increasing global competition driven by knowledge and the economy. It also addresses longstanding concerns about the traditional Chinese education system, which has been heavily focused on rote learning and often overlooks practicality, diversity, and innovation.

The studies discussed above underscore the central value of quality education in China, which emphasises collectivism, national pride, and art and physical abilities. However, Lin (2011) argues that quality education in China tends to prioritize intellectual development, which aligns with the emerging middle class, while rural migrants are often linked to physical labour. This division, rooted in *suzhi*, creates a social gap, as education for rural migrants typically emphasizes practical skills for manual work, which are seen as less valuable than the cognitive skills emphasized for

the middle class. As a result, rural migrants are disadvantaged, facing limited opportunities for upward mobility, while the middle-class benefits from education that prepares them for knowledge-based, higher-status careers. Additionally, as China has increasingly promoted Quality Education and knowledge-based careers, children from less-developed regions often lack the necessary resources, resulting in difficulties for migrant children to integrate effectively into the educational system. The next section will explore these disparities in educational resources and the underrepresentation of rural children within the educational system.

2.2.2 Inequality in education

As discussed in the Introduction, primary education in China is both a legal mandate and a fundamental responsibility for families, and access to public schools is mostly restricted to the district corresponding to a child's hukou registration. The equitable allocation of educational resources thus emerges as a paramount concern in this field of inquiry. This section will analyse regional inequalities in the allocation of educational resources and investigate the challenges of underrepresentation and insufficient support experienced by children who migrate from or reside in rural areas within the education system.

Regional Disparities in Educational Resource Allocation

The disparity in educational resources between urban and rural areas in China is deeply influenced by variations in economic investment, leading to significant differences in educational conditions. Chen (2011) has found and emphasized the stark contrast in rural primary schools, where library resources are systematically allocated with an urban bias, resulting in severely limited book collections. For many rural pupils who rely solely on school libraries for extracurricular reading, this scarcity creates immediate disadvantages by restricting their access to supplementary reading materials. Additionally, Qian and Cai (2024) discuss the disparities in digital educational infrastructure and competency, observing that while educational digitization is expected to facilitate teaching and learning, rural areas lag in both digital resources and skilled personnel. Moreover, Huang (2017) also suggests that rural schools exhibit notable deficiencies in physical education resources. Using methods including documentary analysis, interviews, and questionnaires, an empirical study of 12 urban and rural schools in S County, Hebei Province revealed that while both areas faced shortages in sports facilities and teaching hours, rural primary schools demonstrated particularly marked resource gaps. Li, Han and Li (2022) also found,

through an analysis of questionnaire data from 399 urban and 266 rural primary school students along with their final English exam scores, that rural pupils reported higher levels of boredom in English classes and achieved significantly lower results. This is linked to insufficient English learning resources and a shortage of qualified teachers in rural areas, which reflects a broader pattern of educational inequality.

The studies discussed above align with Dello-Iacovo (2009), who suggests that in rural China, the development of Quality Education is less advanced due to a substantial gap in educational quality, which stems from the unequal distribution of resources between rural and urban areas. As Peng (2021) point out, rural families often view education primarily as a pathway to leaving their villages and attaining a better standard of living in urban areas. The 'gaokao,' for example, China's mandatory national examination for university entry, serves as the primary mechanism for selecting individuals from the country's large population to gain access to scarce educational resources. Therefore, in rural regions, education that focuses on holistic development, including social skills and personal growth, is often seen as less effective than exam-oriented education, which is perceived as more directly linked to success in critical exams and the achievement of educational goals.

Moreover, as Lei and Qian (2019) argues, inequality of educational resources does not only exist in the rural-urban divide but also differs from megacities to other cities in China. According to them (Lei and Qian, 2019), urban schools in megacities benefit from substantially higher investments, which manifest in superior infrastructure. For instance, they highlight that schools in major cities in the eastern region are more likely to be equipped with extensive facilities, including specialised buildings for laboratories, libraries, and modern teaching tools. This high level of investment allows urban schools to offer a well-rounded educational experience with resources that are often lacking in other small cities. This is also supported by Guo (2015) who highlight that schools in urban centres benefit from enhanced educational resources, which include modern facilities and especially extensive extracurricular programs with substantial financial backing from both the government and private sectors. Also, He and Ren (2019) found that schools in less-developed regions frequently face issues such as insufficient funding and a shortage of qualified teachers, all of which significantly hinder the quality of education.

The studies highlighted above reveal a significant disparity in educational resources between rural and urban areas, as well as between megacities and less-developed cities in China. However, while doing research in urban areas, the research often focuses on key schools located in the central areas of megacities, potentially overshadowing the challenges faced by schools and children on the periphery of these urban centres.

The Underrepresentation of Rural Children in the Educational System

As discussed in the previous section, the issue extends beyond regional disparities in educational resources to also include the underrepresentation of rural children in the education system.

In the context of rural education in China, various scholars have highlighted the persistent challenges faced by rural children due to an education system that is predominantly teacher-centred, knowledge-focused, and examination-oriented which is opposed to the quality education based on the knowledge economy mentioned above (e.g. Lin, 2011; Dello-Iacovo, 2009). Li (2012) details how the educational content and pedagogical practices are skewed towards urban perspectives, often portraying rural life in a negative light. For instance, textbooks and educational materials frequently depict rural culture as outdated, less modern, and even unsanitary, reinforcing stereotypes that rural students and their ways of life are inferior (Li, 2012). This portrayal not only fails to reflect the true diversity of rural experiences but also exacerbates the stigma faced by rural students. Chen and Qin (2025) further illustrate how these negative cultural stereotypes manifest in classroom settings. They found that migrant children's linguistic habits and rural backgrounds often become subjects of discrimination in urban classrooms. These students are frequently stigmatized as academically inferior, while their rural lifestyles are perceived as less civilized compared to urban norms. This cultural bias leads to diminished respect for migrant children's backgrounds and perpetuates feelings of inadequacy and alienation. The very few depictions of rural residents in educational contexts, according to Chen (2014) are typically linked to traits such as 'diligence' and 'tolerance,' portraying them as working sweatily and laboriously in dirty conditions. However, this portrayal stands in stark contrast to the values emphasised by the modern knowledge economy, as has been mentioned above, which prioritises cleanliness, sophistication, and intellectual achievement. Therefore, rural children are often labelled as 'impolite' and 'dirty' (Chen, 2014, p. 319). This stigmatisation reflects broader societal biases where urban

dwellers are viewed as embodying modernity and sophistication, whereas rural inhabitants are seen as embodying less developed and the target of education towards 'human modernization' (Chen, 2014 p.305).

The underrepresentation and stigmatisation of rural residents in Chinese educational settings resemble those in the British context, where similar issues are often linked to class and race. For example, Reay (2017) found that working-class students' preferred subjects and activities, in which they often excel, receive minimal prestige and acknowledgement in the present education system. These activities, which manifest in various forms, are frequently overlooked and not integrated into the formal educational framework. Similarly, Bhopal (2014) highlights how Black mothers' cultures are underrepresented and stigmatised in British education, positioning them as 'outsiders' in predominantly White schools. In these settings, White norms of behaviour and appearance are often taken as the standard, which leads to misunderstandings and marginalisation of Black mothers who do not conform to these stereotypes. Moreover, Black mothers, who were often few in number within these school environments, were perceived as disruptive to the 'normality' of rural areas. Their parenting styles, characterised by rigid regulations and a heavy focus on study, were often misunderstood and evaluated based on white, middle-class ideals of motherhood. Consequently, while white, middle-class mothers' similar values were praised and viewed as a sign of their commitment to their children's success, black mothers were unfairly labelled as overly ambitious, with their expectations considered unrealistic. This misrepresentation and stigmatisation reflect broader issues of racial and class-based biases within the educational system, where Black mothers' culturally rooted approaches to parenting are undervalued and misunderstood. Thus, the educational context fails to acknowledge and appreciate the diverse cultural values that Black mothers bring to their children's education.

As Quality Education becomes a core value in China, families increasingly turn to extracurricular activities to enhance their children's development to match the 'core values' (Quality Education). This trend will be explored in the following section.

Extracurricular activities

As discussed above, Quality Education is a central value in China, yet it is plagued by regional disparities in educational resources, which results in the stigmatisation of rural residents. Therefore, not only middle-class families but also families with marginalised

or migrant children use extracurricular education as a way of supplementing the exclusions and harms of mainstream education. Quality education emphasises the development of artistic and physical abilities, which are crucial for success in high school and college entrance examinations. Consequently, participating in extracurricular activities has become a common parenting strategy. However, families from different socioeconomic backgrounds experience this differently; while some can afford extensive extracurricular programs, others, particularly those from lower socioeconomic statuses, face significant barriers (Bai, 2021).

According to Lareau (2003), social class significantly shapes child-rearing practices, as demonstrated in her extensive ethnographic study of children from various socio-economic backgrounds in a major U.S. city. Her research included children from a middle-class group in suburban neighbourhoods, a working-class community, and an area predominantly inhabited by low-income Black residents. Data were gathered through home visits, schools, churches, organized activities, medical appointments, and family interactions. Lareau (2003) contends that social class structures children's daily lives differently, influencing their dependence on and engagement with parents. Middle-class families adopt a strategy she calls 'concerted cultivation,' where parents actively schedule diverse activities to enhance their children's skills, resulting in a fast-paced family dynamic and an emphasis on achievement. This method fosters children who are more confident in navigating interactions with authority figures, as their parents communicate frequently and strategically with teachers (Lareau, 2003). In contrast, working-class and low-income families generally follow a parenting style known as the 'accomplishment of natural growth,' which prioritizes meeting children's basic needs and providing emotional support while placing less emphasis on structured activities or direct parental intervention in development (Lareau, 2003). Similarly, Posey-Maddox (2014, p.4) found that middle-class parents played a crucial role in securing and maintaining academic and extracurricular opportunities at schools, benefiting the broader student population. However, their involvement in fundraising, volunteering, and outreach to families of similar racial and economic backgrounds also contributed to the exclusion and marginalization of low-income and working-class families.

However, as Reay (2017, p.63) argues, while learning outside of school was perceived as more meaningful and engaging compared to formal education, it is important to recognize that these activities were guided by the goal of concerted cultivation, a

practice commonly adopted by the middle and upper classes. This occurred during a time when working-class parents increasingly bore the responsibility of addressing educational inequality and overcoming structural barriers. In contemporary society, accountability for academic achievement has been redefined as a concern for individual families rather than a shared social responsibility, even though working-class parents lack the financial resources to pay for additional teaching or the expertise and confidence to do it themselves. The focus on extracurricular activities, irrespective of family background, reflects a neoliberal ideology of 'responsibilities,' where individuals are seen as responsible for shaping their own life courses and trajectories (Beck, 1992). As a result, parents are expected to shape their children's lives by developing their social, intellectual, and physical abilities.

Similarly, in contemporary China, a common thread among parents from diverse rural, urban and social class backgrounds is the pursuit of extracurricular activities to enhance their children's future prospects. This trend reflects a broader societal belief in the necessity of a comprehensive educational experience to navigate a competitive job market. Zhao and Wang (2023) explores how urban Chinese families often invest significantly in extracurriculars, including high-cost activities such as elite sports training and advanced academic tutoring. Chen's research shows that these activities are perceived as vital for academic enrichment and developing skills that are highly valued in professional environments. Urban parents typically have more access to resources and are thus able to provide a broader range of opportunities for their children. Conversely, Liu (2024) discovered the rural context, revealing that even in less affluent areas, parents are committed to enrolling their children in extracurricular programs. Despite economic limitations, rural families often turn to community centres or online platforms to offer their children activities that can foster personal development and academic skills. Liu's (2024) findings highlight that the drive for Quality Education and competitive advantage permeates all social strata, with rural parents showing resourcefulness in overcoming financial constraints. Tan, Cai and Bodovski (2021) synthesize these perspectives, arguing that across different settings and socioeconomic backgrounds, Chinese parents uniformly view extracurricular activities as crucial for their children's success. Wang (2020) points out that these activities are seen as a means to enhance not only academic performance but also skills and resilience, which are increasingly important in the modern job market. This unified approach underscores a deep-rooted cultural emphasis on educational attainment as a gateway to better career opportunities.

In the British context, for Vincent and Maxwell (2016), participation in extracurricular activities is increasingly seen as an essential aspect of providing a 'good' childhood among affluent families. Consequently, a 'good' parent is often judged by their ability to offer these opportunities to their children. In this context, providing children with computer games is viewed as a form of passive parenting, reflecting a perceived lack of creativity, engagement, and effort, which are considered integral to effective parenting.

However, similar to Wang (2020) as has been discussed above, attending extracurricular activities in China is regarded as beneficial for children's future career development, even though attending extracurricular activities has become a parenting strategy, Vincent and Maxwell (2016) argue that anxiety regarding social reproduction cannot be regarded as the sole factor driving the use of enrichment activities. Aligning with Irwin and Elley (2011), they view this intense focus on enrichment as a 'particular' rather than a 'general' feature of middle-class parenting, influenced by the varied experiences within the middle class. For instance, Black middle-class families, unlike their white counterparts, pursue these activities with a heightened awareness of racial dynamics in education and employment. Vincent et al. (2013) suggest that for Black middle-class parents, extracurricular activities serve not only as a means to gain additional credentials and skills but also as a strategic tool to help their children navigate a racially biased society more effectively. Similarly, like their white middle-class counterparts, Black middle-class parents use these activities to cultivate what is regarded as 'refined taste' and cultural awareness. However, for Black families, often stereotyped as a homogeneous working-class group in England, participating in activities like classical music also represents a way to assert and affirm their middle-class identity and claim traditional elite culture for their children.

Therefore, as has been discussed in this section, Quality Education has become the core value of Chinese education, while educational resources were allocated differently, and rural residents' culture was underrepresented in educational values and has the potential to stigmatise the group. However, studies in China often generalise these groups without considering internal variations or intersecting social divisions. For example, the distinction between 'rural' and 'urban' families is typically reduced to their hukou registration, overlooking the diverse backgrounds and experiences within these categories. Therefore, in alignment with the work of Vincent

and Maxwell (2016) and Vincent et al. (2013), there are still gaps academically in China in terms of children's experience in educational settings as rural and urban students were normally examined collectively and fewer internal variations were discovered, for example, the experiences of students from specific subgroups, such as urban working-class students, are often insufficiently explored academically.

In the next section, I will review the literature on children's friendships within educational settings, with a focus on how children's friendships are influenced by specific contexts and social divisions.

2. 3. Children's friendships

2.3.1 The 'New' Sociology of Childhood Paradigm

Children as beings rather than 'becomings'

The 'new' sociology of childhood has significantly transformed the understanding of children, shifting from viewing them as passive recipients of socialisation to recognizing them as active agents who shape their own social worlds and stress the importance of context in understanding children and childhood (Prout and James, 1997). This new perspective marked a departure from historical research where children were often marginalised and considered subordinate in both sociological theories and childhood studies (Matthews, 2007).

Recent scholarship has drawn increasing attention to how childhood in China is increasingly conceptualized less as a state of being and more as a process of cultivation, shaped by family aspirations, state priorities, and educational regimes. Liu's (2022) intergenerational study, drawing on life history interviews conducted across three urban sites in China, reveals a marked transition in conceptions of childhood. While earlier generations experienced childhoods primarily defined by labour and familial obligations, the youngest generation of only children experienced an increasing regimentalization of childhood, exercised by their parents and driven by both neoliberal market and post-socialist state forces. As Wang and Xu (2022) highlights, these only children were positioned as their family's sole opportunity for upward mobility, which intensified parental pressure while limiting children's space for autonomous decision-making. Wang (2021) identifies two dominant parenting logics that shape how childhood is conceptualised and lived in urban China. 'Tiger' parenting emphasises discipline and academic success, while 'Buddha' parenting appears more relaxed but

often stems from limited resources rather than choice. Guo (2013) argues that while 'tiger' and 'buddha' parents possess differing resources and employ distinct educational strategies, they share a fundamental belief in the paramount importance of education as a predictor of their children's future attainment. Therefore, in both approaches, childhood is framed as a managed project, and children's voices are secondary to parental goals. Law (2006) explains that the Chinese education system trains children into citizens who willingly follow social norms. It does this by instilling a sense of self-discipline, so they naturally desire to behave in expected ways. Therefore, childhood in China can sometimes be understood as a period of preparation for future achievement and citizenship, echoing the perspective in the 'new' sociology of childhood that views children as 'human becomings' rather than beings in their own right. As a result, children's agency is significantly shaped by parental aspirations and institutional control within educational settings.

Earlier scholarship on childhood predominantly framed socialisation as a deterministic process, positioning children as passive recipients of societal norms and values. This approach typically positions socialisation as a process of preparing children to conform to societal expectations, focusing on their future roles as adults rather than their current experiences (Corsaro, 2015, p.6). This 'forward-looking way' treats children more as 'becoming' (which is concerned with their future potential) than as 'beings' (which acknowledges their present reality and agency) (Corsaro, 2015, p. 6). In contrast, the 'new' sociology of childhood highlights the importance of acknowledging children as active agents in their social environments, rather than earlier developmental models which portrayed children as progressing through fixed stages of cognitive and moral development. Instead, this perspective advocates for recognizing the various ways in which children navigate and impact their surroundings, emphasizing that childhood is a dynamic and context-dependent stage of life (Prout, 2011). From this perspective, children's engagements and connections with both peers and adults are essential in the co-construction of their social realities, emphasizing their position as 'beings' with distinct voices and agency.

Although prioritising children's agency, the paradigm of the 'new' sociology of childhood has also resulted in continuous disputes over how children exert agency in their daily lives, how the social, economic, and cultural context impacts children's agency, and how children's exert of agency interacts with others (for example, adults) (e.g. Konstantoni, 2012; Edmonds, 2019). For example, as noted above, children have

their agency in negotiating friendship practices and this is influenced by social and cultural background (e.g., Corsaro, 2009; Oh and Lee, 2019; Antonopoulou, Xanthou and Kouvava, 2021). Therefore, it is probable to observe a debate surrounding the imbalanced power dynamics that influence socio-cultural norms, all of which exert varying degrees of influence on children's capacity to become agents in their own lives and communities. This aligns with Corsaro's (2009) argument that asserting children create their own peer culture does not imply that these cultures exist independently of the culture of adults. Children are always in the process of participating as well as being part of both children's and adults' cultures while negotiating and creating their culture. This is further expanded by Syrou (2019), who argues that any discussion of agency must consider the broader societal and cultural contexts that influence, facilitate, or limit individuals' capacity to exercise agency. These arguments are largely advocated by Chinese sociologists (e.g. Xiao, 2005; Lam, 2019) who especially highlight the importance of adults in children's creation of peer culture, as based on Confucian values, Chinese children are educated to obey the instructions and guidance of adults.

'New' Sociology of Childhood within Global South

The 'new' sociology of childhood is advocated by Chinese sociologists, as an alternative to the dominant psychological approach to understanding children, for example, Zheng (2012) argued that while psychologists used specific 'standards' to examine rural children's friendships and assumed that rural children were problematic when establishing friendships, the 'standard' of good friendship practices was developed in the Global North, and she further advocated theory of children's friendships more of a specific Chinese context to avoid stigmatising migrant children.

However, this has been criticised as a 'dichotomy', which indicates that patterns of childhood and friendship cannot simply be split into those of the Global North and those of the Global South (e.g. Ouyang and Liu, 2023; Prout, 2011). For example, Prout (2011) argued that the proposed dichotomy fails to transcend beyond distinct worlds and promotes a dialogue between Minority and Majority World contexts, as it simplifies and homogenizes complex and diverse cultures.

In an attempt to move beyond the dichotomy, Twum-Danso Imoh (2016) highlighted the need to construct a more comprehensive understanding of childhood within a specific context. She believes that this is crucial because to truly comprehend

childhoods in our modern society, scholars must take into consideration both similarities and differences, both within and between contexts. Twum-Danso Imoh (2016) further contended that, when analysing contemporary childhoods in the context of historical trajectories and global processes, it becomes apparent that, alongside the diversities in childhood experiences between the continent and the dominant global ideal, there also exist notable commonalities. Twum-Danso Imoh (2016) emphasises that academics should not only add research from the Global South and compare it to research from the Global North but also pay attention to commonalities to create a more comprehensive understanding of childhood. This perspective resonates with Kesby et al.'s (2006) conceptual position that childhood studies must actively engage with Southern contexts to illuminate the diverse manifestations of childhood experiences, rather than treating non-Western cases as mere supplements to existing theoretical frameworks. Following Kesby et al (2006)'s assertion, Wang, Wei and Lin (2020) emphasised that due to globalisation, childhoods in China share certain commonalities and are influenced by childhoods around the world. As a result, they argued that scholars need to concentrate on both the unique socioeconomic context of China as well as the commonalities of childhood and children's friendships around the world (Wang, Wei and Lin, 2020).

However, challenging the deficit model of children's childhoods in the Global South does not imply a binary dichotomous discourse of childhoods. In recent years, the 'new' sociology of childhood has been criticized for reinforcing the North-South binary by placing excessive emphasis on local contexts, thereby overlooking the broader influence of other countries and failing to address global issues such as capitalism and neoliberalism, which continue to shape societies in an era of globalization (Twum-Danso Imoh, Bourdillon and Meichsner, 2019; Wang, Wei and Lin, 2020). As Twum-Danso Imoh and colleagues (2019) suggest, research on children's childhoods should move beyond binary thinking, as childhoods are shaped by global processes such as concepts and ideas. The global assumptions surrounding childhood also contribute to enhancing local self-awareness and critical thinking, ultimately fostering improvements in children's welfare. The national and cultural context of childhood should also be analysed with the connection of childhoods in different societies at different times (Wells, 2009).

Therefore, it is essential to consider children's friendships within the context of social divisions, as these relationships are shaped by broader societal factors. The 'new'

sociology of childhood perspectives highlights children as active agents, with friendships serving as both a reflection of and a response to social inequalities. This lens allows for a deeper understanding of how children navigate identity and belonging within their social environments.

2.3.2 Sociology of Friendships

Sociologists approach the study of friendship through an integrative lens that emphasizes the interplay between interpersonal relationships and their broader socio-cultural milieus (Adams and Allan, 1998). This perspective diverges sharply from psychological frameworks centred on individual traits, instead positioning friendship as a dynamic construct, mediated by layered contextual forces. Central to this analytical tradition is Adams and Allan's (1998) conceptualization of context, which they define as the external conditions shaping friendship formation, maintenance, and dissolution (p.4). Their framework transcends simplistic dichotomies between individual agency and structural determinism by proposing four interconnected contextual levels: personal environment (encompassing factors such as age, education, and gender); the network level (involving friendship circles and community ties); the community/subcultural level (comprising school and workplace environments); and the broader societal level (including cultural norms and political systems). Crucially, they argue that these levels are not mutually exclusive but operate synergistically, requiring researchers to examine how macro-structural forces (e.g., structural inequality) intersect with micro-level interactions (e.g., trust-building rituals) to shape friendship practices (Adams and Allan, 1998). This theoretical flexibility, encapsulated in their assertion that extrinsic elements surrounding friendships are 'boundless' (Adams and Allan, 1998, p.4), has become crucial in sociological studies, enabling nuanced analyses of friendship across diverse populations. A key proposition within sociological scholarship is that friendship defies universal definitions but prefers context-sensitive analyses. While scholars acknowledge recurring criteria such as voluntarism, equality, and reciprocity (e.g. Lynch, 2015; Clark and Ayers, 1993; Vaquera and Kao, 2008), they insist that friendship's meaning is inherently contextual. Allan and Adams (2007, p.124) suggested framing friendship as an evaluative term contingent on subjective judgments rather than fixed categories, a perspective that foregrounds individuals' agency in negotiating relational boundaries. For example, in their ethnographic work with street children in Accra, Mizen and Ofori-Kusi (2010) showed how these children understand friendship as a vital survival strategy, offering mutual protection

and resource-sharing in conditions of profound precarity. Similarly, Dyson's (2010) research with girls in the Himalayan region illuminates how friendship operates not only as a form of everyday mutual aid but also as a means of social reproduction, helping to sustain cultural norms and cooperative labour practices within their communities. Such variability underscores the necessity of grounding analyses in specific sociocultural settings rather than imposing external definitions. Importantly, Adams and Allan's (1998) framework accommodates temporal shifts in which the social meanings of 'friendship' evolve alongside broader cultural transformations.

The sociological emphasis on contextual fluidity and negotiated meanings, as exemplified by Adams and Allan's (1998) framework, naturally prompts questions about how these dynamics unfold across different stages of human development. Although much of the research has examined adult friendships, scholars have increasingly shifted their focus toward childhood relationality, challenging its historical neglect in the field. This shift reflects growing critiques of normative assumptions that children's social worlds primarily mirror those of adults (e.g. Corsaro, 2015; Thorne, 1993; Kustatscher, 2015). This epistemological shift toward the 'new' sociology of childhood rejects developmental paradigms that frame children as incomplete adults, instead theorizing childhood as a socially constructed category where peer interactions generate distinct cultural logics (Prout, 2011). This conceptual framework which emphasises contextualized agency is also increasingly used in exploring children's friendships.

Children's friendships are shaped by various institutional and social factors, with schools and families playing a significant role in structuring friendship choices. For example, Connolly (1998) conducted an ethnographic study to explore the impact of teachers' perceptions of the neighbourhood on children's school experiences. His study revealed that teachers used disciplinary methods disproportionately against Black students, particularly boys, who were labelled as 'evil' and 'quintessentially masculine' (Connolly, 1998, p.114). This resulted in Black boys being more frequently subjected to both peer and teacher punishment, reinforcing a cycle where their social interactions were shaped by external perceptions rather than personal choice. Similarly, Dong's (2018) ethnographic research in a Chinese urban public school demonstrated how schools, under the guise of promoting equality, subtly directed migrant children's friendships by 'correcting' their accents. While this was framed as an effort to foster inclusion, it also suggested that migrant children needed to assimilate

into local linguistic norms to be fully accepted, indicating that school policies and teacher interventions actively shape friendship dynamics.

While institutions influence friendships, children are not passive recipients of these structures. Davies (2015) observes that children's capacity to exercise agency in peer relationships varies significantly across different educational spaces, depending on the degree of autonomy permitted within each specific school environment. For example, while regulated environments such as classrooms impose strict behavioural norms, children actively negotiate their social relationships in interstitial spaces like playgrounds and hallways, and consistently demonstrate agency by resisting and subverting institutional rules across settings (Davies, 2015; Harden, 2012; Thorne, 1993). Corsaro's (1985) participant observations found that children creatively bypass school regulations by exchanging objects such as toys or pencils as tokens of friendship and having their secret play. Despite schools prohibiting personal items, children found ways to negotiate and maintain relationships. Similarly, Vincent, Neal and Iqbal (2016) highlight how children's agency manifests in friendship selection, showing that they do not always conform to adult expectations. Rather than simply following institutional or parental guidance, children form friendships based on personal affinities and shared interests, demonstrating their ability to navigate and challenge the imposed structures.

Apart from institutional settings, families play a crucial role in shaping children's friendships, particularly through the management of social differences. Vincent, Neal and Iqbal (2017) examined three highly diverse primary schools and found that 'social mix did not translate straightforwardly into social mixing' (p.1985). While parents facilitated out-of-school interactions to foster friendships, social divisions persisted, as children's access to private spaces such as homes was selectively granted based on perceived similarities. This suggests that while diversity is present in schools, deeper social barriers influence the extent to which friendships form across differences. Konstantoni (2012) similarly explored how family values and social categories intersect to shape children's friendships. Her ethnographic study in a Scottish nursery highlighted how a Pakistani girl adhered strictly to her father's instruction that she should only play with other girls. This illustrates how parental guidance and cultural expectations directly structure friendship formation, reinforcing boundaries based on gender and ethnicity. Konstantoni (2012) further argues that children's agency in

friendships is mediated by the intersectionality of social categories, demonstrating that while children make choices, these are constrained by broader social frameworks.

Research in China also indicates that migrant parents' priorities heavily influence their children's social environments. Peng (2021) found that migrant parents, often dealing with economic and social instability, prioritise academic achievement and future economic stability over social integration. This emphasis can result in less encouragement and fewer opportunities for children to develop friendships, as extra academic pressures reduce time for social activities. Additionally, Wang (2012) also found that family socioeconomic status and the educational capital of parents are significant predictors of migrant children's social integration outcomes in urban settings. The research stresses the resource availability within urban communities, where both local networks and associations of fellow villagers act as essential conduits for facilitating the children's urban adaptation and friendships. Moreover, the discrimination and social stigma often faced by migrant families in urban areas can negatively impact children's self-esteem and social confidence, further hindering their ability to form friendships (Liu et al., 2012). Overall, migrant parents' prioritisation of academic and economic goals, coupled with their limited social capital, creates an environment where children have fewer opportunities and support to develop meaningful friendships, impacting their social integration and emotional well-being in the long term.

Therefore, both in the sociology of friendships and the 'new' sociology of childhood, researchers are encouraged to remain open to and recognize children's agency in interpreting their own friendships. However, debates persist regarding the extent to which children's agency is influenced by the power of significant adults. Additionally, the impact of adult influence can vary by context; for example, academic performance in China (e.g., Lin, 2009), class and ethnicity in Britain (e.g., Vincent, Neal and Iqbal, 2018), and gender and religion (e.g., Konstantoni, 2010) all shape how children experience and navigate their friendships. The next section will review studies on how social divisions embedded in different contexts affect children's friendships.

2.3.3 Friendships and Social Divisions

The experience of migration has been regarded as a primary factor influencing migrant children's friendships (e.g. Bergnehr, Aronson and Enell, 2020; Lauer and Yan, 2020). As Mill (1997) has pointed out, migration is far from simply a shift in location. This is

further noted by Castles (2002), who state that migration itself should also be considered as a process in which communities create new boundaries and exclusions. For example, Scholtz and Gilligan (2016) highlight how migrant children's sense of 'newness' influences interethnic relationships among primary school children. Their study, based on interviews with native-born Irish and immigrant girls, reveals emotional barriers to friendship, such as discomfort, anxiety, and unfamiliarity, arising from the children's immigrant backgrounds. Bergner and colleagues (2020) also found that to combat their 'newness' in the cultural differences in the new environment, immigrant girls from Iraq and Syria tend to form close bonds with one another, as their collectivistic cultural backgrounds emphasize shared communication styles, common experiences, and collective activities as essential elements of friendship.

In China, migration experiences are not merely about relocating from one place to another; they are deeply embedded within the rural-urban hierarchy, as discussed in Section 2.1. For example, in the research of Yu (2020), the varied accents of migrant children separated them from their urban counterparts in Beijing public schools. Accent is, therefore, closely related to rurality, whereas rurality is not only a geographical but also a cultural and socioeconomic marker. Therefore, the discrimination faced by migrant children is not solely due to language differences but is also rooted in the rural-urban hierarchy and social divisions. Carrying a distinct accent can further stigmatise them, as it may be perceived as less desirable. The discrimination associated with language that influences children's friendships is intricately linked to the hierarchical nature of language. Language functions as a potent symbol of identity, embodying power dynamics and social stratification rather than simply serving as a tool for communication (Welpy, 2017; Dong, 2018). For example, Welpy (2017) analysed how children from immigrant families perceive the significance of 'other' languages in primary schools in France and England through ethnographic research and discovered that language is more associated with citizenship and belonging. Welpy (2017) found in her study that children's perceptions revealed a hierarchy of languages, in which the official languages were believed to be more legitimate and, hence, more desirable in school than others. This implicit legitimization operates as a sort of symbolic dominance, ingrained in institutions' daily operations and potentially leading to prejudice. This hierarchy, which depicts one language's symbolic dominance over others, also indicates an implicit hierarchy of children's citizenship and results in discrimination in schools. Welpy's findings (2017) also resonate with other research in the U.S. (Lee et al., 2021). A U.S.-based study by Lee et al. (2021) found that while

children preferred same-language friends, those from English-speaking homes were more liked by peers than those from Spanish-speaking homes. Despite bilingual education efforts, students may still perceive English, the country's official language, as having higher status. These findings align with Kinzler and colleagues (2009) that children tend to favour classmates from higher socioeconomic backgrounds and those who speak English fluently with a natural accent. The research outlined above evidenced that language and accent serve as powerful indicators of hierarchy and markers of group identity among children. These factors often influence friendship choices and can, at times, lead to discrimination within school environments.

Apart from migration experiences and language, studies also suggest that children's social class background, especially material possessions, influences their friendships. Ridge's (2011) qualitative study examines the daily lives of low-income children in the UK, emphasizing the critical role of money. Financial resources provide autonomy, enabling children to acquire necessities and personal items while shaping their social interactions and mobility. Limited funds restrict participation in activities, school events, and transportation. This often results in exclusion, which is sometimes self-imposed by children to avoid burdening their parents. This exclusion intensifies in later school years as costs for materials and trips rise. Financial hardship also heightens pressure to conform, particularly in clothing, increasing the risk of bullying (Ridge, 2011). Similarly, in the research of Chen (2024), the study explores the economic hardships faced by poor migrant children in China and their impact on children's opportunities for outdoor play and social interactions. Chen (2024) investigated how the financial limitations and lack of child-friendly spaces in migrant families restrict their access to safe recreational spaces. The researcher found that these constraints are significant barriers to outdoor activities, which are essential for children's ability to engage in free play, which is crucial for developing social skills and forming friendships. Also, Wang (2018) highlight the precarious living conditions of migrant families in urban China, noting that they often reside in overcrowded and inadequate housing within unsafe neighbourhoods, with limited access to public playgrounds and communal spaces. These substandard environmental conditions collectively restrict migrant children's opportunities for outdoor play and peer interaction.

Gender differences often lead to same-sex friendships among children, a phenomenon that can be linked to gender segregation (Thorne, 1993). However, cross-gender friendships also play a crucial role in children's social interactions. Play, which is

integral to children's social worlds, offers a valuable lens through which these dynamics can be understood. Ethnographic studies of children's play have provided deep insights into how gendered friendships are formed and negotiated. Through detailed observations of boys' and girls' interactions during play, researchers have examined how children engage with and perform gender roles, sexuality, and friendship in school contexts (e.g., Swain, 2023; Laoire, 2011; Thorne, 1993). For example, Thorne's (1993) ethnographic research identifies 'borderwork' as the process through which children actively construct and reinforce gender boundaries within peer cultures. Simultaneously, her concept of 'crossing' captures children's capacity to transgress these very divisions through nuanced and sometimes contradictory interactions during shared activities. This research reveals that while cross-gender interactions can involve more hostility than positive engagement, such behaviours are intricately linked to the negotiation of sexuality. Ros George (2007) also found the gendered pattern of friendships that she questions the idea that girls are less capable of forming friendships and as a result, have more difficult relationships with children of their own gender. She also challenges the idea that, when it comes to interactions with their classmates, girls are primarily nice, compassionate, and fair. While intimacy and compassion are evident within these circles, George (2007) contends that girls seek broader peer networks, which are typically hierarchical in structure. The influence of the girls' race and ethnicity on who controls authority, takes the initiative, and how other age-mates are perceived in these friendship groupings is especially important. In China, Yin (2023) found that for preschool migrant boys, social avoidance in friendship contexts correlates with significantly increased peer rejection; conversely, among migrant girls, such avoidance demonstrates no statistically significant association with rejection by peers. However, the research does not thoroughly examine how these gendered patterns are affected by both the migrant experience and the urban-rural divide, which shape the expectations and behaviours associated with each gender. Additionally, the work of Meng (2009) investigates how educational institutions and community programs impact migrant children's social interactions and gendered experiences. According to her, both schools significantly influence the reinforcement or disruption of gender norms. For instance, programs designed to integrate migrant children into urban schools can either reinforce existing gender stereotypes or offer opportunities for more egalitarian interactions.

The studies mentioned above revealed that children's friendships are highly gendered. However, research on migrant children in China, while offering valuable insights into

how girls and boys form friendships differently, often remains focused on studying either girls or boys individually rather than examining gender more broadly. While analysing gender in migration studies, Nawyn (2010) suggests that

... feminist migration scholars shifted their analysis from studying women to studying gender, the difference being that instead of contrasting women to men, they focused on gender as a system of relations which was influenced by migration. (p.750).

According to Nawyn (2010), migration studies should involve the shift that simply compares females to males but how migration influences gender dynamics and relations more comprehensively. Therefore, when studying children's friendships, it is important to consider why gender matters in the context of migrant children's relationships in the first place, rather than merely dividing them into boys and girls.

The studies reviewed highlight how children's friendships are shaped by a range of social identities and differences. However, research in China often relies on a single category, such as accent or gender, to understand these relationships, lacking a nuanced, intersectional approach. Furthermore, existing research tends to adopt an essentialist perspective, overgeneralizing and dividing children into broad categories like rural versus urban. Therefore, in the next section, I will discuss the application of intersectionality as an analytical framework in my research. This approach will integrate factors such as migration experience, gender, language, and socioeconomic background to capture the complexity of children's friendships.

2.4 Intersectionality

2.4.1 Introduction of intersectionality

Intersectionality is a critical theoretical framework that illuminates how multiple social identities, such as race, gender, class, and sexuality, converge at the individual level to create interconnected systems of privilege and oppression. Coined by legal scholar Kimberlé Crenshaw (1989), the concept originated from a critique of single-axis analyses of discrimination, which focused solely on race or gender in isolation. Such approaches failed to capture the unique subordination faced by Black women, whose

experiences were rendered invisible within both feminist and anti-racist discourses (Crenshaw, 1998).

Building upon this foundational critique, Crenshaw (1998) elucidated that intersectionality is not merely about the additive effect of multiple identities. She argued that because the intersectional experience is greater than the sum of racism and sexism, any analysis that does not take intersectionality into account cannot sufficiently address the particular manner in which Black women are subordinated. This unique subordination manifests not simply as a sum of race and gender discrimination, but as a distinct form of discrimination as Black women. They may sometimes face issues similar to those of white women or Black men, yet they often endure a compounded, double-discrimination that arises from the convergence of both systems of power (Crenshaw, 1998). To illustrate this structural dynamic, Crenshaw (1998) employed a powerful metaphor of social power and discrimination, stating

Consider an analogy to traffic in an intersection, coming and going in all four directions. Discrimination, like traffic through an intersection, may flow in one direction, and it may flow in another. (p. 322)

Crenshaw's focus on structural oppression finds strong echoes in subsequent scholarship. Collins (2019), for instance, describes how intersecting power relations are organized into a matrix of domination that systematically marginalizes certain groups. Similarly, Davis (2008) emphasizes that intersectionality examines how structural power relations emerge from the interaction of gender, race, and other categories of difference across social institutions, cultural ideologies, and individual experiences. This scholarly consensus underscores that systemic inequality is not a matter of isolated disadvantages, but of an interlocking architecture of power.

This is further illustrated by Crenshaw's (1998) powerful metaphor of structural inequality as a basement, where disadvantaged individuals are vertically stacked by burden multiplicity. Those at the bottom endure compounded oppressions, while those near the top face singular disadvantages. When opportunity arises, only the least-burdened (those with relative privilege) can escape through the 'hatch,' leaving the multiply oppressed behind. This vividly demonstrates how non-intersectional remedies

often reinforce privilege within marginalized groups, failing to reach the most disadvantaged.

Although Crenshaw is widely credited with first articulating the concept of intersectionality and demonstrating how intersecting categories structurally oppress Black women, numerous scholars have since adapted and expanded this framework to analyse diverse marginalised groups. For example, Lykke (2011) characterises intersectionality not as a closed system but as a nodal point, a gathering place for open-ended investigations into the overlapping and conflicting dynamics of race, gender, class, sexuality, nation, and other forms of inequality. In this evolving context, intersectionality serves as a vital analytical lens for examining how diverse hierarchies such as race, class, gender, disability, and age collectively shape structural inequalities. Mirza (2013), for instance, calls for an 'embodied intersectionality' that centres marginalised lived experiences and takes seriously the processes of 'being and becoming' as gendered, classed, and raced subjects within materialist social contexts.

2.4.2 Additive and Constitutive Approaches

Scholarly debates on intersectionality in international contexts often revolve around two analytical frameworks: additive and constitutive approaches. Carastathis (2016) positions these as competing paradigms with fundamentally different implications for understanding oppression. Additive approaches treat social categories like gender, race, class, and sexuality as distinct variables that interact while retaining their independent analytical significance. This framework, which Carastathis (2016) critically characterizes as operating through a mechanistic logic of summation, seeks to calculate how these categories accumulate to shape experiences of privilege and disadvantage. For instance, an additive analysis might attempt to separately quantify the effects of racism and sexism on a woman of colour, then combine them to represent her total experience of discrimination.

This model has been extensively critiqued for its theoretical limitations. As Ken and Helmuth (2021) argue that additive models view social categories as separate and simply added and combined, which can inadvertently create a hierarchy of oppressions. Similarly, a key criticism, articulated by Christoffersen and Emejulu (2023), is that the additive approach risks reproducing the very single-axis analyses that intersectionality was developed to challenge, by treating systems of power as

separate and comparable rather than intertwined and 'within'. Moreover, it relies on essentialist conceptions about the social structure of gender. Furthermore, according to La Barbera and colleagues (2024), it risks in policy formulation a singular focus on isolated identity categories (such as 'women' or 'ethnic minorities') while neglecting the intersecting structural discriminations faced by individuals living at the convergence of multiple marginalizations.

The constitutive approach, fundamentally opposed to additive logic, posits that social categories such as race, gender, and class are mutually constitutive and co-constructed. They do not simply intersect as pre-formed, independent entities; rather, they shape and define each other to produce qualitatively distinct social positions and experiences of power (Knudsen, 2006). As Christoffersen and Emejulu (2023) argues, the power of this framework lies in its focus on the relationality of power dynamics, examining how these systems are forged in and through their connection to one another.

This paradigm shift from addition to constitution offers a more robust analytical tool. It moves beyond what Yuval-Davis (2006) critiques as the categorical fragmentation of additive models, instead illuminating the interconnected and historical processes through which systems of power emerge and operate. A constitutive analysis does not ask how much race or gender contributes to an outcome, but rather how race is gendered and how gender is racialized in a specific context. This allows for a more dynamic understanding of identity and oppression, acknowledging their fluid and context-dependent nature. By rejecting the notion of a 'base' identity and focusing on the synergistic production of social locations, the constitutive approach provides a framework for both deconstructing the workings of power and formulating effective, inclusive political strategies that address the complexity of lived experience.

Applying this constitutive lens, this study analyses how the specific socioeconomic background, language, gender, and migration intersect in institutional settings. In China, internal migrants, through sharing ethnicity and nationality with non-migrants, are racialized through hierarchical distinctions mirroring Global North patterns. Migrant children are often framed as 'culturally other' due to linguistic differences and class backgrounds, a narrative reinforced by structural forces like urban-rural divides and school policies. This exemplifies how constitutive intersectionality operates: categories do not simply accumulate but coalesce to produce exclusion within specific institutional

contexts. By shifting focus from identity 'layers' to power-laden processes, the constitutive approach reveals how inequality is dynamically enacted rather than statically embodied.

2.4.3 Intersectionality in the internal migrant China context

The term intersectionality has rarely been used in research in China. Taking this approach would bring a new perspective to the multidimensional social identities and experiences of rural migrant children.

Research using intersectionality to study adult migrants in China is also limited. For instance, Wang, Cheng and Bian (2018) examined Chinese female migrant workers' layered marginalization in urban labour markets, where gender and rural *hukou* (household registration) intersect. Using process-based analysis, the study revealed how these dual identities entrenched their exploitation as cheap labour, rooted in China's *hukou* system and patriarchal norms. While offering critical insights into intersectional migration studies, their framework may risks in oversimplifying rural-urban stigmatization as purely *hukou*-driven, neglecting nuanced socio-cultural hierarchies. Gao and Hopkins (2021) also studied internal migration in China using intersectionality to explore how rural Christian migrant workers in China experience intersectional marginalisation through the overlapping effects of gender, class, and migration status. These workers face systemic disadvantages due to the interaction of these identity categories, compounded by state regulations and neoliberal labour practices. However, the concept of intersectionality also highlights how these overlapping identities create opportunities for agency and community-building. Christian churches play a crucial role in providing support by offering social networks, childcare, and marriage opportunities, which help migrants navigate their complex social positions. While the churches address some of the challenges associated with their marginalised statuses and foster family-making and emotional resilience, the limitations imposed by systemic structures such as the *hukou* system continue to persist. This intersectional perspective underscores that although rural Christian migrants face multiple layers of inequality, their intersecting identities also offer pathways to reframe and address their marginalised experiences.

While the scholarly literature on Chinese children's experiences has seldom explicitly adopted an intersectionality framework, a number of studies have attempted to explore how the confluence of factors like migration status, socioeconomic class, and

household registration (hukou) shapes the social lives and friendships of migrant children. For example, in the research conducted by Zhang and Luo (2016), the study reveals that migrant children experience compounded disadvantages due to their rural background, lower socioeconomic status, and limited academic performance. They reside in marginalised urban neighbourhoods, face restrictions on participating in extracurricular activities, and often struggle academically compared to local children in Beijing. These combined factors collectively impede their ability to form close friendships with local peers. Additionally, Zhang (2018) found that migrant children often experience feelings of inferiority and anxiety when interacting with their more privileged urban counterparts. To manage these feelings, they strongly identify with fellow migrants, emphasising internal group unity and creating stereotypes to protect their self-esteem. For example, they use the broader label 'Waidiren' (outsiders) to distance themselves from the more stigmatised term 'Nongmingong' (migrant workers with limited income). They also reframe the negative perceptions associated with being a migrant by highlighting their own hard work and resilience, contrasting this with the perceived laziness of local Beijing residents (Zhang, 2018).

The studies reviewed reveal limited use of intersectionality in China to explicitly or implicitly understand internal migration and migrant children's experiences. Important factors such as migration status, language, and gender have not yet been integrated into a unified framework. This highlights a potential for further exploration by adopting intersectionality in childhood research in China. My research aims to address this gap by using intersectionality as an analytical framework. As noted, migration is a racialized category in China, similar to the Global North, and intersectionality offers a flexible and creative approach to interpreting its scope and categories. Additionally, the focus of intersectionality on the social geography of context aligns with the sociology of friendship and the 'new' sociology of childhood, which emphasises the importance of context in understanding children's friendships.

2.5 Conclusion

As discussed in this chapter, hukou and language are significant sources of discrimination in China. The hukou system creates a division between 'citizens' and 'second-class citizens' based on geographic location and household registration, which is also reinforced by the unequal distribution of resources and leads to discrimination and stigmatisation. Similarly, language and accents contribute to this stigmatisation. Inequality and discrimination in educational settings further perpetuate these issues.

However, other factors that are less visible compared to hukou and accent, and how these contribute to discrimination, have been less explored. In addition, in line with Bhopal (2006, p. 211), the experiences of other 'unidentifiable' groups, such as urban working-class children, remain underrepresented in academic research and require further investigation.

Although scholars recognize the importance of children's agency in interpreting their friendships, they have also highlighted the significant role that adults, such as teachers and parents, play in shaping these relationships. In China, as reviewed, grandparents often migrate as part of family strategies, taking on the responsibility of caring for their children and grandchildren. Bifarin and colleagues (2024) notes that older generations are highly respected in Chinese families. While some research has addressed the challenges grandparents face after migration and their increased dependence on their adult children, gaps remain in understanding the subordinate integration of migrant grandparents as suggested by Kahil and colleagues (2022). Therefore, there is still a need to explore how the experiences of migrant grandparents, particularly their integration challenges, impact their grandchildren's friendships.

Both the sociology of friendship and the 'new' sociology of childhood emphasise the critical role of context in understanding children's friendships. Research in China, however, often tends to analyse specific factors in isolation and lacks a comprehensive framework that integrates these factors. Consequently, my study aims to address this gap by adopting intersectionality as an analytical framework. This approach will allow for a nuanced analysis of how various social divisions in China, including migration experiences, gender, and language, intersect and influence children's friendships. By focusing on these specific social divisions, the study seeks to provide a more comprehensive understanding of the complex dynamics shaping children's social relationships.

Chapter 3. Methodology

3.1 Introduction

This chapter outlines the methodological framework employed in this study, detailing the rationale for its design, the procedures for data collection, and the approach to data analysis. Building on the theoretical foundation outlined in Chapter 2, this study is informed by the 'new' sociology of childhood, which emphasises the importance of recognizing children's voices while also considering the crucial role of adults, such as teachers and family members, in shaping children's social experiences.

As outlined in the Introduction and Literature Review, the following research questions were formulated to guide the inquiry into the friendships of rural migrant and urban children:

Research Question 1: What are rural migrant and urban children's experiences of friendships in school? How do internal, rural-to-urban migrant and urban children understand and negotiate their friendships within primary school settings?

Research Question 2: How does the intersection of rural-urban migrant status, gender and language (particularly accent) influence migrant children's friendship and their friendship strategies?

Research Question 3: How are migrant children's friendships shaped by adult worlds – parents, grandparents, teaching staff - and wider educational policy contexts and social inequalities?

The research is based on an eight-month ethnographic case study conducted in China in 2023. The fieldwork was planned year-long, with an intended span of two semesters, but was interrupted by the Covid lockdown, reducing the observation period to around five months (February to July 2023). To navigate this shortened timeframe, I utilized Knoblauch's (2005) concept of 'focused ethnography' that emphasizes short-term and intensive fieldwork to collect data and to balance breadth and depth in research and sampling strategies. Therefore, my research involved approximately five months of classroom observation at a primary school, accompanied by detailed field notes. The study also included paired interviews with children, during which they created social maps, as well as interviews with parents, teachers, and grandparents. A reflexive diary was maintained throughout the process to facilitate critical self-reflection. This chapter will address the key elements of the research design, including sampling and

recruitment, ethical considerations, data collection and analysis, and the role of reflexivity.

This chapter consists of five sections. The first section elaborates on the philosophical considerations underpinning the research, specifically how the ontological and epistemological perspectives on understanding children shaped the research design. The second section outlines the research methods employed in the study, detailing the application of a qualitative ethnographic case study approach, which includes observation, interviews with teachers, parents and grandparents, and participatory methods such as children's drawing of social maps. The following section covers the sampling and access processes, providing an overview of the participants involved. It then delves into addressing data management, encompassing translation, coding, and thematic analysis. The final section explores ethical issues encountered throughout the project and discusses reflexivity and positionality, particularly examining how my own identity influenced the research and the ethical considerations that emerged in the field.

3.2. Ontological and Epistemological Considerations

Gallagher (2009) asserts that contemplating ontological and epistemological positions in research involving children requires researchers to reflect on their own conceptualizations of childhood and the methods through which such knowledge is acquired. As discussed in the Literature Review, this research is informed by the 'new' sociology of childhood paradigm, which emphasises the agency of children. Accordingly, I adopt an ontological stance that views children as competent agents who actively shape their social worlds through their everyday interactions (Tisdall, Davis and Gallagher, 2009, p. 66). This perspective acknowledges that children have their own distinct culture and are experts in their own lives. However, as discussed in the Literature Review, my ontological stance is also influenced by the recognition of the significant roles played by adults in children's friendships. Research by, for example, Vincent, Neal and Iqbal (2018) and Ahn (2011) highlights the impact of teachers and parents, as well as the broader school and local context on children's friendships. Moreover, in line with the 'new' sociology of childhood's perspective that childhood is socially constructed (Sorin and Galloway, 2006) and cannot be fully understood in isolation from other social variables such as 'race', ethnicity and gender (Kurt, 2022), my ontological stance also emphasises the diversity and heterogeneity of children as a social group.

Informed by my ontological stances, I developed an epistemological perspective that emphasizes a comprehensive understanding of children's lives through immersive engagement, which involves spending time with them, interacting, and participating in their activities. Given that childhood experiences are diverse and subjective, it is essential to remain nuanced and flexible in defining categories such as gender, language, and migration experience. This approach ensures that the knowledge acquired remains receptive to the varied manifestations of children's experiences throughout the research process (Greene and Hogan, 2005). By valuing children's own interpretations and perspectives and understanding their social worlds from their viewpoints, the research aims to capture the dynamic and integral nature of their experiences.

3.3 Research design: an ethnographic case study in a Chinese primary school

3.3.1 Why an ethnographic case study approach?

Given the focus on understanding children's perceptions of peer friendships and how these are shaped by their daily school interactions, a qualitative research strategy was considered suitable for this research. According to Bryman (2012), qualitative research enables scholars to investigate how individuals actively construct and reinterpret meanings through everyday social exchanges.

Qualitative research with children is especially crucial for gaining a nuanced understanding of their perspectives and experiences, as it allows for in-depth exploration of their social worlds and personal meanings. This approach is particularly valuable because it enables researchers to capture the complexities of children's lived experiences and interactions in ways that quantitative methods might overlook. According to Vincent, Neal and Iqbal (2018), qualitative methods offer insights into how children perceive and interpret their social environments, including their friendships and social interactions. Furthermore, qualitative research provides a platform for children to voice their experiences and opinions, which is essential for understanding their unique viewpoints and agency (Konstantoni, 2010, p.81). Accordingly, qualitative approaches are especially pertinent when examining sensitive topics, such as migration and social integration, as it allows for a deeper engagement with children's subjective experiences and the contexts influencing their relationships. As such, a qualitative approach was adopted to explore the processes through which children

construct and interpret their peer relationships. This study specifically employed an ethnographic case study design to achieve this aim.

Gomm (2011) asserts that as an intensive research method, the case study provides the advantage of examining individuals' lives and issues in relation to their contexts across various temporal and spatial dimensions while maintaining the centrality of the subjects under investigation. In a similar vein, Yin (2014) argues that this method is particularly suitable for exploratory inquiries that aim to address 'what' questions. Additionally, case studies provide rich, qualitative insights that can uncover nuanced understandings of complex phenomena. This approach allows researchers to systematise understanding of complex phenomena through detailed inquiry, establishing a robust empirical foundation for theoretical development and informed practice.

Scholars (e.g., Tsang, 2014; Gomm, Hammersley and Foster, 2000) have argued that the case study method does not facilitate the generalization of findings. However, Yin (2014) argues that the primary objective of a case study is to develop theories rather than to make probabilistic or statistical generalizations. Furthermore, Flyvbjerg (2006) notes that the generalizability of case studies can be correlated to a good selection of cases, which can provide rich insights into how these cases are logically connected to theory. To gain comprehensive insights, the study utilized an ethnographic case study approach. As noted by Hammersley and Atkinson (2007), the ethnographic research process usually involves:

... the researcher participating, overtly or covertly, in people's daily lives for an extended period of time, watching what happens, listening to what is said, and/or asking questions through informal and formal interviews, collecting documents and artefacts - in fact, gathering whatever data are available to throw light on the issues that are the emerging focus of inquiry. (Hammersley and Atkinson, 2007, p.3)

Therefore, ethnographic research encompasses a range of methodologies aimed at understanding interactions and behaviours within specific contexts, emphasising detailed descriptions known as 'thick description' (Geertz, 1973). Ethnography is also widely supported in the 'new' sociology of childhood for studying children's lives (e.g. Konstantoni, 2010; Kustatscher, 2015). It enables a perspective that recognizes

children as active participants, casting them as competent agents in their social world and culture (Prout and James, 1997, p.8) rather than simply as subjects of study. Prout and James (1997, p. 8) contend that ethnography allows children to have a 'direct voice' in the production of sociological data and underscores its value in exploring children's unique cultural experiences, which can sometimes be distinct from those of adults. This approach, therefore, provides me with opportunities to gather comprehensive descriptions of children's friendships through immersion with children and by various methods and from different perspectives.

In addition to recognizing children as authorities on their own culture, as discussed in the previous chapter, the merging of 'new' sociology of childhood studies and intersectionality promotes the examination of power dynamics in research, while ethnography has been advocated for rebalancing power dynamics between researchers and child participants (Prout and James, 2015; Prout, 2011). For instance, ethnographic research has been proposed as a means to enhance children's involvement by facilitating the negotiation of the relationship and interaction with the researcher (James and Prout, 2003). This emphasis has established critical reflexivity regarding the researcher's role and the power dynamics inherent in the research process as a key issue in childhood studies. Within this framework, power is often viewed negatively, yet it remains an inevitable force that shapes the research context and demands ongoing critical reflection, a concern that aligns closely with ethnography's commitment to examining the researcher's role and influence.

Furthermore, schools serve as critical sites for ethnographic inquiry into children's social worlds, offering a structured yet diverse environment in which to examine their interactions with both peers and adults (Chambers, 2006). In the Chinese context, schools bring together children from varied social backgrounds, often stratified by age, gender, and migration experiences. Such settings are particularly conducive to generating the kind of 'thick description' necessary to address current gaps in the literature on children's friendships. Moreover, as institutions where children spend a substantial portion of their daily lives, schools provide essential insights into the formation and dynamics of their social experiences.

In light of ethnography's advantages in exploring children's friendships, I conducted an ethnographic case study at Xincun Primary School (pseudonym) in China. The next

subsection outlines the rationale for selecting the school, gaining access, and the research methods employed.

3.3.2 The research context: selection and access in the research setting

The choice of research context

Thomas (2011) has suggested that a well-chosen case should provide a clear and illustrative instance of the phenomenon being studied. Additionally, the case should be significant enough to offer valuable insights and contribute meaningfully to the research. According to Thomas (2011), selecting a case that aligns with these criteria ensures that it will be both representative and rich in data, thereby enhancing the overall quality and depth of the case study analysis.

Therefore, following Thomas's (2011) guidance and the research gaps identified in the preceding chapter, the research site was strategically selected to address these gaps. As previously discussed, the aim was to identify a setting that included a diverse group of participants, comprising both rural migrant and urban children, and reflecting a range of backgrounds such as socioeconomic status and gender. Relying on data from the *Migrant Workers Monitoring Survey Report 2021* (National Bureau of Statistics, 2022) and *Seventh National Population Census Bulletin (No. 8)* (National Bureau of Statistics, 2021) for migration patterns, living distribution of migrant families as well as primary schools that enrol rural migrant children, I narrowed my focus to several schools that accommodate a larger proportion of rural migrant children, while also maintaining a balance of urban children, thereby ensuring a diversity of backgrounds.

To effectively achieve the research objective of investigating the friendships among rural migrant children in primary school settings, the fieldwork took place in a primary school located on the outskirts of Beijing. As detailed earlier, the focus of this study was on children from rural migrant families, encompassing those who self-identify as 'rural middle class' in addition to those experiencing economic hardship. Due to its well-resourced education system and sustained economic growth, research has found that Beijing has become one of the primary destinations for migrant families in China (e.g., Liu, Liu, and Yu, 2017; Pong, 2014). Thus, Beijing offers a rich diversity of migrant families in terms of cultural and linguistic backgrounds, rendering it an optimal setting for conducting fieldwork.

The selection of Xincun Primary School (a pseudonym) in the community of Licun (also a pseudonym) as the research site is motivated not only by the school itself but also by Licun's distinct socioeconomic position. Located in a peripheral suburban area of Beijing, far from the city's urban core, Licun has transitioned from a farming village into a geographically and socially marginal suburb. While a segment of the population continues to consist of original villagers, a considerable proportion is made up of migrant workers. This transformation was initially driven by the development of local industrial enterprises, which generated non-agricultural jobs and drew surplus rural labour. The presence of such employment, combined with low living costs, has established Licun as a destination for new arrivals. Over recent decades, the community has grown increasingly diverse, with migrants now forming a visible and integral part of the local population. This demographic complexity renders Licun a revealing setting in which to study how migrant family backgrounds shape children's social networks and friendships.

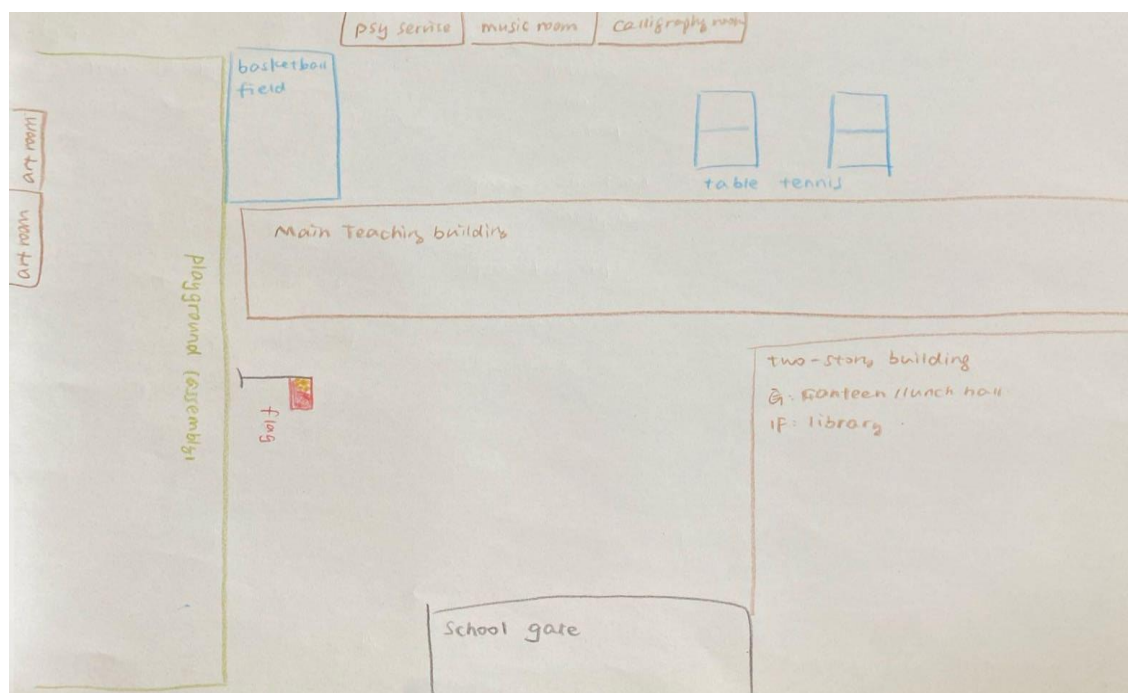
This study focuses on Xincun Primary School in Licun as an empirical site whose student composition directly addresses key gaps in the literature. The school enrolls students from rural migrant backgrounds, creating a context for investigating how familial migration experiences influence the formation and dynamics of children's social relationships. The selection of Xincun Primary School was also guided by practical considerations. For choosing research sites and gaining access, Heimer and Thogersen (2006) suggest that gaining access in China sometimes requires the support of important people or organisations. In my research, my previous experience working with migrant families through an NGO provided me with access to a WeChat group comprising migrant parents. I remained in this group while recruiting participants, and the school was recommended by parents for its diverse student body and cooperative staff. Furthermore, my prior involvement with the NGO allowed me to know the school's principal, who possessed extensive experience collaborating with voluntary organisations and researchers. This familiarity proved significant in gaining access to the school and conducting observations. Ultimately, the principal's experience facilitated a smoother integration into the school environment and enhanced the research process. The detailed analysis of recruiting participants and gaining access will be discussed in the 'sampling section.'

The research site: Xincun Primary

Xincun Primary School is nestled in the historic core of Licun, an area characterised by its traditional apartment buildings and affordable local eateries. Due to the affordability of these apartments, they are typically home to long-term local Beijingers and also attract new migrant families from rural areas. Some of the children from these households attend Xincun Primary School. The principal, who has actively visited schools in various countries, takes pride in fostering an educational environment that blends Chinese and Western characteristics. The school management is relatively strict, children should obey, for example, the 'Safety Rules' and 'Meal Instructions'. The principal is also keenly aware of the school's substantial population of migrant children and their varied academic backgrounds. In response, she emphasizes that beyond ensuring students' understandings of compulsory subjects, the school must also strengthen their overall competencies through arts and sports activities, which she believes aligns with the national 'Quality Education' initiative and is regarded as essential for the children's holistic development and future readiness. Therefore, the school insists on holding Annual Art Month (for performance shows and art activities such as poem writing and drawing exhibition), Annual Sport Month (during which classes have various sport competitions such as football and basketball match) and Annual Civility Month (during which children watch patriotic education, have patriotic field trip by visiting historic revolutionary sites and get prizes when they showed their kindness to strangers).

Although no government data indicates the school's academic performance in city rankings, its students have achieved strong results in national competitions in English, sports, and piano, which are typically showcased as 'good news' sharing on display near the school gate.

Figure 1 is the map I drew for the school for my daily observation.



(Figure 1. The school map)

Through the main gate, a modest two-story building on the left houses the canteen on the ground floor and the school library upstairs, with inspiring and also disciplining slogans, such as 'Cherish time.' Parents normally drop off and pick up students around the school gate. Positioned in front of the main gate and adjacent to the two-story structure stands the primary teaching building. Inside this building, on the ground level, is a sizable mirror accompanied by a thought-provoking question slogan above it: 'Have you read books today?' The walls of the main teaching building are adorned with children's drawings, characterised by patriotic themes such as embracing people from diverse ethnic backgrounds, honouring soldiers who sacrificed their lives in WWII expressing love for the Party and the nation, showcasing the Chinese people's commitment to peace, and expressing pride in achievements like the high-speed railway and spacecraft. Additionally, there are slogans displayed on the walls reminding students not to run or push in the corridors. Towards the rear of the school, in front of the main teaching building, are rooms dedicated to psychology services, art, music, and calligraphy classes, with table tennis tables interspersed between them. Adjacent to these facilities is a playground featuring a large football field used for physical education classes and weekly school assemblies, along with a smaller basketball court. The following field notes present my initial impressions of the school:

As I entered the school grounds for the first time, I was struck by the orderly

bustle around the main gate, with parents dropping off their children in a calm yet efficient manner. The environment felt disciplined but warm, with slogans displayed throughout the space: on the walls, in classrooms, and along the corridors. These messages typically served as reminders for students not to run in the hallways and to value their time.

(Fieldnote. 22 Feb 2023)

Walking through the corridors of the primary teaching building, I was surprised by the impressive skill in the children's drawings, many of which depicted scenes of national pride and cultural values. The artwork seemed to reflect not only the students' artistic talent but also the strong emphasis the school places on instilling a sense of national identity and pride in children's minds.

(Fieldnote. 23 Feb 2023)



Figure 2. Playground where children attend weekly assembly for flag-raising ceremony, PE class and play. There are slogans on the two-story building, which are 'motivation', 'pursuit of truth', 'cherish time' and 'keep promise'.



Figure 3. Table tennis tables and rooms for psychological consultations.



Figure 4. Art and music rooms. The slogan on the wall means 'the young is strong, so the country is strong'.



Figure 5. Corridors in the teaching building were decorated with children's drawings and slogans. The slogans are reminders for children to avoid running and be safe in the building.

The school employed various educational staff members for the children's study and well-being. For this study, I specifically included those who regularly interacted with the child participants, such as the teaching staff of the class, the head teacher and the principal. Through participant observation and interviews, I aimed to understand their roles, interactions with students, and perspectives on my research topic. In the next section, I will outline the process of sampling and data collection, explaining the methods used to gather the data.

3.4 Fieldwork

3.4.1. Sampling

As has been discussed, my work with an NGO that provides free tutoring to rural migrant children gave me access to migrant parents through a WeChat group. Using recommendations from these parents, the NGO, and information from different school websites, I compiled a list of potential research sites and reached out to the schools via email. Xincun Primary stood out for its prompt response, its strong recommendations from parents due to its diversity, and its prior experience working with NGOs and researchers. After further negotiations, the school agreed to my request, granting me access to conduct the research. After securing the school's agreement, as outlined in the Introduction and Literature Review, I decided to engage

with Grade 3 children (aged 8-9) for my research. As it was during the Covid-19 period winter holiday, the principal introduced me to a WeChat group of Grade 3 headteachers, allowing me to negotiate with them and select the class for my research.

The decision to focus on Grade 3 was influenced by the gap and significance highlighted in Chapters 1 and 2. While incorporating migrant children's perspectives on friendships, children in grades beyond Grade 4 were typically included, as they were considered more literate and better able to express their ideas and cooperate with surveys (e.g. research of Zeng et al., 2019; Jiang, Li and Feng, 2011). The decision to do my research with Class A was firstly informed by the discussions with the headteacher, who highlighted the class's diversity in terms of student backgrounds. Meanwhile, among rural migrant students in Class A, the headteacher emphasized that some came from rural migrant families with higher household incomes, adding to the complexity of migrant families and the diversity of participants. The headteacher had access to basic family information, such as the parents' occupations and the students' places of origin and hukou status. However, I remain reflexive about the limitations of this information as well as the ethics in using them, as it may not fully capture the complexity of the students' backgrounds and my sense of being more ethical if these are also the things parents agree and are willing to share with me. Also, I acknowledge that the headteacher's interpretation of 'affluence' and 'diversity' may be influenced by administrative or observational factors, and the brief phrases regarding children's families have the potential to oversimplify their backgrounds and experiences. Therefore, in my fieldwork, I place significant importance on the children's, parents' and grandparents' own descriptions of their family backgrounds. My decision to do my research with Class A was also informed by Ms. Xu (pseudonymised), the headteacher of Class A, who also served as the Grade 3 leader, a role that I believe would offer valuable insights into teaching methodologies and school assignments of the whole Grade. Collaborating with her was, therefore, seen as an opportunity to deepen my understanding of friendship dynamics within this age group. Thus, with Ms. Xu's approval, she assisted me at the beginning of the semester. I introduced myself and my research to the children in Class A and provided information sheets and consent forms for the students, teachers, and guardians. In this research, having obtained consent from both the children and their guardians, I worked with 38 students in Grade 3. Amongst them were 18 boys and 20 girls, 17 rural migrant children and 21 urban children. With the exception of one urban girl, who commenced schooling later due to illness and was 10 years old, the majority of the children in the class were either

eight or nine years old. The demographic sheet of the children was attached as an appendix.

Apart from children, to address the research question regarding adults' influence on children's friendships, I expanded the scope to include teachers, parents, and grandparents. Therefore, in total, I conducted interviews with seven school staff members, comprising the school principal, the director of studies (also responsible for moral education), the head teacher (also the Chinese teacher), the mathematics teacher, the English teacher, the art teacher and the physical education teacher. Notably, three of the seven teachers were themselves rural-urban migrants, providing valuable insights into the dynamics of migrant children's friendships. Additionally, the predominance of female teachers (six out of seven) aligns with the typical gender distribution in Chinese educational settings, where the majority of primary school teachers are female (Hu, 2013). The teachers exhibited a diverse range of teaching experience, ranging from 4 to 21 years, and ages spanning from 27 to 50 years old. These variations in experience and age contribute to a multifaceted understanding of the dynamics at play. The demographic sheet of the teachers was attached as an appendix.

To address the research question concerning adults' influence on children's friendships, I also extended my inquiry to include parents and grandparents, due to their significant role in shaping their children's social interactions (e.g. Vincent, Neal and Iqbal, 2017; Tympa, Karavida and Siaviki, 2021). However, during my fieldwork, I observed that grandparents were also heavily involved in children's education and caregiving responsibilities. Also, as has been discussed in the Introduction and Literature Review, grandparents commonly migrated along with the families to care for their grandchildren, and there remain research gaps in terms of how their experiences of integration in urban areas influenced children's friendships. Consequently, I expanded my research to encompass grandparents as well. Utilising the daily drop-off and pick-up times as opportunities for engagement, I endeavoured to establish rapport with grandparents and parents, ensuring they were acquainted with both me and my research. Additionally, I distributed consent forms and information sheets during the School Art Festival, an event where families are welcomed to visit the school and provided a conducive setting for my communication with them.

Obtaining consent from parents proved to be challenging, particularly among grandparents. Although the majority of them were thrilled and expressed gratitude for my recognition of their contribution to their grandchildren's schooling and the significance of their role in their grandchildren's friendships, it was still hard to engage them in the research. This was especially when recruiting grandparents from rural areas who had not received formal education and possessed limited literacy skills, conveying feelings of embarrassment during the recruitment process. They expressed a sense of worry about their literacy ability by normally saying, 'But I don't know much about culture' (which indicated a lack of literacy skills in Chinese). In response, I assured them that I would keep an open and non-judgmental approach, reassuring them that there were no correct or incorrect answers and emphasizing my interest in their personal stories. In total, there were 13 participants, including eight rural migrants and five urban parents and grandparents, with three grandparents and ten parents. Among the parents and grandparents, there were three fathers, one grandfather, seven mothers and two grandmothers. The uneven distribution of grandparents and parents reflects concerns about the literacy abilities of grandparents, as previously discussed. Similarly, the unequal number of fathers and mothers aligns with findings from sociology and education literature (e.g., Vincent, 2009; Reay, 2005), indicating that mothers are more often responsible for children's caregiving and education. The demographic sheet of participants was also attached as an appendix.

3.4.2 Data Collection

As has been discussed earlier, due to the shortened research timeframe caused by the Covid pandemic, I adopted a comprehensive and intense approach to maximize ethnographic insights (Pink and Morgan, 2013). Given the complex and sensitive nature of children's friendships and interactions, I aimed to capture the richness of their experiences. Drawing on the 'new' sociology of childhood, which emphasizes children's voices and experiences, I employed a combination of participant observation, interviews with children, teachers, parents and grandparents, and children's social maps. The combination of research methods not only ensured a nuanced understanding but also allowed for a deeper exploration of children's friendships within the constraints of my limited fieldwork time.

Observation

Participant observation played a pivotal role in the data collection process for this project as it has manifested to be helpful in building trust and reciprocity with the

children (e.g. Roets et al., 2013; Connolly, 2004; Thorne, 1993). By assuming the dual role of observer and participant, I gained both an external perspective and an internal understanding of the children's daily school experiences. This involved spending time with the children, observing their interactions, engaging in conversations, and participating in their activities. Participant observation facilitated a comprehensive understanding in addressing the three research questions outlined above. Initially, I began with two days of participant observation per week, gradually increasing my presence until I was present in the school for three or four days. As the fieldwork approached its conclusion, I progressively reduced my presence in the classroom, in alignment with the natural conclusion of the school year, to facilitate a smooth closure of the study. Participant observation entailed immersing myself in the children's everyday school routines, including activities in various spaces such as the playground, lunch hall, corridors and classroom, as well as occasional trips outside the school premises, such as visits to farms for labour classes. This approach allowed me to collect data that captured most of their school experiences throughout the day, rather than selectively focusing on specific events deemed 'interesting' (Hammersley and Atkinson, 2007). I also tried and enjoyed sitting as students' desk mates when their normal desk mates were sick and couldn't go to school. Furthermore, for daily observation, I also observed, for example, the changes of slogans on the wall, children's textbooks and how teachers used it for teaching friendships. To facilitate better observation, I drew seat maps of the class to track how students were sending secret notes to their friends, capturing children's friendships, and how teachers used seating arrangements to help children focus on their studies by separating them from their friends. Engaging directly in the activities and conversations of the children allowed me to support my observations by gaining both an insider's understanding through active participation in their school life and an external perspective. Figure 6 is an example from my field notes of a map I drew showing how children sent notes. This map illustrates how Jiaming sent notes to his friend Songyi, and the route Songyi used to send them back. Although they are friends, the teachers intended to separate them through seating arrangements to prevent them from talking during class. All the children along this route who helped in sending the notes seemed cooperative, as they told me that they sometimes did this too and shared the feeling of sadness at not being able to talk to a friend during class (Field note, 17 Mar, 2023).

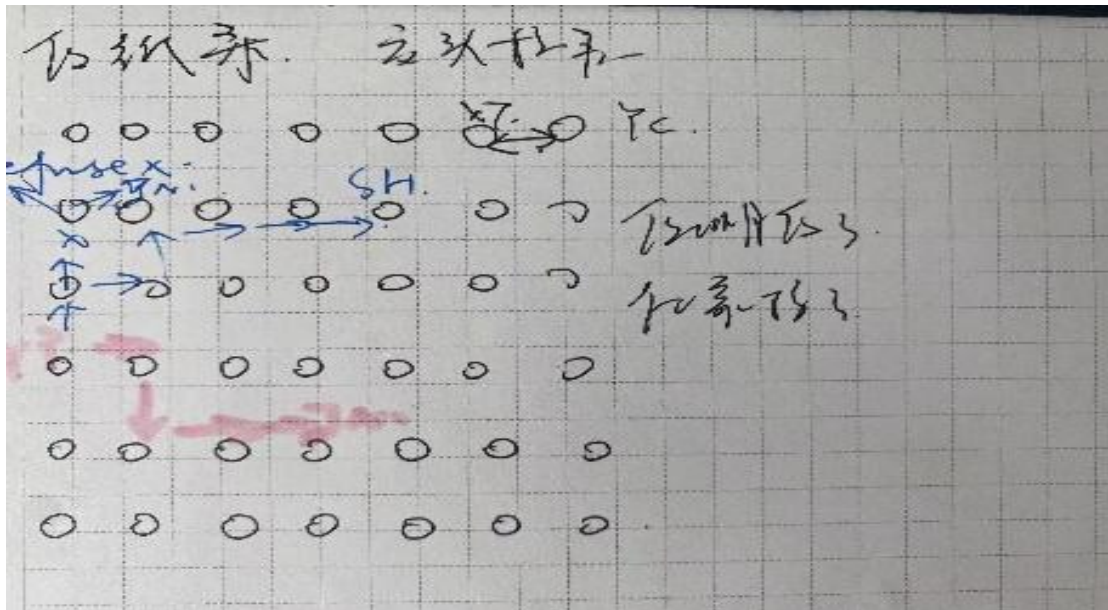


Figure 6. The route Jiaming used to send the notes and the route Songyi used to send them back.

The data collected through participant observation consisted mainly of field notes, which were recorded digitally on an iPad. The tablet was selected for its quiet typing feature and its efficiency in comparison to handwriting. During class, the notes were brief and concise due to time constraints. Subsequently, I spent several hours each evening transcribing and elaborating on these initial notes, providing more detailed and thorough accounts of the observations. However, sharing similar experiences with other ethnographers in childhood studies, such as Kustatscher (2015), I found that using an iPad wasn't always the most convenient option during my fieldwork. At times, children asked me or the teachers why I was allowed to bring and use the iPad, so I opted to use a notebook instead, blending in with the students who were writing by hand in class. On occasion, I made notes on my phone, either in the bathroom or after school, quickly recording key observations to elaborate in detail when I returned home.

In addition to the field notes, I maintained a reflexive diary to capture broader reflections, particularly addressing the intellectual challenges and the intense emotional experiences that I encountered throughout the fieldwork. This approach aligns with Punch's (2012) assertion that a field diary captures the researcher's feelings about the research process, including difficulties encountered, coping mechanisms, evolving relationships with participants, and changes over time. Consequently, I maintained a reflexive diary on a daily basis to reflect on both the methods employed and my personal emotions throughout the research process.

Interviews with teachers

Interviews with educational staff were conducted to gain a more comprehensive understanding of the school's environment and its approach to children's friendships. These interviews provided an alternative perspective to my fieldwork observations, specifically addressing Research Question 3, which examines the role of adults in shaping children's friendships.

The interviews were conducted online during the Covid lockdown period using Tencent Meeting, a widely used video conferencing platform in China for work-related purposes. This platform was selected to minimize the need for personal information exchange, such as adding friends on personal accounts, thereby maintaining privacy for both the participants and me. I approached and recruited the teachers through the recommendation and introduction of the headteacher, Ms. Xu, with whom I first gained access. I explained the research's purpose and outlined the consent process to other teachers. The teachers were willing to participate, given their interest in the study, their relationship with children in Class A and the convenience of reflexivity allowed for greater flexibility in scheduling and reduced the need for travel, especially during the pandemic. However, the lack of face-to-face interaction made it more challenging to establish rapport and, at times, led to technical difficulties, which may have affected the flow of conversation. These challenges are reflected upon further in the section of reflection.

The interviews with teachers focused on their perspectives regarding children's friendships within the school setting and how school influenced their friendships. Each interview typically lasted around 50 minutes, contingent upon the level of engagement exhibited by the interviewee. By integrating recorded interview data with insights gained from informal interactions with teachers in the everyday school lives, I obtained diverse data and an understanding of children's friendships. Therefore, interviewing school staff enabled me to delve deeper into how the viewpoints of these influential adults influenced children's understanding and behaviour of friendships in school settings.

Teachers in my study did not speak solely as individuals with pedagogical expertise; rather, they occupied dual roles as institutional agents and local enforcers of educational governance (Ball, 2010). As such, their narratives likely reflected a

complex interplay of positionalities: on the one hand, articulations aligned with institutional discourses and expectations; on the other, expressions shaped by self-censorship or surveillance-aware reflexivity; and, at times, more personal accounts driven by their own subjective experiences and perspectives.

This also echoed with Goffman's (1959) dramaturgical framework, as teachers' engagement operated on a clear 'frontstage', where performances aligned with expected norms of professionalism, discipline, and loyalty to institutional authority. However, as my presence became more sustained and relational trust developed, I observed a gradual softening of this formal performance. This relational trust was also likely aided by my own positionality as a former teacher and teaching assistant, which provided a shared professional understanding and helped to establish rapport. Teachers began to speak with greater candour, reflecting on their understandings, experiences, and frustrations with me. This created what I experienced as a 'semi-private front', an interactional zone still embedded in the frontstage of the school made partially intimate through relational familiarity and selective disclosure. Correspondingly, teachers were more likely to share their understandings with me in informal conversations and everyday interactions, which were, following consent, noted in my fieldnotes as supplements to the interviews. For instance, in Chapter 5, I examined how teachers hold stereotypes of rural migrant students, with these stereotypes associating rurality with poverty, when addressing students' conflicts. These conflicts occur in informal everyday interactions rather than in structured interviews. This gradual move towards greater candour also presented a key ethical consideration. As the research progressed and participants became more comfortable, there was a risk that they might temporarily 'forget' my role as a researcher and speak with less caution. To mitigate this, I made a conscious effort to periodically remind participants of my role and the confidential, research-oriented nature of our conversations, ensuring informed consent remained a continuous process.

Interview with parents and grandparents

Interviewing parents and grandparents about children's friendships provided valuable insights due to their close daily involvement in their children's lives. I approached parents primarily during pickup times, when informal conversations naturally occurred, as well as during school festivals, where I was able to engage with them more casually once they were invited and familiar with me. At the school's art festival, I provided information sheets and consent forms, at which point parents were already more

comfortable with my presence. I noticed that local, middle-class parents were generally more willing to participate, while some migrant parents felt that they had 'no stories to share' (reflexive diary, 21 May 2023). This reluctance among migrant parents mirrors findings in existing research, where individuals from migrant backgrounds are likely to feel their experiences are less valued or relevant in such contexts and there exists power imbalance between the researchers and the participants (e.g. Ahmed et al.2019; Fiorito, 2023). This was especially salient for rural migrant grandparents, as some expressed a desire to participate but were hesitant, feeling that they 'didn't know the culture', a phrase that indicates limited formal education (reflexive diary, 21 May 2023). The reluctance of grandparents, especially grandmothers, echoes research on how individuals with limited educational backgrounds, particularly women, may feel in participating in research, as they may feel self-abased or insufficiently knowledgeable and are also difficult to find and engage (Linn, 2020; Huang, 2004). I reassured and encouraged them, emphasizing that their perspectives were valuable and welcomed in the study.

To ensure a sense of safety and a relaxed atmosphere, along with privacy, I offered participants several options for interview locations, such as cafes and nearby parks. In practice, locations near the school, such as benches at a distance from the gate or nearby parks, were the most preferred, as they allowed parents to easily pick up their children afterward. To maintain privacy, we scheduled the interviews before the school day ended, ensuring that the area around the school was quiet, free from distractions, and conducive to protecting participants' privacy.

Despite the limited number of adults interviewed, interviewing family members enabled me to delve deeper into how the perspectives of family members influenced children's friendships, especially in out-of-school time. Interviews with parents and grandparents generally lasted between 45 and 60 minutes, varying based on the participants' level of engagement.

Interview with children

To explore children's understanding of friendships and the influence of intersectional categories (Research Questions 1 and 2), interviews provided a structured opportunity to address specific questions. In contrast to the informal conversations initiated by the children, which were spontaneous and focused on their interests and immediate

surroundings, interviews allowed for a more focused and thorough investigation of the key themes.

Following the approach used by Vincent, Neal and Iqbal (2018), children participated in interviews in pairs. This format was chosen to ensure they were not alone, making the experience more social, enjoyable, and less intimidating while also fostering a more child-centred environment. Careful consideration was given to the pairing process, with pairs selected after thoughtful deliberation in consultation with the teacher. It was essential to ensure that the selected pairs comprised children who were not particularly close friends and did not typically spend significant time together. This precautionary measure aimed to mitigate the risk of any child feeling hurt or upset if their perceived close friend did not demonstrate a reciprocal level of friendship during the interview process (Vincent, Neal and Iqbal, 2018).

For the interviews, I used an iPad with a child-friendly cover and a small recording device. The interviews were conducted in small groups, held in various school spaces like the calligraphy, art, or music rooms, based on room availability and the children's preferences. To avoid disrupting their school day, the timing of the interviews was coordinated with their class schedules, with teachers' approval. Each interview lasted 40-50 minutes, aligning with a typical class period.

I employed semi-structured interviews to explore children's understanding of concepts such as 'friend' and 'school life', as well as to discuss their personal friendship experiences. This approach balanced the researcher's guidance with participant flexibility, allowing children to express their views while remaining focused on key research themes (Prior, 2016). Moreover, the format was conducive to uncovering new insights emerging directly from the children's narratives. The approach complemented my field observations, offering deeper insights into children's conceptualizations of friendship.

Drawing social maps

Along with interviews, the research also employed the technique of drawing social maps, drawing inspiration from the work of Vincent, Neal and Iqbal (2018). In their investigation of children's friendships, Vincent and colleagues integrated interviews with the task of prompting children to create social maps depicting their friendship networks. This was to offer nonverbal communication within children, to help prompt

child-led discussions and to make the interviews fun, active and less adult centred. During this activity, researchers encouraged children to place themselves at the centre of the paper, surrounded by representations of their friends. The spacing between the drawings symbolised the varying degrees of emotional closeness between individuals. Through these drawings, researchers were able to construct friendship maps for the entire class, facilitating an exploration of the reciprocity of friendships across ethnic and class boundaries (Vincent Neal and Iqbal, 2018). Moreover, social maps serve as a valuable tool for comprehending the composition and size of friendship groups. Drawing upon insights from George (2007, p. 78), understanding different patterns of friendships also aids in comprehending the hierarchy within friend groups, delineating leaders, inner circles, and peripheral members.

However, in my research, children sometimes deviated from the instructions I provided during the drawing activity, such as drawing only one friend instead of multiple friends surrounding themselves. This divergence may reflect their differentiation between 'friends' and 'besties,' a distinction that I will delve into further in the reflexivity section and Chapter 4 of my thesis. For example, in the drawings of Ziyi (figure 7) and Shige (figure 8), they only drew themselves and their one best friend, indicating that 'best friend' is the most emotionally close form of friendships.



(Figure 7, A drawing by Ziyi, an urban girl)

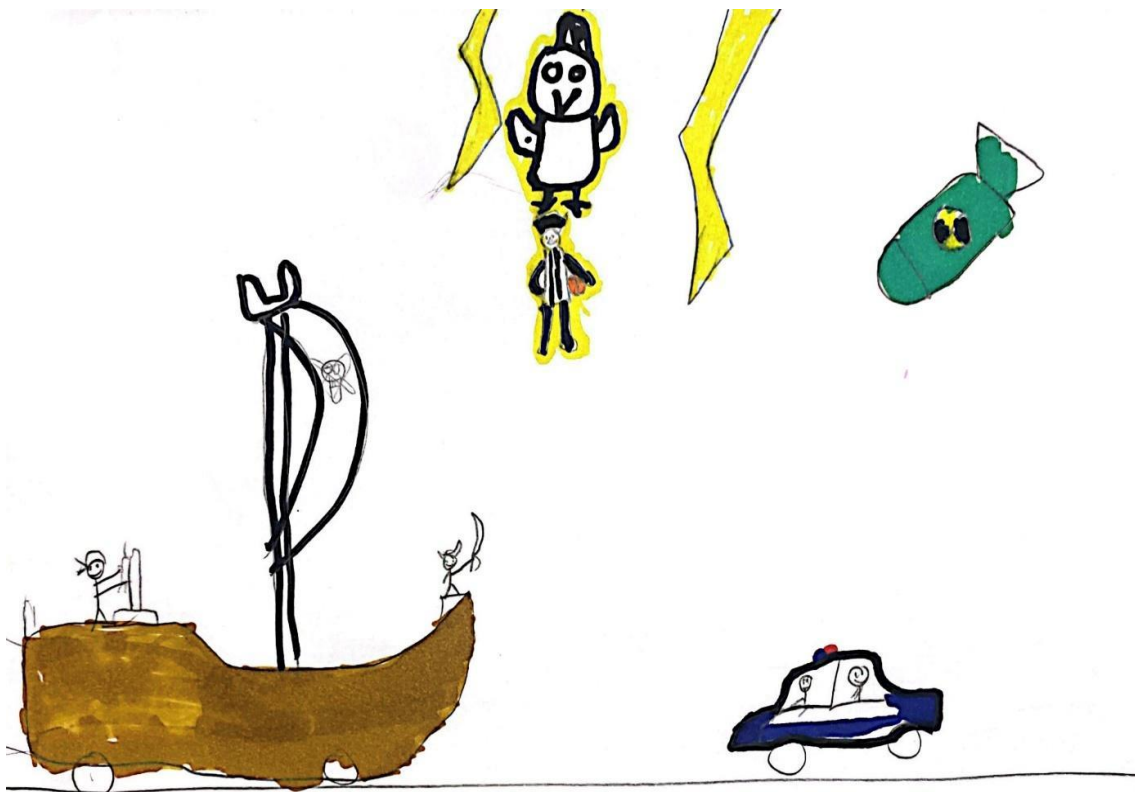


(Figure 8, A drawing by Shige, a rural migrant girl)

Furthermore, in most of the drawings, children dedicated significant time to determining the setting for their depiction of friendships. For instance, during interviews, children often stated, 'I will spend some time thinking about what I do with my friends more often' (interview with Wangyao, 13 March 2023), 'I don't like my picture with a white background; I want it to be colourful, so I placed us in a place we go to more often' (interview with Ran, 9 May 2023), and even 'I will divide my picture into three sections, each representing a different context with my best friend. On the left, my school friends; in the middle, hometown friend, and in the right, my two neighbourhood best friends' (Interview with Tianyi, 11 Apr, 2023). In this research, I adopted the same methods as Vincent, Neal, and Iqbal (2018) but applied them within a different national and educational context. At the initial stage of the interviews, I did not prompt the children to draw a background but instead to create a map illustrating their friendships and closeness between themselves and their friends. However, the way children emphasized the 'background of the picture' and 'places we go more often' highlighted the potential of this method (social map) to stimulate children's discussions about their friendships during interviews. This approach also led me to reflect on the significant role of context in friendships, which is argued by Adams and Allan (1998), and the importance of family backgrounds in shaping rural migrant and urban children's friendships in China. For example, figure 9 is the social map of Tianyi (a rural migrant girl) in which she divided the picture into four parts, from the left are her school friends, hometown friend, two neighbourhood friends.



(Figure 9. A drawing by Tianyi, a rural migrant girl)



(Figure 10. A drawing by Shihao, a rural migrant boy)

Figure 10 is the drawing of Shihao (a rural migrant boy), where he depicted himself and his four best friends at a theme park that their parents typically take them to during holidays. According to him, their parents are friends, which influences the children to form friendships as well. The insistence of children on drawing ‘backgrounds’ highlights

the importance of context in children's friendships and the role of parents in shaping these friendships.

Traffic lights were also incorporated into the interviewing and drawing process with children, aiming to empower them by allowing them to control the pace of their interviews while also managing their paired partner's contributions. Drawing from the experiences of Hemming (2008), children who participated in this research were provided with traffic light cards to regulate the flow of the interviews. In my research, a red light indicated a 'stop' signal, allowing participants to withdraw from the interview or address any concerns that arose. An amber light signalled a 'short pause' or an attempt to interrupt without interrupting loudly, while a green light signalled to 'go' and continue with the interview. The traffic light system effectively empowered children by giving them control over the pace of the interview, allowing them to feel more comfortable and engaged. It facilitated a smooth and responsive interaction, ensuring that the children could express their needs and manage the flow of the conversation with ease.

3.5. Ethical Considerations

Ethics plays a critical role in research involving children, as they are typically positioned as vulnerable and subordinate in studies primarily led by adults (Alderson and Morrow, 2011). Accordingly, the research will be conducted with the University of Sheffield's ethical approval and will adhere to the guidelines of ethical practices of the British Sociological Association (2017) and the British Educational Research Association (2011). In the following section, I outline some of the main ethical concerns in this research and how I plan to approach them.

Access and informed consent

The British Educational Research Association (2011) conceptualizes consent as a process in which 'participants understand and agree to their participation without any duress, prior to the research getting underway' (p.5). Further, Kustatscher (2014) also noted that obtaining informed consent does not simply imply that prior event but should also be a process that is subject to renegotiation over time while doing research with children.

Therefore, I considered the process of acquiring informed consent to be two-phased: first, securing initial consent during participant recruitment, and second, continuously

reaffirming consent throughout the entire fieldwork period. Following informal conversations with staff and teachers at Xincun Primary School, who expressed potential interest in participating in the study, I shared with them the ethical approval from the University of Sheffield Ethics Review Committee as well as my Non-criminal Record. Upon obtaining approval from the principal, I initiated formal negotiations with various gatekeepers responsible for facilitating access to the children at Xincun Primary School, including the head teacher, class teachers, and parents. Due to the dual roles of the principal and head teacher as both gatekeepers and participants in the study, they were given informational leaflets and consent forms. These documents sought approval for my access to the research site, my conduct of participant observation, interviews with children, and their own involvement in teacher interviews (see Appendix).

With the assistance of the head teacher, I organized a visit to the school to introduce myself and outline the details of the research project. Utilising slides, I provided an overview of my background and the objectives of the study. I distributed child-friendly information booklets (refer to Appendix) to everyone present, and together we reviewed its contents. Introducing myself as a PhD student from the university interested in exploring children's friendships, I elucidated the purpose of the research. This prompted a series of questions from the children, such as 'What is a PhD?' and 'Is this your homework?', which I answered before inviting them to contemplate our discussion and consider whether they would like to participate in the research in the coming days. To secure parental consent, I distributed consent forms to be returned to the school (see Appendix) and provided parents with information sheets and consent forms regarding parent interviews, along with forms for their children to take home. A few days later, I returned to the classroom to collect the consent forms from both children and parents. While a few parents opted out, they agreed to allow me to interact with their children in daily school activities without recording any data about them.

However, I concur with the notion that obtaining consent is an ongoing process (Kustatscher, 2014). Therefore, I emphasised to teachers, parents, and children that regardless of their initial decisions, they retained the option to change their minds at any point later on. To facilitate ongoing consent from the children, I placed a small box on my desk where they could secretly put notes indicating their willingness to withdraw from the research temporarily or entirely. I only very occasionally received notes from

children telling me they were not in the mood, due to reasons such as their performance in mid-term exams.

Managing the challenges of anonymity and confidentiality

In accordance with the University of Sheffield's Research Ethics Policy, data protection protocols will be implemented to guarantee the secure storage of research data and participants' personal information.

As Beijing holds significance within the research context, it remains unaltered. However, to ensure confidentiality, the specific location of the school (referred to as Licun) and the name of the school (Xincun Primary), as well as those of parents, staff, and children, have been anonymized. Pseudonyms have been assigned to the children, and educational staff are identified as 'course teachers' (e.g. English teacher, maths teacher). Adherence to confidentiality principles includes securely storing data and sharing only de-identified data extracts publicly. Writing field notes in the classroom raises confidentiality issues, as children may inadvertently view or contribute to them. Some notes were promptly taken, frequently using just short phrases and bullet points. Although this approach was primarily a practical method for swiftly recording activities and conversations, it also functioned to partially obscure the data.

However, children typically showed little interest in notes about others, instead focusing on notes about themselves. They sometimes wanted me to interpret the signals or phrases of my notes and were interested in adding more details about their activities. I found that children's additions to my field notes were often useful, as they sometimes revealed more about their emotions than I could gather solely from my observations.

Anonymity and confidentiality were treated as key ethical principles throughout this study; however, their practical application was difficult to be fully guaranteed and posed particular challenges given the close-knit nature of the primary school setting. As, researchers such as Kaiser (2009) and Alderson and Morrow (2011) have argued, anonymization and confidentiality are not only technically difficult but also ethically fraught. For example, despite the use of pseudonyms such as 'English teacher' or 'Headteacher' in my writing, I recognize that full anonymity and confidentiality cannot be guaranteed in a primary school setting where roles and relationships are often well known. Therefore, the research process itself had a relatively high degree of visibility.

Children, for instance, were seen leaving the classroom together to participate in interviews. This meant that there was a high level of transparency about who was involved: children were aware that their peers had been interviewed, teachers, especially the head teacher who helped me in pairing up the children knew who were participating and parents knew their children were participating. Similarly, parents gave permission for their children to participate in the study and be interviewed. Children were, therefore, most exposed to breakdowns in confidentiality, whereas teachers and parents were relatively less clear and exposed. For example, parents knew each other and might have conversations about being involved in the project or see other parents talking to me. Teachers might be aware of which other teachers were participating; however, teachers' consent forms and interviews were sent to me and were taken online individually during Covid-19 (see Chapter 3.4.2).

Therefore, in my fieldwork, I always explained the principle of anonymity and confidentiality and the risks as part of the informed consent process with every participant before starting the interview. I confirmed that all names would be changed, and all personal identifiers would be removed to ensure confidentiality. I anonymized not only names but also identifying contextual features (e.g., the specific name of the employing organization of parents), where possible. I explained to the children that only if they shared details about harms they were experiencing would or if I was worried about their wellbeing would I break confidentiality. When the combination of narrative detail and role specificity made anonymity difficult to maintain, I made a considered decision to omit or paraphrase parts of the data, prioritizing participants' confidentiality over completeness of reporting. For example, as has been discussed in the following section, I typically chose to report the situation in this manner because the issues worrying me constituted a general phenomenon, and this approach was intended to prevent children from being punished. However, there were still times that I shared the paraphrased parts of the data with the headteacher when a particular child worried me. For example, Jiaxi shared with me that she's being called a nickname, 'Jiatie,' by her classmates for quite a long time and has nothing to do about it, therefore, she normally discloses that she has no friends (Fieldnote, 23 May 2023).

Dealing with sensitive issues

In the course of extended ethnographic research and the development of relationships with participants, sensitive issues often emerge, requiring thoughtful management by researchers. This issue is particularly significant when conducting research with

children, given the inherent power imbalance between adult researchers and child participants (Mayall, 2008; Punch, 2002). It becomes even more sensitive when studying rural migrant children in China, as this group is often subjected to political sensitivities, with rural migrant children and their families sometimes facing discrimination and stigma. While I generally avoided conversational topics that might prompt intimate disclosures from children or their families, such disclosures did occasionally occur. These sensitive topics often involved family dynamics such as separation or loss, as well as financial matters. In these instances, my approach was guided by a commitment to ethical principles (British Educational Research Association, 2011), which prioritised the children's interests. This involved treating them with respect to mitigate any feelings of intrusion, distress, or discomfort.

Scholars have highlighted the possibility of children disclosing sensitive information, emphasising the importance of researchers' sensitive handling (e.g. Due, Riggs and Augoustinos, 2013; Powell et al., 2018). This is particularly relevant when investigating children's friendships, given the emotionally charged nature of these relationships. During my fieldwork, although no child disclosed seriously harm or abuse, discussions occasionally touched upon sensitive topics. The perception of sensitivity can vary subjectively, and my understanding of the term guides this discussion. Moreover, I acknowledge that the research focus on friendships inherently carries sensitivity, especially regarding potential experiences of discrimination and emotional sensitivities in friendships. Additionally, discussions around 'migration' can be sensitive, as children sometimes shared experiences of their parents' conflicts at home due to financial strain, as well as their reluctance to live with other family members instead of their parents. Therefore, as outlined in my ethical approval, I am committed to providing comfort and support to the children if sensitive issues arise during fieldwork and in the event of a more serious or sensitive issue, I will communicate it only to the headteacher.

However, navigating ethical challenges in practice can be complex, particularly when considering children's reluctance to disclose sensitive issues due to fear of punishment, as observed in my current research. Upon reflecting on my experiences, I realised that decisions about whether to disclose information to teachers could impact the ongoing consent relationship with children (as discussed in the reflection section). For example, when children feel sad or angry, they were afraid that the teachers would find out and criticized them, as these were considered negative emotions. Consequently, I adopted a cautious approach in such circumstances, only reporting concerns that genuinely

troubled me and avoiding singling out specific children. For example, during one instance where I accompanied two boys of my participants to their extracurricular classes in school, a Grade 5 boy proudly displayed an armband with a 'Nazi' symbol and repeatedly glorified violence by telling other young children it was cool to torture and kill others. I felt compelled to address this issue but chose to report it to the teacher responsible for moral education without revealing the child's identity while just describing a general phenomenon. This approach aimed to address the concerning behaviour and sensitive issues while safeguarding the child's privacy.

Providing Feedback and the Dissemination of Research Findings

The rationale for providing feedback to participants varies from ethical responsibilities (e.g., British Sociological Association, 2017) to addressing concerns about potential feelings of exclusion that may deter future participation in research. However, due to the timeframe of this research, I found it challenging to provide comprehensive feedback during the fieldwork phase.

Ultimately, I decided to revisit the class at the end of the semester, coinciding with the day when children received their exam results and holiday homework. During this visit, I provided a brief summary of the initial research findings to the teachers and children involved in the study. Within the framework of the 'new' sociology of childhood, which highlights the active agency of children, and considering the sensitive issue of rural stigma in China, I presented my research findings to children in a manner that was both accessible and encouraging. I highlighted their strengths by affirming that they were 'brilliant at making friends and maintaining friendships' and 'amazing in their kindness and sense of unity within the class.' Since parents were not present on that day, I provided the teachers with a condensed summary in a hard copy report of the initial research findings for distribution to parents, ensuring confidentiality and respecting ethical considerations. Given the potentially sensitive nature of certain findings, such as the family backgrounds and the involvement of migrant grandparents in their grandchildren's lives, I opted to present my results in more generalized and caring terms. These included themes such as 'children demonstrated their ability to make and maintain friendships,' 'both schools and families worked to support children in their friendships,' and 'children sometimes have different perceptions of friendships compared to adults, often placing greater value on emotional closeness.' For teachers, I conducted a presentation in the teachers' office for those who participated in my research. The research findings for teachers were presented more straightforward,

highlighting themes such as: 'teachers made significant efforts to use collective friendships and emphasize unity among children, which at times effectively helped children form friendships that transcended social boundaries, such as rural and urban divisions'; and 'teachers strived to cultivate empathy and kindness in children, although this was sometimes framed within the rural-urban hierarchy, where rural children were often perceived as poorer and more in need of empathy.'

3.6 Reflexivity

Reflexivity in ethnography refers to the researcher's ability to critically consider their positionality and its ethical implications, fostering greater ethical mindfulness in social research (Takeda, 2021). The importance of the researcher as the primary tool in ethnographic research has also been emphasised in literature, especially within qualitative studies where the various roles adopted by researchers in the field have been extensively examined (Pillow, 2003; Cheney, 2019). This aligns closely with the framework I outlined in the previous chapter, where I emphasized the importance of integrating childhood studies with an intersectional approach.

In intersectionality, Anthias (2008) argues for an approach that goes beyond merely listing the researcher's identity categories, advocating instead for the development of a narrative that explores how one's unique positionality shapes their perspectives. Therefore, in this section, I will analyse my social identity and how this is influenced by my role as a researcher, as well as dealing with ethical issues in practice.

My role and position as a researcher

My research focused on rural-urban migrant children's friendships, and my personal background, to some extent, informed and enriched this research. I was born in rural North China and migrated to urban areas with my parents at the age of one. While I acquired an urban household registration (hukou) and received education in urban settings, my upbringing was heavily influenced by my family's rural heritage and habits, as both of my parents were born and raised in rural areas, and my grandparents continue to reside there. For example, I have retained the eating habits that are typical of northern rural China till now, particularly those associated with starving and survival during times of scarcity. Despite my urban education, which afforded me proficiency in standard Mandarin, my rural upbringing is still evident in my accent, especially when conversing at home. My experiences of spending holidays in rural China and my

accent have given me a unique advantage in my research, particularly in understanding the rural context.

Accents also play a significant role in identity formation and communication (Dong, 2018). Rural migrant parents have shared their feelings of awkwardness regarding literacy due to their accents and limited educational experience with me, which makes them reluctant to participate in interviews. To help them feel comfortable, I intentionally use my rural accent when interviewing them. Thøgersen (2006) highlights that the categorization of 'the Chinese language' is inherently political, distinguishing between 'Baixingese,' the colloquial language, and 'Ganbunese,' the formal language used by government institutions. As Huang (2004) suggest, educated women researchers may exert influence over those with less education. In China, accents often correlate with educational levels, and carrying a strong accent can be associated with limited education. By maintaining my rural accent, particularly when interviewing migrant grandparents, I aimed to bridge potential power imbalances and establish a sense of shared cultural understanding, positioning myself as an 'insider' among the grandparent participants.

In addition to the influence of my accent and Mandarin proficiency, my educational background played a significant role in shaping my research approach. Having attended public schools in a province with limited educational resources but a large population, especially in high school, my schooling experiences were highly similar to those of students at Xincun Primary. These schools were characterised by strict teachers, intense competition, and considerable academic pressure. Furthermore, during my holidays and internship terms in my last two undergraduate years, and especially during the COVID-19 lockdown after graduating with my Master's, I worked both as a primary school teacher and as a volunteer educator at an NGO focused on teaching migrant children. These experiences provided me with opportunities to get to know rural migrant children and their families better. Additionally, pursuing my MSc in Education in the UK exposed me to different educational dynamics through school visits and the postgraduate curriculum. Reflecting on my own experiences of disliking harsh teaching methods and observing power dynamics between teachers and students in the UK, I became increasingly attuned to issues of power balance when interacting with children. These experiences have deeply informed my approach to building relationships with participants and navigating power dynamics within educational settings.

In the initial stages of my research, a critical concern emerged regarding the power dynamics between myself and the children involved. Drawing from insights in educational research (e.g., Kustatscher, 2014; Vincent, Neal and Iqbal, 2018), I was motivated to foster a sense of equity and friendship by encouraging the children to call me by my first name, thus mitigating the traditional power differential inherent in teacher-student relationships in China. However, during my fieldwork, it became evident that the children defaulted to calling me 'Teacher Yin' and greeted me with nods, reinforcing a sense of emotional distance akin to their interactions with their other teachers that they were afraid of. Despite my efforts to encourage a more egalitarian rapport by inviting the children to address me by my given names, 'Boyang' or 'Yinyin,' names my friends used to call me during my teenage years, this approach was met with resistance from the headteacher, who viewed it as a breach of respectful conduct towards elders or authority adults. Consequently, this at the initial stage of the fieldwork made me worried about the trust between the children and me. To address this uncertainty, I adopted a more informal approach, seeking to establish friendships with the children on their terms. For instance, I initiated greetings with high-fives or embraced hugging as a gesture of greetings, the same as the manner in which the children interacted amongst themselves. Also, I avoided scolding the children for their playful behaviour and instead laughed along with them, creating a feeling of shared fun. These efforts yielded satisfactory outcomes, which are evidenced by the children's behaviours. For instance, when seated as some children's desk mates, they would secretly pass me items prohibited in school, such as stickers, to me, indicating a level of trust and inclusion, I assume. Girls would often engage in styling my hair, a gesture of intimacy typically reserved for close friends among girls. Also, Yiyou shared milk with me in the corridors as he assumed I was one of them, so I should have my student milk (children should take free student milk at school each day). These interactions boosted my confidence in the changing power dynamics, which in turn allowed for deeper engagement during interviews. While I did not seek to fully adopt the role of a student akin to the children, my efforts to engage with and understand their cultural world were often met with positive responses, which facilitated the process of doing interviews with them.

As previously mentioned, my own educational background in highly competitive schools with similar academic pressure to that of Xincun, as well as my exposure to the educational values of the UK, where power dynamics between teachers and

students are different, sometimes influenced my data analysis. This became especially apparent in my interactions with students in the left side roll (as detailed in Chapter 4), where I found myself empathising with boys who were often disrespected by teachers. I reflected in my diary that:

I don't think children at the left side roll have absolutely no gifts or talents or absolutely bad children as the teacher images [...] I can't help but show my kindness to them by encouraging them in things that are not related to studying. For example, Yiyou was able to jump high and reach a certain decoration on the back blackboard. (Diary, 28 Apr 2023)

I found myself unable to resist displaying empathy towards the boys who were often harshly yelled at by the teachers simply because of their study performance, and as a result, we formed a special bond. This connection was particularly evident on the last day of my fieldwork when I came back to the school at the end of the semester to share my initial research findings and say goodbye to the teachers and children. Yiyou, the boy from the left side roll and normally being yelled by the teachers, had forgotten that I would be visiting that day, and his emotional reaction was evident in his actions:

Yiyou took me to the end of the corridor and, hurrying, took a waffle from his pocket. He told me this was the snack his parents had bought him from Tianjin; it was a really good one. I said, 'Then you should eat it. Your mum packed this for you in case you were hungry'. He rushed, saying quickly, 'Eat it; otherwise, we'll be caught by teachers'. As snacks were not allowed in the school, I assumed that he said to eat it as a reminder of our friendship. I ate the waffle but secretly kept the wrapper and stuck it onto my daily schedule book, to remember the children and the friendship with them. (Dairy, 5 Jul 2023).



(Figure 11. Yiyou's waffle).

Apart from Yiyou, there are other children saying, 'I met you at the start of this semester; does this mean I can meet you every time the semester starts' (Diary, 5 Jul 2023), which also, to some extent, displayed our emotional bonds. In reflecting on my role as a researcher, I find myself grappling with the tension between my professional identity and my personal inclination to connect with students on a more informal, friendly level. While I value the rapport and open communication that can arise from a friendly relationship with the children, I am increasingly aware of how this dynamic and my personal empathy towards certain children may impact my objectivity and authority as a researcher. My tendency to blur the lines between professionalism and personal connection can lead to challenges in maintaining the necessary distance for objective analysis. This duality complicates my efforts to balance empathy with critical distance, which is essential for rigorous research.

Therefore, my personal background and upbringing also shaped the manner in which I negotiated relational dynamics with grandparents, parents, and children during fieldwork. Firstly, my professional background in teaching rural migrant children led the teachers to presume a shared experiential common ground, particularly regarding an

understanding of the demanding teaching load and the challenges of engaging with parents from rural communities.

Furthermore, as previously discussed, my family migrated from a rural area to an urban setting when I was approximately two years old. During this relocation process, my family embodied a distinct rural habitus that encompassed linguistic features (e.g., a regional accent) and dietary practices, and this habitus in turn exerted a formative influence on my own behavioural patterns and sense of identity. Further, having received education in urban schools in my years after migrated while spending holidays in rural areas with my grandparents, I find myself in a culturally 'in-between' position, with an understanding of both rural migrant and urban parents. Therefore, my North China accent was identified by parents, creating shared connections particularly with rural migrant parents and grandparents. Consequently, my willingness to share my background, coupled with the accent that parents recognized, strengthened my connections with both rural migrant and urban parents and facilitated the fluidity of my insider-outsider positioning. This positioning, however, also generated epistemic ambiguity, as some participants presumed shared cultural understandings with me, which may have led to selective disclosure or tacit silences, especially among migrant adults.

Furthermore, having received education from primary to high school in an institution similar to the research site, one also characterized by high academic pressure, a focus on ranking, and an emphasis on academic performance, I developed a certain degree of empathy toward the children. I also found myself positioned 'in between' two perspectives: on one hand, I typically expressed empathy for children who faced punishment due to poor performance in exams or incomplete homework; on the other hand, my experience working as a teacher for rural migrant children occasionally led me to the eagerness of why some children did not exert greater effort in their studies. During the research process, I more frequently leaned toward acknowledging their learning-related stress, and this orientation may have influenced the children to disclose more of their personal experiences or 'secrets' to me, as they assumed I could relate to their circumstances. For instance, Yiyou complained that his friend refused to help him with completing or copying homework (11 May 2023), a disclosure rooted in his assumption that I shared an understanding of homework-related pressure and that assisting peers with such tasks should be a defining criterion of a good friend. Similarly, several boys shared stories of secretly passing notes to one another during exams (24

Mar 2023), as they believed I could empathize with the helplessness of encountering unfamiliar exam questions and thus recognize the value of friendship in navigating such situations.

Therefore, my 'in-between' positionality that shaped by receiving education in urban areas while spending holidays in rural settings, as well as by my experience of being educated in high-pressure schools and later working as a teacher myself, has influenced how my participants, both adults and children, perceive our connections and determine what information they are willing to share with me. Consistent with this, I align with feminist scholars in rejecting the notion of researchers as 'positionless' or 'non-interfering' in the research context. Following Smith (1990), I recognize that researchers are active, engaged agents that occupy specific positionalities and participate in a broad range of interactions that shape the research process. Therefore, my positionality is not fixed but constantly shifting, and it is continually recognized and responded to by the participants. Echoing Stuart (2017), therefore, entering the field constitutes an act of transgression that my positionality directly influences how participants perceive my identity and decide what aspects of their experiences they are willing to share with me.

Addressing Ethical Issues in Practice

Addressing ethical issues in ethnographic research is crucial, particularly when working with children, as it ensures their safety and respects their autonomy. Ethical considerations such as informed consent and confidentiality are essential to protect children from potential harm or exploitation (Kustatscher, 2014). Ethical guidelines also help establish trust between researchers and participants, leading to more credible and transparent findings.

The initial concern that emerged pertained to interviewing grandparents. I did not anticipate encountering difficulties in obtaining consent from grandparents, given that a significant number of children are cared for by them and picked up from school, which implies my closer relationship with the children's grandparents. In fact, for a portion of the children, I had not interacted with their parents throughout the research process; it was predominantly the grandparents whom I met. Nearly all the grandparents conveyed that they needed to obtain approval from the children's parents before they could proceed with their involvement, even though they showed evident enthusiasm for participating.

Chengxi's grandmother was super glad when I gave her the form again. She continued repeating, 'My story? Is that important?' and 'never been interviewed before' several times, but obviously with a smiley face. She then looked a bit disappointed and told me that she could not guarantee that she could participate because she must get permission from the child's parents. She then continued by comforting me that 'you indeed are correct to include me, I'm the person taking care of the child, of course I can be interviewed.'

(Diary, 21 May 2023).

There is a similar situation with recruiting Shihao's grandfather:

... he carefully folded and put the sheet and form in his front pocket with his cash. He looked pretty thrilled by telling me this was the first time he was being interviewed. He told me that I am the smart one by the ability to recognise the fact that it is the grandparents sacrificing and contributing to the family. He said he promised that he would tell the child's parents how nice and easy-going I am, and they will, hopefully, agree that he could participate. I felt a bit heartbroken by how happy he was that his work had been recognised (if being invited can be considered a form of recognition) and by how he worried that he wouldn't be able to participate if his parents disagreed. Although it is not my position to comment...

(Diary, 20 May 2023).

Reflecting broader research, grandparents' eager family participation often brings to light the fact that their essential contributions are sometimes undervalued and often perceived as an expected extension of their motherhood and/or fatherhood (e.g. Can, 2019; Kerrane, Kerrane and Bettany, 2024). The difficulties of gaining consent from grandparents also echoed with 'subordinate integration' as I mentioned in the Literature Review. 'Subordinate integration' refers to the phenomenon where, following migration, grandparents gradually give up their traditional authority within the family and adopt a more dependent role on their children (Kahil, Iqbal and Maghbouleh, 2022). This concept is evident in the difficulties I encountered when seeking their consent for research participation. Although grandparents are legally adults able to give consent, they still felt the need to seek their children's approval first. Even though children's

parents seldom appear at the school and grandparents usually pick them up, parents still consider 'diplomatic activities,' such as meeting schoolteachers and participating in research, to be their responsibility rather than something based on the grandparents' willingness. Therefore, grandparents' hesitancy and the intricate negotiation of their familial role illustrate how the erosion of traditional authority impacts not only their family interactions but also their readiness and capacity to participate in research activities. Consequently, 'subordinate integration' influences their involvement in research, reflecting how shifts in familial hierarchies can affect both consent and participation in the research.

Apart from the grandparents, navigating ethical considerations in practice was a dynamic and reflective process, especially regarding the participation of children in research activities. One notable instance occurred when the children did not engage in drawing social maps as I imagined in the research proposal. In this situation, my eagerness to adhere to preconceived notions of the research process clashed with the foundational principle of openness advocated within childhood studies.

'While children were drawing, there were times that I tried to control myself by not interrupting the children, however, I did gently repeat the kind of guidelines of social map, as the children didn't draw friends as a social map, but only one friend, and they spent countless efforts in drawing the backgrounds.'

(Diary, 3 Apr 2023).

I discussed this issue with my supervisors afterwards as children didn't draw maps as I expected, and I was eager about this. Following the suggestions of my supervisors, I recognized the importance of maintaining an environment of trust and openness, and I, therefore, tried to reconsider the power dynamics of the research and was guided more by the children's interests and perspectives.

Secondly, ethical considerations regarding anonymity emerged as another point of negotiation in power dynamics. Despite ethical guidelines advocating for the anonymization of participants (as discussed in the previous section), the children expressed a desire to have their contributions attributed by including their names on the drawings. For instance, there were occasions when children argued, 'I put a lot of effort into the drawing. I want my name to be known by your reader!' This presented a

delicate ethical dilemma, as valuing the children's autonomy and agency while upholding principles of anonymity posed a significant challenge. In order to respect the children's autonomy and recognize their contributions, we agreed that their names would be discreetly included on the drawings, positioned at the back of the paper to preserve anonymity while valuing their efforts and help. This negotiation highlighted the intricate interplay between ethical principles and practical considerations inherent in research practice, particularly within the context of childhood studies.

Another ethical issue arose regarding my efforts to maintain ongoing consent while disclosing issues to the head teacher. For example,

The day Huohou and Shihao were playing with a toy on the playground, the toy was brought by Huohou, who is a migrant boy living with his aunt and has limited toys. Shihao accidentally destroyed the toy and didn't apologise. This upset Huohou, who began crying bitterly. The PE teacher approached, not knowing the boys' names, and tried to comfort Huohou by asking who his headteacher was, intending to inform them to protect Huohou. Huohou continued crying without responding. I intervened, accompanying Huohou for a while. After the PE teacher left, I asked Huohou whether he didn't tell the PE teacher because he would tell the head teacher, and both he and Shihou would be punished as taking toys to school is not allowed, even though the head teacher would make Shihou apologize. He nodded. I then asked him if I just keep the secrets without no one know, and he nodded'

(Field note, 13 Apr 2023).

This situation highlights the tension involved in navigating ethical issues in practice. As discussed in the ethics section, I had committed to informing only the head teacher when issues arose during fieldwork. However, ethical decision-making in real-life situations is often more complex and context dependent. In school settings, children were afraid of teachers and were concerned about facing punishment. Also, I have to acknowledge that my decision to keep the secrets was partly influenced by my empathy towards the children, as mentioned earlier, and also by my desire to maintain the ongoing consent of the children. Therefore, addressing ethical concerns required navigating how children permitted my involvement in their daily lives and how they conveyed their identities and emotions in my presence as a researcher. Navigating my

role as a researcher, therefore, often puts me in a difficult position, especially when it comes to reporting issues to teachers while maintaining students' trust. I have found myself in awkward situations where my inclination to keep students' secrets clashes with my responsibility to address certain matters with faculty. This conflict creates a challenging dynamic as I struggle with the need to respect students' privacy and my duty to ensure their well-being through appropriate channels.

3.7 Data management and analysis

Transcription and Translation

To transcribe the interview data, I first carefully listened to the recorded interviews multiple times to ensure accuracy and capture the nuances of participants' responses. I began by transcribing the audio verbatim, noting not only the words spoken but also pauses, laughter, and tone shifts that could provide additional context to the responses. I paid close attention to non-verbal cues, such as hesitations or emotional expressions, which could offer insight into the participants' feelings or the significance of their statements. After completing the initial transcription, I reviewed the text while listening to the recording again to confirm its accuracy and make any necessary adjustments. This process helped ensure that the transcription was both precise and reflective of the participants' voices.

Since the interviews and some field notes were in Chinese, my primary task in the analysis process, following transcription, was translation. As argued by Baz (2021), both language and translation play significant roles in capturing the social worlds of marginalised groups and presenting their social realities. Therefore, translation brings to questions surrounding representation as to who speaks for whom and who is being represented. Accordingly, I endeavoured to make the tone of translation more akin to the tone and the emotion of the participants. These complexities present challenges that are not easily resolved and may evolve over time. Drawing on the theoretical perspectives of Bourdieu (1991) and Foucault (1975), Bochmann (2022) contends that translations are inevitably shaped by broader sociohistorical regimes of power and knowledge, highlighting how linguistic choices are influenced by external ideological structures that extend beyond the immediate translational context. Moreover, Temple (2005, p.23) pointed out that using English as a common language 'silences alternative ways of constructing the social world through language.' Similarly, in my current research, the power of translation is not limited to translating into English; it also

extends to translating from dialects to Mandarin Chinese, which is the dominant language in China. This is particularly crucial for participants in my study who spoke dialects, as they were often older generations of migrants who identified themselves as 'not knowing much about culture', as discussed in the previous section. Therefore, the process of translation requires careful consideration rather than being seen as 'mere technical exercises' (Temple, 2008, p. 361) that involve power imbalances not only between English and Chinese but also between Mandarin and dialects.

Hence, when addressing translation, it is imperative to acknowledge its complexity and importance beyond mere technicality. Temple (2008) underscores this by advocating for an ethical approach to translation, emphasising the responsibility of translators to represent research participants. This idea aligns with Valentine's (2002) criticism of essentialism, which assumes that insiders can interpret stories more accurately. Translation, as argued by Wolf and Fukari (2007), is a socially constructed process that encompasses multiple epistemological layers, requiring a multidimensional approach involving interpretative decisions. For example, Anna Gawlewicz (2016), translating from Polish to English in migration studies, notes that her own Polish identity made her more aware of the insider/outsider dynamic, and she argues that acknowledging positionality is crucial but must not be oversimplified. Ganga and Scott (2006) also note that the underexplored complexity of this positionality should be valued, and Temple and Koterba (2009) suggest that it involves translating lives rather than just words. Gawlewicz (2016) illustrates this complexity through her own experiences, where her Polish background provided insider access but also emphasized differences in migration history, class, education, gender, age, religion, and values between herself and her research participants. Furthermore, translation involves more than just converting language; it also encompasses emotional connotations, cultural assumptions, and expressions that can be difficult to translate accurately into English. Therefore, when examining translation in research, it is crucial to consider its ethical implications, the complexity of insider/outsider dynamics, and the multifaceted nature of linguistic and cultural interpretation. Following the experiences and suggestions of Gawlewicz (2016), I was aware of the ethical dimensions of translation and recognised translation as a socially constructed process with multiple epistemological layers. Hence, I made a concerted effort to seek further explanation and feedback from my participants and engage in reflective practice by critically examining my own positionality and biases as both a researcher and interpreter.

For example, in the reflexive diary, I captured the time that I felt awkward in translation soon after the boy used certain words in his dialect to describe his friend. Instead of checking the word on the internet, I encouraged the boy to describe it in more detail.

... we continued with Sihao concluding that he thinks his friend can sometimes be 'gelu'. I suddenly felt that this was a word I had never heard before. I felt awkward about interrupting him and making him feel that it is his accent or dialect that is not 'acceptable'. I asked Sihao if he could give me examples of his friend being 'gelu'. He actively came up with examples. I then tried to encourage him to think of similar words, which I think I can then put together to explain and translate into English. Sihao drew from his examples and came up with some similar words, which I found very useful.

(Diary, 23. Mar. 2023).

Therefore, this task involves translation from both dialects to Chinese as well as Chinese to English. In order to fully convey the participants' intended meanings, I supplemented their explanations for certain words during discussions (as demonstrated in Chapter 6).

Coding and analysis

Thematic analysis emerged as the most suitable approach for this task, given its capacity to uncover and elucidate patterns within data, as described by Xu and Zammit (2020). Moreover, given the emphasis of this friendship study on contextual factors, thematic analysis aligns well with the goal of emphasising contexts in both descriptions and interpretations, particularly within constructionist paradigms (Vaismoradi, Turunen and Bondas, 2013).

In my study, I employed NVivo to code data from interviews with children, parents, grandparents, and teachers, social maps, and field notes. Drawing on Emerson, Fretz and Shaw (2011), I followed the close reading and coding method. Initially, I thoroughly read the data, integrating previous insights from in-field analysis. This process included two phases of coding: open coding, where I examined the data line by line to identify emerging ideas and themes, and focused coding, which concentrated on significant topics.

While conducting fieldwork, I continuously generated initial memos and open codes, identifying key phenomena and topics related to participants' experiences of friendships. This in-field analysis informed preparatory work, allowing me to categorize and develop typologies relevant to my research questions (Hammersley and Atkinson, 2007). By the end of the fieldwork, I had refined these themes into broader categories, which helped organize the data systematically for later analysis.

After fieldwork, I reviewed my data and codes during transcription, reflecting on initial insights and creating new codes. This iterative process involved refining memos, enhancing coding clarity, and developing a codebook. To ensure rigor, I adhered to Morse's (2015) advice to maintain consistent coding decisions, ensuring reliability throughout the analysis. When encountering contradictory patterns, I revisited and expanded my coding, adding new dimensions to refine the findings. This ongoing analysis ultimately led to the structure of themes in the final chapters.

3.8 Conclusion

This chapter not only explains the rationale behind choosing an ethnographic case study approach to study the friendships of rural-urban migrant children at school but also offers a detailed account of how the approach was implemented. Additionally, it discusses the empirical strategy, fieldwork experiences, and reflections while also outlining how I managed the various data sets.

Situating the study within social constructionist perspectives, I discuss how intersectionality aligns with childhood studies and how it was applied in this research. The chapter elucidates the rationale for selecting the ethnographical case study approach, emphasising its ability to facilitate deep interaction with children for acquiring rich descriptions and interpretations of their friendships in specific contexts. Additionally, this section explains the rationale behind selecting the research context and settings, participant recruitment, and data collection and analysis methods, aligning them with the study's objectives and research questions. This research employed the same methods approach of social map as Vincent, Neal, and Iqbal (2018) but applied it to new geographies and school contexts, where children sometimes draw only one friend rather than a 'map.' Additionally, children place a strong emphasis on depicting their surroundings, which highlights the importance of emotional closeness

in children's friendships and the role of family background in shaping these relationships.

Ethical considerations in this research include obtaining informed consent, maintaining anonymity and confidentiality, and navigating sensitive topics. Additionally, I reflect on the ethical challenges arising from my role and social identity as a researcher. These aspects shaped my approach to fieldwork and data collection. Ensuring ethical integrity also involved fostering knowledge exchange while addressing dilemmas encountered throughout the research process. The following chapter presents the study's findings, offering insight into the complexity of children's friendships.

Chapter 4. Children's understandings and practices of friendship in contexts of social difference

4.1 Introduction

Children's friendships can serve as an 'emotional resource' for navigating and managing their school lives (Vincent, Neal and Iqbal, 2018, p. 98). A substantial body of literature has explored how children navigate their interpersonal relationships, focusing not only on dynamics with close friends but also on interactions within the broader peer and classroom environment (e.g., Ahn, 2011; Zhu, 2021; Oh and Lee, 2019). Additionally, scholars have identified various intersecting social factors that influence children's friendships, such as socioeconomic status, gender, and ethnicity (e.g. Vincent, Neal and Iqbal, 2018; Konstantoni, 2012; Blazek, 2011). In this chapter, I primarily draw on data from children's interviews and drawings and my field notes from observations to address Research Question 1: 'What are internal migrant and urban children's experiences of friendships in school? How do internal, rural to urban migrant and urban children understand and interpret their friendships within primary school settings?' This chapter is organised into two main sections. The first section delves into major themes that arose from children's interviews on their understanding of friendships, with children emphasizing the number or quantity of friends alongside themes such as having fun, sharing secrets, and being kind as important aspects of their friendships. The second section, which draws on children's social maps, interviews, and field notes, explores their everyday friendship activities and interactions, along with the strategies they employ to navigate diversity and cultivate friendships.

4.2 Children's Friendship Values

The importance of the number of friends

Irrespective of migrant status, a theme in the interviews was the children's tendency to quantify their social circles, often competitively claiming a large number of friends. This category, although may shaped by my perspective as an adult observer, sometimes included peers who might otherwise be regarded as mere classmates. The interview data illustrated that, within this specific context, the children's drive to expand their networks even in the absence of deep emotional ties was fundamentally linked to their pursuit of social recognition and a strengthened sense of belonging among peers.

For example, Wangyin, an urban girl with both parents working at the local public institutions, explained: *'I like having lots of friends. Even if we don't talk all the time, I can still say they're my friends, and I'll go for them during breaks'* (Interview with Wangyin, 23 Mar 2023). Wangyin's account illustrates that the number of friends is important to her social identity as well as enjoying having lots of people she can be with at lunch time, even if these friendships are not particularly close. The sheer quantity of friends, rather than the quality of the relationships, seems to be of importance. Similarly, Jiayi, an urban girl whose parents work as a doctor and nurse, shared that: *'[...] I don't always hang out with them, but I also think they are my friends. It's good to have a lot of friends, so you're never alone. You can always pick someone up in school or the neighbourhood to play with'* (Interview with Jiayi, 13 Apr 2023). Wangyin's perspective on the number of friends reflects her emphasis on the quantity of friendships, not for status, but as a representation of her identity and her concern about being alone during breaks. Similarly, Jiayi highlights the functional aspect of friendship, where the label of 'friend' provides social and emotional value so that she does not have to be alone, even if the connection is not intimate.

In addition to avoiding loneliness, having more friends is a means of demonstrating their popularity among their peers for children. For instance, Zihan, a rural migrant boy whose parents operate a small grocery store on the outskirts of the city, shared that *'I like it when everyone says I'm their friend and nice to be. I like being liked'* (Interview with Zihan, 28 Mar 2023). Similarly, Wangyao, the twin sister of Wangyin, whose parents were working at local public institutions, also shared that *'I think all of them are my friends and I think they think of me the same way. I'm good, and everyone likes me'* (Interview with Wangyao, 13 Mar 2023).

In interviews, children even compete for having more friends, for example, in the paired interview with Ran, who is an urban boy with parents who run a small noodle restaurant, and Yurun, a rural migrant boy whose parents run a small tea shop:

Yurun: Tianze, Yiyu, Shihao, Ming, Jiayi, and Enyu are all my friends!

Ran: You just sit nearby.

Yurun: But they are.

Ran: If I count in your way, Tianze, Yiyu, Shihao, Ming, Jiayi, and Enyu are all my friends! And also, Yuan, Wangyin, Wangyao and many many!

Yurun: And the children in my English tutoring class are my friends! I even have a friend in English class who is a big brother!

Ran: But you said big brother! A BIG BROTHER, your friend?

Yurun: They are [my friends]!

(Interview with Yurun and Youran, 9 May 2023).

In the interview between Yurun and Ran, both boys engaged in reciprocal displays of social popularity by enumerating their extensive circles of friends. Yurun, for instance, referenced a broad network that included peers from diverse contexts such as his English tutoring class, and notably claimed an older 'big brother' as a friend. This assertion appears to function as a deliberate claim to social recognition and acceptance. Ran, in turn, responded by listing an even wider array of friends, suggesting a mutual reinforcement of social value through quantitative claims. This observed pattern indicates that, irrespective of the boys' backgrounds, the act of claiming numerous friends served as a strategic practice for asserting one's position within the peer hierarchy. Beyond the dimension of status, however, the value placed on friendship quantity may also reflect varied underlying motivations among children, such as the need for security, the desire for companionship in play, or the fear of social isolation, as illustrated by the contrasting perspectives offered by other participants such as Wangyin and Jiayi.

The importance of fun and friendships

As noted by Danby (2008), children in friendship groups often foster friendships by sharing enjoyable activities and games that enhance feelings of joy, belonging, and mutual understanding. The data in my research shows that children form friendships through fun activities, and having fun is important as it sometimes helps in transcending differences in migration status in children's friendships. For example, Enyu (an urban girl whose parents work in local public institutions) enjoys playing 'Truth or Dare' with her classmates, which is a game that includes a large circle of children, Yutong forms connections with a large group of friends through cartoons (both in Field note Mar 13, 2023) and Zihan learns a Northeastern accent from a friend (Field note Mar 16, 2023). These examples highlight how shared play, interests, and cultural exchanges are essential to friendship-building and children's understanding of friendships.

Furthermore, according to children's interviews, 'having fun' also contributes significantly to the growth of friendship and intimacy. For example, Chenxian, an urban girl, shared a moment when she and her friends played a hunt game together:

'We were all so excited! We kept laughing and running around. Everyone was so happy, and it felt like we were really close by the end of it. I think it's the laughter and running together that made it feel special. Like we shared something fun that made us friends.'
(Interview with Chenxian, 14 Apr 2023)

Similarly, a migrant girl, Tianyi, whose parents identified the family as 'rural middle class' and run a large restaurant, stated that:

'When I was in my hometown, it was easy to make friends. We hide from goats together and hide from our parents. It was fun playing on the field. When we were hiding, we would go hand in hand and sometimes hug. [...] For example, if my friend brought a friend that I don't know, but after playing happily all together, we became close friends.'
(Interview with Tianyi, 11 Apr 2023)

The children's interviews demonstrate that fun activities promote intimacy and strengthen friendships. Chenxian highlights how laughter and running together created a special bond, suggesting that shared joyful experiences are crucial for emotional closeness. Similarly, Tianyi recounts playful childhood games, such as hiding from goats or parents, where physical closeness, like holding hands or hugging, naturally emerged.

Both interviews highlight how having fun together not only facilitates connections but also fosters intimate relationships among children. During these games, children engaged in physical contact with close friends and openly discussed private matters. This aligns with earlier discussions on how having fun together can provide emotional support among children (e.g. Yoon, 2014; Qualter and Munn, 2005), and these playful interactions are crucial in fostering emotional intimacy and personal bonding. These fun activities help children establish connections or, at the very least, create moments of joy that go beyond rural-urban divides (as discussed in Chapter 4.2.1). However,

children also view friendships as spaces for providing help and the sharing of secrets, which demands more emotional effort. Shared extracurricular activities further influence children's friendships, which are more affected by factors such as rural-urban status and the family's socioeconomic background. According to my data, while engaging in fun activities allows children to occasionally form positive connections that transcend rural-urban boundaries, these relationships sometimes tend to be 'thin'. In contrast, children shared having deeper, closer friendships, as detailed in their interviews.

The importance of helping and being kind

In the children's interviews, the concept of 'help' was another key theme that emerged. Wangyao, a local girl whose parents work in local public institutions, states:

'A good friend is someone who helps you when you're sad or having a hard time. For example, my friend helped me with my homework when I didn't understand it. It feels nice to know they care, and I try to do the same for them when they need help.'

(Interview with Wangyao, 13 Mar, 2023)

Similarly, Mei, a rural migrant girl whose mother works in a local clothing factory, and her father works as a chef in a company, emphasises the unconditional nature of helping:

'Helping each other is really important. If your friend needs something, you should be there for them. But it's not about getting something back. I believe that true friends help because they want to, not because they expect a favour in return.'

(Interview with Mei, 20 Mar 2023)

Yuan, a rural migrant boy whose family operates a small restaurant, also underscores the significance of helping in small, everyday ways. He notes,

'We help each other in little ways, like sharing snacks secretly. If he finds small insects on the playground, he will give them to me, and I will do the same. [...] But it's not like I find one, and he has to give me one too; being with a friend is not like trading stuff.'

(Interview with Yuan, 6 May 2023)

In the interviews with Wangyao, Mei, and Yuan, the importance of ethical and unconditional help in friendships emerges as an important theme. Wangyao emphasises that a good friend is someone who supports you during difficult times. She appreciates the caring nature of her friends and believes that this mutual support is essential for maintaining strong relationships. Similarly, Mei also articulates that friendship should be rooted in genuine help rather than transactional exchanges. She stresses that friendship is about wanting to assist one another without expecting anything in return. Yuan echoes this sentiment, explaining that he and his friends help each other in small, thoughtful ways, like sharing snacks. He makes it clear that their interactions are not based on reciprocity or obligations, linking it to a business transaction. Instead, their friendship thrives on the unconditional support they provide one another. However, children's need for help can vary according to different contexts. For example, in the study by Mizen and Ofosu-Kusi (2010), children living on the streets conceptualise helping each other as a form of mutual assistance, akin to a 'trade' for safety and survival and are more likely to perceive help as arising from genuine willingness. Similarly, Wang's (2024) research on rural-urban migrant children in China indicates that help can take the form of children protecting their peers, particularly those from the same hometown, as a means of defending against bullying from other children. In contrast, the children in my research, including both rural migrant and urban children, are more likely to associate helping with protecting each other from teachers. For instance, Shihao, a rural migrant boy, explained that help meant *'Huohou gave me his homework for me to copy so that I won't be punished by Ms. Wei'* (interview with Shihao, 16 Mar 2023). Similarly, Enyu (an urban girl) described how *'Jiayi secretly passed her scissors to me in art class so the art teacher didn't know that I forgot to bring it from home'* (interview with Enyu, 11 Apr 2023). Conversely, not helping, especially not covering for each other's mistakes is perceived as a sign of being excluded and not having friends, as Yiyu (a rural migrant boy) shared: *'I don't have friends in this school; they can't wait to tell the teachers what mistakes I've made'* (interview with Yiyu, 6 May 2023).

Therefore, the children in this study conceptualised help as a form of 'invisible infrastructure', a notion that also reflects the school's implicit moral pedagogy, which is a theme to be further developed in Chapter Five. Moreover, my findings suggest that help, as an expression of friendship, is deeply embedded in power dynamics. These

dynamics manifest in recurrent patterns of who is consistently positioned to give help, who regularly requires it, and who remains excluded from such support. Over time, these patterns reinforce or reproduce social hierarchies. As the following chapters will explore, these power relations are closely linked to students' family backgrounds and are often mediated or intensified by the institutional authority of teachers.

Sharing secrets and creating close friendship ties

Sharing secrets is another factor that some children identified as an important aspect of friendship, regardless of rural-urban status. In recounting their experiences, many children observed that sharing secrets offered them a valuable opportunity to foster trust, cultivate deep friendships, and establish their closest friends as reliable confidants, thereby strengthening the bonds of their relationships. For instance, a migrant boy Huohou shared *'When I tell my best friend about my fears or something embarrassing which is my secret, my friend should keep it'* (interview with Huohou, 12 Apr 2023), while Yisan (rural migrant boy) explained to friends as *'We shared secrets no one else knows; it makes us feel special'* (interview with Yisan, 8 Apr 2023). Tianyi (rural migrant girl) also shared that *'a friend should be, if I shared secrets, like I don't like someone, she won't spread it'* (interview with Tianyi, 11 Apr 2023). Such understandings and values reflect the notion that children utilise secret-sharing as a tool for emotional support and relational closeness, and it allows children to feel secure and understood (Corsano et al., 2017). This is particularly important when children experience embarrassing situations related to material hardships, particularly rural migrant children. For example, Ming, a boy whose family migrated to the city from a rural area two years ago and is now working at a construction site:

'I think friendship is when you can trust someone to keep your secrets. I don't have many close friends because not everyone understands me. But there's one boy I trust. One time, I told him I didn't have enough money, so I didn't want to go with other boys for roasted sausage, and he didn't tell anyone. I felt safe sharing with him.'
(Interview with Ming, 10 Mar 2023)

For Ming, a boy from a rural family now working in the city, friendship means having someone he can trust with his personal information. His trust in his friend stems from an experience where he shared a sensitive issue: not having enough money to join other boys for roasted sausage. His friend respected this secret, allowing Ming to feel

safe and understood. This reflects research by Corsano and colleagues (2017), which suggests that only close friends are typically trusted with self-disclosure, as it often involves sharing sensitive information or secrets. This is particularly significant in the context of rural migrant children in China, many of whom face challenges in accessing improved material resources and possessions. For them, a close friend serves as someone who not only understands their struggles but also safeguards their awkwardness as confidences.

Therefore, aligned with the 'new' sociology of childhood perspective outlined in Chapters 2 and 3 (e.g. James and Prout, 2015; Matthews, 2007), this research utilised interviews with children to prioritise their interpretations and understandings of their social world. The findings reveal that children are competent agents in interpreting their friendships and social dynamics, demonstrating a nuanced appreciation for intimacy and emotional connection. For example, children emphasised the importance of the quantity of friends, having fun, helping and sharing secrets as essential factors in their relationships. These insights underscore children's strong desire for emotional closeness and their agency and capacity to navigate complex emotional landscapes, effectively shaping their own relationships.

Moreover, as discussed in this section, it is primarily rural migrant children who emphasize the significance of 'help' in this research. My observations indicate that the rural migrant children in this study, unlike those experiencing severe poverty in earlier research on migrants in megacities (e.g., Zhang, 2018; Zhang and Luo, 2016), did not face acute material shortages. Nevertheless, they predominantly originated from regions characterized by limited educational resources. Additionally, their parents often face unstable working conditions, which, combined with their study performance, contributes to rural migrant children being more frequently reprimanded by teachers for poor academic performance (see Chapters 5 and 6). Therefore, although urban children in this study did not dismiss the role of 'help' in friendships, and rural migrant children were not entirely dependent on their urban peers, the structural inequalities they face, particularly in terms of inadequate rural education and parental job instability, made them more likely to emphasize the importance of help during interviews. This can also be found in rural migrant parents' understandings of children's friendships in Chapter 6. Thus, the way children specifically identified 'help' and support as a means of assisting each other in evading teacher supervision, a concept distinct from help in other contexts (e.g., Mizen and Ofosu-Kusi, 2010; van Blerk, 2011), illustrates the

advocacy of the 'new' sociology of childhood. This perspective argues that childhood is a socially constructed and context-dependent experience influenced by factors such as culture, socioeconomic status, and educational environments (Matthews, 2007). Therefore, the following section will examine the various ways in which children demonstrate and navigate friendship in specific school settings in China.

4.3 Children's Friendships Practices

This section examines the dynamics of friendship formation among children, with a particular focus on the social inequality brought by the rural-urban divide and migration. It explores how children navigate both large-group interactions and intimate friendships, using inclusive activities and gendered practices to foster belonging and reduce feelings of isolation. The analysis highlights the role of shared games and cultural resources in shaping peer relationships, revealing how children from diverse backgrounds engage in social mixing while deeper bonds often form among those with similar backgrounds. Additionally, the section investigates how rural migrant children employ 'strategies of being indistinguishable' to integrate into peer groups and mitigate marginalization. Also, it explores how accent and rural culture can sometimes be utilised by rural migrant children and be valued by urban children in building and maintaining friendships

The importance of games and play time

Research has shown that certain games, particularly various chasing and catching games, tend to be more inclusive regarding ethnicity and cultural diversity, often involving mixed groups of children (e.g., Iqbal, Neal and Vincent, 2017; Kyratzis, 2004). In my research, I observed that certain types of games demonstrate a higher level of inclusivity, thereby allowing the majority of children, irrespective of migrant status, to participate and derive enjoyment from the activities. This inclusivity fosters the development of friendships within larger groups and helps mitigate feelings of isolation during recess. My observations indicate that children who typically have a limited number of friends or appear to lack stable friendships are more likely to engage in these inclusive activities. This section will focus on two activities that children frequently engage in during break times: 'Chicken vs. Eagles' and 'rock-paper-scissors'.

For instance, the day after lunch, I noticed Jiayi attempting to organise her classmates for a game of 'Chicken vs. Eagles.' Jiayi (an urban girl), who serves as the class

monitor and consistently achieves top scores on exams, appears to be popular and is often surrounded by other children, primarily girls. Although it wasn't the monitor's responsibility to organise games, Jiayi often enjoyed arranging activities during breaks that all children could participate in. The day Jiayi organised children to play Chicken VS Eagles, which is a traditional game played by children in China.

Along our walk to the playground where they normally play, I ask Jiayi who will join us today or whom we can invite. She said not specifically, we just had to keep an eye on children especially who seemed to play alone and invite them to play 'Chicken VS Eagles'. [...] Indeed, she found four girls, including the two girls whom I found may not have 'stable friends', and two girls who seemed to be close friends. [...] During the game, 'chicks' stand in turn after the 'hen', the back of the people grasping the clothes of the people in front and cannot loosen the clothes, the eagle stands opposite the hen, to catch the chicks. The chicks caught by the eagle are eliminated. [...] Later, there are two boys joined in by directly queuing to be the 'chickens.' Every child seemed happy and enjoyed it.

(Field note, 17 Mar 2023).

In addition to 'Chicken vs. Eagles,' another game that all the children tended to play during breaks was 'rock-paper-scissors.' This game doesn't require a designated or specialised space, every child can jump in at any time, allowing children to engage in it at any time, making it enjoyable for most of the children.

During break time, children (including both rural and urban) were engaged in a game of 'rock-paper-scissors.' This game is particularly popular because it doesn't require a designated or specialised space, enabling any child to join in at any moment, which is why they play it all the time. As I watched, I noticed Yiyou standing in a central position with a group of children facing him, queuing and eagerly waiting for their turn to challenge him. They formed a line, with each child taking a shot at beating Yiyou. When one child won, Yiyou stepped aside to join the group, allowing the new winner to take his place in the centre. Throughout this activity, I observed a steady stream of children jumping into the line, all excitedly waiting for their chance to challenge the winner.

(Field note 6 May 2023).

The data collected from the observations suggests that children from different migrant backgrounds are capable of playing together harmoniously and exhibit a willingness to establish friendships through fundamentally inclusive games. This dynamic fosters social interaction and strengthens interpersonal relationships among peers. In my research, Jiayi's initiative to organise a game of 'Chicken vs. Eagles' exemplifies how children can actively promote inclusivity. By encouraging her peers to invite others, especially those who might be playing alone, Jiayi creates an environment where all children, regardless of their social circles, can engage and participate. This not only enhances their enjoyment but also cultivates a sense of belonging among children. The mechanics of the game, which require teamwork and coordination, further support social integration as children collaborate to succeed against the eagle. During this process, children's interaction with others increased, as evidenced by Jiayi's interactions with both familiar classmates and those who may not have stable friendships. Similarly, the game of 'rock-paper-scissors' allows, in principle, for spontaneous participation, as any child can join in without needing a designated space or prior preparation. This accessibility ensures that children from different backgrounds can engage with one another, reinforcing children's positive relationships.

Similarly, in their study of girls attending ethnically diverse primary schools in Dublin, Scholtz and Gilligan (2017) found that inclusive activities and projects led most girls to view their relationships with classmates not as close friends but more as positive, polite, and cooperative. Classmates were therefore described as welcoming, helpful, and interested in getting to know them for children in minority groups. These findings are echoed by Vincent and colleagues (2018), who studied three highly diverse primary schools in London. Although social diversity did not always lead to deep social mixing and close friendships, children still exhibited a willingness to embrace differences, albeit with varying abilities to engage fully with one another. This willingness is often supported by the low cost of certain activities, such as handmade projects, which make them accessible and inclusive for both boys and girls, fostering moments of connection (p. 100). Such handmade activities provide opportunities for all children to participate, encouraging collaboration and interaction among diverse groups and helping to create positive connections among classmates, regardless of their backgrounds. Similarly, my research aligns with Scholtz and Gilligan (2017) and

Vincent et al. (2018), showing that children have the potential to maintain positive and inclusive relationships with peers from diverse backgrounds, even if not close friends. Also, compared to break-time activities like football (e.g. Stuij, 2013; Epstein, 2000), which are often shaped by gender and socioeconomic factors, my findings further resonate with the research of Scholtz and Gilligan (2017) and Vincent et al. (2018), suggesting that children fostering social mixing among others is often facilitated through low-cost, accessible activities.

Beyond shared games and playtime, which function as low-cost, accessible, and inclusive activities regardless of background, gender also provides children with a crucial sense of 'shelter' by helping them avoid isolation within same-gender groups. This is particularly relevant as children's social circles in the classroom tend to be highly gendered. However, the connections formed through shared games and gendered activities in large groups appear to be relatively thin, as reflected in children's interviews, which will be discussed in the next section.

Gender activities cross migrant barriers

In my observations of the classroom and its daily interactions, children displayed a variety of friendship dynamics based on gender divisions. Generally, in my observation, more interactions occurred within larger groups and based on gender lines, particularly during physical education (PE) classes. For example, in PE class, children typically played in larger groups, often engaging in random games of chasing (Field note, 2 Mar 2023). It was common to see children running and chasing, for example, '*a group of girls chasing another group of boys*' (Field note, 16 Mar 2023). This aligns with Thorne's (1993) observation that while mixed-gender play can sometimes reduce group distinctions, it can also reinforce them, often solidifying 'the boys' and 'the girls' as distinct entities. Friendships across gender lines also emerged, particularly with children like Tianze (an urban boy), who tended to play with girls more often. As I noted in my field notes, '*height is the primary factor for teachers when organizing children's seating and lining them up for activities, which results in Tianze, the only boy, sitting and playing with girls more frequently*' (Field note, 14 Mar 2023). During break times, boys typically engaged in play within larger groups, while girls often formed smaller clusters of two or three. For instance, '*the boys in the leftmost row consistently stick together*' (Field note, 14 Mar, 2023), and '*boys frequently engage in group games on the playground during breaks*' (Field note, 14 Mar, 2023). In contrast, '*girls often*

interacted in smaller groups of two or three, commonly exchanging small gadgets or chatting privately' (Field note, 21 Mar 2023).

This gender-specific play can sometimes function as a protective mechanism, offering support to those children who may struggle to form stable friendships. This enables them to find companionship within gendered activities. For instance, I observed instances where *'all the boys participated in chasing games together during PE'* (14 Mar, 2023; 11 Mar, 2023) and that *'many boys were observed running and chasing during breaks'* (22 Mar, 2023). Playing within the same gender can often act as an 'umbrella' that shelters, includes, or conceals children from disadvantaged backgrounds who struggle to make friends. For instance,

'During PE today, the teacher organized a game called 'cabbage,' The cabbage game is where the children stand in a long row holding hands and then start rolling from the child at the head of the row, so that the children hold hands and roll into layer upon layer of circles, like cabbages. The children decided that the girls would stand at the front of the line, allowing them to stick closely together at the 'core' of the cabbage without discomfort, as children believed that girls prefer to stay close physically than boys. In contrast, the boys were less inclined to be physically close. As they held hands and played together, I noticed two girls—one a rural migrant and the other from an urban poor family—who, despite not having close friends, happily engaged with the other girls. They all enjoyed sticking close to one another. Meanwhile, a boy who also seemed to lack friends excitedly held hands and played with the other boys, where he appeared to be welcomed as well.

(Fieldnote, 7 Jun 2023)

In the game of cabbage, the way children have to stick to each other and especially how distributions of labour are gendered make children who do not have stable friends being included, therefore, gender and gendered activities serve as an 'umbrella' to shelter children who do not have many stable friends. A similar situation was also found in the day that:

'Children typically go in pairs, assigned by the head teacher, to collect boxes of milk for the entire class each day using two baskets. However, today, one of the baskets was broken, leaving the children puzzled about how to take the milk. Xiayun, a boy from a rural working-class family whose parents run a fishery shop, often struggles to find stable friends. During past interviews or informal conversations, some boys have expressed their dislike for Xiayun, claiming he is too well-behaved. Today, Xiayun suddenly suggested, "Why don't we boys go together to get the milk for our class and the girls? We can each carry several boxes in our arms and finish quickly!" The boys eagerly embraced this idea, and they spent a long time getting the milk and it was clear that they, especially Xiayun, enjoyed the activity and taking milk with all boys together.'

(Field note, 3 May 2023)

A similar situation can also be found in Jiaxi's case as an urban girl from a middle-class family. Despite having few friends in my observation as she is the only girl that usually goes to the canteen and PE class alone, she expressed a certain contentment with her social situation during our interview. Initially, Jiaxi requested to conduct the interview alone, but later, she confided in me during a break, saying, *'If you have to ask me who my friends are, maybe you are my friend now. I don't have many friends, but that's okay; I don't like to play with little kids'* (Interview with Jiaxi, 17 May 2023). Although Jiaxi claimed to dislike playing with younger children, my observations during school activities, such as sports events and singing competitions, contradicted this sentiment. I noticed, for instance, that *'Jiaxi asked some girls if they could sit together to make cheer boards, believing it to be a girls' activity'* (Fieldnote 8 June 2023). Additionally, *'Jiaxi happily joined other girls as they collaborated to chase after the boys during PE, as this was considered a traditional game in their class. Both boys and girls appeared to enjoy this playful interaction'* (Fieldnote 8 Mar 2023).

In these observations and interviews, it seems that children's play and practices are often heavily influenced by gender roles. Boys typically engage in physically demanding tasks, such as carrying milk, while girls are more likely to create cheerleading boards and run and chase after boys. Furthermore, gender acts as an 'umbrella' that encompasses children who may not have stable friendships, as certain tasks, such as carrying milk boxes or creating a cheering board, require the

collaboration of children of the same gender. Children's willingness to participate in activities (for instance, Xiayun encouraged all the boys to carry the milk together, and Jiayi expressed a desire to join in board-making) shows children's ability to identify and utilize 'gendered activities' as a means to form friendships when necessary. This behaviour reflects their underlying values concerning friendship, as they express concerns about loneliness in the classroom (as discussed in Chapter 4.1). It also underscores their ability to leverage gendered activities as a strategy for forging friendships, occasionally offering companionship to lonely children, and avoiding feelings of isolation within larger groups.

However, according to children's interviews, while shared and gendered activities provided a platform to avoid loneliness, the connections formed through these activities were often perceived as 'thin', casual and informal. When compared to their deeper values of friendship (see Chapter 4.2), children expressed that having fun and sharing confidences were more commonly experienced with close friends or 'besties' who came from similar backgrounds. These stronger bonds were typically fostered through extracurricular activities and shared experiences during holidays, which will be discussed in the next section.

The influence of out-of-school activities on friendship practices

In the research conducted by Vincent, Neal and Iqbal (2018), which explored three primary schools in London with varying degrees of gentrification, the findings revealed that, compared to ethnic differences, there were significantly fewer best friendships across class lines. Supporting their findings, my research indicates that children's friendships are highly contextual, with rural-urban hierarchy and access to material possessions that are brought by the hierarchy influencing children's friendships. During interviews and drawing activities, children, especially girls, often differentiated between 'friends' and 'besties,' emphasizing that their closest friendships were typically formed through shared extracurricular activities. Participation in these activities, however, was largely influenced by family income, which affected access to such opportunities.

For example, in Shiyun's drawing, she depicted her best friend as the daughter of her parents' best friends, symbolising a close-knit relationship that transcends typical peer connections. Shiyun came from a rural migrant family that had achieved selective financial success through her parents' ownership and operation of a popular, large specialty food restaurant. This economic stability has allowed her to participate in high-

cost extracurricular activities. The drawing features vibrant colours, showcasing the two girls enjoying their time together during horse training, an activity they participate in every weekend. In her drawing, Shiyun depicted herself and her bestie riding horses amidst lush greenery. She specifically highlighted her 'bestie' as the one who shares the same extracurricular activity with her.



(Figure 12. A drawing by Shiyun)

Shiyun further explained her friendship with her 'bestie' as:

Boyang: Shiyun, can you tell me about your drawing of your best friend?

Shiyun: I drew my bestie, who is the daughter of my parents' best friends. We have a really close bond.

Boyang: That's great! What do you two do together?

Shiyun: We go to horse training every weekend. It's our special time together, and I know only we among our peers do horning.

Boyang: As she is your bestie, how does your friendship with her compare to your other friends?

Shiyun: Well, I feel like there are more things we can do together because our parents also like to be together. We then have more

common interests, we then become closer, we then have even more common interests, and closer...
(Interview with Shiyun, 8 May 2023)

Shiyun's experience illustrates how having the financial resources to participate in costly activities, such as horse riding, can significantly impact children's friendships and the way these relationships are experienced. In her case, her close bond with her best friend stems from their families' relationships, which often provide them with unique opportunities. Their shared interests, like horse training, which is less affordable for working class families, especially rural migrants, not only strengthen their friendship but also create a space where they can enjoy activities that may be less accessible to others. Moreover, despite coming from a rural migrant background, Shiyun's story contributes to the emerging pattern of economic success and social mobility among certain rural migrant households. This success is reflected in their ability to afford desirable and costly extracurricular activities, positioning Shiyun beyond the stereotypical image of rural migrant children with limited resources (e.g. Tong, 2016; Wu, 2017). The influence of family background and shared extracurricular activities on children's friendships in school can also be seen in the case of Yixia, an urban girl whose parents work as a teacher and a clerk. She shared her stories and drawings, highlighting her close bond with her bestie.

Yixia: My bestie is my neighbour (who is also Yixia's classmate); we play with each other after finishing homework and during holidays.'

Boyang: Do you usually see other of your school friends during weekends or holidays?'

Yixia: 'Basically, no. My parents were busy, they couldn't accompany me to their homes or arrange a day to play in parks. They think the neighbourhood is safe and strangers cannot come in, so they can cook while me and my bestie play in the garden of the neighbourhood. [...] They think it's especially safe for girls to not run on streets while just in the neighbourhood.'

(Interview with Yixia, 20 Apr 2023).



(Figure 13. A drawing by Yixia)

In Yixia's drawing, she and her best friend are playing in a sunny, gated neighbourhood. Around them, vibrant flowers bloom in well-kept gardens. The garden and buildings are fenced, showing the neighbourhood's safety. Yixia's experience illustrates how living in a gated neighbourhood provides her family with a sense of security and a unique social environment where she can easily connect with her best friend in class, who is also her neighbour. This proximity allows them to play together frequently, especially after completing their homework and during holidays. In China, the gated neighbourhoods represent the new forms of neoliberal space production that privatise and materialise the urban environment for children's consumption, thus excluding children from lower socio-economic status (Song and Zhu, 2009). The experiences of both Yixia and Shiyun illustrate how children's friendships can be shaped by shared out-of-school activities and how access to socio-economic resources influences friendships for both rural migrant and urban children. Yixia, an urban girl from a relatively comfortable family, naturally benefits from these opportunities. However, for Shiyun, a rural migrant girl, access to certain out-of-school activities allows her to transcend the stereotypical image of a migrant child and integrate into broader social networks.

The importance of both migrant and socioeconomic status in children's friendships is supported by research showing that children from similar social backgrounds are more likely to form friendships due to shared experiences and interests. For example, in the research by Vincent, Neal and Iqbal (2018, p. 113), symbolic markers such as specific material possessions, like branded goods, can create a sense of belonging and

facilitate social relationships between differently socially located children. In schools characterised by significant diversity in ethnicity, gender, 'race,' and social class, interactions across class distinctions tend to occur less frequently than those across ethnicity and gender, while children can promote interactions as they both possess the latest technology. Additionally, in the research by Kustatcher (2015), children's friendships can be strengthened when they both have the opportunity to travel abroad for holidays, highlighting that these shared experiences can be more significant than the differences in ethnicity and religion in children's lives. Thus, the findings from Lixia and Shiyun further reinforce the notion that, compared to other social divisions such as gender and migration experiences, social mixing across class occurs less frequently in children's friendships. However, in my research, socioeconomic factors do not operate in isolation. While a few rural migrant families demonstrate that economic success influences the way they nurture their children, socioeconomic status and access to material possessions are still predominantly brought by the rural-urban hierarchy and the experiences of migration.

The significance of migrant status plus some rural migrant socio-economic mobility can also be manifested in the story of Tianyi, Duanduan and Shige. Tianyi is a rural migrant girl whose family identified themselves as 'rural middle class' and owns a restaurant and an express service shop; Duanduan is an urban girl whose parents are doctors and nurses in a local hospital; and Shige is a rural migrant girl whose family runs a small noodle restaurant near the school. In my observations, it seemed that the three girls play together more often; however, in the interview with Duanduan, she distinguishes her friendships with Tianyi and Shige as:

Duanduan: 'Can I draw only Tianyi here, as my bestie? [...] Because we attend the same English class together, so we have more times together.'

Boyang: 'Do other children from this class go to the same English class as you and Tianyi?'

Duanduan: 'No, my mother said probably, only me and Tianyi in class attend English class with a foreign teacher, it is expensive and not every household can afford it. [...] Me and Tianyi go together, so we see each other six days a week, we only see Shige five days a week.'

(Interview with Duanduan, 27 Mar 2023).

A similar story about the significance of socioeconomic status that intersected with migration status has also been shared by Chengxi, a rural migrant girl whose parents work at a local transport station:

'I divided my drawing into four parts [...] On the left side of the paper, I drew Ziyi with lightning above her, showing that she gets struck when the lightning appears.

[...] I hate her, she is the desk mate the teacher assigned, she is urban, she looks pretty, her grades are good, but I don't like her [...] She thinks herself too superior over other, over me. She never lent me her stationery when I forgot to take mine. One day, she forgot her blue pen, and I gave her mine. She looked at it and said no, she would ask someone else. I know she doesn't like my stationery. [...] At school, Jiaxuan is my best friend, my bestie. We are in the middle (of the picture), we use each other's stationery, and she told me her secrets, she never thinks she's so superior because she is a local.'

(Interview with Chengxi, 12 Apr 2023).

In this story, it appears that Chengxi's values of friendships echoed with discussions in Chapter 4.2 that children value sharing secrets in maintaining friendships. In this interview, Chengxi identified Jiaxuan (an urban girl with a father working in a factory and a mother not working) as her 'bestie' in class. In contrast to her interactions with Ziyi, where there was exchange but refusal, Chengxi and Jiaxuan share stationery and secrets. Moreover, the interview with Chengxi also revealed that rural-urban hierarchy can necessarily be brought by the uneven socioeconomic backgrounds of the families and children's material possessions, which leads to the division of children's friendships. However, migration status can sometimes be transcended, as Chengxi's 'bestie,' Jiaxuan, is an urban girl. Nevertheless, their similar backgrounds and material possessions foster a stronger sense of connection, leading them to share more with each other. This is also echoing research of Vincent, Neal and Iqbal (2018), who found that social divisions such as socioeconomic status are more difficult to cross. For example, Chengxi and Jiaxuan have different migration backgrounds, however, their different belongings shape their friendships.



(Figure 14. A drawing by Chengxi)

As discussed, children's friendships are shaped by rural-urban migration experiences and the social inequalities brought about by the rural-urban hierarchy in China and migration. The previous discussions illustrate the complexity of migration patterns, which contrast with earlier findings (e.g., Zhang and Luo, 2016; Zhang, 2018) that often depict rural migrant children as uniformly disadvantaged, whereas in this research, they are not necessarily economically deprived and actively develop their own strategies for forming friendships. Therefore, this study does not seek to establish class as the sole determinant of urban-rural divisions in China, but rather traces how classed experiences and inequalities are lived and experienced, thereby revealing the complexity of migrant backgrounds and the increasing blurring of previous urban-rural boundaries in contemporary China. However, some rural migrant children still experience poverty and marginalization brought by rural-urban hierarchy (e.g. Chengxi) and some of them adopt a 'strategy of being indistinguishable' to facilitate their integration into the classroom and the development of peer relationships, and this will be discussed in the next section.

Strategies for being indistinguishable

In their study of children and cultural difference, Devine (2009) noted that to mitigate boundaries and the process of 'othering,' migrant and ethnic minority children often strive to minimise embodied aspects of difference, including their accent, clothing, dietary habits, and language. Mas Giralt (2011, p. 331) further characterizes these

efforts as 'in/visibility strategies,' wherein students conceal their visible markers in an attempt to minimize their visibility to others, thereby reducing the risk of potential marginalization. By doing so, they seek to avoid stigmatisation and gain acceptance within their social environment. In my research, there were similar 'strategies for being indistinguishable' being enacted by the rural migrant (and children from low-income families). Rural migrant children seemed to adopt 'strategies of being indistinguishable,' striving not only to avoid drawing attention to themselves but also to dress similarly to urban children and use material possessions to minimize their 'rural characteristics.' In doing so, they sought to align more closely with urban children, becoming less distinguishable and more similar to their peers in order to better 'blend in' and integrate with their classmates.

For instance, Huohou is a migrant boy from rural China. Although he migrated with his parents, who work as long-distance truck drivers, he primarily lives with his aunt and his cousin, a girl two years older than him, who are also migrants. Huohou's living conditions sometimes necessitate that he uses second-hand clothes and stationery, which often made him being teased and laughed at by his classmates:

After English, the children surrounded Huohou's desk, chatting. Suddenly, Yiming noticed Huohou's schoolbag, laughing loudly and commented that what kind of boys use a pink school bag? Yiyong then took a pen from his pencil case, which was also pink. The boys laughed even louder, saying Huohou does not only have a pink school bag, but a pink pen and pink highlighter as well! Huohou cried, sobbing and said that he only lives with his aunt and his cousin, his parents rarely come to see him, and his cousin is a girl, so he only got the second-hand from his cousin [which are pink].'
(Fieldnote, 5 Jun 2023).

This incident involving Huohou illustrates that factors leading to children's marginalisation can be intersectional, particularly in relation to migration, gender, and financial difficulties. Huohou, a rural migrant boy, were being teased for carrying a pink school bag, which signifies non-conformity to traditional masculine standards and types of expression of femininity (Renold, 2005). This ridicule highlights how gender norms dictate what is acceptable behaviour for boys, leading to Huohou being perceived as 'not a proper boy' and being teased by his classmates. These dynamics

reproduce dominant norms, such as the association of pink with femininity and thus its inadequacy for boys. Children with less social and economic capital, such as rural migrants, often possess limited agency to resist or challenge these gendered and class-based expectations, further reinforcing the very hierarchies that constrain them. Additionally, Huohou's use of second-hand items from his cousin reflects the challenges posed by his family's departure and the hardships encountered during their migration journey. This situation highlights his family's financial struggles, further intensifying his vulnerability in relation to his peers. This intersection of migration experiences and gender creates a compounded effect, making Huohou more susceptible to bullying and exclusion from his peers. These items (the pink school bag and stationery) are highly visible markers, and Huohou then employed 'strategies of indistinguishable' in an attempt to better integrate himself and avoid drawing attention while being accepted by his peers:

Today, during maths exercise, I saw Huohou using his new pen with a cartoon Danzai on it. I praised his pen, told him it's cool and I like it. He seemed proud and told me that he let his father buy him this as all boys in school like Danzai and he will be just like him.

(Fieldnote 14 Jun 2023).

In this field note, Huohou's use of the Danzai-themed pen shows his effort to adopt 'strategies of being indistinguishable' by choosing items that conform to peer norms. After being teased for his pink belongings, Huohou opts for an object linked to masculinity, something that 'all boys in school' like. By asking his father to buy him this pen, Huohou attempts to blend in with his classmates and avoid further ridicule. This behaviour illustrates Huohou's strategies for integrating into his peer group and gaining greater acceptance by minimising the visible markers that lead to him being 'distinguished' by his peers.

A similar story also happened to Yaoxin, who migrated with her parents, who run a local flower shop,

Yaoxin: It was last semester [...] I got a pair of yellow shoes from my grandparents. They sent them from back home. I was excited at

first, but when I wore them to school, the other girls laughed at me.

They said the colour looked really 'rural.'

Boyang: That sounds really upsetting. How did you feel after they said that?

Yaoxin: I felt embarrassed. I thought the shoes were beautiful and bright, but after that, I didn't want to wear them anymore. I started wearing my old shoes that didn't stand out.

(Interview with Yaoxin, 17 Apr 2023)

Both Yaoxin's and Huohou's experiences highlight how material possessions, along with family backgrounds in rural areas and migration experiences, can become sources of marginalization in school settings. Yaoxin's bright yellow shoes, sent by her grandparents from a rural area, initially sparked excitement for her. However, when her classmates labelled the shoes as 'rural,' this transformed her pride into embarrassment. Similarly, Huohou's pink school bag and stationery, both second-hand items from his female cousin, were ridiculed for not conforming to conventional gender expectations.

In both instances, these material items, which reflected the children's migrant and low-income status as well as their family circumstances, marked them as different from their peers, typically positioning them in a lower social standing. Yaoxin's shoes' colour and design signified her connection to her rural origins, while Huohou's pink belongings highlighted his gender nonconformity and economic constraints that were brought by the family's migration experiences. The teasing they experienced demonstrates how visible markers of migrant and rural origin and/or low-income identity become ways to stigmatise or exclude some children in the class. In these circumstances, the children employ 'strategies of being indistinguishable' by adopting items commonly used by their urban peers, aiming to reduce their distinctiveness and thus appear more similar to their classmates, facilitating greater inclusion within the group. The experiences of Yaoxin and Huohou demonstrate how rural migrant children tended to employ 'strategies of being indistinguishable' to gain acceptance among their peers. In addition to material possessions, accents worked as another, but more embodied, social marker of rural identity, which will be discussed in the next section.

The concept of 'strategies for being indistinguishable' observed in my research presents a distinct pattern from Mas Giral't's 'in/visibility strategies'. Mas Giral't's (2011) framework outlines a bidirectional negotiation, where individuals selectively reveal or

conceal their cultural background to navigate a visual regime of difference. In contrast, the strategies employed by rural migrant children in my study are primarily geared towards blending in. This constitutes a unidirectional practice focused on self-protection, where their agency is expressed through conformity to and imitation of dominant urban norms, systematically minimizing any visible markers that could signal a stigmatized rural identity. This finding further clarifies the concept of agency in the 'new' sociology of childhood. While the field emphasizes children's agency (e.g. Matthews, 2009; James and Prout, 2015), my study indicates that such agency is unevenly distributed and context-dependent. In my research, children's actions are strongly influenced by mainstream social norms and institutional power, particularly the authority of teachers. For rural migrant children, their agency is often expressed through adaptation and compliance rather than open negotiation, showing that agency is not an innate capacity but one structured by existing social hierarchies.

The strategic use of accent for inclusion and friendship making

As discussed in the earlier literature review chapter, prior research conducted in China (e.g., Dong, 2018; He and Cai, 2023; Ding, 2022) indicates that rural migrant children often face teasing due to their accents. In contrast, my research reveals that the data suggests migrant children strategically utilize their accents along with rural culture and traditions as resources to forge friendships and be perceived favourably by their peers.

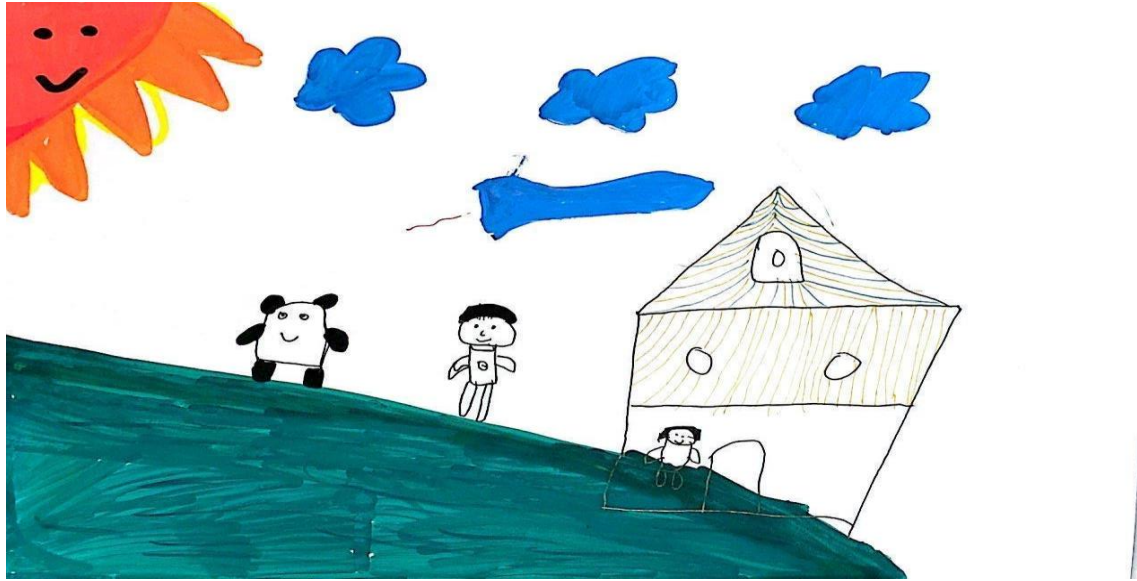
Yurun, for example, is a migrant boy whose family migrated from Northeastern China and runs a shop selling tea. Yurun is normally called by his nickname 'Panda,' which he seems to enjoy. In children's social maps, Yurun is frequently represented as a friend by many children, regardless of gender, particularly in two drawings where he is specifically illustrated as a panda.

In Yubao's drawing, for instance, which features himself and Yurun, both of whom are rural migrant boys, Yubao depicts himself and Yurun (the panda) as closer than their mutual friend Yiyu. This reflects not only the closeness of their families but also Yubao's personal closeness with Yurun. During his interview, he specifically noted that he likes Yurun because of his 'funny accent':

'Both Yurun, Yiyu and I are my best friends, but I will draw myself and Yurun closer and Yiyu a bit far away from us in that house. This is because he seldom plays with us during weekends. He

lives in a neighbourhood not far away from ours, but it is gated, so we cannot come in. [...] Also, I like Yurun a lot! He always does funny accents. Every time we say, Yurun, can you say this in a Northeastern accent? He will do the accent in really funny ways and make us laugh.'

(Interview with Yubao, 25 May 2023).



(Figure 15. A drawing by Yubao, with Yubao himself and Yurun closer and outside the building. Yiyu is inside the buildings, representing his apartment in a gated neighbourhood.)

In Yubao's interview, the two migrant children did not need to hide their rural accents; instead, phrases such as 'can you say this in a Northeastern accent?' and 'make us laugh' illustrate how accents became part of their friendship, allowing them to be open about who they are and their migration experiences. However, accents can also be appreciated by urban children and serve as an asset for rural migrant children in forming friendships. For example, Siyu, an urban girl, also drew Yurun as her best friend. In her drawing, she depicted only Yurun, and as a panda, as she believes that only her 'bestie' deserves to be represented rather than her other ordinary friends. She included a line of dots to illustrate their 'brain wave', symbolising their mutual understanding and emotional closeness. Their friendship began with the teacher's seating arrangements, which required them to be desk mates. Over time, she discovered that Yurun is both interesting and caring:

Siyu: Yurun is my best friend [...] Every time I randomly pick up something and ask Yurun what it's called in a Northeastern accent, he tells me in a really funny way. Although I think he exaggerates the accent [...] We secretly chat during class, shhh... He shares stories about his hometown, like how there's a large pot in rural Northeastern China, there's heavy snow on branches, and in his old home, there's a huge snowman made of ice with lights inside it. I've asked my parents several times to take me to his hometown for the holidays.'

(Interview with Siyu, 23 May 2023)



(Figure 16. A drawing by Siyu)

The interviews with Yubao and Siyu illustrate how cultural and natural resources, along with accents, serve as vital resources for migrant children in shaping their friendships, especially children who identify their relationship as a bestie friendship that also crosses migrant and gender boundaries. In this section, Yubao emphasizes how Yurun's laughter at his Northeastern accent reflects (as discussed in the previous section) that accents can be a source of fun for children and, according to my notes, a sign of friendly behaviour. In Yubao's drawing, positioning Yurun closer signifies the importance of Yurun's acceptance and even appreciation of his accent, which represents his identity as a migrant boy. Siyu's account further emphasises this dynamic. She expresses admiration for Yurun's background and his rural stories and depictions of his hometown, such as the 'large pot,' 'heavy snow,' and the 'huge snowman made of ice with lights inside it.' She finds these details fascinating and

appreciates the beauty of his rural experiences, which feel so different from her own. In terms of accent, Yurun also shared in the interview that:

Yurun: When I first arrived here, I tried to hide my accent because no one else spoke like that. One day in Chinese class, I got excited and accidentally spoke with my accent. They laughed at me! But it wasn't teasing; they liked it! So now, I use it a lot. [...] There was even one time when Duanduan fell down the stairs and started crying. I spoke in my funny accent, and she ended up laughing!

(Interview with Yurun, 9 May 2023).

In the interview, Yurun reflects on his evolving relationship with his accent and cultural identity when he first went to school. Initially, he felt the need to hide his Northeastern accent, perceiving it as a difference that set him apart from his peers. However, a turning point occurred during a Chinese class when he accidentally used his accent while expressing excitement. Therefore, it appeared that the laughter from his classmates was not mocking; instead, it was an expression of enjoyment, which encouraged him to embrace his unique way of speaking. The positive reaction from his classmates encouraged Yurun to utilise his heritage and accent as resources for integrating into the group.

In contrast to teachers and parents, who view accent as a marker of migrant children that should be hidden or corrected (as discussed in Chapters 5 and 6), the use of accent as a strategy for forming friendships within larger groups can also be observed in other instances among children. For example, Wangyin (an urban girl) shared her story with Songyi (a rural migrant boy), '*Songyi isn't my best friend, but everyone in our class likes him. He's so funny and loves to make jokes, especially in his accent*' (Interview with Wangyin, 23 Mar 2023). Similarly, Zihan (a rural migrant boy) remarked, '*I like Yiyou; he always says something in an exaggerated accent loudly during breaks, and it makes everyone in the classroom laugh*' (Interview with Zihan, 28 Mar 2023). Therefore, it appears that rural migrant children strategically use their accents to cultivate friendships and enhance their likability within larger social groups. This behaviour aligns with their values surrounding friendship, particularly the importance of having fun (as discussed in Chapter 4.1). Furthermore, it demonstrates how rural migrant children leverage their accents to connect with peers in the class and how it is

welcomed and valued by urban children thus fostering inclusion and challenging the existing rural-urban divide and its associated stigmatization.

In the Introduction and Literature Review chapters, I reviewed how accents serve as an audible marker of rural or urban identities. Accents make migrant children identifiable among their peers, often leading to stigmatisation and bullying. For instance, Dong (2018) found that in an urban public school, teachers attempted to promote friendships among children by 'correcting' the accents of migrant students who were frequently teased by their peers. This finding aligns with the research of Liu and Jin (2018), which indicates that accents act as prominent social markers reflecting children's migration experiences, making them targets for bullying and prompting teachers to strive for correction. However, stories of Yurun, Songyi and Yiyu show that this discrimination can be overcome in certain situations with the support of friends who liked their accent or classmates who believe it is fun. Therefore, in this study, rural migrant children utilised accents, along with the cultural and natural aspects of their hometown and heritage, as resources to foster their interaction with classmates and friendship. This case further contributes to the 'new' Sociology of Childhood, highlighting that children construct social meanings independently of adults. This emphasises children's agency, viewing them as active participants in their social worlds rather than passive recipients of adult influence (e.g. Matthews, 2007). This perspective asserts that children have the capacity to interpret their experiences, negotiate relationships, and assert their identities based on their contexts and interactions. By utilising and appreciating accents and diverse cultural backgrounds, children like Yuran, Siyu, Songyi, and Yubao demonstrate their ability to challenge and reconstruct social norms and divisions that potentially influence friendships.

4.4 Conclusion

This chapter has explored the nuanced dynamics of children's friendships in contexts of social difference, focusing on the experiences of internal migrant and urban children in primary school settings. Drawing on interviews, social maps, and field observations, the study reveals how children navigate friendships within the complex interplay of migration status, socioeconomic background, and cultural identity. The findings highlight children's agency in constructing and negotiating their social worlds, often challenging the boundaries imposed by rural-urban divides and socioeconomic disparities.

Children's values and understandings of friendship emphasize quantity, fun, help, and shared secrets as key elements. The desire for a large number of friends reflects their need for social recognition and belonging, while fun activities, such as games and shared interests, foster emotional intimacy and transcend social differences. Help, particularly among rural migrant children, underscores the importance of mutual support in navigating school life, while sharing secrets builds trust and emotional closeness, especially for those facing material hardships or marginalization.

The chapter also examines friendship practices, revealing how children navigate social diversity through inclusive games, gendered activities, and shared extracurricular experiences. Games like 'Chicken vs. Eagles' and 'rock-paper-scissors' promote inclusivity, allowing children from different backgrounds to interact, though these connections are sometimes casual and 'thin'. Gendered activities, such as boys engaging in physical tasks and girls collaborating on creative projects, provide a sense of belonging for children struggling to form stable friendships. However, deeper, more emotionally demanding friendships are often formed through shared extracurricular activities, which are heavily influenced by family backgrounds and rural-urban hierarchy.

Rural migrant children employ strategic practices to foster inclusion and acceptance. By adopting 'strategies of being indistinguishable,' such as aligning material possessions with peer norms, rural migrant children minimize visible markers of difference to facilitate them to 'blend in'. Contrary to previous studies (e.g., Dong, 2009, 2018; Ding, 2022), which depict accents as a stigmatizing feature of rural migrant children that subjects them to discrimination, some children in my research, such as Yurun, utilized their cultural heritage and accents as assets in fostering friendships and are valued by their urban peers. This challenges the stigmatization typically associated with rural identities. Consequently, these findings resonate with those of Vincent, Neal, and Iqbal (2018), who argue that socioeconomic disparities are more difficult to transcend. However, in my study, socioeconomic differences were more complexly intertwined, particularly shaped by the rural-urban hierarchy and the experiences of migration.

These findings further contribute to the broader literature on the 'new' sociology of childhood, which emphasizes the agency of children in navigating and shaping their social worlds and the importance of contexts (James and Prout, 2015; Matthews, 2007).

This perspective challenges the conventional narrative that rural migrant children are universally disadvantaged. Instead, it highlights the diverse and dynamic strategies employed by children to transcend social divisions and build friendships. While some children may experience marginalization due to factors such as material possessions or accents, others, like Yurun, actively utilize their cultural heritage to forge meaningful social connections. In parallel, urban children also demonstrate agency in negotiating and engaging with diversity. However, this perspective avoids romanticizing children's agency by recognizing that it is not uniformly possessed by all children across contexts. My research findings suggest that agency is often structured by existing power relations rather than being an equal attribute of all children. In practice, children who conform to mainstream norms generally demonstrate more visible forms of agency, while marginalized children like rural migrants frequently exercise theirs through compliance with dominant norms rather than through resistance or negotiation. This demonstrates how social hierarchies shape the very forms that children's agency can take, challenging perspectives that might romanticize children's autonomy without considering these structural constraints. Moreover, as the 'new' sociology of childhood highlights the role of context in shaping children's friendships and the influence of significant adults, the next chapter will focus on the impact of school settings and teachers.

Chapter 5 Children's Friendships in School Settings

5.1. Introduction

The preceding chapter examined children's strategies for building friendships, analysing the intersected categories of gender, accent, and migration experiences that collectively influence the dynamics of their friendships (see Chapter 4). It also underscored existing gaps in understanding the influence of educational settings and values on children's understanding of friendship. When delving into children's friendships within educational environments, Valentine (2013, p.142) noted the existence of two distinct realms within schools: the informal domain of children themselves, encompassing their social networks and peer group culture, and the institutional domain governed by adults, characterised by regulated schedules, curriculum, and age-based spatial segregation, all of which impact children's school experiences. Therefore, in this chapter, to answer Research Question 3—'How are rural migrant and urban children's friendships shaped by the adult worlds of parents, grandparents, schools, and broader educational policy contexts and social inequalities?'—data generated from interviews with educational staff (school principal and teachers), interviews with children, their drawings, and my field notes are analysed in this chapter with the focus on educational settings.

The chapter will be structured into three sections. The first section presents findings concerning teachers' perspectives on children's friendships. It foregrounds the significance of China's cultural collective values and social skills and highlights the teachers' ambivalent perspectives of 'friends' and 'friendly behaviours.' The chapter examines the emphasis placed on fostering unity, collectivism, and mutual support within the classroom, aligning these principles with the core values of Quality Education as articulated in the Introduction and Literature Review. Subsequently, the discussion will focus on how teachers' conceptualisations of children's friendships manifest within the school environment and how schools manage and facilitate these relationships. This will involve an examination of aspects such as playground design, supervision within school buildings, and school activities. Finally, the chapter will consider how teachers integrate children's friendships into their pedagogical practices and daily management. This will encompass everyday approaches such as correcting migrant children's accents, implementing seating arrangements and class leadership systems, as well as managing conflicts.

5.2. Teachers' Understanding of Children's Friendships

As discussed in Chapter 4, children's understanding of friendships as relationships built on voluntary and unconditional mutual support is influenced by educational values within the schooling environment. Additionally, children's agency in forming friendships is largely constrained and is often subject to negotiation within the power dynamics established by teachers. This section will explore how teachers perceive and understand both rural migrant and urban children's friendships.

In this case study, teachers sometimes observe and describe children's friendships as a whole class and in larger groups. For instance, the PE teacher, who interacts with this class twice a week (see demographic sheet in the appendix for frequency of meeting the children), observed that *'it seems all class can play together well'* and noted, *'I cannot really identify close friend groups,'* while acknowledging that boundaries between boys and girls typically involve *'fights, but friendly fights'* (interview with the PE teacher, 24 May 2023). Similarly, the art teacher who sees the class once a week agreed, observing that *'the whole class treat each other friendly'* and, due to the seating arrangement the same as in their regular classroom, stated, *'I don't know who are best friends'* (interview with art teacher, 6 Feb 2023).

In contrast, teachers who spend more time with the children identified more distinct friendship dynamics. The headteacher, Ms Xu, who interacts with the class daily, described a pattern where *'girls are more likely to play in pairs and boys in larger groups,'* though she added that *'boundaries between friendship groups are not that clear and children also tend to mix together'* (Interview with Ms Xu, 23 Jan 2023). Similarly, Ms Wei, the maths teacher, observed that *'there are groups of two or three boys and girls that are closer, but there are friendship groups that are larger and cross gender boundaries'* (Interview with the maths teacher, 26 Jan 2023).

Therefore, based on teachers' observations and interpretations of friendship patterns, their understanding of children's friendships varies according to their differing perspectives on the spectrum of children's friendships.

The teachers' ideal of friendship as unconditional support

As discussed in the Literature Review, Quality Education in China highlights the social ability and friendship of individuals to address both personal and national needs (Dello-Iacovo, 2009). Li (2014) note that this educational philosophy on children's

relationships emphasises mutual support and cooperation, illustrating that fostering deep friendships and supportive relationships among children is integral to their personal development in primary education settings. At Xincun Primary School, the head teacher perceives that children tend to form close friendships within smaller groups, such as those with their best friends (e.g. Interview with Ms Xu, 23 Jan. 2023). To convey the values associated with close friendships, the head teacher (also the Chinese teacher) utilizes readings and articles, drawing both from her own developed materials and those adapted from official government textbooks.

In today's Chinese class, the teacher assigned a reading exercise featuring a story about a girl injured during wartime who is bleeding. A boy donates his blood to her without uttering a word, despite enduring significant pain while lying on the grass. When asked why he chose to donate his blood, he replied simply, 'Because she is my friend.' The teacher used this text to train students to identify phrases that describe the boy's facial expressions for language learning while also emphasising that noble and pure friendship involves helping and sacrificing for one's friends unconditionally.

(Fieldnote, 11 May 2023)

This field note described how the teacher uses the reading exercise to convey an idealised vision of friendship, one rooted in sacrifice and selflessness. Through the boy's silent but painful act of donating blood to his friend, the teacher underscores the notion that true friendship involves unconditional support and a willingness to help friends in times of need. By focusing on and explaining this story, the teacher implicitly communicates that friendship goes beyond casual companionship, portraying it as a bond that may require personal sacrifice. However, how teachers impart the notion of friendship is contingent on their personal conception of it as an unconditional and voluntary form of mutual help. Similarly, in the interview with Ms Xu, the head teacher of the class, she described her understanding of friendship as:

'I hope at best, students can have their best friends in this class, the one child that they can trust and help each other. I think a good friendship for children is that they help each other willingly [...] as later in the adult world they will find that people will weigh the pros and cons.'

(Interview with Ms Xu, 23 Jan 2023)

Ms Xu's views on children's friendships highlight her belief in the importance of mutual support as a foundational element and value. She advocates for supporting each other willingly in children's relationships with close friends, this echoes with children's ideal of friendships as 'help' is essential for a friend (see in Chapter 4). By contrasting these ideals with the transactional nature of adult relationships, she underscores the necessity of cultivating genuine friendships among children, suggesting that these early experiences are important and precious in their later lives. In a similar vein, Ms Wei, the mathematics teacher, also underscores the necessity of children cultivating friendships in primary school years. She posits that 'pure' friendships exist, asserting that children are particularly predisposed to such connections due to their inherent innocence.

[...] Like there are times when one boy is caught being naughty, and his friends will show up trying to cover for his mistakes, claiming it was their doing, not their friend's. Can you imagine an adult doing this for a friend? [...] We are too old to stay in pure and beautiful friendships; the children are young and pure. I wish to nurture their friendships so that there will be beautiful memories that they can carry into adulthood.
(Interview with Ms Wei, 26 Jan 2023).

Ms Wei's assertion that children possess a purity which fosters ideal friendships aligns with Ms Xu's view on the essential role of support. According to Ms Wei, these friendships are characterised by mutual support and the covering of each other's mistakes. This perspective positions children as inherently innocent and deserving of idealised friendships marked by unconditional support and emotional bonds. However, the way teachers emphasise the ideal of friendships is rooted in their assumption of children's innocence, suggesting that children can form genuine connections without the complexities that often complicate adult friendships. This perspective is consistent with the 'new' sociology of childhood, which emphasises the impact of adult perceptions of childhood innocence on children's social experiences, framing them as active agents to varying degrees within these socially constructed dynamics (James and Prout, 2015, p.7; Sarmiento, Marchi and Trevisan, 2018, p. 155).

Furthermore, teachers' advocacy for pure and unconditional support in friendships reflects an understanding that there is a 'proper way to do friendship' (Vincent, Neal and Iqbal, 2018, p. 131). For them, this idealized friendship encompasses moral

obligations where friendship is defined as 'a voluntary relationship that includes a mutual and equal emotional bond, mutual and equal care and goodwill, as well as pleasure' (Lynch, 2015, p. 9). This perspective contrasts with the 'new' sociology of childhood, which challenges the view of children as merely innocent beings and emphasises their role as active agents capable of forming complex friendships influenced by social contexts, power dynamics, and cultural norms (Kurt, 2021). Therefore, the way in which teachers understand the idealised nature of friendships risks over-emphasizing the most intense, ideal forms of friendships.

Consequently, teachers promote friendship as a pedagogical strategy, valuing it for the mutual support between close friends and its role in encouraging collaborative learning, a function to be examined in the next section.

'Healthy' friendships for a better learning environment

Teachers at Xincun Primary School also prioritise the cultivation of 'healthy' friendships. By 'healthy' friendships, it is mentioned by most of the teacher participants as a relationship that children can '*spur each other on study*' (interview with the school principal, 16 Jan 2023) and that can '*help students improve their study*' (interview with the English teacher, 13th Jan 2023).

Teachers emphasise the importance of healthy friendships that foster mutual improvement and competition, highlighting a shared understanding of how these relationships can enhance, especially, students' academic success. In an interview with the head teacher, Ms Xu, she articulated her insights on children's friendships as follows:

Ms Xu: 'I like Chenxian and Yutong, for example, they are good friends, but in a way that they compete with each other, so they make progress together. I think this is a healthy friendship for young children, to compete for improvements.'

(Interview with the headteacher, 23 Jan 2023)

A similar understanding of children's friendships that support their academic learning is also shared by Ms Wei, the maths teacher:

Ms Wei: 'Overall, I do wish the children could befriend each other or at least not fight each other or hate each other. Only in this way can a good study environment be produced, an environment where everybody can focus on their study. This is the main job for everyone, to achieve good grades and have a good future. As they have to compete with each other in exams in the near future, and the schools are also under pressure to compete.'

(Interview with the maths teacher, 26 Jan 2023)

Both the head teacher and the maths teacher share a perspective on children's friendships that reflects the influence of neoliberalism on China's education system in recent decades. Neoliberalism has introduced market-like mechanisms into education, promoting concepts such as school choice, competition and market principles like efficiency and accountability (Burch, 2021). Consequently, schools face pressure to prioritise standardised testing as a means of evaluating student performance and school effectiveness (Tan, 2017; Zhang and Bray, 2017). Therefore, teachers in the study emphasise the importance of friendships in terms of fostering competition and academic progress, as well as creating a conducive study environment. This relegation of friendships is evident in their belief that friendships primarily serve to enhance academic performance and contribute to a positive study atmosphere. For example, Ms Xu articulates this by highlighting that the friendship between Chenxian and Yutong, which involves competition, is viewed as a healthy dynamic that promotes progress. This aligns with the broader educational trend where friendships are valued for their role in supporting academic achievement. Similarly, Ms Wei emphasizes fostering positive relationships among students, seeing them as foundational to a supportive learning environment and to academic achievement, a connection which is particularly critical in a competitive educational landscape.

However, teachers acknowledge that *'children do not always build friendships as we expect'* (Interview with the maths teacher, 26th Jan 2023) and that *'the class consists of students from diverse backgrounds'* (Interview with the headteacher, 23rd Jan 2023). As a result, they intentionally blur the boundaries between individual friendships and class unity to foster a sense of belonging and promote social skills that emphasise unity and collective values, which are fundamental to collectivism and citizenship education within the framework of Quality Education (Reiß, 2014).

Friendship and Unity

Through my fieldwork and interviews with teachers, I have observed that unity is frequently used as a strategy to cultivate children's sense of belonging within the class. This approach typically involves crafting a collective and distinctive class identity, blurring the lines between unity and individual friendships. For example,

'In a football competition, students made flags and slogans 'Go Class A', which was encouraged and praised by the head teacher. The teachers say we are the unique and irreplaceable Class A, so compared with other classes, when we lose, we do not put a sad face on, we together say oh what a fun game and everyone will look at us and admire us!'

(Field note, 25 May 2023)

Therefore, emphasising that Class A is 'unique and irreplaceable', teachers instil a sense of belonging and pride, encouraging students to view themselves as part of a cohesive group. Likewise, in the PE class, the teacher aimed to foster a sense of unity among the children by merging the concepts of unity and friendship:

'Children participated in a tug-of-war competition against a senior grade class, an impromptu idea suggested by the PE teachers of both classes. As they cheered on the students, both PE teachers shouted You are a unity, so pull together with your friends!'

(Field note, 13 Apr 2023).

In the PE class, the tug-of-war competition served as a practical application of the teacher's goal to blend unity and friendship, encouraging children to work together as a cohesive team. The PE teachers reinforced this concept through their enthusiastic cheers, emphasising the importance of collective effort, which aimed to help strengthen the children's sense of belonging and teamwork. Similarly, teachers are also attempting to combine unity and friendship while engaging in activities with other classes.

'When preparing for the field trip for the labour class, Ms Xu provided students with guidelines on appropriate behaviour outside of school. She repeatedly emphasised that, when interacting with outsiders, the

class should present themselves as a united group, demonstrating their care for one another and the importance of friendship. [...] Ms. Xu further added that showing unity is also an important quality of a citizen in China as it is in our blood and tradition [...] To illustrate the significance of unity, in the week's class assembly, Ms Xu referenced films about World War II, explaining that if a class or unit fails to unite, they risk being ridiculed and losing.'

(Fieldnote, 13 Jun 2023)

Through my fieldwork, teachers prioritise unity and often blur it with the concept of friendship to foster a strong sense of belonging among students. Likewise, in anthropological studies conducted in the Global South (e.g., Froerer, 2010; Obeid, 2020), friendships may become ambiguous due to both voluntary and obligatory factors, which are regarded as significant for individual well-being as well as for national and community cohesion and unity. For instance, during the football competition, the head teacher emphasised the unique identity of Class A, encouraging students to celebrate their togetherness regardless of the outcome. Also, Ms. Xu emphasized that the ability to show unity is also a good quality of a Chinese citizen as this is in the tradition. This mirrors Kaplan's (2018) argument that nationalism is intrinsically linked to friendship as a symbol of collective solidarity, where civic-like qualities emphasise voluntary, horizontal relations among citizens instead of traditional, authoritative family ties. Similarly, in the PE class, the tug-of-war competition was framed as a demonstration of collective effort, where teachers urged students to unite as they pulled together. By transforming the notion of strangers into friends, teachers reinforce the idea of shared identity and communal belonging. Additionally, during preparations for a field trip, Ms Xu reinforced the importance of presenting a united front to outsiders, linking unity to mutual care and respect among classmates. In this way, teachers actively silence divisions such as the rural-urban divide, focusing instead on fostering unity and downplaying differences. This has also been shared in interviews, for example, Ms Xu states that '*children from the marginalized background will feel the sense of belonging if the class shows as a unity*' (Interview with the headteacher, 23 Jan 2023) and the art teacher shares that '*it is hurting if mentioning children's family backgrounds, but if they feel here as a home they will overcome the divisions*' (interview with art teacher, 6 Feb 2023). By intertwining the notions of unity and friendship, teachers effectively cultivate a supportive environment that enhances teamwork, fosters resilience and pride within the students, and highlights that good

citizenship is fundamentally rooted in friendship. This reflects teachers' assumptions about the role of friendships in merging with unity to foster a sense of belonging and aligns with the argument in Quality Education that children should develop the ability to cultivate unity among their peers (Reiß, 2014). Ultimately, this approach strengthens their communal identity and sense of belonging, resonating with Kaplan's (2018) assertion that friendship acts as a 'staging area' for the broader collective significance of the nation.

The ambivalence of friendship and friendly behaviours

As discussed, teachers recognize that while they hold an idealized view of childhood friendship, such bonds do not always materialize spontaneously, nor can they be universally present across the classroom. Consequently, the terms 'friends' and 'friendship' are commonly used to blur the distinction between 'friends' and 'friendly behaviour' in order to promote the development of good citizens and help children from marginalized backgrounds foster a sense of belonging. Here are examples from the interviews in which teachers shared how they incorporate the concepts of 'friends' and 'friendship' to encourage positive and friendly behaviour among students:

In my maths class, when children forgot to take their rulers, I would ask loudly, 'Who wants to lend their ruler to those who forgot their ruler? The children were very excited to raise their hands. I was pretty happy and proud about this, they will know that in this class, you can rely on each other. They are your friends.

(Interview with the maths teacher, 26 Jan 2023)

Similarly, the English teacher shared with me that:

'Creating a friendly atmosphere in my classroom is a top priority for me as an English teacher. I use activities like group discussions and peer reviews to encourage students to work together and communicate openly. I often pair them for reading exercises so they can share their thoughts and build connections. [...] I encourage them that you are friends so you will do well in your group work!'

(interview with the English teacher, 13 Jan 2023)

The school principal shared similar guidelines in her daily management:

'Children are brought together by destiny and have to cooperate with each other well. [...] This is beneficial for them to be included in society when they grow up, as in the workplace and living, the core is to deal with strangers [...] The world is full of strangers [...] Our students come from diverse backgrounds, I always tell the teachers to stress that everyone is friends and siblings, and be friendly with others, so that they won't be bullied when they enter the workplace due to unacceptable behaviour and even if children do not have best friends, at least friendly behaviour from others will make them safe.'

(interview with the school principal, 16 Jan 2023)

The interviews with teachers and the school principal provide insight into how educators intentionally foster cooperation among students. Recognizing that ideal friendships may not always form, educators blur the lines between 'friends' and 'friendly behaviour' to promote positive conduct, good citizenship and children's sense of sage and comfort. For instance, the maths teacher encourages students to lend their rulers to those who forget, fostering a sense of reliance and mutual support within the classroom. Similarly, the English teacher prioritises creating a friendly atmosphere through group discussions and peer reviews, promoting teamwork and communication skills. The principal emphasises that these interactions prepare students for future societal engagement, where collaboration with strangers is essential. By instilling the values of friendship and friendliness, the school aims to equip students with the skills to navigate diverse environments, thus enhancing their ability to interact positively with others. This approach aligns with the principles of Quality Education, which advocates for social cohesion and the essential social skills of students (Reiß, 2014, p.81).

These findings are consistent with current research demonstrating that educators deliberately blur the distinction between friendship and friendly behaviour as a pedagogical strategy. This approach is shown to foster a sense of belonging and equip students with transferable skills for cooperation in diverse settings. Research has explored how Western notions of friendship, such as sharing and empathy, are integrated into civic education to promote nationalism and societal solidarity, while sometimes, middle-class values. For example, Ahn (2010) explores these concepts in the context of American middle-class socialisation practices. She describes the practices of demonstrating empathy and cooperation as being primarily centred on

cultivating socio-centric values, such as kindness, collaboration, social appropriateness, empathy, friendship, politeness, and good manners. According to Ahn (2010), to be a successful member of a classroom, an individual child must learn to accommodate oneself to certain societal constraints, such as groupness, sharing, and cooperation. Ahn (2010) found that schools often display 'Let's get along' posters and that teachers view friendship as a key method for instilling prosocial values. They strive to instil in children the belief that everyone in the class is a friend and that, as friends, they should be kind to one another to uphold middle-class values through friendship. Friendship is also utilised as an approach to foster nationalism in children's civic education. Also, for instance, Assan (2023) conducted a qualitative study on friendship socialisation among girls in an Israeli elementary school, considering both the perspectives of the girls and their teachers. The research found that teachers promote civic education for solidarity by encouraging friendship practices such as sharing, supporting, and complementing each other. They navigate a tension between two friendship ideals: on one hand, affirming 'chosen' bonds between specific students that respect children's agency; on the other, promoting a 'collective' friendship among all classmates to ensure social cohesion and prevent loneliness. Assan (2023) observed that through their interactions, the girls and teachers revealed the tensions between the ideals of chosen and collective friendships, as well as the discrepancies between these ideals and the realities of friendship. Despite these tensions, they managed to intertwine both ideals in everyday school life. According to Assan (2023), these ambiguities may serve a purposeful role in cultivating collective friendships.

Therefore, in alignment with Adams and Allan (1998) in contextualising friendship, and based on the Quality Education and social divisions of rural-urban hierarchy in China, friendship is utilised as a tool for civic education and solidarity in this case study school. Teachers in this study recognize the diverse spectrum of children's friendships and backgrounds and believe that encouraging the formation of close friendships can enhance support and motivate learning. However, they acknowledge that this assumption of friendship is rooted in the teachers' perspectives as adults, who admit that such idealised friendships cannot always exist. Consequently, in line with the emphasis on Quality Education, teachers aim to promote unity and friendly behaviour by merging the concepts of 'friendship' and 'friends' to cultivate collective friendships that extend beyond mere friendliness, seeing this as vital for fostering social cohesiveness, relatedness, and the importance of group life. This aligns with Kaplan (2018), who argues that friendship serves as 'the social glue of the state and nation'

(p. 7), as citizens are expected to cooperate and forge friendships with strangers encountered in various social institutions, such as schools. However, both Assan (2023) and the teachers in this study appear to view children's friendships as strictly dichotomous, categorising them into either collective or voluntary patterns, with collective friendships often serving as a substitute for voluntary ones (see discussions above). At the same time, teachers focus on promoting unity through friendship, deliberately avoiding the rural-urban divide in their narratives and highlighting friendly behaviour as a means of silencing such social divisions. Nevertheless, in reality, children's friendships are far more complex, allowing them to engage with various forms and groups of friends (see Chapter 4 and Conclusion).

In the following section, the analysis will be presented regarding how educators' conceptions of friendships are integrated into daily activities in Xincun Primary School.

5.3. School Environment and Children's Friendships

Schools exert a substantial influence on children's friendships through multiple avenues, including the architectural design of the buildings and the organisation of daily activities, as well as the configuration of social spaces such as cafeterias, communal areas, and outdoor environments (e.g. Carter and Nutbrown, 2016; Papadopoulou, 2016; Markström and Halldén, 2009). This section will explore how spatial arrangements and school activities affect children's friendships. The initial focus will be on analysing the impact of school architecture and spatial configurations on interactions among children. Subsequently, the discussion will continue to discuss the role of school activities and events in facilitating friendships among students.

School Building

As has been argued by Paul Jones (2011), architectures can serve as roles where political projects attempt to become socially meaningful, and architectures themselves have a role to play in codifying and reproducing identities. Particularly in school buildings, Adam Wood (2020) suggested that school buildings and architecture can be used to manifest and do policy as well as organise education. As discussed in the Methodology, the architectural design of Xincun Primary School, this study's case site, reveals the tension between Quality Education ideals and the persistent imperative of exam-oriented education, ultimately shaping children's interactions with their peers:

'The main building of the school is made of red bricks and looks pretty much like schools in Western countries and some of the elite international schools in China. The principal was so proud of the architecture while showing me around. There is a canteen and a small library on the second floor of the canteen adjacent to the main building, a small art room, a calligraphy room and a music room built behind the main building. Students were not allowed to enter or use the rooms when they were not having classes there. There were corridors and classrooms; in corridors, there were slogans indicating 'no running and chasing' and 'no loud talk'. I haven't seen any places specifically built for children to play... At the entrance of the school, there's a wall with students' photos; one student in each class who showed willingness to others was voted to put their photo on the wall for one month. The corridors were decorated by children's drawings, and the theme was patriotism for the whole semester.'

(Fieldnote, 24 Feb 2023)

Emma Dyer argued that 'the spatial setting is nevertheless ever-present and never neutral' (2021, p.109). The school building itself resembles the educational values and policy that dominated the society at that time. In the research with Xincun Primary School, the principal was proud of how the building of the school looked 'western' and also looked like an elite international school. Being proud of the building of the school and how it attracts families, especially migrant families, also revealed the neoliberalism trend in education in China, where market-like mechanisms were advocated, assuming parents are consumers and encouraging schools to compete (Zhang and Bray, 2017). This also meant that school buildings are not neutral sites and are integrated into the social, political and economic relations of society. Based on the assumption of the non-neutral form of schools, Lascomes and Le Gales (2007, p.9) further suggested that the non-neutral form of school buildings 'eventually privilege certain actors and interests and exclude others.' Buildings in Xincun Primary School were in the way that is similar to Western and elite international schools differentiated themselves from architecture in rural areas and may in a way marginalise the culture of rural-urban migrant children.

Apart from the architecture itself, the spatial arrangements and segregation of the rooms, along with the slogans such as 'no entry for students', 'no talking in class' and 'no running and chasing in the corridors' (Fieldnote, 1 Mar 2023) also speaks to Foucault's notion of power. Foucault (2000) argues that power may operate at the

micro-level of social life, suggesting that it is not merely held by a singular authority but is dispersed throughout societal structures, influencing behaviour and interactions. He also argues that discipline arises from the way individuals are separated and positioned in space (2000), indicating that spatial arrangements are pivotal in the regulation of conduct and the maintenance of social order. In Xincun Primary, for example, activities in the corridor can be understood as techniques of governance that seek to shape the conduct of students interacting with friends within the setting by limiting their places of play and interaction. Normally, at Xincun Primary, teachers take turns standing at the centre of the corridor to supervise students' misbehaviour, such as running and chasing, as well as bringing toys from home that are not allowed in the school (Fieldnote, 1 Mar 2023). Therefore, children typically share small toys (Fieldnote, 21 Mar 2023) and do a bit of wrestling (Fieldnote, 8 Apr 2023) at the 'end of the corridor,' where there are usually no teachers standing during breaks. For instance, the significance of 'the end of the corridor,' where power is diminished, manifests in:

Yiming brought a bouncing ball from his home, he wanted to share it with his friend Shihao, as classrooms and corridors were forbidden from children playing balls. The two boys met at the end of the corridor and played with the ball on the ground.

(Fieldnote, 15 Mar 2023)

The narrative of using 'the end of the corridor' in children's school lives with their friends illustrates that friendships in schools are often shaped by discipline and adult control, particularly from teachers. This occurs despite Carter and Nutbrown's (2016) argument that children have a strong desire to safeguard their private spaces for play and friendship. This can also be found in my research: whereas with 'no chasing or running,' children who chase or run will be noted on the teachers' name list, and their classes will lose marks because of this (Fieldnote, 1 Mar 2023). However, children can still share their secrets with friends in 'Meet Me at the Corridor.' And in the Methodology section, Yiyu gave me his milk so that I could also become a student like them; both are done in the format of 'meet me at the corridor.'

Playground

Apart from the main building, the playground was the key place for children to play, but this was a more sport- and gender-based space than the corridors. For example, I note in my fieldwork diary that:

I ran downstairs with Shihao for PE. He told me that he would play the game of running and catching on the playground, which is the game almost all boys would join in during PE. I asked him if he liked the game, and he answered no, but he would join in, otherwise, his classmates would think of him as a girl sitting on the stairs of the main building. It is, indeed, that girls seldom join the game; they more often pick up things, such as leaves or plastic rope as decorations to decorate each other's hair.

(Fieldnote, 18 Apr 2023)

The way girls use leaves or plastic ropes as play materials can be classified as 'loose materials,' which Snow et al. (2019, p. 150) define as natural or man-made objects lacking a specific play purpose, such as tyres, logs, and milk crates, and are more commonly used by children to pick up and play with in school playgrounds. The random picking and utilising of those loose materials by girls partly mirrored the fact that there was normally very limited playing materials provided by the school that suited all genders and did not specifically have an 'exercise' purpose.

Apart from playing materials, the playground itself seemed to be more sport-based rather than random and casual play. In Xincun Primary School, as has been shown in Chapter Three, the playground is built behind the main building, with a small basketball court with a hard surface adjacent to a large soccer field covered with plastic pellets. The basketball court is itself age- and gender-segregated, as most of the young children are afraid of passing by as they worry about being hit by the taller ones and the playground is itself a football gate which more boys rather than girls use it. Therefore, certain Chinese school playgrounds, such as the one in Xincun Primary School, are designed for sport-based physical activities rather than dyadic play and social interaction. This may excludes some girls and girls' activities in school, which will be discussed as followed. Observations of the school playground revealed a distinct gendered division that constructed separate social spaces. As seen with Shihao and the ball games, the central area was predominantly occupied by boys, whose vigorous physical activity often served as a performance of masculinity. In

contrast, girls were typically found in the marginal zones, engaged in quieter interactions such as adorning each other's hair or conversing in small groups. This spatial and behavioural segregation substantiates the argument that gender is constructed within playground environments (e.g. Paechter and Clark, 2007; Mayeza and Bhana, 2019). For example, Jiayi explained that:

We don't want to join the boys anyway. We don't like running all the time. I think we are looking forward to PE because we can have long conversations with friends or, for example, I brought stickers from home secretly; I cannot show Enyu (her friend) in class, so I put them in my pocket and showed her during PE.
(Interview with Jiayi, 14 Apr 2023)

The story shared by Jiayi also mirrors how the playground in school is gender-dominant by providing only sport-based activities that exclude girls from free play, reinforcing gender-based forms of play and interaction within friendships. For example, in Snow and colleagues' research (2019), the type of play surface shapes children's gendered play patterns, highlighting that the physical environment can significantly influence how children engage with one another. Snow et al. (2019) emphasise that for children, the meanings of play extend beyond sports and exercises; they often seek opportunities for social connection and personal expression through play with peers.

However, the design of the playground and regulations of the school not only constrain peer interaction by reinforcing gendered practices but also marginalise children who lack access to or have not received sports training or have other preferences. For example, in my field notes and interviews, I captured moments when students would like to join in sports with friends but were reluctant as they didn't know how to play the sports:

'Huohou and Yiyou were standing at the table tennis table, I asked them if they would like to join in, and they said they would rather just watch as they do not know how to play. A boy who was playing table tennis said out loud that only people who know how to play can play, others can only watch.'
(Fieldnote, 12 Apr 2023).

Similarly, in the interview, when we talked about being bored during breaks:

Ming: 'I wanted to play 'One two three four five thieves' at school, but I can't. [...] The area on a playground that we can use is small, and children have to stand in long lines for this game [...] Can't play on the basketball gate, I don't know how to play it.'

(Interview with Ming, 15 Mar 2023)

The two field notes illustrate how the playground marginalized children who lack access to sports training or have different preferences. For instance, Huohou, introduced in Chapter 4, is a rural migrant boy living with his aunt who does not have access to extracurricular activities, while Ming, another rural migrant boy, has rather limited access to sports training due to his family background. The marginalization of some children is exacerbated by the exclusivity of those familiar with the games, as when a boy playing table tennis stated, 'only people who know how to play can play.' However, this exclusion is not solely social; the design of the playground itself plays a crucial role in limiting opportunities for all children to engage and interact. As observed by Reimers and Knapp (2017), children regard the playground as a vast area for exploration and unplanned play, while adults might view it as a structured environment designated for specific activities and sports. The playground at Xincun Primary School was designed by adults to facilitate organized sports like basketball and football, but it may not accommodate the diverse interests and backgrounds of all children, including factors like gender and socioeconomic status. Although gender is the more significant factor shaping playground experiences, the rural-urban divide also plays an important role. This is notably evident in the case of rural migrant children, whose limited access to extracurricular activities influences how they navigate and engage with the space. Thus, the design continues to marginalize those who lack access to sports training or who have other preferences for interaction with their peers, with gender being a central factor, but rural migrant status also influences participation and access.

School Festivals

The principal understood and interpreted Quality Education as the necessity for children to '*possess knowledge that is not covered in textbooks or in compulsory education*' (Interview with the school principal, 16 Jan 2023). To achieve this goal, the principal holds 'festivals', such as the Culture Festival and Sport Month annually. In my observations, these 'festivals' are typically structured as 'exhibitions' or 'performances'

rather than opportunities for 'fun' or skill development. As a result, children from working-class families, particularly rural migrant children with limited educational and financial resources who lack art or sports skills, are often excluded or overlooked in these activities. For example,

The day the school had a drawing festival as a warm-up event before the Children's Day Festival, children who were recommended by the art teacher to participate were sitting on the playground with their paintings. I saw Tianze and Zhuorui, who were recommended to sit on the playground, and they were surrounded by their classmates during the break to see their drawings. Shihao, a migrant boy, was among the crowd. Shihao told me that all the students in Grade 3 learnt to draw lotus during art class, but Tianze and Zhuorui were taking classes outside the school, and their drawings looked less free than others who drew on their free will and can represent the class's reputation. Shihao also proudly said that he also got a chance to perform on Children's Day, which is actually a class chorus by each class, meaning that migrant children or children's performances that are 'too free' and cannot represent the class' reputation do not actually get chances to show their own works.

(Fieldnote, 24 May 2023).

The head teacher that I interviewed shared a similar picture:

Ms Xu: 'On art festivals, for example, the Calligraphy Festival, students will vote for one or two kids who can write well to join in, and for the Drawing Festival, they will vote for children who drew best to take part.'

Boyang: 'To what degree do you think migrant children were included in this?'

Ms Xu: 'Very seldom. It's not like other children exclude them; it's because they can draw. I mean, we all have the ability to draw, but their drawing is obviously not trained. All the festivals are in the form of competitions and exhibitions. I told the parents to let their children learn something about art; this is what modern education is about, but maybe because some of them came to the city simply in the pursuit of better grades.'

(Interview with the headteacher, 23 Jan. 2023)

Having received training itself can be the hierarchy, which may resemble that forms of art are regulated and should be in the way of 'modern' and 'western' and having received art training shows parents' 'modern' ways of education. For example, Ms Xu acknowledged migrant children's ability to draw but not to participate in school activities, especially competitions, as 'their drawing is obviously not trained'. In this sense, they admit that 'we both can draw' while denying migrant children's drawings and the fact that migrant children seldom are voted by their peers as their drawings look like they have never been trained before. This perspective reveals a bias, as she simultaneously admits that 'we all have the ability to draw' yet dismisses the legitimacy of migrant children's artistic expressions.

Qualitative studies indicate that recognizing and accepting cultural diversity is a mainstream educational practice aimed at fostering inclusivity in primary school environments. This involves activities that recognize students' religious identities, such as the inclusion of Eid al-Fitr celebrations in schools as noted by Finnish principals (Rissanen, 2021), and practices that validate the diverse cultural backgrounds of all children through the celebration of various religious and non-religious festivals (Kustatscher, 2015). For instance, in the study, Xincun Primary School tended to prioritise events centred around traditional Chinese culture like calligraphy and poetry, as well as themes related to environmental conservation such as tree-planting festivals. Meanwhile, children may have differing perspectives on what constitutes culture deserving of celebration. For example, for children in Class A, with nearly half of the children from rural areas, the characteristics of rural areas, such as natural resources and traditions, are an interesting culture for children. This can be manifested in children's everyday interactions (see in Chapter 4) and is especially evident in children's interest and pride in attending agritainment. Agritainment (farm tourism) in China refers to the entertainment of rural households offering accommodations and meals with a rustic charm to tourists. This phenomenon has been described as an attempt to craft a weekend retreat for the urban middle class (Jia et al., 2022). For example,

Jiaming, Huohou, Wangyin and some other kids were chatting in a circle during free play time in PE. Jiaming, a migrant boy, praised how silkworms can be so tasty after they are toasted. Hanbo, another migrant boy, was praised for being able to climb trees and catch fish in his hometown. He was particularly proud that he could catch fish in the

stream near his house, and his dad would cook the fish he caught. All the children were amazed and even jealous of being able to let the whole family eat the fish the child caught. Wangyin, an urban girl, was praised for going to agritainment with her parents during weekends, and all the other children jumped in, sharing their experiences in going to agritainment and regard these as absolutely delightful experiences.
(Fieldnote, 4 May 2023).

In the fieldnote, it seemed that migrant children from rural areas were proud of their rural heritage and experiences, whereas non-migrant children were attracted by their adventures and upbringing in villages and also took their experiences in agritainment as a pleasure to 'show off' to their peers. This dynamic highlights a nuanced interaction, where the migrant children's pride in their unique skills, such as fishing and climbing trees, creates a sense of envy and respect among their peers. Conversely, urban children sought to validate their own experiences through shared discussions about agritainment, using these outings to establish social connections and demonstrate their own sense of adventure. This also resonates with findings from Chapter 4, that rural migrant children can use rural heritage (e.g. accent and traditional culture) as assets to build friendships and are accepted and valued by urban children. The school, on the contrary, showed different attitudes towards rustic culture:

'I saw the headteacher while watching children rehearse for the Children's Day Festival. I asked the principal if there was a festival about rural culture, especially for migrant children to share their experiences, as I found children seemed interested in this. The principal looked pretty shocked and told me that rurality is hardly a culture, and they will never have this! She repeated the efforts the school made in covering migrant children's experiences of being bullied. I asked her if they had reported being bullied. She said very seldom, but the media reported it.'
(Field note, 26 May 2023)

The field notes highlight the school's efforts to protect migrant children by downplaying their rural identities and focusing on measures to shield them from bullying. The principal's emphasis on minimising reported incidents, despite acknowledging media coverage, reflects a protective stance aimed at creating a safe environment, albeit at the expense of recognizing and celebrating the diverse backgrounds of migrant

students. The stories about rurality within the school context also resonate with McCormack's findings (2002) regarding rurality as a cultural concept and how children perceive rural culture differently from adults. McCormack's study highlighted that children in rural New Zealand often conceptualised rural life through elements of agriculture and nature. They associated rural settings with imagery such as grass, gates, fences, farm animals, and farming activities like tailing, feeding out, haymaking, and milking. Conversely, urban children tended to relate to rural experiences through recreational activities or exposure to rural life through media consumption. McCormack (2002) also noted that children's understanding and portrayal of rural life were influenced and sometimes limited by adult perspectives, which often stigmatised rural areas as economically disadvantaged. Similarly, in my research, the principal's attitude toward rural culture was dismissive, considering it something to be concealed. Her efforts to 'protect' migrant children from their rural backgrounds inadvertently perpetuated and reinforced the stigma associated with rurality. These incidents align with McCormack's (2002) argument that children demonstrate agency not only through their actions but also as 'thinkers' (p.207). Through its lack of celebration or acknowledgement of rural culture, the school marginalised and silenced the cultural identities of migrant children. Despite this, the children openly shared their experiences and perspectives on rurality, actively constructing and reinforcing positive representations of rural life, as discussed in Chapter 4.

Class Activities

The Ministry of Education recently released the Compulsory Education Labor Curriculum Standards (2022 Edition), marking the official establishment of labour education as an independent subject in primary and secondary schools (Wang, 2022). This initiative aims to equip students with practical life skills such as organizing and cooking, while also allowing them to experience the rewards of agricultural production activities like growing vegetables and raising poultry. As Wang (2022) notes, this shift represents a significant departure from the decades-long trend of 'de-agrarianization' in China's education system, which has historically prioritized urbanization and industrialization. This builds on the food literacy discourse (e.g. Cosby et al., 2022; Hess and Trexler, 2011), which highlights that young children are increasingly disconnected from nature and agriculture, with limited understanding of how food systems can negatively impact the environment. In Chinese labour courses, primary schools typically exhibit greater freedom and creativity in designing their activities, allowing for a more autonomous approach (Wang, 2022). Although activities in the

labour courses aim to teach children about agricultural knowledge, my observations indicate that they inadvertently showcase the skills of rural-urban migrant children, positioning them as 'pop stars' among their peers, particularly for those who may not be familiar with the educational system or have received formal art training, as mentioned earlier.

This story of visiting an urban farm could be an example. It happened on the day that the labour class was delivered to an urban farm with fruit trees. The class was delivered in the form that the staff on the farm introduced some basic knowledge of planting trees, and children competed in apricot picking in groups.

Huohou was so popular in the labour class this week. When the guide at the Fruit Picking Garden shares knowledge about fruits, especially apricots, for example, the season to sow seeds and harvest and how to do the maintenance of the apricot trees. Unlike in other classes such as English and Chinese, when Huohou was silent, Huohou was scrambling for answers this time! The other kids were surprised by how Huohou knew all the agricultural things, and when in the apricot picking competition, in which children group themselves in groups of 8 to compete to see who can get more apricots, unlike grouping in other classes, everyone wanted to group with Huohou this time. He chose his friends, and their team won.

(Fieldnote, 13 Jun 2023)

A similar thing happened in another labour class where children learnt and competed to shuck corn by hand:

Unlike other children who felt their hands hurt and could not husk that, Songyi did all the things quickly, he finished the first place and posed a cool ending pose after that. Children called Songyi 'corn superman' and as Songyi noted, he often did that with his grandpa back in the village.

(Fieldnote, 25 May 2023)

In the context of curriculum design and reform, Kelly, Luke and Green (2008) argue that the distribution of knowledge within the education system is typically controlled by groups in society that hold power or represent the dominant ideology. These groups

determine which forms of knowledge are prioritized, often marginalizing or excluding knowledge that does not align with their dominance. Therefore, children who are professional in the 'dominant' knowledge may possess more power or popularity among the groups. For example, in art festivals as has been discussed above, which are held in the form of competitions, only 'trained' and 'modernised' drawings are chosen to take part in the competition and exhibition, in this sense, migrant children who are not acquainted with, for example, urban buildings when 'building' was the theme of the festival, were more likely to be excluded from the activity, and so did their 'untrained' drawings or drawings about their village. It is in this process, Beach and Öhrn (2023) suggest, that the general cultural domination and marginalisation of rural consciousness and experiences marginalise rural knowledge and expose rural-urban migrant children to a, for them, culturally intensive curriculum. In my research, the rural-urban migrant children's knowledge and experiences have been marginalised, leading them into an awkward position in school festivals; for example, their drawings were devalued and celebrating rurality became a 'taboo' topic. The labour class, on the contrary, prioritises knowledge about agriculture, which is possessed by most of the migrant children in my class. Their professional agricultural knowledge made them 'corn supermen' in labour classes and gained them popularity among their peers. Hence, in this context, children's exclusion or inclusion in educational environments may also be linked to the perception of whose knowledge is considered dominant or desirable within the education system.

As previously discussed, the school's initiatives to promote friendships among students are primarily informed by educators' careful understanding of the diverse types and dimensions of friendships. While educators aim to foster close, supportive bonds among students, they acknowledge the limitations of achieving this ideal broadly. Therefore, they seek to cultivate harmony among peers through the intentional design of school architecture and the organisation of festivals. However, these structures and activities themselves may inadvertently exclude children from rural migrant backgrounds, especially rural migrant children with limited educational and financial resources. The following section examines teachers' everyday pedagogical approaches and their efforts to support and sustain student friendships.

5.4 Teachers' Approaches in Supporting and Shaping Children's Friendships

In addition to the broader education system and structured school activities, teachers play an essential role in shaping children's friendships. This influence is particularly

apparent through daily interactions and the nature of student-teacher relationships in educational settings (e.g. Vincent, Neal and Iqbal, 2018; Carter and Nutbrown, 2016). At Xincun Primary School, teachers often employ multiple strategies in shaping children's friendships. These include pedagogies correcting children's accents, seating arrangements, implementing a class leader system and responding to everyday children's conflicts.

Correcting Accent

As has been discussed in the Introduction and Literature Review, accent, as a key component of language variation, significantly influences the formation of identity, as even subtle differences in accent can swiftly reveal one's social background and migrant children are unwilling to communicate with others because they are worried that their accents cannot be understood (Dong, 2018; Kayaalp, 2015). At Xincun Primary, teachers recognize the accents of their students. This awareness originated when the English teacher remarked to migrant children that *'even their English carries an accent similar to their Chinese accent'* (interview with the English teacher, 13 Jan 2023). Additionally, the PE teacher mentioned to me that *'I only remember the names of students with a distinctly Northern accent'* (interview with the PE teacher, 24 May 2023). In my research, I first interviewed with Ms Wang (demographic sheet attached in Appendix), the Director of Moral and Studies at the school. In China, the emphasis on collective values like solidarity reflects both collectivist and Confucian principles and is central to the moral education program. Moral education is a compulsory component throughout all stages of schooling, encompassing the cultivation of personal moral quality and civic responsibilities toward the nation (Yu, 2008). Each school appoints a Director of Morals and Studies to oversee moral education, which, at the primary level, instils social, interpersonal, and political values. Researchers like Zhu (2021) and Hansen (2015) argue that Chinese moral education fosters a strong sense of collective identity, with teachers prioritising values such as solidarity and harmony to guide student behaviour and resolve conflicts. At Xincun Primary School, as speaking Mandarin in public spaces is mandated as part of China's language policy and deemed advantageous for the integration of migrant children, the Director of Morals and Studies holds responsibility for implementing and overseeing the school's Mandarin policy. In the interview with Ms Wang:

'We put slogans on the wall saying that only standard Mandarin is allowed in public spaces. We should not mention in class who are migrant children to

protect children's feelings, but the teachers should pay more attention to their accents, teaching them to speak standard Mandarin, so they won't be recognized as children from the villages and won't be bullied, and they will make friends.'

(Interview with the moral director, 30 Jan 2023)

Ms Wang's approach indicates that she believes migrant children must prioritize changing certain personal characteristics, particularly their accent to conform to standard Mandarin, before they can establish friendships. This perspective shifts the responsibility onto migrant children to adapt, suggesting that integration necessitates altering their identity rather than promoting more inclusive social attitudes that embrace diverse backgrounds. Ms Xu, the head teacher and the Chinese teacher of the class, shared a similar opinion:

'In the Chinese class, I particularly gave migrant children more chances to read texts aloud in front of everyone so that I can correct their accent. I don't want them to, one day, after they graduate, people make fun of them because of their accent.'

(Interview with the headteacher, 23 Jan 2023)

According to Peled and Bonotti (2019, p.145), in terms of factors influencing people's prestige, class and competence, there exist not only a 'visible minority' but also an 'audible minority', with the latter being characterised by the flaw of accent. The way Ms Wang and Ms Xu contend that their children's accents should be prioritised reflects how the school interprets and responds to Quality Education, which seeks to refine children's accents for urbanised citizens as they assumed. This perspective categorises children with accents as the 'audible minority' (Peled and Bonotti, 2019, p. 145) and resonates with Lippi-Green's (1997, p.64) claim that 'accent serves as the first point of gatekeeping.' Therefore, in the interview with Ms Wang and Ms Xu the way they believe migrant children's accent has to be taught first so that they can get 'entry' to friendships or be less likely to be bullied thus in a way of regarding the accent-related 'rurality' as deficit, which is not superior or comparable with 'urban' habitus and the dominant culture, and thus have to be treated first. Accordingly, promoting standard languages over nonstandard varieties reflects a perception of nonstandard language use as incorrect, leading teachers to feel obligated to encourage their students to adopt the standard language first. Similarly, in Dong's (2018) study in Beijing, she found that

the teachers' emphasis on equal treatment was rooted in the assumption that migrant children should assimilate and become part of 'us' rather than remain as the 'other'. In other words, they should be corrected and mainstreamed: behaving in 'our way' and speaking in 'our' accent so that they can become a 'normal' child and are treated equally.

Therefore, the process of correcting children's accents is deeply ideological, as it involves elevating one language variety to the status of standard while devaluing and marginalising others. In this regard, the perspective shifts the responsibility onto migrant children to adapt, suggesting that integration necessitates altering their identity rather than promoting more inclusive social attitudes that embrace diverse backgrounds. For example, in the interviews, the expression 'so they won't be recognized as children from the villages and won't be bullied, and they will make friends' demonstrates that integration necessitates altering children's identity rather than promoting more inclusive social attitudes that embrace diverse backgrounds. Similarly, in the research of Rollock (2007), while exploring how and why Black pupils fail in schools, in discussions about identifying academically successful students, some staff emphasised traits like hard work, while others focused on dress and behaviour. A teacher who initially denied a link between appearance and academic performance later suggested that popularity among staff is tied to conformity to uniform rules, rejecting items like hooded tops or Nike apparel. This perspective implies that rather than fostering an inclusive social attitude, the expectation is for children, particularly Black students who may wear such clothing, to change themselves to fit the school's narrow definitions of success. Similarly in the research about teachers' attitudes towards Gypsy and Traveller children in British schools, Bhopal (2011) noticed that Gypsy and Traveller pupils often challenge the stereotype of obedient and diligent students, leading some teachers to view them as non-conformist and defiant. Therefore, while both schools promote inclusion through 'good practice,' this focus inadvertently emphasised their differences, reinforcing their status as outsiders. This approach suggests that instead of fostering inclusive social attitudes, the expectation is for these students to change their behaviour and conform to dominant school norms, placing the responsibility on them rather than the educational environment to embrace diverse identities.

Similarly, my research at Xincun Primary indicates that teachers' attempts to instruct migrant children in standard Mandarin demonstrate their care for these students, as

they are concerned that 'people will make fun of them because of their accent.' However, this strategy is grounded in a deficit perspective of rural migrant children rather than promoting an inclusive environment that values cultural diversity.

Seating Arrangement

Seating arrangements are also used by the head teacher to separate close friends to prevent talking during class, as well as to pair students whom the teacher hopes will form friendships that support academic progress. As discussed in Chapter 5.2, teachers endeavoured to pair students whom they assumed would spur each other on in learning.

In the seating arrangements in Class A in Xincun Primary School, the teacher arranged seating in the way that:

Ms Xu: I arranged seats according to the height of students first, then tall, gender, and the combination of outgoing and quiet personalities and characteristics, and good or bad eyesight.

Boyang: Would the seating be permanent, or could it be changed? Can children change themselves?

Ms Xu: No, they can't. I normally separate them when, for example, the two children are not familiar with each other, but I think they will have a positive influence on each other, so I arranged them to be desk mates. But they became friends and talked during class, so I had to separate them. The naughty boys have to sit in the left row themselves, they are a bad influence.

(Interview with the headteacher, 23 Jan 2023)

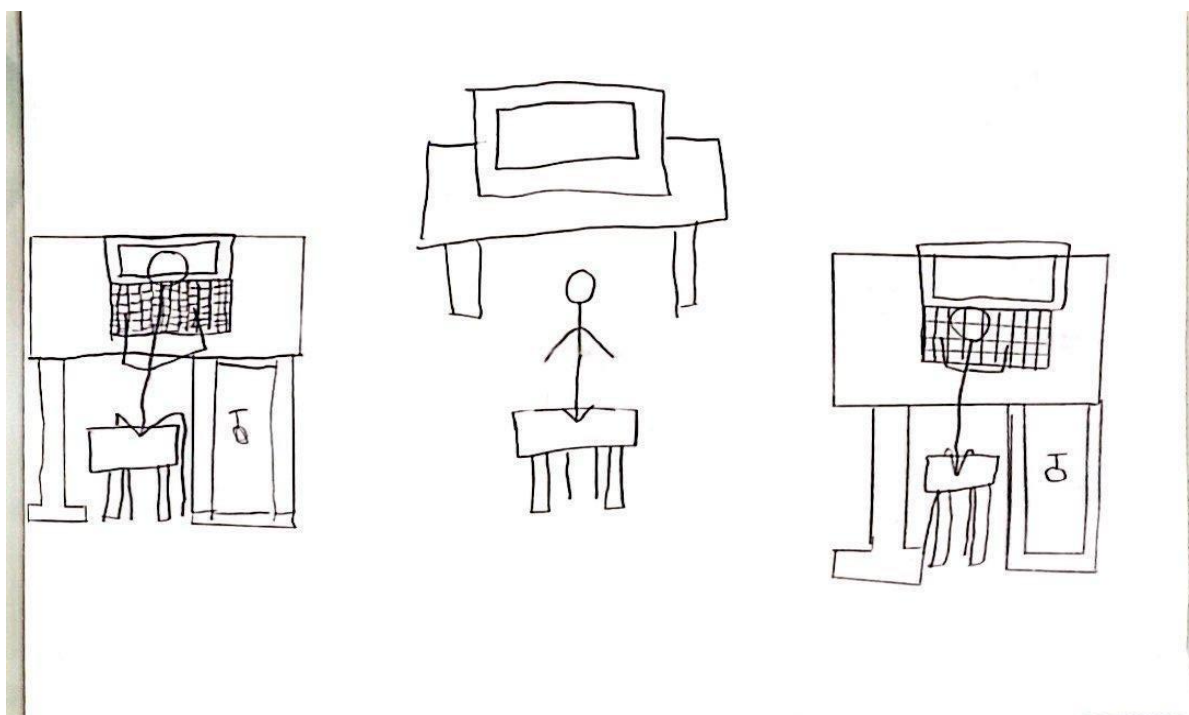
The art teacher also shared her similar consideration:

'We sometimes suggest to the head teacher that some students become close after sitting together. We will try to make them stable if they foster healthy friendships, which is helping each other to learn. But if they were together being naughty in class, I would go to the head teacher to separate them.'

(interview with art teacher, 6 Feb 2023)

The interviews reveal an ambivalent approach among teachers regarding children's friendships in the classroom. On one hand, teachers like Ms Xu recognize that friendships can have positive influences, as evidenced by her seating arrangements that aim to pair students who may benefit from one another's company. This strategy reflects an understanding of the potential for friendships to enhance learning and promote collaboration among peers. However, this perspective is complicated by the concern that these friendships can also lead to distractions, as demonstrated when Ms Xu had to separate students who became overly chatty during class. Similarly, the art teacher acknowledges the dual nature of friendships, highlighting that while some relationships can foster stability and mutual support, others may devolve into disruptive behaviour. This tension illustrates that while teachers value the friendships formed among students, they also see them as a potential threat to classroom governance; for example, when children develop close friendships with desk mates, they may talk during class. Moreover, it also shows that teachers use the seating plan as a way to curate the children's friendships according to their own ideas about what matters in friendship, as has been discussed in Chapter 5.2, teachers regard children's friendships as ways to help them study and therefore, seating arrangements is also based on teachers' ideals of children's friendships.

Children themselves also shared the experiences that they must be separated because they already become friends and talked during class, for example, Muzhao's (an urban boy) drawing about himself and his best friend (Tianxiang, another urban boy) illustrates that:



(Figure 17. A drawing by Muzhao)

In Muzhao's drawing, he and his friends were sitting far away from each other (Muzhao is on the rightmost row while his best friend is in the left row), with the teacher, who is standing at the teacher's desk in the middle. In Muzhao's interview, he described his drawing and mentioned his story with his best friends, how they were separated and how their friends were maintained afterwards:

'My best friend, Tianxiang, I didn't know him a lot before. The teacher made us be desk mates as we are of similar height. Later, we became friends. We did paper folding once during class. We made frogs using paper, and the teacher separated us because we couldn't concentrate on studying. Now if I want to let him know something, for example, where to play after this class or if I feel bored during class, I send him small, tiny notes and students sitting between us help us send it.'

(Interview with Muzhao, 29 Mar 2023).

The experience of Muzhao demonstrates how a teacher's seating management can assist students in forming friendships, as this aligns with the teacher's expectations.

However, once children become friends, their 'unexpected behaviours' like paper folding or talking during class may lead to their separation. This has also been shared by Dongding (an urban boy):

'I like school, but I don't like having classes. I can't play or talk with my friends in class. You know Yisan's seating? He is far away from me, the teacher doesn't allow him to sit near me. Now a girl who studies well sits next to me, but we don't have lots of things in common and don't want to talk or play together.'

(Interview with Dongding, 29 Mar 2023; his friend Yisan is a rural migrant boy)

Similarly, a rural migrant girl, Chengxi, shared that:

'The person you like, you can't sit together; the person you dislike, you will be seating together. Teachers say it is good for study, to avoid distractions.' (Interview with Chengxi, 14 Apr 2023)

Therefore, in Class A, the headteacher appeared to have the authority to help children bond with specific peers or to separate them if needed. However, teachers' understanding and management play only a limited role in children's friendships, as children retain some freedom and agency in these relationships, which often remain hidden from adults (Vincent, Neal and Iqbal, 2016). For example, in Muzhao's case, 'note passing' enabled two children to stay connected with friends seated far away. This scenario underscores the restricted role teachers have in directing or enforcing friendships among children. Similarly, in Vincent and colleagues' (2018) study, teachers recognized the essential role of friendships in children's wellbeing and generally avoided imposing strict restrictions on their freedom to form connections. Although teachers encouraged interactions through seating arrangements, their efforts to control or shape friendships were often limited in effect. This can also be observed in the student leader system, which will be discussed in the next section.

Student leader system

In China, the student leader system is widely implemented in schools, where students with strong academic performance and adherence to school principles are selected as class leaders. Their role is to assist teachers in managing the class while also fostering

the ability of leadership and a sense of obedience among students (Hansen, 2015; Zhu, 2021).

In the class of this case study, class leader selection happens at the start of each semester. There is one class monitor (a girl) and four vice class monitors; the number of four is because the head teacher is trying to keep a balance of two boys and two girls. There are also two Sports Representatives helping PE teachers in managing PE courses, one Study Representative who is a model for studying, one Chinese Class Representative who is excellent in Chinese and helping Chinese teachers in managing Chinese courses, one maths Class Representative who is excellent in maths and helping English teacher in managing maths courses and one English Class Representative who excellent in English and helping English teacher in managing English courses. Normally, the head teacher nominates three or four children with the highest grades in the last term's final exams, and the children vote for the representatives. The headteacher also divided the class into small groups, each group having around 4 members, including one group leader. The group leader is assigned by the head teacher. Sometimes, it is the students with good grades or more able to discipline others, while sometimes, it is simply because the teacher is trying to cultivate some students in taking responsibility. The responsibilities of group leaders typically include collecting students' daily homework on behalf of the teacher. Additionally, if a group member misbehaves, the group leader is expected to record the incident in their notebook. At the end of the week, the groups with the highest number of recorded infractions are criticized by the headteacher during the class gathering (Fieldnote, 2 Mar 2023).

Thus, the way student leaders described their relationships with and supervision of their peers suggests they may have replicated their teachers' methods of exerting authority. This implies that the interaction between students without leadership and student leaders may not be equal, potentially mirroring a hierarchical dynamic. The class-leader model was proposed by the head teacher to empower the class leaders supervising other students' behaviour in their studying and friend-making. However, children themselves do not actually respond to the model effectively, as class leaders normally help their good friends in covering their mistakes, and this happens across social divisions (gender and migration experiences):

Zihan: Ran is definitely my best friend. He is the leader of our group, and every time I did something wrong, but the teacher didn't find out, he would help me cover it by not writing down what had happened. This rescued me from being criticised by the headteacher and being embarrassed in front of everyone.'

(Interview with Zihan, a migrant boy, 28 Mar 2023; Ran is an urban boy)

Jiayi: Every time I have to stand in the corridor and monitor if there are students running or chasing each other, I seldom write down the names of my best friends. I don't want them to be shamed in front of everyone and feeling bad.'

(Interview with Jiayi, an urban girl, 13 Apr 2023)

The way Youran and Jiayi helped their friends by covering their mistakes and not reporting to the teachers shows the way children's agency played a role in the governance of the teachers and how this can transcend the rural-urban hierarchy. Also, how Ran helped Zihan to 'rescue me from being criticised by the headteacher and embarrassed in front of everyone' and Jiayi worrisome that 'don't want them to be shamed in front of everyone and feeling bad', in contrast with the previous section that teachers regard children as 'human becomings' and their friendships should be taught, Zihan and Jiayi's stories revealed that children themselves value their friendships in their own ways. The way Youran and Jiayi protect their friends' feelings, which reflects the children's perception of friendship as a voluntary relationship grounded in emotional support and understanding (see Chapter 4), stands in contrast to the teachers' efforts to establish hierarchical management of students.

However, the head teacher shared in the interview that she did '*not attempt to have migrant children or children from working-class families to be or not to be class leaders*' (interview with the head teacher, 23 Jan 2023). Whereas in practice, as PE class requires a Class Representative with professional sports abilities and art class requires a Class Representative with professional art abilities, I've noticed that in reality, 'the head teacher intended to vote for Tianze, who is an urban boy with parents working as accountant and teacher, advocating that he is the few ones in class who receives formal basketball training' (Field note, 7 Mar 2023) and 'Zhuorui was advocated by the head teacher, who is a girl both parents working in local government and received formal drawing training each week' (Field note, 7 Mar 2023). Therefore, although the

head teacher did not intentionally try to exclude certain groups of children, those who did not achieve high exam scores or lacked formal weekly extracurricular training were rarely chosen. However, in my observations and through the interview with children, children shared that *'I tried to persuade Ms Xu to have Yiyou as a group leader as he will cover my mistake'* (Interview with Songyi, 18 Apr 2023); *'I'm hopeless but I hope my sister does well in this dictation so she can be the group leader and I can relax a bit, don't worry being noted down and shouted by Ms Xu'* (Interview with Wangyin, 23 Mar 2023) and *'when Ms Xu criticised Ming and said he cannot be the group leader any more, all children in the group praised Tianze in front of the teacher, hoping he can be the next leader'* (Field note, 18 Apr 2023). Therefore, although the head teacher did not intend to create a hierarchical structure, one nonetheless emerged, replicating the children's social backgrounds. Nevertheless, consistent with findings from other qualitative studies involving children in diverse contexts (e.g., Vincent, Neal and Iqbal, 2018; Carter and Nutbrown, 2016), this research illustrates that children still retain a notable degree of agency in educational settings. Thus, although teachers did not directly contribute to or try to perpetuate inequality, their emphasis on skills and academic performance still led to the marginalization of rural migrant children, particularly those with limited educational and financial resources. In contrast, rural migrant children demonstrated agency by supporting one another in ways that transcended the rural-urban divide.

Responding to conflicts

In daily teaching and classroom management, conflicts occasionally arise among children, which requires intervention from teachers. My observations reveal that teachers strive to approach these situations with care; however, their approach is largely shaped by their perceptions of which child is more 'disadvantaged.' Teachers frequently rely on categories such as gender and migration background as 'resources' to inform their strategies for handling these conflicts.

For example, the category of gender can serve as a guideline for teachers, as performing 'gender-appropriate' behaviours is sometimes used to manage conflicts:

'In my observations, Yiming is an urban boy who loves to kiss other boys to show his love and passion, but not all boys seem to enjoy it or kiss back. Today, when the children were queuing for lunch, he suddenly kissed Shihao and Yiyou, who were standing in front of

him. The boys who were kissed said, "Ewww... Disgusting..." out loud, and Yiming seemed upset. Shihao and Yiyou were also unhappy because they didn't like being kissed. The head teacher yelled at Yiming only, stating that boys can kiss girls when they get older and girls can kiss girls, but boys cannot kiss boys, which means that Yiming is not a good boy.'
(Field note, 7 Apr 2023)

Also, in PE Class,

'Ran, the boy PE Class Representative, and Jiaxi, the girl Class Representative for this period, were in a quarrel about whether the class should do running for pre-exercise or walking. It seemed that most children in the class preferred walking, as suggested by Ran. However, the PE teacher told Ran to listen to Jiaxi, as a real man should respect girls.'
(Field note, 18 Apr 2023)

The head teacher's intervention highlights how the teacher's own gender stereotyping and heteronormativity, rather than gender alone, serve as lenses through which conflicts are managed. By yelling at Yiming and stating that 'boys cannot kiss boys' and 'a real man should respect girls,' the teachers reinforce the gender norms that dictate acceptable behaviour, thus reinforcing societal expectations regarding masculinity in dealing with conflicts among children. This response reflects Butler's (1990) concept of identity construction, wherein gender norms are enacted through repetitive performances, demonstrating how individuals come to embody and internalise societal standards. For Butler (1990), gender is not merely an attribute but a series of acts and behaviours that create the illusion of a stable identity. In this sense, the headteacher and PE teachers' gendered norms illustrate a rigid gender binary. Furthermore, Jackson and Scott (2004) expand on the notion of Butler's 'compulsory heterosexuality' by exploring how societal norms compel individuals to conform to specific gendered behaviours and relationships, framing heterosexual interactions as the normative standard. In this context, the head teacher's comments reflect an entrenched belief system that not only reinforces traditional masculinity but also positions same-sex affection as threatening to the established order. This approach underscores how teachers may unconsciously draw from societal gender norms to

navigate conflicts among children, perpetuating the idea that expressions of intimacy between boys are inappropriate and must be curtailed. Therefore, the management of the head teacher also echoed Renold's (2005) work, indicating that children's sexualities and their relationships are heavily influenced by societal expectations. Her research suggests that the construction of children's gender identities as being framed within a hierarchical and presumed heterosexual paradigm. In this framework, any deviation from normative masculine or feminine expressions is seen as a challenge to heterosexual dominance (Renold, 2005). Correspondingly, my study shows that teachers presuppose children's conformity to gender rules and tend to navigate interpersonal conflicts through a gendered lens that prioritizes adherence to these norms.

Apart from gender, social categories and divisions can also intersect in determining who is considered 'poorer' at resolving conflicts among children. For example, stories in English, PE, and maths classes:

'A local girl, Wangyin and a migrant boy, Ming, accidentally crashed into each other during the break before maths. Neither child wanted to say sorry. The English teacher told Ming to say sorry to Wangyin in front of everyone, as this is gentlemanly behaviour. She then quietly told Wangyin to say sorry to Ming too as Ming is already poor as being a migrant boy, and a good child should show empathy to others [...]'
(Field note, 23 May 2023)

Tianze (an urban boy) and Huohou (a migrant boy) were good friends, but today in PE they were caught in a fight today as they were fighting over a sucker punch that they picked up at a playground together. Both of the boys cried. Ms Xu took Tianze to the teacher's office. After comforting Tianze, Ms Xu persuaded Tianze to give the sucker punch to Huohou and say sorry to him as Huohou is a migrant child who also happened to have to live with his aunt here and their family income was below average. She continued comforting Tianze by saying, You don't need to cry. Compared with Huohou, you have so many good toys, and Tianze has to show empathy to Huohou. Tianze finally agreed, admitting that he lived a far better life than Huohou.
(Fieldnote, 6 Jun 2023)

Songyi, a migrant boy, makes fun of Jiayi, an urban girl, by saying she is fat and her skin looks dark. The math comforts Jiayi first by saying Songyi, a migrant boy who grew up with his grandparents and his grandparents living in mountainous areas for their whole life. The maths teacher persuades Jiayi to forgive Songyi as his background makes him not know how to talk. She continued by telling Jiayi that she had to yell back at Songyi. The maths teacher later shared with me that she was a left-behind child when she was young, and she knew the toughness of being bullied, so she taught Jiayi to yell back.

(Field note, 15 Mar 2023).

The expression 'don't know how to talk' was articulated by the teachers many times during my observations, and in China, this indicates that a person doesn't know how to communicate well and has poor emotional intelligence. In the story involving the maths teacher, her assumption that Songyi is making fun of Jiayi's body reflects Bernstein's (1970) sociolinguistic research, which showed how social class identity is reflected in people's use of language codes. Bernstein (1971) argued that, depending on their families' social class backgrounds, people have different access to language codes, with children from working-class backgrounds more often using restricted codes that are not suitable in modern school settings. Furthermore, the manner in which the maths teacher encouraged Jiayi to respond assertively, stemming from her own experiences as a left-behind child, which suggest that her own experiences as migrants and their wellbeing can significantly impact her behaviour.

Moreover, the manner in which teachers encourage children to 'show empathy' and 'forgive' reflects their commitment to practising Quality Education, which emphasises the importance of showing empathy towards those who are less fortunate (Reiß, 2014). This perspective is also aligned with Vincent and colleagues' (2018) assertion that emotional intelligence can be seen as a vital form of capital. According to Vincent and colleagues (2018), social and emotional well-being is a new mode of governance that shapes desirable citizens. They noted that teachers often model appropriate friendship behaviours, such as demonstrating fairness and optimism, and emotional regulation is seen as essential for fostering children's friendships. Similarly, the approach teachers took in this research to encourage and persuade children to exhibit empathy towards others also reflects their understanding of children's friendships as has been discussed,

emphasising that even if students cannot become close friends, they should at least learn to cooperate effectively with one another.

Additionally, although the Literature Review has highlighted Yuval-Davis's (2011) support for a constitutive approach to categorization that employs intersectionality as an analytical framework, which views categories as interrelated and mutually transformative rather than merely additive, Nawyn (2010) shifts the focus to emphasise that migration studies should go beyond comparing different genders to also understand why gender has become a significant category within the field. In this context, migration experiences appear to be an 'elephant in the room' that schools avoid discussing openly, as teachers quietly advised Wangyin to apologise to Ming, recognizing that Ming's status as a migrant boy already places him at a disadvantage. Despite this, migration experiences remain a crucial factor for teachers in managing conflicts. For instance, when Tianze and their migrant friend Huohou fought over a toy, Ms Xu highlighted Huohou's economic challenges and his status as a migrant child to encourage Tianze's empathy, suggesting that understanding Huohou's difficult circumstances was essential to resolving their conflict. This approach not only fostered a sense of compassion but also reinforced the idea that socioeconomic status should influence how children navigate relationships. Similarly, the maths teacher's guidance to Jiayi in addressing Songyi's mockery emphasised the importance of considering Songyi's migrant background and the hardships he faced growing up in a challenging environment. This perspective aimed to cultivate understanding and forgiveness among students, yet it also inadvertently positioned migration experiences as a central factor in social dynamics, illustrating how teachers navigate conflicts by prioritising migrant status while reinforcing existing social hierarchies among students.

5.5 Conclusion

This chapter focused on how educational settings influence children's friendships. The findings indicate that grounded in the principles of Quality Education, which promotes fostering citizens with collective values and positive interactions with unfamiliar individuals (Reiß, 2014), along with teachers' personal beliefs about friendships, educators often prioritise and value supportive relationships among students. However, teachers acknowledge that such supportive dynamics are not always feasible. Additionally influenced by neoliberal educational demands, where schools must maintain their academic reputation, teachers interpret friendships as a mechanism to encourage students to excel academically. When this ideal of supportive friendships

cannot be fully achieved, teachers strive to foster a sense of unity and collective identity among students. They also foster a fluid but blur interplay between friendship and general friendly behaviour to cultivate a stronger sense of belonging within the school community. Through these efforts, teachers aim to develop students into citizens who can collaborate effectively with diverse individuals. To support these goals, teachers employ strategies like seating arrangements and a class leader system. However, teachers also revealed their complexities and contradictions. Although not intentionally perpetuating inequality, their practice of assigning class leadership roles and seating arrangements based on academic performance ultimately marginalized rural migrant children, who typically lacked access to the educational resources needed to develop such advantages.

Additionally, the school, recognizing the diversity among its students, organises festivals and activities to promote friendship and inclusivity, especially for migrant children. However, consistent with findings from Snow et al. (2019) and Wood (2020) certain aspects of the school's design and activities may inadvertently marginalise students from disadvantaged backgrounds, such as girls and those from rural migrant families. While educators aim to show care, they often do so by trying to kindly silence the rural-urban migration category. For instance, rural culture is seldom celebrated in school events, and students are encouraged to adjust their accents, which educators believe aids their social inclusion.

Nevertheless, children maintain agency in their friendships. As outlined in Chapter 4, children have unique perspectives on rural culture and migration, viewing them less negatively than adults might. This finding aligns with research emphasising children's agency in their social relationships (e.g., Vincent, Neal and Iqbal, 2018; Ahn, 2011) and supports the 'new' sociology of childhood framework, which considers children as active contributors to their own social worlds (Qvortrup, 1994; Prout, 2005). This approach highlights that children's friendships are shaped by their own interpretations and interactions, not solely by adult-imposed views. Moreover, although teachers adopt a constitutive approach to categorization, which uses intersectionality as an analytical framework by viewing categories as interrelated and mutually transformative rather than simply additive (Yuval-Davis, 2011), their efforts to address students' friendship conflicts remain influenced by hierarchical assumptions. Specifically, they tend to perceive rural-urban migration experiences as the most disadvantaged, thus

prioritising these students as the most in need of support when conflicts arise among children.

Chapter 6. Parents and Children's Friendships

6.1 Introduction

In the previous chapter, I analysed how children's friendships are shaped by the school environment as part of the research question of 'How are migrant children's friendships shaped by adult worlds –parents, schools and wider educational policy contexts and social inequalities?'

A significant body of research has examined parental endeavours to navigate the schooling landscape and support their children's development of new friendships (e.g. Vincent, Neal and Iqbal, 2018; Romano et al., 2009; Tympa, Karavida and Siaviki, 2021). My current research shows that parents do typically acknowledge the significance of their children's friendships, particularly in relation to children's well-being and sense of belonging, and actively seek to facilitate the establishment and nurturing of meaningful peer relationships. In this chapter, I will scrutinize parental perspectives on children's friendships and their concerted efforts to foster and maintain these connections but also manage and steer to maximise the child's social location and capital.

The dynamics of children's friendships within diverse social contexts are complex, and influenced by factors such as parental attitudes, cultural backgrounds, and migration experiences. This chapter initially explores the multifaceted nature of children's friendships through the lens of parental perceptions and actions. Through an analysis of interviews with parents and grandparents and fieldnotes, I will examine how parents and grandparents perceive and prioritise their children's friendships, highlighting themes such as the secondary importance of friendships compared to academic achievement, the role of friendships in providing practical assistance, and the development of social skills through friendships. In the second section, I will analyze how parents in this study facilitate their children's friendships, observing patterns of inclusionary and exclusionary boundary work that are similar to those identified by Rollock and colleagues (2011). Specifically, I will explore how parents engage in inclusionary boundary work that emphasizes similarities to reduce distinctions among children to help children build friendships, as well as exclusionary practices that enable children to form friendships with peers from similar backgrounds while excluding others. Furthermore, I will examine how the intersectionality of gender, language, and migration experiences shapes parental approaches to managing and supporting their

children's friendships. This analysis will elucidate how parents from rural migrant and urban backgrounds navigate the complexities of fostering their children's friendships and parents' approaches to their children befriending children from diverse backgrounds.

6.2. Parents' Understanding of Their Children's Friendships

As has been discussed, a body of research has endeavoured to comprehend the challenges parents face in navigating the educational landscape and the consequential impact on their children's emerging peer relationships (e.g. Vincent, Neal and Iqbal, 2016; Tympa, Karavida and Siaviki, 2021). Parents commonly acknowledge the significance of their children's friendships and often endeavour to facilitate the establishment and maintenance of meaningful social connections. This section will analyse the perspectives of both rural migrant parents and urban parents concerning their children's friendships, encompassing themes such as the balance between academic achievements and friendships, the role of friendships in achieving practical help, and the recognition of friendships as pivotal social competencies and skills.

6.2.1 The tension between academic commitments and friendships

Several parents in my study have articulated the tension between dedicating time to academic studying and fostering friendships, with a significant portion advocating for prioritising studies. This sentiment is particularly pronounced among migrant parents, whose migration often stems from aspirations for their children's educational advancement. For instance, Tianwei, the father of Yiyou, who relocated his family to the outskirts of Beijing when Yiyou's elder sister began primary school while Yiyou was in kindergarten, emphasised the primacy of academic achievements of his children rather than friendship. As the owner of a sizable auto repair shop, Tianwei underscored the importance of acquiring cultural knowledge and educational achievements, viewing friendship formation as secondary to academic pursuits:

'We are not migrating for him to make friends. We migrated because of the poor educational resources back in the village. We think there is no future for the children in this highly competitive society. So, all we have to do is ensure they get good grades [...] We also squeeze time for him to learn Taekwondo; children in the village don't have

opportunities for this, and we hope he cherishes this [...] Everyone can play. If we just wanted him to play well, we wouldn't even migrate.'
(Interview with Tianwei, 6 Jun 2023)

This statement, articulated by Tianwei, illuminates the considerations underpinning parental decisions to migrate in pursuit of enhanced educational opportunities for their child. Rather than solely emphasising the social aspect of migration, Tianwei underscores the pivotal role of education in shaping his child's prospects in a highly competitive society. His decision is grounded in the perceived inadequacy of educational resources in their village. By prioritising academic achievement and providing extracurricular opportunities such as Taekwondo training, Tianwei aims to equip his child with the skills and competencies necessary for success in a competitive society. He, therefore, put friendships as less important than the study of the children, as 'if we want him to play well, we wouldn't even migrate.'

A similar value is also shared by Xiuqin, Chengxi's grandmother. She was a farmer in her hometown and had only a primary school degree. She migrated primarily to help her children by taking care of her grandchildren. Although Xiuqin shared with me that she felt her limited power in having a say in Chengxi's education, she emphasized that *'the family agree that Chengxi's playing time with friends should be limited as they tried hard to migrate for Chengxi's learning'* (Interview with Xiuqin, 28 Jun 2023). Another migrant mother, Fangyu, Yaoxin's mother, who was running a flower shop, also stressed that there is *'no time for play and friends, she's here to study'* (Interview with Fangyu, 5 Jul 2023).

Similar values are also shared by Lisan, a migrant mother of Mei, who works in a local clothing factory, and her husband works as a chef in a company. Compared with Tianwei, Xiuqin and Fangyu, Lisan did not only emphasise good grades but also the cultural benefits of the urban, which also seemed to contradict building friendships. In the interview, Lisan shared that:

'She has to achieve good grades. This is the top priority. Also, we migrated because we wanted her to know about culture and art. There are more galleries and museums in cities. I want my child to know this. [...] We also chose this school because it's good at teaching English, so maybe my child can study abroad or at least foreign companies and

find good jobs [...] People always say 'quality', and I want her to possess more quality [...] During vacations, we went back to our hometown, and it was a pleasure seeing Mei know more culture than her peers. This made me feel absolutely worth it for migration [...] I really wanted her to escape farming as her elder generations did. [...] It's a pleasure she made friends, but she's not here to play.'
(Interview with Lisan, 9 Jun 2023)

The mention of 'It's a pleasure she got friends, but she's not here to play' by Lisan reflects the secondary importance placed on friendships compared to academic and professional goals. This is also shared by urban parents, for example, Yiming's father Zhuowei shared that 'playing too much and spending too much with friends will distract him from study' (interview with Zhuowei, 26 Jun 2023) and Zhuorui's mother Duanyu shared that 'good to have friendship time for relaxation from the study, but the main job is to study' (interview with Duanyu, 21 Jun 2023). This perspective suggests that, for parents, while friendships are appreciated, they are not the main focus of the child's experience in the new environment. Instead, the family prioritises academic success, cultural exposure, and potential future opportunities such as studying abroad or securing desirable jobs; they then underscore the importance of urban habitus and English learning. This is especially true for rural migrant parents, particularly those with higher incomes and more flexible schedules, allowing them to take their children to museums and galleries. In contrast, urban parents rarely mentioned cultural exposure in their interviews. A similar pattern was observed in research conducted in rural India, where Aslany (2020) found that higher-income families are more likely to associate rural life and agriculture with uncertainty and hardship. This view was most clearly reflected in their desire for their children to receive a private English-medium education and become proficient in English. Proficiency in English is viewed not just as a valuable economic resource that opens doors to non-farm and high-status jobs, but also as a crucial factor in securing future opportunities and success. Similarly to Lisan, this emphasis on academic and professional goals, such as learning English, over social relationships may stem from the family's belief that these achievements are fundamental to their child's long-term success and socio-economic mobility. This perspective may also reflect an additional pressure faced by migrant families, where the pursuit of success leaves little space for emotional well-being and leisure, rendering friendships secondary in children's lives.

The research also highlighted a tension between children's friendships and academic study. However, the data suggests that unlike migrant parents, particularly those from the working class, middle-class families are more confident in incorporating their children's friendships into their daily routines. For example, Dan (mother of Zixing), an urban middle-class mother who works at a local middle school, said that:

[...] She can play with her friends anyway. We can play video games or we can arrange playdates. [...] Grades are, of course, important, but I don't think this means she has to sacrifice all her time to study.
(Interview with Dan, 17 Jun 2023)

Similarly, Jin, a mother who migrated from rural to urban areas, is running a courier service company with her husband with a good income and is proud that both she and her husband possess college degrees migrant parents, disclosed that:

'Study is important, but I don't think that my girl is a good student if she only knows how to study. Playing with friends can, of course, be put on the timetable.'
(Interview with Jin, 19 Jun 2023)

In the interviews, both Dan and Jin express an understanding of the importance of balancing academic achievement with friendship, and compared with rural and urban working-class parents, they are more confident in balancing these by stating 'I don't think this means she has to sacrifice all her time to study' and 'playing with friends can of course be put on the timetable.' Nevertheless, parents across different migration statuses, genders, ages, and socioeconomic backgrounds consistently linked children's friendships to their academic development, including cultural knowledge. This partly challenges the notion of 'natural growth' and 'concerted cultivation' generated from the research of Lareau (2003) by suggesting children's upbringing as a social class and racial practice. Lareau's (2003) two-year ethnographic study in the United States, focusing on children between the ages of 7 and 10, identifies 'concerted cultivation' as a parenting approach that involves actively engaging in children's lives, organizing structured activities, and prioritizing the development of their talents and potential. This approach, identified by Lareau (2003), is often associated with middle-class families and is believed to foster a sense of entitlement and greater cultural capital among children. On the contrary, 'natural growth' is often associated with

working-class families and is characterised by a greater emphasis on informal learning experiences and allowing children to learn through everyday interactions and experiences. The notion of ‘natural growth’ and ‘concerted cultivation’ is further enriched by Vincent et al., (2012) as a more racialized strategy as Black middle-class families, endeavour to equip their children not only with academic credentials but also with accolades in music, sports, performing arts, and various activities to facilitate their children to be more included. My current research further revealed that both ‘natural growth’ and ‘concerted cultivation’ are also significantly influenced by migration experiences, therefore, they could also be regarded as a ‘migration strategy’ in China. However, this challenges the previous argument that ‘concerted cultivation’ is a universally shared feature of parenting, as it highlights the differing strategies employed by rural migrant and local families, as well as the varying opportunities and constraints that shape these parenting styles. It suggests that migration status is a key factor in shaping the degree to which ‘concerted cultivation’ can be practised, particularly when access to resources may be limited or influenced by socio-political factors. Parents, irrespective of socioeconomic backgrounds, whether urban or rural migrants make efforts to provide their children with academic and cultural resources (e.g., museums and English courses) to support their educational development. This aligns with neoliberal educational trends in China, where individuals are increasingly responsible for their children’s education (Zhang and Bray, 2017). Within this context, it seems that the academic pressures appear to conflict with the promotion of children’s friendships for some parents, although middle-class parents demonstrate slightly greater confidence in balancing these competing priorities.

6.2.2 Friendship for Practical Help

In contrast to children, who see friendships mainly as sources of mutual support, enjoyment, and assistance (as discussed in Chapter 4), parents, especially migrant parents, tend to view these friendships primarily as a means of providing help. However, unlike children, parents do not always associate emotional value with this assistance. This is particularly shared by rural migrant parents as *‘at least having a friend is knowing someone in class she can go to when she needs help’* (interview with Xiuqin, 28 Jun 2023), *‘if she has a friend, when she’s sick so cannot go to school or doesn’t understand something from the teacher, she can ask for help’* (Interview with Jin, 19 Jun 2023).

This is particularly shared by Dawei (Huohou's father), who is a migrant worker. He is a truck driver and seldom at home. Huohou spent more time with his aunt and cousin, who were also migrants and rented a small apartment near the school. Huohou was raised by his grandparents in rural areas and spent most of his holidays back in the village. In the interview, Dawei particularly highlights assistance as an important 'function' of friendship rather than emotional support as disclosed by Huohou (see in Chapter 4):

'From my viewpoint, friendships for my son as a migrant child go beyond just companionship; they're about forming connections that can offer mutual support and assistance. In our situation, pure friendship may not always be the primary goal. Instead, we value relationships that can provide practical help and assistance to our children in navigating their new environment. I hope Huohou can make friends that offer him assistance when needed. [...] I feel relieved when I'm not at home, knowing he will be good at school as he knows whom to turn to [for help].

(Interview with Dawei, 21 Jun 2023)

Dawei emphasises that for his son with a migration background, friendships are more than just about having someone to hang out with. He believes that these relationships should offer practical support and assistance, especially in navigating the challenges of their new environment. Dawei's perspective reflects a pragmatic approach to social connections, prioritising friendships that go beyond casual companionship and instead provide tangible help when needed (e.g. van Blerk, 2011; Mizen and Ofosu-Kusi, 2010).

Another participant, Fangyu (Yaoxin's mom), also raised the same topic compared with Yaoxin's stressing of emotional closeness, Fangyu prioritised the function of help in a new environment of friendships. Fangyu and her husband are running a flower shop nearby, they expanded their business to online shopping and express delivery last year so that Yaoxin's grandmother migrated to help take care of Yaoxin, Fangyu shared her worry that both she and her husband were busy with business and hope that friendship may help Tianmei in the new environment:

'Before migrating, I've always seen the news that migrant children are being discriminated against. these cannot be news to you, I assume.

Both me and her dad are super busy, we seldom have time to help Yaoxin with things like arranging playdates. But Yaoxin told me she's got friends and enjoys school. I am glad to hear that, for us as parents, I don't expect their friendships to last forever, but at least somebody can help her during the six years.'

(Interview with Fangyu, 5 Jul 2023)

From Fangyu's perspective, the significance of friendships for her daughter Yaoxin is acknowledged within the context of their hectic schedules. Fangyu's contentment arises from the realisation that friendships serve as a form of support for Yaoxin during their six-year period. Compared with children's interpretations of friendships (see Chapter 4), Fangyu does not harbour expectations of emotional closeness as children regarding the longevity of Yaoxin's friendships but instead values the immediate assistance and companionship they provide.

Rural migrant parents in this study who understood children's friendships as a way of providing practical support echoed with the research of Kathiravelu (2012), that friendship is a coping strategy helping migrants to alleviate the additional burdens of living in a highly controlled, stratified and even uncaring place. Kathiravelu (2012) noted that for migrant children, difficulties involved not only in the everyday knowledge about a place but the actual process of urban learning that needs to be required. Therefore, friendships are often crucial to this process for low-wage migrants and are thus useful in quickly learning skills or codes of behaviour that enable better fitting in so as not to stand out or transgress established social and cultural expectations of urbanity (Bunnell and Kathiravelu, 2016). The findings of this study, consistent with broader literature, suggest that parents often endorse an instrumental perspective on friendship, prioritizing peers who can offer positive influence and practical support. For instance, Zhu (2020) observed that parents guide their children's peer selection not merely for socialization, but as a strategy to connect them with well-behaved and supportive companions.

However, although 'help' is also mentioned by children in interviews (see Chapter 4), compared with children who attached more emotions to 'help' as friends should help them and they feel the obligation to help friends which marks true friendship and especially 'besties', parents did not highlight the emotional labour of help or the particular friends that help their children, their understandings of 'help' in children's

friendships are more appeared to link with the cooperation of 'crucial acquaintances' mentioned by Wessendorf and Phillimore (2019). For Wessendorf and Phillimore (2019), 'crucial acquaintances' are instrumental, situational relationships in super-diverse urban contexts. Unlike close friendships or family ties, these connections are casual yet vital for accessing resources, services, and opportunities, particularly for migrants. Such ties help individuals navigate multicultural cities, fostering belonging and integration. This is shared in rural migrant parents' interviews that *'pure friendship may not always be the primary goal. Instead, we value relationships that can provide practical help and assistance,' and 'I don't expect their friendships to last forever, but at least somebody can help her during the six years.'* Parents' understanding of friendships is also echoed in the research of Phillimore and colleagues (2017), who observed migrants extending various forms of support to strangers, including sharing information and providing language skills. This reciprocity underscores the mutual support often inherent in crucial acquaintanceships, reinforcing the notion that these relationships are instrumental in navigating new environments. Therefore, according to Phillimore and colleagues (2017), while these individuals may not share deep emotional bonds or engage in frequent interaction, they nonetheless play essential roles in offering assistance and facilitating access to opportunities, akin to the role of crucial acquaintances during settlement.

6.2.3. Friendships as Pathways for Developing Social Skills

Parents in this study emphasized that the formation of friendships among children serves as a key avenue and platform for the development of their social skills, namely the ability to coexist and cooperate with children (and later, with adults in their future life) from diverse backgrounds.

This perspective, however, was not equally prevalent across groups. It resonated strongly among urban parents, who frequently framed friendship as a primary context for internalizing key social competencies. In contrast, few rural migrant parents explicitly linked friendship to the development of social skills; only a minority endorsed this view. Sifeng (Shige's grandmother), who migrated from rural to urban areas to take care of Shige and assist with her parents' business, is one such example. Shige's parents ran a tiny restaurant near the school. She mentioned that *'Shige is entering a bigger world with more different children compared to her hometown, so building friendships is a way for her to learn how to deal with others'* (Interview with Sifeng, 28

Jun 2023). Dawei (Huohou's father) also mentioned that *'building friendships is important as children will have the abilities to build networks in future'* (Interview with Dawei, 21 Jun 2023).

Compared with migrant parents, more urban parents understand the importance of developing children's friendships as an approach to developing the social skills of cooperating with children from different backgrounds. This includes Qiyao, an urban mother of Jiayi; both she and her husband work in local hospitals. Qiyao is proud that her daughter Jiayi is the class monitor and can do her job well. She shared that:

'I've heard from the teachers that Jiayi does her job well, she unites her classmates and befriends everyone [...] She, of course, went back home and complained about some of her classmates' behaviours, and I told her that this is society [...] The value of her to be the class monitor is she has to develop the ability to befriend all her classmates, at least seem good with others, even though she doesn't like them or doesn't accept certain behaviours'

(Interview with Qiyao, 3 Jul 2023)

In the interview, Qiyao highlights the importance of befriending and maintaining harmony with classmates, even when personal preferences or behaviours clash. She further links the significance of developing friendships to the ability to tolerate differences, emphasizing the need to 'at least seem good to others.' Similarly, another urban parent, Duanyu, who works at a public institution, also stressed the importance for her daughter Zhuorui to have friendships with her classmates as an approach to developing her social ability:

'Zhuorui once came back home in her Second Grade, complaining she didn't like her desk mate, a boy from a rural area. She said he blew his nose and put his booger everywhere. I explained to her that she should show her understanding as the boy is from a rural area and may not have received education about not putting boogers everywhere. [...] I also convinced her that she has to learn to cooperate with very different individuals; building friendships with that boy is a lesson she could learn from which benefits her ability to cooperate with others in future.'

(Interview with Duanyu, 21 Jun 2023)

Similarly, in her interview, Duanyu also underscores that building friendships is essential to developing social skills and highlights the importance of approaching differences with tolerance. She views her daughter's interaction with a rural classmate as an opportunity to cultivate both understanding and the ability to cooperate with diverse individuals. This perspective resonates with Crozier, Reay and James' (2011) work on middle-class parenting, where they suggests that middle-class families often emphasize the development of cosmopolitan values and global social skills in their children, encouraging them to engage with and understand diverse cultural backgrounds. However, Duanyu's understanding of her daughter's friendships as important ways to 'learn to cooperate with very different individuals' is based on her assumption of the hierarchy and stereotype towards children from rural areas, believing that 'he may not have received education about not putting boogers everywhere.'

Another example is from an urban mom, Dan (Zixing's mom), who is a local schoolteacher, and her husband works in a foreign company. She was glad that her child was able to befriend migrant children and stay positive with the proportion of migrant children in class:

'I don't mind if her friends are migrant children. I think this is the world that she needs to know; it's not all people you like. You have to know how to communicate with others, even though some of them are tough to cooperate with or communicate with.'

(Interview with Dan, 17 Jun 2023)

In this interview excerpt, Dan expresses her attitude towards her daughter's friendships, including those with rural migrant children. She emphasises the importance of exposing her daughter to a diverse range of people, suggesting that this reflects the reality of the world she will live in. However, her assumption is also based on the stereotype and stigmatisation of migrant children as she connects migrant children as 'not all people you like' and 'tough to cooperate with or communicate.' This perspective, however, reveals the social and cultural capital that Dan imagines her daughter can gain by interacting with rural migrant children. By learning to navigate these social dynamics, Dan may believe her daughter is acquiring a skillset that will help her

succeed in a world that values adaptability and the ability to engage with diverse, sometimes challenging, social groups. This imagined skill of cooperation with rural migrant children could be seen as an important social tool for Dan, not necessarily for equality, but for navigating and leveraging differences in a competitive social environment. Similar functions of children's friendships are also shared by urban working-class families, in the interview with Zhuowei (Yiming's dad), who works in a local furniture market:

'I think it's good if Yiming befriends other migrant children, as long as they won't have a bad effect on him. Making friends is an important social skill; not everyone he meets is someone he likes in the future. The textbook won't teach this, but this is important.'
(Interview with Zhuowei, 26 Jun 2023)

In Zhuowei's statement, he expresses conditional acceptance regarding his son Yiming's potential friendships with other migrant children, suggesting that such relationships are permissible only if they do not have 'bad effects'. By bad effects, Zhuowei indicates that with his assumptions derived from earlier social media and stereotypes migrant children may tend to '*steal things and be involved in fights due to financial hardships*' (Interview with Zhuowei, 26 Jun 2023). While Zhuowei appears to encourage Yiming's social interactions, there are underlying elements of stigmatisation and marginalisation present in his remarks by assuming that migrant children may pose adverse effects on others. Consequently, although Zhuowei seems to advocate for Yiming's potential friendships with migrant children, the conditional nature of his acceptance and the underlying connotations of stigmatisation and marginalisation underscore the intricate nuances of his attitude towards migrant children.

In this case, befriending migrant children presents an opportunity for urban parents to help their children develop the skills of cooperating with different individuals and developing multicultural capital. By this, urban parents view interactions with rural migrant children not only as an opportunity to teach social cooperation but also as a way to navigate and understand cultural differences. Although these differences may not be as distinct as those shaped by ethnicity, the contrast between urban and rural identities can still contribute to cultural diversity, helping children develop broader social skills and greater cultural awareness. Therefore, multicultural capital, particularly relevant in working-class or impoverished families, encompasses the cultural

resources and knowledge that individuals from these backgrounds bring to educational settings. It acknowledges the unique experiences, perspectives, and skills that may not be traditionally recognized or valued within mainstream educational systems. Reay et al. (2011) argue that individuals from diverse cultural backgrounds contribute valuable cultural resources and knowledge to educational settings, forming multicultural capital that encompasses linguistic, cultural, and social knowledge. Despite enhancing learning experiences and contributing to broader educational diversity, these assets may not always be recognized or valued within dominant cultural norms. In this research, the rural/urban hierarchy operates similarly, but with a notable distinction: rather than positioning rural culture as a separate or undervalued entity, it can be seen as part of the national narrative. Urban parents often view rural culture as a means for children to 'learn to cooperate with very different individuals,' reflecting an implicit national identity that marginalizes rural practices as secondary or less sophisticated. In contrast, rural migrant and urban children may view aspects of rural culture, such as natural resources and traditional festivals, as valuable forms of capital that help them build connections with peers (see Chapter 4). Thus, rural culture, while often undervalued in educational settings, is also intertwined with broader national identity, where it plays a complex role in shaping perceptions of cultural worth. Consequently, in this research, the rural-urban hierarchy worked in a similar way. Compared with both rural migrant and urban children who can view rural culture (e.g. natural resources and traditional festivals) as assets or capital for them to build connections with classmates (see Chapter 4), urban parents are more likely to view rural culture as an undesired or undervalued 'resource' for children to 'learn to cooperate with very different individuals.'

Therefore, building on an understanding of children's friendships, the ways in which parents facilitate their children's social connections seem to align with the patterns identified by Rollock and colleagues (2011). These efforts can be categorized into inclusionary boundary work, which emphasizes similarities to help children integrate and fit in, and exclusionary practices, which focus on guiding children to form friendships with peers whom parents prefer and who share a similar habitus. In the following sections, I will examine the approaches parents adopt in employing inclusionary and exclusionary practices to support and shape their children's friendships.

6.3. Parents' Inclusionary Boundary Practices

In this study, both rural and urban migrant parents utilize inclusionary boundary practices to assist their children in adapting to the school environment. According to Rollock et al. (2011), inclusionary boundary practices are employed by Black middle-class parents to highlight similarities and shared experiences with White middle-class families. This approach aims to minimize distinctions between the groups, thereby facilitating their children's integration and acceptance. Building on the research of Rollock et al. (2011), this study reveals that both rural migrant and urban parents appeared to believe that their families should be accepted and that their children should be shielded from bullying as a prerequisite for forming friendships. Furthermore, as previously discussed, compared with children who often prioritize emotional closeness in friendships, parents tend to place greater value on the practical support that friendships can provide within the school context. Accordingly, this section will explore how parents employ strategies such as displaying family and fostering tolerance in schools to protect their children from exclusion and facilitate the formation of friendships.

6.3.1 Displaying Family for Inclusion

Building on the work of Finch (2007), that families need to be displayed, and family display is a strategy aiming to legitimise in society, Walsh (2018) investigated how migrant families use family display as a strategy to assert their legitimacy in everyday life. This reflects their aspiration to be recognized as legitimate families within the local community. Walsh (2018) specifically examined the role of audiences in these displays, identifying who constitutes the relevant others for migrant families. Migrant families, therefore, often perceive themselves as being observed by specific audiences and strive to present their family as adhering to societal norms. Families, particularly migrant families in this study, demonstrated a notable emphasis on displaying their family in alignment with societal norms, which they perceived as a crucial strategy for facilitating their children's social inclusion and fostering friendships in a new environment. Walsh, McNamee, and Seymour (2019) further argued that family display is intricately linked to social structures. The following section will explore how parents utilize factors such as accents, material possessions, and dress codes as forms of family display, illustrating how these practices reflect broader social structures and shape their children's opportunities to build friendships.

Altering Accent

Resonating with research in China, several scholars have found that migrant schools and parents often attempt to protect children from bullying by encouraging them to correct their accents. This assimilation strategy aims to reduce their visibility as migrants and lower the risk of being targeted in urban school environments (e.g. Li, 2012; Dong, 2018; Dong, 2009). Migrant parents also shared their feelings on the necessity of correcting children's accents in this study.

For example, Xiuqin, Chengxi's grandmother, was a farmer back at home and had only a primary school degree. She was proud that she was able to adapt both Chengxi's and her accent for Chengxi's schooling and inclusion:

'The parents wanted to give Chengxi a better linguistic environment so that she could speak Mandarin well. So, I have tried to speak Mandarin with her since she was born. I particularly paid attention to it after our migration. I'm afraid she's looked down on as her grandmother is a farmer with a strong accent. [...] I also paid attention to her accent. Every time she unconsciously speaks in an accent, I tell her accent is only at home as you will be discriminated against.'

(Interview with Xiuqin, 28 Jun 2023)

A similar story is also shared by Fangyu, who shared her story of adapting her daughter Yaoxin's accent before migration:

'I believe you knew this from social media, migrant children being laughed at because of their accents. They are so young and easily hurt, and this will make them feel like they are not as good as others forever. So, I tried to correct her accent before migration, so she wouldn't be identified [as a migrant]. So, she can make friends equally as local children and be included here.'

(Interview with Fangyu, 5 Jul 2023)

Migrant mother Jin also shared her similar experience; however, compared with Fangyu and Xiuqin, Jin also believes that rural children have accents in speaking

English as well, which may be influenced by their Chinese accent and should also be altered before migration:

'Since Tianyi was born, the family tried to speak only Mandarin to her, so hopefully, Mandarin is natural for her. Have you noticed that rural children have accents in their English? I downloaded Western movies for children for my daughter to learn English. I tried to guarantee that all the words he spoke did not sound like migrants, so she wouldn't be bullied. And then she can make friends safely.'

(Interview with Jin, 19 Jun 2023)

The narratives of Xiuqin, Fangyu, and Jin highlight how migrant families adapt their children's accents to prevent social exclusion and discrimination. Xiuqin linked accent correction to ensuring Chengxi's inclusion and avoiding judgment. Fangyu emphasized protecting Yaoxin from being laughed at and fostering equal friendships. Jin extended this concern to English, aiming for her daughter to sound non-migrant to avoid bullying. These strategies underscore the role rural migrant parents attribute to accent in social integration. Their efforts to alter their children's accent align with findings that accent functions as a key identifier in discriminatory contexts (e.g., Dong, 2009; Li, 2012), thereby representing a practical attempt to mitigate barriers to inclusion within the school environment. Compared with children in this research who are interested in and value accents, rural migrant parents' attitudes towards accents resonate with teachers in this research who also believe that accents act as 'gatekeepers' for children's friendships, something that children should get rid of first before being bullied and finally building friendships (see in Chapter 4 and 5). Therefore, in China, marginalization and stigmatization work effectively through cultural and also phenotypical features (e.g. accent); however, by altering children's accents, migrant parents appeared to 'naturalize' stigma and subjection towards rural and migrant people. The emphasis on language (accent) also chimed with the research of Walsh (2018, p.77) that fluency of the dominant language in local society showed that the migrant family is legitimate; therefore, language can be regarded as a 'tool of display' for migrant families. In this study, parents believe that altering children's accents enables them to *'make friends equally as local children'* to build friendships.

The Role of Objects and Things

In addition to accent, both urban and rural migrant parents deliberately utilized material possessions to showcase their family's financial status as a means of shielding their children from exclusion. This strategy is particularly significant for rural migrant parents, as has been discussed, some of whom have achieved economic success and can afford the items their children desire, which hold value in children's material cultures. By doing so, these parents aim to ensure that their children are not marginalized based on their background, using material goods as a way to signal their integration into urban society. For example, Lisan cited a Chinese idiom that *'clothes make the man, and a saddle makes the horse'*, showing the family endeavours to *'buy good stationery for her, so nobody will think she looks shabby and bully her'* (Interview with Lisan, 9 Jun 2023). Urban father Zhuowei also shared his experience: *'Children tended to bully children from poor families,'* so his family *'always remember to bring expensive snacks for my son to school when snacks are permitted in school festivals'* (Interview with Zhuowei, 26 Jun 2023). This is particularly salient in interviews with migrant parents, for example, Jin, a mom in her thirties coming from rural China. She is a mother of two daughters, and her elder girl, Tianyi, is now in Xincun Primary. Compared with women in her generation in rural areas, Jin was proud that she obtained a college degree. She and her husband are running a small courier services company on the outskirts of Beijing, the family is also financially dependent on her father and mother-in-law, who have been running a big restaurant in the village for decades, and according to Jin, that was the most popular restaurant at the conjunction of three villages. Jin described themselves as rural middle class while introducing her family to me:

'I think we are the middle class, at least in the rural areas, also, I think when it comes to income, we are at least in the middle compared with other parents of Tianyi's classmates. I mean, we are not only financially comfortable, but we can also send Tianyi to the city to study, and later her younger sister as well. Both they and their dads have been to college before, and this is not very common.'
(Interview with Jin, 19 Jun 2023)

Yiyu's father, Tianwei, also expressed their identity as a rural middle class. The father runs a large auto repair shop, and the mother is a housewife. The family was able to rent an apartment in a fancy gated community near the school, and the father was pretty proud of it:

'We were rich in the village, although we don't live there anymore. I started a business in Beijing so that Yiyu and his elder sister could receive a better education there. I think we are even, at least the middle-class families here at the school. Every time the school allowed children to bring books or snacks from home for celebrations or allowed children to wear their own clothes instead of uniforms, I think his clothes and snacks were better than those of his classmates. And that's what I'm working hard for.'

(Interview with Tianwei, 6 Jun 2023)

Both Jin and Tianwei positioned themselves as the 'rural middle class', that at least they are the middle class in the rural areas. This made them proud that they enabled their children to receive a better education in cities. This highlights the diversity among rural migrants before their migration to the city, a point explored in more detail in the Introduction. For Jin and Tianwei, their efforts in distinguishing themselves from the stereotyped rural-urban migrant workers also manifested in the way they helped their children build friendships. Moreover, both Tianwei and Jin recognized the risk of migrant children feeling excluded and took steps to ensure their own children weren't subjected to such treatment by distinguishing them from the stereotypical image often associated with migrant children. Tianwei shared his parenting strategy with me, explaining:

'Every time I send Yiyu to school or pick him up, I will drive my Land Rover. I've got two cars and this one is better. I will clean it if I have time before picking Yiyu. Children sometimes will say Wow, your dad's car is big and cool, and Your dad is cool driving with sunglasses. Children will not bully him knowing he comes from an affluent family and his dad is protective. I will also give Yiyu more pocket money compared with his peers. I know children sometimes borrow money from him, and I know this is forbidden by the teachers, but it would be better if he is the one child borrows money from rather than is the one borrowing money from others.'

(Interview with Tianwei, 6 Jun 2023)

The interview excerpt sheds light on Tianwei's parenting style, revealing a blend of materialism and protective instincts. Tianwei's emphasis on driving their Land Rover,

symbolising wealth and status, suggests a focus on material possessions while displaying family as a strategy. This extends to ensuring their child arrives at school in a prestigious vehicle, likely to shield them from potential bullying and garner admiration among peers. Moreover, Tianwei's provision of more pocket money than their peers also indicates a desire to protect his child from potential harm and discrimination by creating and showing social hierarchy within their child's peer group. The extra pocket money facilitates participation in peer activities and acts as a means of assistance, fostering friendship formation and maintenance. This also mirrors Yiyou's friendships, as in an interview with Shihao (see Chapter 4), he distinguishes between his two best friends in terms of their ability to help with homework (Huohou) and lend money (Yiyou).

In the participant observation, I also noticed examples of the strategies through which parents leverage material possessions as a form of inclusionary work to facilitate their children's integration into school settings and support the development of friendships. These are the stories of Jiaxi and Wangwang, who are both urban children:

'Jiaxi is an urban girl who behaves well in class and is one of the class leaders. But she normally plays alone by herself, and teachers also shared with me that she doesn't have many friends. Today, Jiaxi was delighted to announce that her mother bought her an astronomical telescope and told her to invite her classmates to come to play! Children surrounded Jiaxi and asked her if they could go and play together.'

(Fieldnote, 18 May 2023)

'Wangwang's mother bought him a fancy watch, Wangwang wore it and let the classmates queue and take turns to wear his watch.'

(Fieldnote, 16 Mar 2023).

These field notes highlight parents' strategic use of material possessions to facilitate their children's social inclusion. In the first example, Jiaxi's mother buys her an astronomical telescope, encouraging Jiaxi to invite classmates to play, thereby fostering social interaction and friendship opportunities that she previously lacked in school. In the second example, Wangwang's mother purchases a fancy watch, which he uses to engage his classmates by allowing them to take turns wearing it, thus promoting social exchange for Wangwang. These efforts reflect how parents utilize

material possessions as tools to enhance their children's social standing and integrate them more fully into school social networks. As noted by Vincent and colleagues (2018), although the relationship between social class and material possessions is complex and material resources do not solely define social class, children nonetheless pay attention to the material possessions and objects of their peers and friends—such as the appearance of their homes. Similarly, Kustatscher's (2015) research demonstrates that children also notice material objects in the context of forming friendships and interacting with classmates, for example, observing what clothes their peers wear or what kind of yogurt they bring to school. In the context of children's social networks, therefore, parents' provision of desirable items, such as trendy hats or pocket money, can help children align with peer norms and foster shared interests, thereby facilitating social inclusion. However, utilising material possessions is not always effective; for example, Jin also sought to empower her daughter Tianyi with superior material possessions. However, in the interview, Jin went further by emphasising that both she and her husband had attended colleges in larger cities, allowing them familiarity with brands and a better education. They endeavoured to equip their children with not only superior material possessions but also what they perceived as 'better' parenting styles, deemed suitable for urban middle-class girls. However, in contrast to Tianwei, this parenting approach did not always yield successful results.

Jin: 'I think better clothes and stationery will help Tianyi not to be bullied by her peers [...] I did home tutoring when I was in college, and I found that middle-class girls in large cities are very 'ladylike', you know, they speak gently and elegantly. They are not like girls in rural villages who talk and laugh loudly, running across streets in villages fighting with boys, so I educated Tianyi in that way. We wanted her to be like that kind of city girl [...] But maybe she was too gentle. I bought her a very fancy MLB hat. Maybe her classmates were jealous of her, so they put sour ink on her hat. They may assume she is a soft one to bully because she has good hats and is a very gentle girl.'

(Interview with Jin, 19 Jun. 2023)

Jin's belief that providing Tianyi with better clothes and stationery will prevent her from being bullied by her peers reflects an understanding of cultural goods as markers of social status. In this context, Jin's emphasis on better clothes and stationery suggests

an attempt to elevate Tianyi's social status and align her with a certain cultural ideal associated with the 'rural middle class' identity. Furthermore, through her account of college tutoring experiences, Jin implicitly frames a contrast in gendered behaviour: she perceives middle-class urban girls as 'ladylike,' while depicting their rural counterparts as loud, thereby invoking class-based behavioural norms. By educating Tianyi to emulate the behaviour of middle-class city girls, Jin is attempting to shape Tianyi's cultural practices and social identity in accordance with a specific class-based ideal. However, Jin's efforts to cultivate Tianyi into a 'city girl' as she imagined may have unintended consequences. The incident involving the fancy MLB hat and the jealousy of Tianyi's classmates illustrates how attempts to visibly display higher social status through material possessions can sometimes lead to social friction and resentment. In Jin's example, where Tianyi faces bullying despite efforts to embody qualities associated with middle-class femininity, children being bullied can be multi-factored and intersectional and social boundaries are not easily or permanently disrupted by things or objects. This aligns with Nash's (2008, p.10) argument in her analysis of intersectionality, which contends that 'privilege and oppression' must be considered as interconnected, rather than as dichotomous forces. In this framework, an individual's position of privilege in one context may simultaneously manifest as a disadvantage in another, depending on the complex interplay of intersecting social identities. For example, in research in Pakistan (Taj, 2024), rural middle-class girls are also likely to be discriminated against, as the concept of education is guided by religious principles aimed at nurturing the intellectual abilities of girls while preserving their modesty and gentleness. The ultimate goal is to prepare them for the important roles they will undertake as wives, mothers, mistresses of households, and friends, serving as natural companions and supporters for men. Within this framework, the educational objectives are influenced by the 'feminine ideal' (Devji, 1991, p. 151), shaping girls to be obedient and gentle and this is also associated with the assumed modern lifestyle associated with middle-class norms (Taj, 2024). Although Taj's work focuses on education systems, my research shifts the emphasis to how adults, through both explicit and implicit practices, situate children within gendered frameworks. In Jin's case, her efforts to shape Tianyi's identity are influenced by societal norms surrounding femininity. She strives to mould her daughter into a culturally and socially constructed ideal of middle-class womanhood, reflecting broader expectations of gender roles. Similarly, in Jin and her daughter Tianyi's case, despite Jin's efforts to shield Tianyi from bullying by imparting her manners and appearances aligned with middle-class ideals, Tianyi still faces bullying. Jealousy and competition among peers,

exemplified by an incident involving a fancy MLB hat, can escalate tensions within social circles and classroom and playground hierarchies. The factor of gender or gendered parenting norms may also contribute to Tianyi's experiences of discrimination or bullying.

Dressing code

Apart from altering accents and displaying material possessions, both rural migrant and urban parents value the importance of dressing in schools as an approach to display family and prevent children from potential bullying. For instance, rural migrant mother Fangyu described her efforts to ensure that her daughter was always dressed in clothing similar to that worn by urban children:

'I know in the city clothes matter a lot. When she first started school, I noticed that other children all wore branded clothes or things I thought were "fashionable." At first, I didn't know how to dress her, but I learned quickly that the way she was dressed would affect how the others saw her. I started buying her clothes from the local urban stores and made sure she looked like the other children, so she wouldn't be looked down upon.'

(Interview with Fangyu, 5 Jul 2023)

Urban father Zhuowei, who works in a small local furniture market with his wife, also shared a similar concern:

'I think it's important for him to look good. [...] Of course, he's local, but I don't want him to be seen as untidy or careless or not as good as others. Children here notice everything, from what shoes they wear to the brands on their shirts.'

(Interview with Zhuowei, 26 Jun 2023)

The concern of clothing and wearing spread not only to working class, or especially working-class rural migrant families, Tianwei, who with better income identified his family as rural middle class shared a similar concern, although he linked dressing well more as 'looking urban':

'Even though children wear uniforms, they have to take them off several times a day, and my wife and I want to make sure that every time Yiyou's clothes are cool, he looks like an urban cool boy. [...] don't want him to be identified as a dirty rural migrant boy, who will play with that boy?'

(Interview with Tianwei, 6 Jun 2023)

Apart from the concern of children's clothing, parents, regardless of backgrounds, also shared the anxiety and necessity for them in terms of dress in schools. For example, Sifeng, the rural migrant grandmother of Shige, takes responsibility for picking Shige up each day after school. She shared that:

'I can't bear to and feel ashamed of spending money on new clothes because I don't earn money myself. But I will put on clean clothes when picking up Shige. Children from her class and her friends normally come to say Bye, Grandma, I don't want to look too... unlike others...'

(Interview with Sifeng, 28 Jun 2023)

Migrant mother Lisan also shared her efforts in clothing and believes that this is an approach to protect her child from being bullied:

'I'm not the type of person who cares much about clothes, but when I go to pick up my child, I make sure to dress well, like other mothers. [...] In our hometown, we normally just leave the kitchen and pick up children in aprons and slippers! But nobody does it this way. I don't want people to laugh at my child because of me.'

(Interview with Lisan, 9 Jun 2023)

Parents and grandparents from diverse backgrounds in this research underscore the ways in which clothing serves as a symbolic tool of inclusion and exclusion. For migrant parents such as Fangyu and Tianwei, ensuring their children adopt dress styles similar to those of urban peers is considered vital for social acceptance and for helping them blend in, thereby reducing the risk of bullying. Urban parents like Zhuowei also recognize the importance of clothing in signalling respectability and social status within the established norms of their community.

Furthermore, clothing serves not only as a tool to prevent bullying but also as a way to signal social alignment and a desire for inclusion, demonstrating legitimacy through family displays. Furthermore, clothing serves not only as a tool to prevent bullying but also as a way to signal social alignment and a desire for inclusion, demonstrating legitimacy through family displays. In a manner that echoes Hamilton's (2012) findings, this can be seen as a specific manifestation of a broader pattern where low-income families invest in visible consumer goods such as specific brands to mitigate class-based marginalization. This strategy, while intended as a form of social protection, often perpetuates the very economic vulnerability it seeks to overcome. Migrant parents, in this study in particular, appear to view clothing as a way to 'perform' local identity (after migration) in order to avoid stigmatization and enable their children to build friendships. They, therefore, value the dress code of both their children and them. The pressure to conform through dress aligns with research on socialization in urban environments, where visual markers like clothing serve as immediate indicators of socio-economic and cultural belonging. Similar to accent correction, which seeks to eliminate signs of migrant status, clothing becomes a key area where migrant parents actively work to protect their children from the risks of social exclusion. Ultimately, accent, material possessions and clothing function as tools for local and migrant families alike, helping to ease children's social integration and foster positive peer relationships. However, parents who frequently use material goods, such as changing dress codes or purchasing expensive gadgets for their children, often highlight their socioeconomic status in interviews. For instance, Jin described her family as 'rural middle class,' while Tianwei expressed pride in her successful auto repair shop and financial achievements as a migrant. Zhuowei also emphasized their local social standing. In contrast, parents facing financial struggles or challenges related to migration, as shared in their interviews, rarely discussed using material goods to support their children's friendships.

In addition to using accents, material possessions, and dress codes as forms of family display to support inclusionary work for children to fit in and form friendships, parents generally view children's friendships as a means of gaining practical assistance and developing social skills. However, when it comes to friendships with peers from diverse backgrounds, these relationships appear to be seen by parents as something to be 'tolerated' to maintain their children's social connections. This aspect will be further explored in the following section.

6.3.2 'Tolerance' in Maintaining Children's Friendships

In my research, parents often described helping their children maintain friendships with peers from different backgrounds as an act of tolerance. They believed such efforts involved significant emotional and social labour, particularly in navigating and negotiating cultural, social, or economic differences. For example, Qiyao, the urban mother of Jiayi, both she and her husband work in local hospitals. Qiyao is proud that as a monitor in class, Jiayi is able to be considerate to all of her classmates from diverse backgrounds and befriend them. Jiayi has two friends in school (but not in the same class), a migrant girl whose parents work as chefs and cleaners in a local school canteen. The other friend is a also migrant girl whom Qiyao didn't know their occupations. According to Qiyao, even though there were some dissatisfactions and 'tolerance' for her, she tried to arrange playdates for Jiayi as she believed Jiayi would be happy because of this.

'[...] so during the summer holiday, I arranged for them (the two girls) to come to my home to play. We live near a botanic garden, so the girls ride bikes in the garden. I was making dumplings; I am very good at making dumplings; that's Jiayi's favourite. So, when the children came back home, we would be ready for lunch [...] But I'm not very happy about the whole thing. I mean, the two girls' parents never showed up called me by phone or dropped their kids. The kids just took the bus. I mean, when Jiayi comes to other people's homes, at least I will make a phone call to the parents, as a thank you, and also to make sure that my kid is safe. [...] I only don't mind my child befriending children from whatever backgrounds because I love her [...] I can tolerate as long as she is happy.'

(Interview with Qiyao, 3 Jul. 2023)

In Qiyao's account, she describes arranging a playdate for her child Jiayi and two other children during the summer holiday. Despite her efforts to create a welcoming environment by preparing lunch and engaging in activities such as making dumplings, Qiyao expresses dissatisfaction with the situation. She notes that the parents of the girls did not communicate with her or express gratitude for the invitation, nor did they accompany their children to Qiyao's home. This does not align with her expectations and values which she believes she would tolerate as long as Jiayi is happy.

Similarly, rural migrant parents also shared their stories of how they help their children befriend others from diverse backgrounds, especially urban children, but also more of the experience of 'tolerance'. For example, Lisan, a rural migrant mother of Mei, who works in a local clothing factory and her husband works as a chef in a company, shared that:

'If Mei wants her friends to come over, I don't mind. I will buy snacks and fruits. But I just personally don't like the kids, the local ones. I think it's because nearly all of them are the only kids in their home, the families treasured them so much that none of them know any of the housework. They were scared and didn't know how to deal with it when juice was poured on the sofa or the toilet was not working. In our hometown, all kids of Mei's age can do housework. Girls even know how to make clothes on sewing machines. [...] But as long as Mei is happy.'

(Interview with Lisan, 9 Jun 2023)

In Lisan's statement, she expresses a willingness to host Mei's friends despite harbouring negative perceptions of local children. Lisan's aversion towards local children stems from her observation that they lack basic life skills and are not accustomed to household chores, contrasting with her perception of children from her hometown, who are portrayed as more self-sufficient and capable. This comparison implies a sense of superiority regarding her hometown's cultural norms and values and dissatisfaction with the values and behaviours of non-migrant children. Despite her disapproval of local children's behaviour, Lisan prioritises Mei's happiness and is willing to overlook her personal preferences for the sake of her child's social interactions. Lisan's account challenges Bourdieu's (1984) argument that the dominant class imposes legitimate culture to reinforce social hierarchies. Cultural capital, in this framework, legitimizes the tastes and dispositions of the urban middle class while devaluing working-class practices. However, Lisan resists this dynamic by rejecting urban norms rather than aspiring to them. Her critique of urban children as overly sheltered and lacking life skills subverts the expectation that rural migrants should adopt middle-class values. Instead, she positions rural upbringing as superior, undermining the legitimacy of dominant cultural capital. This inversion highlights how cultural legitimacy is not passively accepted but can be contested. While Bourdieu

emphasizes how dominant culture reproduces inequality, Lisan's perspective suggests that marginalized groups may assert alternative forms of worth, challenging the presumed universality of middle-class cultural capital.

Lisan's preference for children who exhibit self-sufficiency and responsibility also resonates with the internalisation of cultural values and norms inherent in her habitus. This reflects Bourdieu's (1993) notion that habitus encompasses the embodied cultural capital acquired through socialisation processes, which guides individuals in their interpretations and evaluations of social phenomena. Conversely, Qiyao's frustration with the lack of communication from the parents of her child's friends showcases a disjuncture between her habitus and the cultural norms prevalent in those families. Raised in an environment where clear communication and mutual respect are valued, Qiyao's habitus predisposes her to expect similar behaviour from others, highlighting the role of habitus in shaping individual expectations and behaviours within social contexts. Thus, the findings of this research are consistent with those of Vincent et al. (2017), which suggest that parents and children in London, from diverse backgrounds in terms of race, gender, ethnicity, and socioeconomic status, experience societal pressures to promote interactions across differences. These pressures include ethical imperatives to engage politely and amicably with neighbours or other parents in shared spaces such as schools, as well as broader national ideals of harmony and tolerance. However, these societal expectations are often complicated by personal fears and anxieties about proximity to those perceived as different, influencing how parents manage their children's friendships with peers from diverse backgrounds.

6.4. Parents' Exclusionary Work for Children's Friendships

In addition to inclusionary boundary work, both rural migrant and urban parents also employ exclusionary strategies to help their children build friendships. However, compared to inclusionary practices, parents are more proactive in engaging in exclusionary work, particularly in fostering friendships with children they consider appropriate. This section will explore how parents use extracurricular activities, weekends, holidays, and organizations, as well as their hesitations and reluctance in promoting exclusionary practices to help their children's friendships.

Extracurricular activities

Both rural migrant and urban parents appear to use extracurricular activities as a means of providing opportunities for their children to form friendships with those they consider ideal friends, and this is deliberate in terms of being selective and invited to these activities. In this way, extracurricular activities not only serve as a platform for children to socialise with preferred peers but also function as a tool for setting boundaries with other children. For example, Jiayi's mother Qiyao (urban) engages Jiayi in horse riding activities to help Jiayi befriend children she considers ideal for Jiayi to play with:

'Jiayi goes horse riding for extracurricular activities, we don't do that often as it is a bit expensive to do that weekly. But she has access to it, so she would make friends who also do elegant sports, and she considers herself to be better than her peers.'

(Interview with Qiyao, 3 Jul. 2023)

Rural migrant father Dawei, who works as a driver, actively engage his son Huohou in Chinese chess and also shares similar values:

'He plays Chinese chess; it is good for intelligence. I want him to form friends who are smart and whose parents share similar income and educational ideas with me.'

(Interview with Dawei, 21 Jun. 2023)

Jin also shared that she engaged Tianyi in an English class with the aim of Tianyi befriending other children who are good at English:

'She attended English tutors with an English teacher who studied abroad, which is expensive. Because the children there speak English far better than children from other tutoring classes, I hope they can befriend and practice their English together.'

(Interview with Jin, 19 Jun 2023)

In the interviews, Qiyao, Dawei, and Jin shared their values of engaging children in extracurricular activities, such as helping them befriend children whom their parents considered to be appropriate playmates. The way Jin believes that friends in the English class they were chosen would help Tianyi in learning English also echoed

parents' understanding of children's friendships as an approach to facilitate their study (see Chapter 6.1.1).

However, extracurricular activities can also act as an approach to building exclusive boundaries among children, whereas exclusivity does not necessarily relate to friendships as benefits for children's learning and grades but is also affected by the families' socioeconomic background. For example, Zhiji (Enyu's mother) shared a story with me about arranging for children to attend English tutoring courses. Both Zhiji and her husband work in local public institutions, and their child Enyu was good at English, Zhiji and other mothers in the class arranged an English tutoring course for some children in the class. According to Zhiji:

'We noticed that several children were particularly good at English, Jiayi's mother knew a great English teacher who studied in Australia before, we tried to create a good learning environment for the kids so we contacted the other moms whose children were good at English and put them in the same tutoring class in weekends.'

(Interview with Zhiji, 3 Jul. 2023)

There was one rural migrant boy, Yisan, who was also in that English class. Yisan was a migrant boy whose mother worked as a waitress and whose father worked at a local factory. Yisan is also great in English; however, he was later excluded from any other after-class activities since dinner at a buffet.

'We arranged dinner in a buffet restaurant for Christmas so that the children would know what Christmas is. All moms attended, and we paid for our own meals and our kids. After having dinner, we went outside, and we suddenly noticed that Yisan's mom was not in the restaurant! It was cold, she was shaky, and she was warming her hand with her bike. We suddenly felt so sorry for her [...] We then very seldom invite Yisan to activities like this afterwards, as we think this is the burden of his family [...] But we continue to arrange other activities for our children like this. I think it's important for children to play together and activities are sometimes themed so they will know some culture.'

(Interview with Zhiji, 3. Jul. 2023)

The arrangement of a Christmas dinner in a buffet restaurant serves as an attempt by Zhiji and other parents to expose their children to different cultures and traditions, thereby influencing and trying to foster children's understanding of globalisation. This aligns with the findings of Crozier et al. (2011), who observed that in addition to their individual, ideological, and ethical values, white middle-class parents were also driven by an aspiration for their children to be exposed to diversity, equipping them for their future roles as global citizens. This also echoes with findings from Yu (2016), which highlight that even middle-class Chinese parents, who prioritize the study of ancient Chinese for its role in fostering patriotism and cultural identity, still allocate significant time to English and art education, even when this requires reducing time spent on ancient Chinese. Similarly, Crabb (2010) observes the enthusiasm of Chinese parents for their children's English learning, evident in their involvement in English clubs and the adoption of English names, further underscoring the value placed on global linguistic and cultural capital. However, the absence of Yisan's mom at the dinner highlights the challenges faced by working-class and rural migrant families in participating fully in such activities due to financial constraints. Yisan's mother's absence, coupled with her discomfort outside the restaurant, evokes feelings of shame and sympathy among the other parents, reflecting the stark contrast in economic circumstances between families. Zhiji and other parents' subsequent decision to exclude Yisan from similar activities due to concerns about burdening his family underscores the complex dynamics at play. While Zhiji recognizes the importance of social activities for children's development and cultural exposure, the practicalities of including Yisan become challenging in light of his family's financial limitations. This highlights the structural barriers faced by working-class migrant families in accessing social opportunities and participating fully in community life. Also, this gradually shaped Enyu's social group after class more consist of children sharing similar family backgrounds.

Holidays and weekends

In addition to extracurricular activities, holidays and weekends also serve as key opportunities for parents to facilitate their children's friendships by grouping them with peers from similar backgrounds. For example, Duanyu (Zhuorui's mom, urban) shared her experience of gently excluding migrant families on weekend playdates in child-friendly malls. Child-friendly malls have emerged as a result of market-oriented reforms, providing children's space and services that were previously managed by the state. These malls offer a range of facilities and activities for children, from education and

entertainment to retail and services, all available for a fee. This commercialization trend reflects a shift towards privatised urban environments tailored for children's consumption (Shen and Lu, 2022). Both Duanyu (Zhuorui's mom) and her husband are now working in public institutions, Zhuorui has a good friend Shiger at school, who is a rural migrant girl, the two children were arranged to play in a mall nearby, however, this is further stopped by Duanyu that:

'We were taking the two girls to that mall. There are many facilities and activities on the Third Floor, like feeding rabbits and fishing for plastic fish. All the activities were not free of charge. Both Zhuorui and Shige were interested in almost all of them. I don't think activities like that would be a huge burden for me. I mean, I agreed with my child to take her out and wanted her to be happy, so I know I have to spend money like this, and this mall is affordable for me. But I noticed Shige's mom was reluctant to pay for the activities. I tried to pay for Shige once or twice, and her mother was more awkward, and I was awkward. Then I told Zhuorui that if you insist on playing in the mall every weekend, then maybe with Xiaoya, a daughter of my friend at work.'

(Interview with Duanyu, 21 Jun 2023)

Based on Duanyu's experience, the reluctance of urban families to include rural working-class migrant families in social activities can be attributed to differences in financial circumstances and social norms. Duanyu describes taking her child and a friend to a mall with various paid activities, indicating a willingness to indulge her child's interests and ensure their happiness. However, she observes reluctance from Shige's mother to pay for these activities, highlighting the financial strain experienced by working-class, rural migrant families. Despite Duanyu's attempts to offer assistance, Shige's mother remains uncomfortable, mirroring the discomfort and potential embarrassment associated with accepting charity or assistance from more affluent peers. This discomfort on both sides can lead to awkward interactions and a reluctance to extend further invitations for social activities, as Duanyu suggests when she remarks that Zhuorui plays in the malls with a friend from a similar family background. Thus, while both families harboured the willingness to help children maintain their friendships with a child from diverse backgrounds, socioeconomic status that intersects and

brought by rural and migration status still constrained them to befriend children who share similar backgrounds.

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Language code, intersected with socioeconomic status and migration experiences, also constrains parents' willingness to help children maintain friendships with children from diverse backgrounds through organizing holidays. The stories are shared by Qiyao (Jiayi's mother); as mentioned above, both she and her husband work in local hospitals. Qiyao is proud that Jiayi, as the monitor of the class, is capable of befriending children from diverse backgrounds, and this includes Tianyi (whose mother is Jin, as mentioned above). Both of the parents shared their experiences that the girls wanted to travel to Beidaihe before and their reluctance about it, the reluctance that ultimately prevented the trip from occurring.

Qiyao: 'I don't think playing with them is comfortable [...] Children can see themselves quite often at school anyways [...] Maybe their parents have higher income I don't know, as the mother talked about the restaurant run by her father-in-law in their hometown quite often [...] I don't think there's a need to live in fancy hotels all trip along, children don't have to experience fancy hotels as long as it is safe [...] I also don't think talking with Jin is easy, I don't like it when she tries to ask something personal; she just throws it to me [...] People sometimes guess each other in my workplace; asking directly is very uncomfortable [...] I really like spending family trips with my colleagues or her dad's colleagues. We know each other well.'
(Interview with Qiyao, 3 Jul 2023)

Similarly, Jin also shared her concerns but from a different perspective:

Jin: 'The children like to play with each other [...] I think the parents are too sour. Their talking seemed very reserved like they didn't want to talk [...] Also I know several parents in the class who work in government bodies are very proud of themselves and teachers respect them but why not let their children sleep in the best hotels so that they can be comfortable and they can share with their classmates after holiday how fancy the hotels were.'
(Interview with Jin, 19 Jun 2023).

According to the participant, describing someone's speech as 'sour' implies that the individual communicates in an overly literal manner, possibly tinged with jealousy or sarcasm, yet without explicit acknowledgement. This manner of speaking might be perceived as arrogant or patronising, leading to unease among those with whom he interacts. In these narratives, Qiyao and Jin offer contrasting viewpoints on parenting practices and social dynamics within their community. Qiyao expresses unease with the intrusive questioning and perceived materialism of Jin, prioritising safety and simplicity over the trip and also the conversation manners she prefers. Her preference for familiar working friends during family outings underscores her inclination towards maintaining a social circle that shares similar social backgrounds. Conversely, Jin critiques the reserved demeanour of Qiyao, labelling her as 'sour', and advocates for more transparent communication and extravagant experiences for children, believing it enhances their status among peers.

Bernstein's (1970; 1971) studies revealed that social class influences language use. Middle-class individuals often employ an elaborated code, which is complex and formal in structure, while working-class individuals tend to use a restricted code characterized by simplicity and reliance on implicit understanding. This distinction reflects their differential access to linguistic resources rooted in family background. In this case, however, Qiyao, who works in a local hospital, demonstrates a communication style characterised by indirectness and subtlety, which aligns with middle-class norms. She expresses discomfort with direct inquiries and prefers more nuanced forms of communication, suggesting a familiarity with codes of politeness and social etiquette often associated with higher social classes. In contrast, Jin, who appears to critique Qiyao's reserved communication style, adopts a more straightforward and assertive approach to language. Her remarks about the parents' perceived reluctance to engage in conversation and her emphasis on providing luxurious experiences for their children during vacations indicate a preference for directness and pragmatism in communication, typical of working-class speech patterns. These stories reflect the ways socioeconomic status, especially as it is brought by the rural-urban hierarchy in China, can intertwine with language, shaping people's preferences for befriending people from similar backgrounds.

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Joining social organizations

In China, NGOs with migrant populations organize weekend activities adjacent to migrant people's neighbourhoods for migrant children to support their social and

educational development and also as a platform for migrant families to build networks. These activities often include cultural enrichment, Reading Corner with free books, and recreational programs aimed at fostering community integration and mitigating the challenges faced by migrant children (Yang, 2020; Deng, 2022; Huang, 2016).

Previously, research in China has found that migrants rely on these sites to build networks and provide free activities for migrant children, support and extracurricular activities (e.g. Lin, 2016; Zhu, 2012). However, rural migrant parents in this study who identified as 'rural middle class' or felt secure in their income shared that they do not attend or take their children to organizations of this nature. For example, Jin shared with me that:

'I never took my child there. I think we are different from the stereotyped migrant children, and I don't want people to connect my child with them [migrant children], and I don't need people showing empathy to us.'
(Interview with Jin, 19 Jun 2023).

Tianwei also shared that:

'I never take my son there. All people in this neighbourhood and school know that organisations give donations to migrant children who want their children to receive donations, and everyone knows he is the kid receiving the donation. I'm worried that he will be looked down upon.'
(Interview with Tianwei, 6 Jun 2023)

This is similar to parents' attitudes towards school festivals, even though parents hope the school will have more festivals celebrating rural cultures, such as natural resources and traditions, they shared that *'but don't pick my child to introduce'* (Interview with Zhuowei, 26 Jun. 2023), and *'don't have my child to involve'* (Interview with Jin, 19 Jun 2023). Therefore, some rural migrant parents' (especially those with higher income) avoidance of attending these activities themselves also echoed with their ways of displaying family that rural migrant families endeavour to show their legitimacy after migration by showing that they are similar to urban (local) families (see in Chapter 6.3.1).

However, there are still a few migrant parents in this research who participate in the activities regularly and encourage their children to make friends in the organizations. For example, Lisan shared with me that:

'I tell my daughter that the friends she makes at the NGO activities are the best ones because they know what it's like to come from a migrant family. I don't want her to be in situations where she might feel inferior to local children. Here, she can be herself, and the other children and families are like us. It's a space where she can make friends without feeling left out.'

(Interview with Lisan, 9 Jun 2023)

Dawei also shared that:

'I think it's great that these NGOs create a space just for us. When my son makes friends there, I also meet the parents, and we can support each other. I wouldn't feel comfortable if he were trying to make friends in other places, like the local parks. Here, it feels safe because we all share similar experiences. I want him to grow up with friends who understand him and his background.'

(Interview with Dawei, 21 Jun 2023)

Zihan's grandfather Tie, who was a farmer in his hometown with a primary school degree, migrated for Zihan and also shared that:

'I think he should make friends here, where everyone's the same. Every weekend, I make sure he goes to these programs.'

(Interview with Tie, 29 Jun 2023)

The narratives reveal that some migrant parents actively encourage their children to build friendships within organizations that cater to families with similar backgrounds. Lisan, Dawei, and Tie express a preference for these spaces, where their children can connect with others who share comparable experiences, reducing feelings of inferiority or exclusion. The way rural migrant parents' endeavours to engage their children in local migrant organizations also chimed with the research of Vincent et al., (2012) that black middle-class families also actively engage children in organizations celebrating

their own racial culture in order to arm their children against racism and help their children in a White-dominated society. However, compared with black middle-class parents who actively engage children in Black-led organisations to build pride for children (Vincent et al., 2012c), based on the stigmatisation and hierarchy of rural culture in China, on the contrary of building pride, rural migrant parents seem more likely to use organisations as ‘shelter’ to protect children from bullying and build friendships with children who share similar backgrounds. Moreover, this is also a different form of exclusion, as some rural parents not only prefer these selective social spaces but also express disapproval or even criticism toward urban parents, viewing them as culturally or morally different. In this way, the formation of these social circles does not merely serve as a protective mechanism but also subtly reinforces boundaries between rural and urban parenting cultures and children’s friendship circles.

Grandparents’ hesitation and reluctance

Apart from actively using extracurricular activities, weekends holidays and organisations in promoting children’s friendships, hesitation and avoidance of parents, especially grandparents, also influenced their approaches to help children befriend others from similar backgrounds. For example, Sifeng (Shige’s grandmother) migrated from rural to urban areas to take care of Shige and her parents’ business as well. Shige’s parents were running a tiny restaurant near the school and were surrounded by local neighbourhoods and local Beijingers who had been living there for generations. Shige’s grandmother normally takes care of Shige after school, she takes Shige to her friends’ apartments so that she can chat with her friends while Shige and their grandchildren are doing homework together. Sifeng particularly mentioned that she normally took Shige to homes that were also rented by rural-urban migrants rather than locals:

‘I don’t really want to engage with the locals. I tried to speak Mandarin so that they wouldn’t judge Shige, whether we came from rural China or not. While the locals specifically use their Beijing accent, the Beijing accent itself sounds very proud. But with other migrant grandparents, they come from different parts of rural China, I’m more at ease [with them].’

(Interview with Sifeng, 28 Jun 2023)

Sifeng's episode sheds light on the complexities of linguistic identity and social dynamics in urban environments, particularly regarding the use of Mandarin (Putonghua) and local dialects. Sifeng expresses a reluctance to engage with locals, opting to speak Mandarin to avoid potential judgment based on regional origins and backgrounds. This reflects the broader societal promotion of Putonghua as a symbol of education and prestige, replacing local dialects perceived as inferior or associated with rural backgrounds (Dong, 2018). However, Sifeng notes that locals in Beijing specifically use their distinct accent, which carries a sense of pride and superiority. This highlights the hierarchical nature of dialects within urban settings, where local accents, particularly in cities like Beijing, Shanghai, and Guangzhou, are imbued with cultural significance and property ownership. For migrants in cities like Shanghai, owning property is often a distant dream due to exorbitant prices. Additionally, fluency in the Beijing accent can unconsciously signal local status and imply inherited property wealth passed down through generations (Xu, 2021). Sifeng's episode offers a nuanced perspective on the hierarchy of accents, that Mandarin sometimes is not always 'superior' to accents, especially local accents, and its implications for social interactions, particularly concerning cultural and economic outsiders in urban environments. Sifeng's reluctance to engage with locals reflects a recognition of the social significance attached to linguistic identity, where speaking Mandarin is perceived as a means to mitigate potential judgment regarding regional origins. This underscores the broader societal promotion of Mandarin as a symbol of education and social status, displacing local dialects relegated to the status of 'low language.' However, Sifeng's observation that locals in Beijing specifically use their accents with pride highlights the complexities of linguistic hierarchy within urban settings. The Beijing dialect, emblematic of both local identity and property ownership, serves as a marker of belonging and superiority, reinforcing social divisions between locals and outsiders. Therefore, Sifeng's preference for interacting with other migrant grandparents from rural China underscores the shared experiences and understanding among individuals navigating the challenges of linguistic and cultural assimilation in urban spaces and shaped Shige's friendships in the pattern of possessing more homophily in private spheres.

Apart from Sifeng's experiences that language constrains her in befriending urban grandparents and further influences Shige's friendships, Tie and Xiuqin also shared their reluctance in engaging with urban families and further influencing children's befriending with rural migrant children in their playtime:

This is also shared by Tie, Zihan's grandfather:

'Sometimes his mom told me he has a play date with some boys his mother prefers so I have to take them. I don't want [...] to go]. There were grandmothers, I have no words [...] to talk with them] with women. But it is the child's education, I have no idea and don't know how to contribute [...] I just listen [to the parents' ideas]
(Interview with Tie, 29 Jun 2023)

Xiuqin, Chengxi's grandmother, who was a farmer back at home and had only a primary school degree, also shared her hesitation and avoidance in the way that:

'The grandmothers in this neighbourhood, I think they looked down upon me, always ask where I actually come from [...] Their clothes are too fashionable for older people, I also don't like them [...] At least I have autonomy where to play [...] I go to the shed near the parking lot with other rural migrant grandmothers who are also from rural areas. We look after children together so they have to play together.
(Interview with Xiuqin, 28 Jun 2023)

The hesitation Tie and Xiuqin in engaging with urban grandparents and their approaches are shaped by their positions in the family as they assumed after migration influenced their ways of forming children's playtime and play friends, for example, Tie believes that *'sometimes his mom told me he has a playdate with some boys his mother prefers so I have to take them'* and Xiuqin shared that *'at least I have autonomy where to play'*. Tie and Xiuqin's position in forming children's playtime and friendship echoed the research of Kahil and colleagues (2022) that upon arriving in Canada, grandmothers were unable to replicate the matriarchal household structure that had once defined their status and control in Syria, thus leading to the 'subordinated integration.' Instead, their roles within the family were significantly weakened due to the process of subordinate integration and the challenges of ageing. This undermined their ability to make independent financial decisions or contributions. However, this research contributes to the notion of 'subordinated integration', that even though grandparents feel a sense of reduced authority and increased dependency on their children, they still have autonomy in shaping their grandchildren's playtime and play friends, for example, Tie made a conscious effort to take Zihan to organizations

specifically for migrant families, while Xiuqin arranged for her child to play with other children who, like hers, were cared for by rural migrant grandmothers.

6.5 Conclusion

This chapter utilises data from parents' and grandparents' interviews and field notes that are generated through observation to illustrate their understanding of children's friendships. It examines the ways parents and grandparents employ inclusionary boundary work and exclusionary work to help children build friendships. Furthermore, it highlights the significance of children's friendships for parents and the considerable effort they invest in fostering them.

This chapter suggests that, firstly, contrary to children's understandings of friendships that involve more emotional labour (see Chapter 4), similar to teachers' understandings of children's friendships (in Chapter 5), parents in this study also seemed to understand children's as less emotional but more of the abilities and opportunities to engage with 'crucial acquaintances' (Wessendorf and Phillimore, 2019). For parents, building friendships seems to contradict studying while also providing opportunities for children to cooperate with 'crucial acquaintances' that, unlike close friendships or family ties, these connections are casual yet vital for accessing resources, services, and opportunities, particularly for migrants.

This study also reveals the complexities of parental identities, showing that even though most parents were shaped by their rural or urban status, some rural migrant parents have achieved economic success and do not necessarily identify with the stereotype of low-income, low-education migrant workers. Conversely, urban parents do not form a direct contrast, as some also experience job insecurity and low income. These variations in parental backgrounds and identities may be influenced by the geographical context of this study, as discussed in Chapter 3, where the location includes both migrant workers and local residents with modest incomes. Therefore, building on the understanding of children's friendships and resonating with the work of Rollock et al. (2011), this research finds that parents also engage in both inclusionary and exclusionary boundary work to help their children adapt to school environments and build friendships. Through inclusionary boundary work, parents prioritize protecting their children from potential bullying as a prerequisite for forming equitable friendships. In line with Walsh (2018), parents employ strategies such as modifying accents, showcasing material possessions, and adhering to specific dress codes as

part of family displays to assert legitimacy. Also expanding on Walsh and colleagues' (2019) argument that family display is shaped by social structures, this study further demonstrates that rural stigmatization in China intensifies the pressures on rural migrant parents to assist their children in forming friendships. In contrast to children, who view rural culture as interesting (see Chapter 4), adults in this study, including both parents and teachers, perceive rural culture, particularly accents, as a barrier or 'gatekeeper' that children must overcome before forming friendships. However, this approach has a limited role in addressing or dismantling rural stigmatization. Building on the work of Vincent, Neal and Iqbal (2018) and expanding the concept of inclusionary boundary work (Rollock et al., 2011), this research further suggests that inclusionary practices extend beyond fostering similar appearances to encompass parents' efforts in cultivating tolerance for children from diverse backgrounds.

In addition to inclusionary boundary work, even though both rural migrant and urban parents perceive children's friendships as opportunities for social and skill development (see Chapter 6.1.3), their actual practices in facilitating these relationships often involve exclusionary boundary work. For instance, parents and grandparents use extracurricular activities, holidays, weekends, and organization activities and their hesitations and avoidance to group children with peers they prefer while avoiding those they find less suitable. Although parents in this study view friendships as a means to support academic success, this research aligns with Vincent, Neal and Iqbal (2018), highlighting that even when parents engage in fostering friendships across diversity with emotional labour, these efforts are influenced by socioeconomic factors. Therefore, in this research, my adoption of intersectional analysis aligns with and contributes to the findings of Ball et al. (2013), demonstrating that factors do not simply add to one another to shape parents' endeavours in children's friendships but rather interact dynamically. For example, socioeconomic factors influence how migration experiences work and are perceived and how these experiences vary for individuals, particularly in exclusionary work. For instance, Jin's socioeconomic status influenced her decisions regarding migration and education, which in turn shaped her approach to encouraging her daughter to form friendships with children who were proficient in English. Additionally, her migration experiences influenced how she utilised her socioeconomic resources, such as material possessions, to protect her daughter from bullying and facilitate her social integration.

Chapter 7. Conclusion

7.1 Introduction

In his later work, *Being Modern in China* (2019), Paul Willis, the renowned author of *Learning to Labour*, conducted research in educational settings in China and reflects on China's modernisation, which he identifies as being marked by the large-scale internal migration of workers from rural to urban areas and an accompanying ideological shift that increasingly prioritises urban cultural landscapes over rural counterparts. Willis's observations align with development theories, which conceptualize modernization as a linear progression characterized by a transition from rural to urban domains (Unger, 2018). In a similar vein, this viewpoint is consistent with recent research in education in China (e.g., Zhang and Bray, 2016; Murphy, 2004), which emphasizes a post-communist shift in educational ideologies towards a more 'modernized' framework, influenced by urbanization, Westernization, and neoliberalism that particularly shapes children's social worlds in contemporary China.

In this era of rapid change and perceived 'progress,' sociologists who work on personal and everyday life emphasize the importance of exploring the potential of 'ordinary relationships' within the neoliberal climate. Such relationships offer valuable insights into processes of individualization and social isolation while also providing pathways to reimagine solidarity and the fabric of everyday life (e.g., Brownlie, 2014; May and Nordqvist, 2019). Notably, Davies (2019) underscores the significance of friendship during periods of social transformation, highlighting how choice and reciprocity within friendships have become increasingly central to sociological inquiry in post-industrial societies. While Davies (2019) refers to friendship in a broad sense, this theme is also evident in sociological research on children's friendships, where neoliberal and urbanized values are shown to shape children's choices and reciprocal interactions within their friendships (e.g., Yuan, 2015; Yue and Lu, 2008).

Therefore, this research captured a period of significant change and perceived 'progress,' characterized by large-scale rural-to-urban migration and the pervasive influence of neoliberal trends in education in China. It explored how these broader transformations were intricately reflected in the mundane lives of individuals, specifically by examining the friendships of rural migrant and urban children. The study was structured around three key research questions:

Research Question 1: What are rural migrant and urban children's experiences of friendships in school? How do internal, rural-to-urban migrant and urban children understand and negotiate their friendships within primary school settings?

Research Question 2: How does the intersection of rural-urban migrant status, gender and language (particularly accent) influence migrant children's friendship and their friendship strategies?

Research Question 3: How are migrant children's friendships shaped by adult worlds – parents, grandparents, teaching staff - and wider educational policy contexts and social inequalities?

This concluding chapter summarizes the key findings of the research and highlights its contributions to existing fields of study. It begins by revisiting the research questions and outlining the key insights derived from the data. The second section discusses how this research advances and contributes to the study of children's friendships, migration, and education. The chapter then reflects on the methodology employed, as well as my positionality and personal experiences throughout the research process. Ultimately, it addresses the limitations of the study and suggests potential and possible directions for future inquiries.

7.2 Research Questions and Findings

The main findings of this research reveal that both rural migrant and urban children actively use their agency in using and negotiating the stigmatised rural heritage, such as accents (which rural identity was mostly apparent through), as assets to build friendships and challenge the rural-urban hierarchy. Also, children's friendships are shaped by intersecting factors such as rural-urban backgrounds, gender, and language (accents).

Teachers also significantly influence children's friendships by promoting values like cooperation and unity and through seating arrangements and class leader systems. However, they also reinforce rural stigma by excluding migrant children from art events, correcting their accents, and dismissing rural culture as inferior.

Families further shape children's friendships through both inclusive and exclusive strategies. Rural migrant parents practice family displays to help their children for inclusion. Family display, as defined by Finch (2007), is the process through which individuals actively demonstrate and validate their family relationships to others using

recognizable symbols, actions, or narratives, and as Walsh (2018) highlights, this is particularly important for migrant families in showcasing their legitimacy within the local community. Data from my research suggests that rural migrant parents use family displays, such as correcting children's accents and providing branded clothing, to help them blend in and avoid stigma. Also, both urban and rural migrant parents use exclusive strategies, like enrolling children in selective extracurricular activities, to create social circles with similar socioeconomic backgrounds. Grandparents also play a key role, as their own discomfort with urban social settings and preference for familiar migrant networks influence the children's friendship patterns.

This section reviews and summarizes these findings in relation to the research questions.

Research Question 1: What are rural migrant and urban children's experiences of friendships in school? How do internal, rural-to-urban migrant and urban children understand and negotiate their friendships within primary school settings?

The study reveals that children's understandings of friendships are influenced by various factors, including the quantity of friends, the importance of shared fun activities, help, and secret sharing. One of the key findings is the emphasis on the quantity of friends, which children often cite as important to their relationships. For example, in Chapter 4, children like Wangyin, an urban girl, and Jiayi, also from an urban family, prioritize having many friends, not necessarily for deep connections but to avoid loneliness and to ensure they are socially connected. Migrant children such as Zihan, whose family operates a small grocery store, also show a desire for social recognition through the number of friends they claim, revealing how certain children from various migration backgrounds value extensive social connections as a way to assert their position within peer groups. This desire for a broad circle of friends aligns with previous research, which suggests that children actively use friendships to enhance their social status and navigate peer dynamics. For example, Adler and Adler (1998) argue that children view their friendships as a tool for social positioning. Similarly, Ní Laoire (2011) highlights how children strategically form and maintain friendships to secure peer acceptance and avoid social exclusion, reinforcing the notion that a large friendship network often correlates with social visibility and influence among peers.

Sharing fun activities is also a critical element in friendship for children. The data in my research shows that children form friendships through enjoyable interactions, such as games or cultural exchanges, regardless of whether they are from rural or urban settings. This echoes previous research that games and activities not only help build trust but also create shared experiences that are vital for friendship formation (e.g. Theobald et al., 2017; Yoon, 2014). For instance, in Chapter 4, Enyu, an urban girl, describes how playing games with friends creates a special bond, while Tianyi, a migrant girl from a rural family, recounts playful childhood games that also foster close friendships. These shared experiences build emotional intimacy, highlighting how the universal value of fun transcends socioeconomic and migration status.

Help and support also emerge as significant elements in how children conceptualise their friendships. Urban and migrant children alike, such as the rural migrant girl, Mei, as well as the rural migrant boy, Yuan, value mutual support, emphasizing help without expecting anything in return. Although rural migrant children are identified as having difficulties in building friendships in urban schools (e.g. Yue and Lu, 2008; Cui and To, 2019), my research findings of their understanding of help in friendship unconditionally contrast with previous research with marginalized children in poverty who identified help in friendships as necessary and should be provided in return (e.g. street children in Mizen and Ofosu-Kus, 2010; Indian Himalayan girls in Dyson, 2010). Finally, sharing secrets plays a pivotal role in cultivating trust and deeper relationships. For children like Ming, a migrant boy, sharing secrets is a way to demonstrate closeness and trust, underscoring how children from diverse backgrounds utilize friendship to navigate both emotional needs and social integration.

Unlike previous studies that reinforce a rigid rural-urban dichotomy in children's social relationships (e.g., Liu et al., 2012; Zhang and Luo, 2016), this research demonstrates how both migrant and urban children actively negotiate these boundaries, revealing that friendship formations are not determined primarily by geographical origins. For example, in Chapter 4, a rural migrant boy, Yurun, uses his rural heritage, such as his accent, as a resource to build friendships, demonstrating that rural characteristics can sometimes be assets rather than barriers. Moreover, the rural-urban divide is not the only factor influencing friendships; these distinctions intersect with material possessions and gender. For example, in Chapter 4, although both migrated from rural areas, the migrant boy Yiyong, whose family owns a car repair business and is more affluent, regularly receives good clothes and pocket money from his father, which

earns him 'followers' in class. However, the financial backgrounds of children influence their behaviours, leading them to adopt strategies of distinguishability to make their rural markers less identifiable. For instance, the girl Yaoxin in Chapter 4 realized that her yellow shoes, perceived as typical rural items, were laughed at by her peers. To make herself less distinguishable and avoid bullying, she then used the 'strategies for becoming distinguishable' to replace the shoes with shoes similar to other children to blend in and avoid being laughed at.

Gender also plays a significant role in shaping children's friendships. Although Chapter 4 illustrates instances where children engage in games that cross gender boundaries, children more frequently interact with peers of the same gender. This tendency is particularly evident in collective activities, for instance, when children sit together to watch singing competitions or football matches. During such moments, children without stable close friendships often seek out peers of the same gender and find acceptance within those groups. Notably, these gender-influenced relationships among children typically transcend migration background differences. However, Chapter 4 highlighted how gender patterns were present in all children's friendships, yet these friendships were often less stable. Similarly, friendships across genders tended to be common but not always deeply close. In this context, children's relationships were often more occasional and thinner, as they did not always identify these friendships as close relationships in interviews.

Therefore, data suggests that both rural migrants and urban children can challenge rural stigmatization by leveraging and valuing rural heritage and accents as assets in building connections. Their agency and capacity to navigate and adapt to both rural and urban aspects of their identity demonstrate that rural-urban distinctions are not rigid, and children can use their experiences, backgrounds, and resources to form friendships despite societal expectations or biases. However, echoing Scholtz and Gilligan (2017) that cross-boundary friendships are normally fostered in specific conditions, my research suggests that rural-urban hierarchy is not the sole factor influencing children's agency in forming friendships. This process is intersectional, as will be discussed in the next section.

Research Question 2: How does the intersection of rural-urban migrant status, gender and language (particularly accent) influence migrant children's friendship and their friendship strategies?

This study examines how the intersection of migration experience, gender, and language shapes the formation of children's friendships. By employing intersectionality as a Black feminist theory and framework (Crenshaw, 1991; Crenshaw, Andrews and Wilson, 2022; Collins, 2000), this research reveals how different lines of social division layer into and reinforce each other. A central finding is that these factors do not act in isolation. Rather than simply adding to one another, they interact in dynamic ways, with one factor influencing how another is experienced and lived. The intersection of these elements creates a complex social landscape, shaping children's social positioning, the strategies they use to form friendships, and the experiences of inclusion or exclusion they face.

The research reveals that the migration experience is deeply intertwined with other factors such as gender, and language (particularly accents). These factors do not accumulate in isolation but instead influence one another, producing nuanced outcomes in the social lives of children. For instance, children from migrant backgrounds often experience marginalization not solely because of material limitations but due to the compounded effects of cultural and linguistic differences. The limited access to cultural resources in rural settings, for example, intersects with the migrant experience to create unique barriers to social integration.

In my research, children from urban backgrounds, particularly those who have access to cultural resources such as extracurricular activities, books, or artistic outlets, benefit from these resources in ways that shape their social status. By comparison, migrant children encounter more complex challenges in forming friendships, even those from economically advantaged backgrounds. As discussed in Chapter 5, the limited cultural resources accessible to them in rural environments shape their social experiences in ways urban children do not face. For example, in Chapter 5, the rural landscape did not provide children with adequate opportunities for art and sports training. This disparity was further exacerbated in urban educational settings, where rural children's artistic expressions and contributions in sports competitions were undervalued due to the perception that their training was insufficient. Moreover, in Chapter 6, parents expressed a strong desire to expose their children to cultural activities in urban areas, an aspiration more commonly observed among rural migrant parents than their urban counterparts. Furthermore, the financial difficulties caused by the instability of migration, combined with the long-term educational disadvantages faced by rural

migrant families, contribute to their poor financial situation after migration, which in turn shapes their children's social circles. For example, in Chapter 6, the awkwardness displayed by Yisan's mother during Christmas resulted in urban parents excluding them from children's group festival celebrations, further reinforcing social divisions among children. Therefore, migration status and experiences, the rural-urban hierarchy, and the financial difficulties associated with migration intersect in shaping children's friendships. However, these factors are not merely additive; rather, migration shapes how children navigate and experience their social worlds, particularly in relation to the cultural resources available to them.

Gender norms and expectations further complicate these dynamics. Children's gender identities influence how they are perceived and accepted within their peer groups, and this effect is compounded by socioeconomic and migration factors. Chapter 4 focuses on Huohou, who comes from a low-income family faces financial difficulties and is ridiculed by his peers for carrying a second-hand pink school bag. His peers' mockery of the bag highlights how gender norms are entangled with socioeconomic status. Huohou's case shows how his economic disadvantage is magnified by the gendered expectations placed on him, making him more vulnerable to exclusion. Additionally, Huohou's accent became another source of mockery, reflecting how language, too, intersects with other factors to influence a child's social position. His experience demonstrates that the social challenges children face are not simply the result of one factor but are compounded by multiple intersecting dimensions of identity.

However, while intersectionality is often employed to explore the compounded disadvantages faced by specific groups, the children in my study also illustrate their agency and capacities in navigating the intersections of migration experiences, language (accent) and gender to build friendships. A key example of how these intersecting factors shape friendships is seen in Chapter 4, in the relationship between Yurun, a migrant boy, and Siyu, an urban girl. Yurun's Northeastern accent, which might have otherwise been a source of social exclusion, becomes a tool for social engagement. Siyu enjoys asking Yurun to speak in different ways, and his accent becomes a source of amusement, allowing them to bond. Yurun also shares stories about his hometown, such as the heavy snow and large ice snowmen, which fascinate Siyu and deepen their connection. In this case, migration experience and accent intersect with the social context, allowing Yurun to leverage his cultural background as a means of forming a unique social identity and fostering emotional closeness with

Siyu. In this context, Siyu also demonstrated her ability to both value and reproduce the meaning of accent and rurality. Yurun's migration experience, therefore, does not act in isolation but shapes how he engages with others, turning potential differences into opportunities for social connection.

Therefore, findings in this study suggest that children are not passive recipients of institutional norms but capable agents in shaping peer relationships and everyday school life. However, drawing on an intersectional framework, agency is not always equally distributed or expressed across all children. Rather than assuming a universal or romanticised notion of agency, this study aligns with critical scholarship that emphasises its relational, situated, and stratified nature (Spyrou, 2011; Gallacher and Gallagher, 2008). For instance, a rural background does not inherently constrain children's agency, but it often intersects with structural disadvantages such as poverty, precarious parental employment, and embodied cultural traits that are not aligned with dominant urban norms. These intersections can intensify children's marginalisation in peer cultures. For example, in Chapter 4, the fieldnote on Yaoxin being ridiculed for her yellow shoes illustrates how rural poverty and urban aesthetic expectations shaped a limited space for her to build friendships. In contrast, when rural status is accompanied by compensatory resources such as economic capital or confident self-presentation, the effects of marginalisation can be softened. Yiyu, for instance, in Chapter 6, had regular pocket money and desirable possessions, which enabled more comfortable engagement with peer interactions.

Children's agency is also relational and situated, shaped by how their actions are interpreted, valued, and either enabled or constrained through interactions with both adults and peers. As discussed in Chapter 5, some children who met institutional expectations were appointed class leaders, which allowed them to exercise greater agency or formal approval status in managing peer relationships. However, such institutional endorsement did not always translate into peer acceptance. For example, in Chapter 4 and 6, Jiayi was well behaved and was appointed as a class leader, however, even though always being praised by teachers, this does not translate into peer popularity as children still think her as not funny and she claims that she doesn't have many friends but that's okay (pp 95, 156). Therefore, children's agency is largely shaped by institutional inequalities and structural power imbalances between the rural and the urban, migration and social class status and between children and adults. In these contexts, rural migrant children more generally possess less agency in building

and maintaining friendships. However, there are occasional spaces of agency for the children in their peer, family and materialist relationships and as Jiaxi's case also shows, children's agency remains contingent on peer recognition.

Therefore, these findings add to the 'new' sociology of childhood that children's agency is constrained by wider inequalities, such as power imbalance between children and adults and socioeconomic differences. However, although urban lifestyles are hegemonic in school settings, rural children are not entirely without agency. Rather, their agency is often more likely to be constrained by persistent rural–urban inequalities and devalued rural identities. However, urban children who closely align with institutional norms and expectations may also experience limited agency within peer cultures (see in Chapter 5). Hence, children's agency is influenced not only by adult recognition, such as from teachers, but also by how children themselves interpret, reproduce and creatively invert or comply with dominant rules, roles and values in their everyday interactions.

Consequently, similar to Vincent et al. (2018), my findings suggest that different social categories and divisions intersect in a dynamic and situational way rather than simply combining to influence children's friendships. The findings of this study underscore the complexity of children's social worlds. Migration experience, gender, and language do not function as isolated variables but interact in multifaceted ways that shape how children form friendships. These factors do not merely add to one another; rather, as Ball and colleagues (2013) and McKinzie and Richards (2019) emphasize, they intersect in ways that actively reshape one another, demonstrating the fluid and context-dependent nature of social positioning. Through this lens, children's friendships are not just about individual traits or divisions but are shaped by the complex, intersecting factors that influence how those divisions are experienced and used in social contexts.

Research Question 3: How are migrant children's friendships shaped by adult worlds – parents, grandparents, teaching staff - and wider educational policy contexts and social inequalities?

The role of adult worlds—teachers, parents, grandparents, and broader societal factors—plays a crucial part in shaping migrant children's friendships. In this section, I

will first analyse the impact of teachers and schools, followed by the influence of family dynamics and social inequalities on children's friendships.

Children's friendships shaped by teachers

Chapter 5 illustrates how teachers, while promoting values of cooperation, empathy, and collective effort, inadvertently reinforce rural-urban binaries and rural stigma. Echoed with the research of Zhu (2021), teachers' strategies, such as seating arrangements and class leader systems, are intended to cultivate cooperation, empathy, and leadership, which are essential for modern education. These systems, which pair students of different academic abilities and assign leadership roles, aim to encourage mutual support, empathy, and responsibility. However, these efforts also reflect an underlying assumption that children from rural or migrant backgrounds require correction or adjustment to align with urban norms and expectations.

Data reveals that the school also places significant emphasis on promoting 'collective friendship' through activities like group sports, field trips, and festivals, positioning these as essential for fostering unity and preparing children for future collaborative roles. Activities like the tug-of-war competition highlight the school's focus on collective effort, with teachers stressing the importance of teamwork. Echoing Assan (2023) and Kaplan (2018), this push for unity and collaboration is intended to foster modern citizenship based on different national contexts, while my research suggests that teachers endeavoured to encourage children to cultivate unity aimed to overcome and 'neglect' the rural-urban division in Chinese society.

However, there are activities that potentially marginalize rural migrant children, particularly those who do not have much educational and material resources. For example, in Chapter 5 of the school's Calligraphy and Drawing Festivals, migrant children are underrepresented because their artistic abilities are considered 'unrefined' due to the perceived lack of formal training in rural areas. This sentiment, expressed by the head teacher, Ms Xu, reflects a broader belief that rural children lack the abilities valued in urban schools. Teachers, therefore, view migrant children's backgrounds as needing correction, reinforcing the stereotype that urban children are more developed and thus deserve more opportunities in school activities.

Similar to findings in previous studies (e.g. Dong, 2018; Ding, 2022), another way rural-urban stereotypes are reinforced is through the school's approach to accents, with

migrant children's accents being seen as a barrier to forming friendships. The teachers' actions in attempting to correct or standardize these accents demonstrate an implicit belief that rural traits, such as accents, are undesirable and should be modified to fit in with urban norms. This also aligns with the findings of Welply (2015, 2017), which, although conducted in immigrant contexts, suggest that teachers generally believe that learning the language of the host country not only facilitates migrant children's integration but also signifies their legitimacy and acceptance in the dominant society. This viewpoint is further compounded by the school's cultural practices, which prioritize urban culture over rural experiences. Migrant children's rural backgrounds, such as activities like fishing or climbing trees, are neither celebrated nor integrated into the school's events. In fact, when the idea of celebrating rural culture was suggested, the principal dismissed it, claiming rurality was 'hardly a culture' and suggesting that rural migrant children would feel uncomfortable if their culture were highlighted. However, this does not suggest that rural migrant children are completely devalued in urban schools. Some rural migrant children who have access to better educational resources excel in art festivals and academics, gaining the recognition of teachers and admiration from peers. This is consistent with Hollingworth's (2019) research, which shows that marginalized migrant children can gain peer approval but typically by achieving and embodying the qualities valued by the dominant education system.

Therefore, this silencing of rural culture is symptomatic of the hierarchical view embedded within the school, where rural identities are seen as inferior to urban ones. Teachers, though acting with care towards migrant children, still frame their support within this hierarchical framework. For example, in Chapter 5, in a conflict between a local girl, Wangyin, and a migrant boy, Ming, they accidentally crash into each other during the break, but neither child wants to apologize. The English teacher instructed Ming to apologize publicly, emphasizing that it was gentlemanly behaviour, and then quietly suggested that Wangyin apologize as well, pointing out Ming's disadvantaged position as a migrant and encouraging her to show empathy. Although the teacher tried to demonstrate empathy, her approach was still rooted in a hierarchical view, reinforcing the notion that the migrant child was the one in need of special consideration.

Therefore, the school's efforts to create an inclusive atmosphere, such as fostering cooperation and empathy, are overshadowed by the persistent reinforcement of urban superiority. While teachers aim to cultivate values of equality and unity, their practices

inadvertently perpetuate the rural-urban binary by presenting rural backgrounds as needing correction and by marginalizing rural experiences and identities. Data in this research suggest that how teachers' actions intersect with broader societal assumptions about rural and urban identities illustrate how educational environments can both challenge and reinforce social divides.

Children's friendships are shaped by family.

A key finding discussed in Chapter 6 is the impact that family has on children's friendships. Unlike children, who often perceive friendships as sources of fun, mutual support, and emotional bonding (as explored in Chapter 4), parents, particularly rural migrant parents, tend to view their children's friendships more pragmatically. They see friendships as tools for practical support, helping children adapt to new environments. For example, Xiuqin, a migrant mother, noted that friendships offer her child, someone, to turn to for help with school lessons or when sick, while Jin, another migrant mother, emphasized that friendships were vital for her child to navigate unfamiliar social and educational settings.

The findings also show that both rural migrant and urban families employ a mix of inclusive and exclusive strategies to facilitate their children's friendship formation. Inclusive strategies are particularly prominent among rural-to-urban migrant families. Echoed with the research of Walsh (2018), migrant parents use 'family display' to present themselves strategically to improve social acceptance and reduce stigma. In my study, family display for rural migrant families frequently involved managing children's accents, which were seen as a marker of rural migrant status. In Chapter 6, migrant parents in my research emphasized the importance of correcting their children's accents before migration, aiming to help them blend in and avoid bullying associated with perceived rural or migrant linguistic traits, as they believe that rural identity is mostly apparent through accent. 'Family display' (Walsh, 2018) can also be manifested through parents' use of material resources. For example, Lisan, a rural migrant mother, emphasized how 'clothes make the man,' highlighting her efforts to buy quality clothing and stationery to prevent her child from appearing 'shabby' and being bullied. Similarly, Jin, a rural migrant mother identified her family as 'rural middle class', purchased branded items like clothing and hats to support her daughter's social integration. The strategy is also used by urban families; for example, Zhuowei, an urban father, ensures his child brings expensive snacks to school to avoid bullying from wealthier peers.

Data from my research also reveals that rural migrant families also use exclusionary strategies to manage their children's social circles. These parents encourage their children to engage in extracurricular activities that align with their social status, such as horse riding, chess, or language classes. For instance, Qiyao, an urban mother, enrolled her daughter Jiayi in horse riding to connect with children involved in 'elegant sports,' while Dawei, a rural migrant father, encouraged his son to play Chinese chess to help him form connections with peers from similar educational backgrounds. This strategy of targeting exclusive activities extends to the grandparents as well. For example, Sifeng, Shige's grandmother, preferred associating with other migrant families, avoiding local Beijing families due to her discomfort with their accents, which she associated with pride and social superiority. Her preference influenced Shige's friendships, fostering connections with children from migrant backgrounds.

In addition, exclusive strategies are also observed in activities organized by grandparents for their grandchildren. For example, Zihan's grandfather, Tie, who had migrated to care for his grandson, emphasized the importance of participating in NGO programs tailored to migrant families, ensuring that Zihan interacted with children from similar backgrounds. Grandparents' strategies are often shaped by their difficulties in adapting to the urban environment. Their sense of discomfort with urban life, including local accents and cultural practices, often leads them to prefer associating with families that share similar migrant experiences. This influences how they guide their grandchildren's friendships, ensuring that these relationships are within familiar, comforting boundaries.

Therefore, what this study has shown, as has been discussed (see Chapter 6), is the ways in which self-identified 'rural middle class' migrant parents and their education-driven migration meant assumptions of 'rural poverty' and 'urban affluence' were regularly challenged in the classroom. For example, Jin, a rural migrant mother with a college education and stable income, invested considerable effort in managing her daughter's linguistic presentation. She corrected her daughter's accent and enrolled her in private English classes with foreign teachers, aiming to minimise the social markers of migration and facilitate smoother integration into peer networks in urban environment. Similarly, Zhuowei sought to protect his son from assumed peer marginalisation by providing him with generous pocket money. While these parental strategies did not challenge structural inequalities, they are significantly informed by

parents' awareness of the importance of (and access to provide) economic and cultural resource. The cases of Jin and Zhuowei do not necessarily reflect the overall profile of rural migrant parents, whereas there still remain rural migrant parents who strive to address concerns about their children being looked down upon in schools. For instance, in Chapter 6, parents, particularly rural migrant parents such as Fangyu, Sifeng, and Lisan, still strive to adhere to appropriate dress codes to help their children fit in. However, the cases of self-identified 'rural middle class' migrant parents, including Jin and Zhuowei, continue to contribute to illustrating the complexity and diversity of the rural-to-urban migrant population. By challenging the 'rural poverty' and 'urban affluence' stereotypes, these cases also highlight the potential of socioeconomic and educational experiences of rural migrant parents as a means of facilitating their children's friendships and inclusion.

7.3 Conceptual Contributions to Literature

Migration Studies

This research makes significant contributions to migration studies and intersectionality theory, particularly by challenging and decolonizing existing frameworks. Originally, intersectionality, as articulated by Crenshaw (1991), primarily focused on the intersections of race, class, gender, and other identity markers, predominantly within Western contexts. This study challenges that paradigm by shifting the focus to the lived experiences of rural migrant children in China, highlighting the importance of a bottom-up approach in understanding intersectional social divisions in everyday relationships. In recent years, intersectionality has revealed its potential through its application to diverse social categories in different countries, particularly across the Global South (e.g. Pal, 2018; Olsen, 2018; Maass, 2023; Lui, 2017). In focusing on rural migrant children, this research challenges the reliance on global North-based social categories and resists the conceptual frameworks imposed by privileged urban scholars within China, thereby positioning migration within a non-Western, internal context through a localized application of intersectionality.

Additionally, this research advances the theoretical development of intersectionality by expanding its application to new contexts, particularly within the realm of internal rural-urban migration. In China, modernization is often viewed as a linear process, with the city positioned as the ultimate goal, standing in contrast to the rural. The rural space is thus portrayed in the national narrative as a site, an identity and a certain kind of culture

and lifestyle to escape from or to be left behind in the pursuit of progress. Yuval-Davis (2006) proposes that intersectional analysis should focus on the situated importance of social categories by prioritizing those that are most salient to the specific group under study, whether universally influential like class and gender or context-specific like caste. This study therefore expands on these arguments by introducing accent and the social inequities arising from the instability of migration and the rural-urban hierarchy as intersectional markers, an important yet underexplored dimension in both Chinese society and migration studies. Dong (2018) argues that rural identity in China is normally apparent through accent. However, while researchers such as Woolard (2016) have examined language as a marker of social distinction, accent remains largely unexplored within intersectionality studies. In the case of rural migrant children, accent serves as a critical marker of difference, often used to both resist and conform to urban hierarchies. However, discrimination can fetishize physical and audible differences, such as skin, hair, or accent, to 'naturalize' or 'signify' stigma, whereas, in my research, accent represents not only cultural or phenotypical traits but also broader social and political inequality and hierarchy. Therefore, the intersection of accent and migration status in my research illuminates the role of language in shaping social identities in rural-urban migration contexts, thereby adding an important, under-explored dimension to intersectionality theory within migration studies.

Furthermore, the research enriches the intersectionality framework by addressing the often-overlooked role of the state- a dimension that has been insufficiently explored in previous intersectionality research. While intersectionality has largely focused on social categories like race, gender and class, it has not adequately examined the influence of institutional and structural forces such as state policies. In China, the hukou system plays a pivotal role in shaping migration experiences, especially for rural migrants. This system, which classifies citizens as either rural or urban, limits rural migrants' access to urban resources and creates hierarchies of resources (e.g., education and healthcare), thereby obstructing social integration. By investigating how state policies shape the social experiences of rural migrant children, this study broadens intersectionality by emphasizing the significance of institutional power and state structures in migration dynamics. As urban policies typically reinforce social divisions, this study underscores how China's migration system, which is rooted in state policy, perpetuates rural-urban divides and shapes social relationships.

This study contributes to ongoing debates on intersectionality by highlighting the role of state in, especially, in the Chinese context. Through an empirical study of friendship formation among migrant children in urban Chinese schools, it shows how the hukou system, which is a state institution that divides citizens into rural/urban categories and links this to welfare, reproduces social differences and shapes everyday relational belonging. Moreover, it also offers a situated way to examine the state's active role in generating intersectional injustice, especially in the Global South.

Scholars have long conceptualized intersectionality as the process of extracting the unique intersecting experiences of individuals (e.g., Black women) from grand identity narratives (e.g., 'Black people' or 'women'), a framework that intends to demonstrate that an individual's suffering stems not from a single identity, but from the overlap of multiple identities (Crenshaw, 1989). By contrast, limited research has focused on discovering and analysing the role of state and national power within the framework of intersectionality. My research further contributes to highlighting the role of the state in intersectionality, especially in the Global South. Echoing Sultana's (2019) research, in Bangladesh, access to water is directly tied to citizenship, which is intersectional and significantly influenced by the state. According to Sultana (2019), even though gender, class, and migrant status intersect with water access in urban spaces, for example, women and girls are more vulnerable in accessing water and suffer in gaining hydraulic citizenship, the urban poor in slums, especially females, suffered more. This is largely due to the infrastructure provided by the state, which showed spatial inequality, with urban poor areas experience greater hardship. Moreover, in Turkey, Ozkaleli (2014) has found that women's access to political rights, such as education and employment, is shaped by the intersection of gender, ethnicity, class, and rural–urban division, and is also significantly influenced by the state. According to Ozkaleli (2014), Kurdish girls in rural areas are less likely to receive education than Turkish girls, due to language barriers and inadequate infrastructure. Similarly, Kurdish women have far less access to healthcare than members of the dominant group (i.e., Turkish women). This disparity is largely attributed to the Turkish state, which participants describe as restrictive, nationalist, masculine, authoritative, and especially with limited gender sensitivity (Ozkaleli, 2014).

Therefore, against this backdrop, the theoretical contribution of this study to intersectionality lies in explicitly defining and emphasizing the role of the state. Specifically, intersectionality is not merely the overlap of an individual's multiple

identities but also a product of the state, which acts both as a source of institutional inequalities and as a potential mitigator of those disparities. For instance, in this research, on one hand, the state has created the hukou system, which is a policy that not only generates inequalities but also serves as a starting point for the formation of multiple identity categories. On the other hand, the state functions as an 'intervenor' and alleviator of intersecting inequalities, for example, previous unequal allocation of educational resources exacerbated certain disparities, and recent policies allowing children of migrant workers to enroll in urban primary schools have adjusted or transformed dynamics of identity and inclusion. Thus, from the perspective of this study, intersectionality encompasses not only cultural or socially constructed identities (such as race or gender) but also institutional identities (such as hukou status, and rural-urban migration experiences) that are created and reinforced by the state through laws and policies. Further, the study's insight into the state's role in intersectionality highlights that oppression stems not solely from social prejudice or cultural-historical factors, but more directly from the state's institutional design.

Accordingly, in alignment with prior scholarship (e.g., Ozkaleli, 2014; Sultana, 2019; Mollett, 2017), this study advances understanding of the state's role in leveraging Intersectionality as an analytical framework to examine inequalities within Global South contexts. This research establishes that the salience of the state in these nations derives not merely from the prevalent stereotype of Global South governments as authoritative (e.g., Nabavi, 2014; Teets, 2013), but more critically, illuminates that such state-centric dynamics constitute a responsive adaptation by Global South countries to the structural pressures of globalization and the inequitable distribution of global resources. For example, China's integration into globalization has accelerated urbanization, which in turn has driven demand for a large migrant workforce in labour-intensive primary processing industries and service sectors. In this context, the policies related with migration formulated by the state have become the origin of identity-based exclusion, while subsequent adjustments to state policies have consistently shaped dynamics of identity and inclusion.

Therefore, this study contributes to the application of intersectionality in migration studies by examining stigmatised forms of *internal* rather than international migration in contemporary urban China. By theorizing intersectionality within diverse contexts, particularly through the exploration of accent as it relates to rural-urban hierarchies, the research enriches both migration studies and intersectionality theory. Furthermore,

by localizing intersectionality theory and highlighting the critical role of state policies, particularly the hukou system, this study integrates institutional power into the analysis, broadening the scope of intersectionality.

Education Studies

In education studies, research typically focuses on formal structures such as classrooms, curricula, and teacher-student dynamics in socialization and social reproduction. However, my research on rural-urban migrant children's friendships offers a critical contribution by shifting the focus from these formal settings to the informal, often overlooked influence of peer relationships. By exploring the friendships of migrant children, this research not only highlights the social integration of marginalized groups but also contributes to understanding the structures of rural-urban division and hierarchy that shape children's personal lives and experiences within schools.

Rural-urban migrant children face numerous challenges when integrating into urban schools. These challenges include cultural and social differences, language barriers, and experiences of exclusion (Dong, 2018; Zhang et al., 2020). In their new school environments, these children are often confronted with a complex social landscape where rural and urban distinctions play a significant role in shaping their social lives. These distinctions, both internal (within the school) and external (within society), can affect how children form friendships and navigate social spaces. Through these friendships, migrant children find a means of negotiating their identities and asserting an agency in a school system that may marginalize or stigmatize them due to their rural origins.

The centrality of peer relationships in shaping migrant children's experiences challenges views in educational sociology that emphasize formal educational structures as the primary sites of socialization (e.g. Cai, 2019; Brint, 2006). By broadening the focus to include peer groups, my research highlights how friendships are not only places of emotional support and social bonding but also arenas where power relations related to rural-urban divisions are played out. As migrant children build friendships, they engage with the social hierarchies within schools, which are often rooted in these rural-urban divides. These peer relationships, therefore, become a crucial site for understanding how children navigate these divides and how they resist or reinforce the social stratification present in their educational setting.

Moreover, migrant children's friendships are not only shaped by their rural-urban background but also by other social categories. The urban-rural divide is often compounded by these factors (gender, accent, material possessions), influencing how friendships are formed and perceived. For instance, migrant children may form close bonds with others from similar rural backgrounds, which provides a sense of belonging and shared experience in a new environment. However, friendships can also be a site of exclusion, particularly when urban children view rural migrants through stereotypes or social hierarchies. Friendships thus serve as not only personal relationships but also as spaces where rural-urban distinctions are actively navigated and sometimes challenged.

This focus on friendships therefore also offers new insights for educational policy. When formal educational structures fail to address the social and emotional needs of migrant children, peer relationships become essential for their well-being, integration and social reproduction. Therefore, the study of rural-urban migrant children's friendships contributes to the sociology of education by shifting the focus from formal educational structures to informal peer relationships and intergenerational processes of friendship management. By exploring how migrant children navigate rural-urban divisions through their friendships, this research deepens the understanding of social integration, identity formation, and the role of peer groups in educational settings.

Sociology of Children's Friendships

My research contributes to the sociology of children's friendships by examining these relationships as a mechanism for both reproducing inequality and challenging dominant discourses. In alignment with Goodwin (2008), who argues that friendships reflect asymmetrical power relations between dominant and marginalized minority cultures, my study highlights how teachers privilege urban cultural norms while marginalizing or devaluing rural ones. This dynamic not only silences rural cultures but also elevates children who embody urban-valued cultural capital, thereby reinforcing social hierarchies within educational settings. This pattern mirrors broader rural-urban power structures in China, where, as Willis (2020) observes, rural cultures are often framed as deficient and in need of transformation within the modern Chinese education system. Consequently, children's friendships serve as both a reflection and a vehicle for the reproduction of social inequalities.

Additionally, my research demonstrates that children's friendships not only reflect societal power imbalances but also serve as a site for resisting and criticizing dominant ideologies. Building on the arguments of Dyson (2010), Hey (1996), and Heinonen (2021), who regard friendships as sites to critique dominant ideas and ideology, my study reveals how rural migrant children reclaim their rural heritage as a valuable asset, a process that is actively negotiated within peer interactions with urban children. Moreover, the way both rural migrant and urban children would occasionally collectively challenge the class leader system by covering each other's mistakes illustrates how friendships function as a means of contesting authority and hierarchical structures. Therefore, echoing Dyson's (2010) research about friendships and social reproduction, children's friendships serve as a site of social reproduction in two key ways. First, inequality reproduces itself, as seen in how Yiyou's privileged family background grants him more 'followers,' with peers borrowing money from him, while Huohou's disadvantaged circumstances lead to ridicule over his stationery. Second, friendships are shaped by dominant ideologies while also reproducing them through both reinforcement and resistance. For example, Yurun and Siyu's use and appreciation of accents in forming friendships challenge the dominant Chinese cultural and national narrative, which often devalues rural culture as undesirable and backward. Moreover, situating these findings within the Chinese context, my research contributes to the literature on children's agency in friendships, demonstrating how they actively disrupt and challenge the dominant rural-urban hierarchy.

My research therefore contributes to the 'new' sociology of childhood by emphasizing children's agency in building friendships, challenging traditional views that see children as passive recipients of socialization. It highlights how children actively shape their social worlds, with friendships serving as important contexts for emotional development and resilience. This perspective aligns with the 'new' sociology of childhood, which recognizes children as 'beings' rather than 'becoming' (James and Prout, 2015), acknowledging their capacity to navigate and influence their social environments. Additionally, my study situates children's friendships within specific sociocultural contexts, showing how factors such as migration, language, and socio-economic status influence children's social interactions. It extends existing work on children's agency, particularly in the Global South, advocating for a more nuanced understanding of childhood that moves beyond simplistic North-South dichotomies (Twum-Danso Imoh, [Bourdillon](#) and [Meichsner](#), 2019). By exploring both the

commonalities and differences in childhood experiences, my research provides valuable insights into the complexities of children's friendships across social divides.

This research contributes to the 'new' sociology of childhood by emphasizing the active role of children in shaping their social worlds, particularly through the formation of friendships. This perspective challenges previous views that portray children as passive recipients of socialization, largely shaped by adults and external forces. Instead, children are recognized as active agents who contribute to the creation and negotiation of their social lives. As James and Prout (2015) argue, childhood should not be viewed merely as a phase of becoming an adult but rather as a time when children are 'beings' with the ability to influence and navigate their environments. In the context of this research, children's friendships serve as crucial sites of agency. These relationships are not simply influenced by external forces; rather, children actively shape their interactions, assert their identities, and create emotional support systems. Through the lens of children's friendships, this study highlights the ways in which children manage complex emotions, negotiate social hierarchies, and foster resilience, particularly in challenging migration contexts.

Furthermore, this research extends existing scholarship by focusing on the ways in which migrant children, particularly those from the Global South, form friendships with the limitation of agency that is influenced by family. While much of the literature on children's agency in migration contexts tends to focus on the challenges and vulnerabilities of migrant children (e.g. Ding, 2022; Yuan, 2015; Zhang and Luo, 2016), this study contributes by emphasizing the resilience and creativity children exhibit in forming and maintaining friendships despite these challenges. Migrant children demonstrate agency by establishing social networks that help them cope with the stresses of migration and foster emotional resilience. By focusing on the role of grandparents, extended family, and peer relationships, the study goes beyond the nuclear family dynamic, exploring how familial and intergenerational relationships shape children's emotional and social development. The inclusion of migrant grandparents and their role in children's social lives, particularly in relation to friendships, is a unique aspect of this research that fills a gap in existing literature, which has largely neglected the role of extended family in children's friendships.

Additionally, this research contributes to a broader understanding of childhood by offering a more nuanced perspective on childhood experiences across diverse cultural

contexts. While studies in the 'new' sociology of childhood have largely focused on Western contexts, this research brings attention to the diverse experiences of children in migration contexts, particularly in the Global South. It challenges the North-South dichotomy often present in childhood studies by demonstrating that childhood experiences are not homogeneous but are instead shaped by socio-cultural, economic, and political factors that vary across national contexts and different regions within these (e.g. Holt and Holloway, 2006; Twum-Danso Imoh, [Bourdillon](#) and [Meichsner](#), 2019). This study also enhances the understanding of children's friendships in diverse contexts, particularly by examining the dynamics within post-communist urbanization. As discussed in the Introduction and Methodology chapters, the research was conducted on the outskirts of the megacity- Beijing, where some local urban residents were once rural inhabitants and where wealth disparities between urban and rural populations persist. The data indicated that some of the migrant families in the study were not impoverished, further complicating traditional rural-urban divides. The findings of this research, of social interactions and closeness between rural and urban children, indicate that migrant status is not the sole determinant of children's friendships. Additionally, this underscores the importance of the geographical location of friendship research by challenging the conventional view in the Global South that rural-urban distinctions are dichotomous, both geographically and culturally.

7.4 Reflections and Limitations of Methodology and Positionality

My methodological approach is grounded in a commitment to epistemic justice, emphasizing the lived experiences of rural-urban migrant children and their families while critically engaging with the power dynamics inherent in knowledge production. Fricker (2007) argues that epistemic injustice arises when certain groups are systematically marginalized in the production and validation of knowledge. In line with this, I sought to move beyond extractive research practices by adopting methods that positioned participants as co-constructors of knowledge. However, despite these intentions, challenges emerged in practice, highlighting the complexities of participation and the inevitable influence of researcher positionality.

The ethnographic case study approach in my research, which combined observations, semi-structured interviews, and social mapping, proved valuable for capturing the nuanced and context-specific nature of children's friendships. As Herbert (2000) highlights, ethnography allows for an in-depth exploration of everyday social interactions, but it is never a neutral or objective process. My observations in the

classroom, for example, provided key insights into peer dynamics, yet I became increasingly aware of how my presence influenced the very behaviours I aimed to document. Corsaro (2003) notes that children, particularly in structured settings like schools, respond to adult authority in ways that may not reflect their typical peer interactions. Despite my efforts to blend into the classroom environment, I observed children alternating between curiosity and performativity in my presence, raising questions about the authenticity of the social relationships I was studying. While keeping detailed field notes and maintaining a reflexive diary helped me interrogate these dynamics, I remained aware that my observations were inevitably shaped by my own positionality and the institutional constraints of the school setting.

Interviews, particularly those conducted with children, further illuminated the complexities of power and participation in research. While scholars of the field of 'new' sociology of childhood advocate for methods that reduce adult-child hierarchies (e.g. James, 2007; Abebe, 2009; Clark, 2005), I found that even seemingly participatory techniques could reproduce social inequalities. Pairing children for interviews, for instance, helped to create a more conversational and less intimidating atmosphere, yet it also brought relational hierarchies to the forefront. Some children became more performative in the presence of peers, while others withdrew, reflecting the very social inequalities I sought to explore. Oswell (2016) argues that children's narratives and agency are always embedded in broader social structures, and this became evident in how friendship hierarchies shaped the openness of responses. Similarly, interviews with parents and teachers revealed their perceptions of children's agency, yet these adult narratives often carried implicit assumptions about childhood, requiring careful navigation between children's lived experiences and adult interpretations.

The impact of the COVID-19 pandemic added another layer of complexity to my methodological choices. Online interviews with teachers, while necessary under pandemic conditions, felt more transactional than in-person interactions. Archibald et al. (2019) highlight that digital platforms can limit the richness of qualitative data, particularly in studies exploring sensitive topics such as social exclusion. The absence of embodied cues in virtual interactions made it difficult to establish rapport, which was especially important when discussing children's friendships and emotional experiences. While later in-person interviews helped mitigate this challenge, the experience reinforced the reality that research methods are never neutral but are always shaped by broader social disruptions and constraints.

Like Vincent, Neal and Iqbal (2018), I found social mapping to be one of the more revealing methods, providing children with an alternative, creative means of expressing their social worlds. Bagnoli (2009) argues that visual methods can capture emotional and relational dimensions of experience that might remain inaccessible in verbal interviews. In my research, some children embraced the activity enthusiastically, using drawings to articulate friendships and conflicts, while others produced minimal sketches, revealing more through omission than inclusion. However, reflecting on my own methodological assumptions, I realized that during drawing, there are children who drew only one friend on their map showing their emotional intimacy, even though this provides an insightful understanding of 'bestie' in my research, the way children only drew one friend instead of a social map still limits my understandings of their friendship network.

Throughout the research process, my positionality remained a central point of reflection. My rural background and insider experience as a teacher allowed me to build rapport with participants, yet they also shaped my interpretations. Ryan (2015) argues that researcher positionality is both a strength and a limitation as it provides valuable insights but also influences what is seen and how it is understood. My status as a researcher also positioned me as an outsider and allowed me to have a critical perspective, as well as an insider familiarity, with hierarchical educational settings. This insider-outsider position made me particularly sensitive to children's deference to authority, but it may also have led me to over-identify with their challenges, potentially overlooking more subtle forms of resistance and agency.

Ultimately, my methodological choices provided rich, multi-layered insights into children's friendships and migration experiences, but they also underscored the inherent partiality of all research. Rather than seeing these limitations as methodological flaws, they can also be understood as integral to the research process—serving as reminders that the production of knowledge is inherently relational, contingent, and shaped by the dynamic interaction of methods, contexts, and researcher positionality.

7.5. Potential for Future Research

This research also identifies several gaps that warrant further investigation, particularly regarding the role of grandparents in children's friendships. The first theme for further

research relates to the role of wider family relationships in children's social lives. While research has shown that migrant and refugee grandparents often experience subordinate inclusion, a form of integration in which older generations rely on their children to facilitate their inclusion into the new environment, after migration (Kahil, Iqbal and Maghbouleh, 2022), there is a limited empirical focus on how this subordinate inclusion of grandparents affects children's friendships. Although this study explored various dimensions of children's peer relationships, the influence of grandparents on these friendships remains underexplored, mainly due to the limited number of grandparent participants. Future research would benefit from a more in-depth exploration of how grandparents and wider family relationships, including sibling relationships, shape children's social dynamics, offering valuable insights into the influence and emotional support of migrant families in the development of friendships.

The second theme emerging from this study, which requires further examination, pertains to the influence of educational policies on children's social experiences. In China, the prohibitive cost of housing in school districts with access to prestigious public schools has led to many urban families being unable to afford housing in these areas. Simultaneously, these families often perceive the public schools within their local districts as substandard. In response to these challenges, relatively affordable private primary schools have become a viable alternative (Wu and Yang, 2024). In rural regions, educational quality is generally low, and although migration to major cities is financially challenging, county-level cities are viewed as offering superior opportunities for development compared to rural areas. Nonetheless, due to household registration (*hukou*) constraints, many rural families choose to enrol their children in private primary schools in nearby towns or smaller cities instead of larger urban areas (Du, Zhang and Liu, 2018). Future research could further investigate these shifts in educational choices and policy, particularly regarding their effects on children's social interactions, friendships, and experiences in schools with varying migration experiences and geographic profiles.

In addition to rural-urban migration, there has been a growing trend of movement between smaller cities in China. According to recent data, the number of migrant populations in second and third-tier cities has increased significantly in the past decade (Lin and Gaubatz, 2015). However, little research has been conducted on how these urban-to-urban migrant children, from diverse cultural and geographical backgrounds, form friendships. Furthermore, my study focuses on areas outside ethnic minority

regions. In the southwestern regions of China, where ethnic minorities are prevalent, the intersection of ethnic diversity, rural-urban educational disparities, and children's friendships warrants further investigation. These areas present unique contexts where both cultural differences and varying educational quality interact, influencing the social dynamics of children's friendships. Exploring these dynamics could provide important insights into how friendship formation is shaped by multiple layers of social, cultural, and educational factors.

7.6 Conclusion

In this chapter, I started by citing Willis (2020), who describes China as being at a stage of modernization marked by the linear transition from rural to urban. I then present the key findings of my research, outlining its academic contributions to the fields of migration, education, and children's friendships while also reflecting on the methodology employed and my position as a researcher. This research uncovers the complex ways in which rural-urban migration shapes the friendships of migrant children in China. Central to the findings is how children navigate social hierarchies rooted in rural-urban divides, with their friendships serving as both a space for emotional support and a site of resistance. The study reveals that migrant children often form close bonds with others from similar rural backgrounds, providing a sense of belonging and shared experience. However, these friendships can also reinforce social distinctions, with urban children sometimes viewing rural migrants through stereotypes that exacerbate feelings of exclusion.

The research also highlights the role of accent as a key intersectional marker, influencing how children are perceived and how they navigate urban hierarchies. The significance of language, particularly accent, in shaping social identities is a critical but underexplored dimension of migration studies. Additionally, the study underscores the important influence of the state, particularly the hukou system, in shaping social relationships and opportunities for rural migrants, with state policies often reinforcing the rural-urban divide and hindering social integration.

Reflecting on the methodology, the study acknowledges the challenges posed by the researcher's positionality, as well as the influence of power dynamics in participant interactions. While ethnographic methods, including observations and interviews, provided valuable insights into children's social worlds, the research also revealed the limitations of these methods. For instance, children's responses during interviews were

often shaped by social hierarchies, and the online format of interviews during the COVID-19 pandemic restricted the depth of engagement. These reflections suggest that research in migration contexts requires a nuanced understanding of both methodological constraints and the power dynamics that shape data collection and interpretation.

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Appendices

Appendix 1. Information Sheet for the School



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Rural-Urban Migrant Children's Friendships and Education Policies in China

Participant Information Sheet (for the school)

1. Who I am?



My name is Boyang Yin and I am currently a PGR student in Sociological Studies at the University of Sheffield.

My PhD study examines rural-urban migrant children's friendships in China. I also have experience in teaching and working with migrant children. I will also provide my Certificate of non-criminal Record in China.

2. What is the project's purpose?

The research is being carried out as part of my Ph.D. in the Department of Sociological Studies at the University of Sheffield. There will be research in one primary school in Beijing. The research will last around a whole academic year.

My research aims to investigate and understand migrant children's own perceptions and experiences of peer friendships and how schools and policies act in shaping and influencing children's friendships in China. The research will facilitate the

understanding of migrant children's friendships in China and will further help educators to improve inclusion within school settings.

3. Why I would like to include this school?

The study will be based in a primary school in Beijing. It is important for the study that the school has a mix of both migrant and non-migrant children. Your school fits very well with this profile. The study aims to recruit one primary school. This school will be anonymised and will not be identifiable. Within the school I will work in-depth with one Grade 3 class in the primary school. This means I will look to spend time over one academic year being in the classroom getting to know the children and the teachers and the children's parents. I know teachers are very busy and I will be happy to help us with teaching activities and supporting the children.

4. Does the school have to take part?

Participation is entirely up to you to decide if your school takes part in the project. This Information Sheet provides full details of the project and explains what will be involved and the confidentiality of the research process. If you do agree to take part then I will ask you to sign in a consent form agreeing to participate. However, you can withdraw from the project at any time and without any negative consequences. You do not have to give a reason for withdrawing. If you wish to withdraw from the research, please contact me by Wechat yby9633 or by email at Byin8@Sheffield.ac.uk.

5. What will happen if this school takes part? What will being part of the study involve?

If the school participants, I will join a Grade 3 classroom and work with the class teacher to become part of the classroom for two semesters in the next academic year. I will work with the teacher and the school to share information about the project and gain consent from teachers, parents and children.

I will also act as a participant observer – getting to know the children and observing their behaviour and interactions and keeping fieldnotes about what I have seen. I will assist with teaching activities as part of this. I will work with the teacher and the school to contact the parents of the children in the Grade 3 class and obtain their consent for the children to participate in my project.

Once I have school, teacher and parental consent I will get to know the class and the children and I will introduce my project to the class. I will then work with the teacher to organise and conduct paired interviews with the children in the class. All children will

be given an Information Sheet about the research and will be asked to sign a consent form. The interviews will be around 45 minutes along with a drawing activity (children drawing their social map).

I will also try to get to know the parents to conduct interviews with the parents. The interview will be around 45 minutes, which will be about parents' perceptions of children's friendships in the school.

I will also conduct interviews with teaching staff in the school (including the principal, the class's headteacher and teachers who teach this class). The interviews will be around 45 minutes. We will talk about children's friendships and national policies during interviews.

6. What are the possible disadvantages of taking part?

Hopefully, this research won't cause any possible disadvantages. However, talking about friendships may be emotional for some children, and taking part in interviews and drawing activities may cost your time. But I will try not to take extra time or influence children's everyday studies and activities. If children disclose to be of talking about sensitive issues, I will talk to parents or headteachers.

7. What are the possible benefits of taking part?

During fieldwork, I will assist with teaching activities, hopefully this will benefit the class teacher and help them.

I will provide a key finding report to the school at the end of the fieldwork. As children's emotional wellbeing is important for schools, it is hoped that the research findings of this project will assist in providing information about this. Also, supporting rural-urban migrant children has becoming a policy focus and this project will contribute information relevant to this.

8. Will my taking part in the project be kept confidential?

All the information that I collect about the school, the children, the teachers and parents will be kept strictly confidential and will only be accessible to members of the research team (my supervisors and me). All data will be completely anonymized. The name and location of the school will be anonymized as well as all the participants.

You will not be able to be identified in any reports or publications unless you have given your explicit consent for this.

9. What is the legal basis for processing my personal data?

According to data protection legislation, I am required to inform you that the legal basis we are applying in order to process your personal data is that 'processing is necessary for the performance of a task carried out in the public interest' (Article 6(1)(e)). Further information can be found in the University's Privacy Notice <https://www.sheffield.ac.uk/govern/data-protection/privacy/general>.'

10. What will happen to the data collected, and the results of the research project?

All physical and audio data will be destroyed. Digitized data will be kept on a password encrypted on University of Sheffield secure Google Drive. The anonymized interview transcripts will be archived in a data archive for 3 years.

11. Who is organising and funding the research?

The research is self-funded and is supervised by my supervisors at the University of Sheffield (Prof. Sarah Neal and Dr. Katherine Davies)

12. Who is the data controller?

The University of Sheffield will act as the Data Controller for this study. This means that the University is responsible for looking after your information and using it properly.

13. Who has ethically reviewed the project?

This project has been ethically approved via the University of Sheffield's Ethics Review Procedure, as administered by the Department of Sociological Studies.

14. What if something goes wrong and I wish to complain about the research or report a concern or incident?

If you are dissatisfied with any aspect of the research and wish to make a complaint, please contact me (BYin8@sheffield.ac.uk) or my supervisors Prof. Sarah Neal (s.neal@sheffield.ac.uk) and Dr. Katherine Davies (k.davies@sheffield.ac.uk) in the first instance. If you feel your complaint has not been handled in a satisfactory way you can contact the Head of the Department of Sociological Studies Prof. Nathan Hughes (nathan.hughes@sheffield.ac.uk). If the complaint relates to how your personal data has been handled, you can find information about how to raise a complaint in the University's Privacy Notice: <https://www.sheffield.ac.uk/govern/data-protection/privacy/general>.

15. Contact for further information

Please do not hesitate to contact me if you need any additional information. My Wechat number is yby9633 and my email address is BYin8@sheffield.ac.uk.

Thank you very much in advance!



The
University
Of
Sheffield.

Department of Sociological Studies

Boyang Yin

Postgraduate Research Student

Wechat: yby9633

Email: Byin8@sheffield.ac.uk



研究情况说明

1. 自我介绍

我的名字是阴博阳，我目前是谢菲尔德大学社会学研究的博士学生。

我对中国的城乡流动儿童友谊和教育政策有着浓厚的兴趣。我也有教授和与移民儿童一起工作的经验。我还将提供我在中国的非犯罪记录证明。

2. 这个项目的目的是什么？

这项研究是作为我在谢菲尔德大学社会学研究系的博士论文的一部分进行的。将在一所小学进行研究，持续一学年左右。

我的研究旨在调查和了解移民儿童对同龄人友谊的看法和经验，以及学校和政策如何在中国塑造和影响儿童的友谊。

我将采用以下研究方法：在学校观察（在观察的同时，我也会做现场记录），采访家长、老师和孩子，以及在采访中与孩子进行绘画活动。儿童表演友谊的策略将在我的研究中得到强调。在研究过程中，参与者可以自由分享他们的意见和观点。

3. 为什么我被选中？

我想倾听和学习有移民经历或有移民学习经历的孩子们的意见。我还想听听那些与孩子们一起生活的老师和家长的经验。

4. 我必须参加吗？

参加与否完全由你自己决定。如果你阅读了信息表并有兴趣参加，你可以在同意书上签字。你可以在任何时候退出，而没有任何负面的后果。你不需要为此给出理由。如果你想退出研究，请通过微信 yby9633 或电子邮件 Byin8@Sheffield.ac.uk 联系。

5.如果我参加了，会发生什么？我必须做什么？

对于孩子的参与，我将在你上学期间和你在一起，观察你是如何进行友谊的。这意味着我将密切关注你在学校的日常活动，我还将做实地考察记录。我也会与你进行访谈，在访谈中，你可以自由谈论你的交友经验，你也可以谈论你的社会地图。当然，在研究过程中，我们可以决定和开展任何你喜欢的其他活动。做访谈和绘画的过程会被记录下来。但我将在记录后删除它们，你的所有个人信息将不会出现在任何后续的出版物或演示中。对于参加访谈的家长 and 教师，访谈可能持续 45 分钟左右。对于教育工作者来说，采访将在学校进行，因此不会产生旅行费用。对于家长来说，你可以选择你觉得合适的地点参加访谈，所造成的交通费用由我来承担。在访谈中，我们可以讨论儿童的友谊经验，以及家长和老师对儿童的友谊认知和表现的看法和反应。我们还可以谈论中国的教育政策，以及这些政策在学校日常生活中是如何体现的。我们可以谈论诸如优质教育、反欺凌政策、儿童友好型城市政策以及社会和情感学习等政策。我还将观察教师对儿童在学校中的友谊的反应。观察将与我的实地记录一起进行。采访将被录音，并在我记录后很快被删除。你的任何个人信息都不会出现在任何进一步的出版物或演讲中。

6.参加研究可能会有什么坏处？

希望这项研究不会造成任何可能的不利因素。然而，谈论友谊对一些孩子来说可能是情绪化的，参加采访和绘画活动可能会花费你的时间。但我将尽量不占用额外的时间，也不影响儿童的日常学习和生活活动。如果孩子们透露自己在谈论敏感问题，我会和家长商量。

7.参加活动可能有什么好处？

虽然参加这个项目的人没有直接的好处，但希望这项工作能对孩子和学校产生积极的影响。

8.我参加这个项目是否会被保密？

我在研究过程中收集到的关于你的所有信息将被严格保密，只有研究小组的成员（我的导师和我）才能看到。除非你明确表示同意，否则你将不能在任何报告或出版物中被确认。

9.处理我的个人数据的法律依据是什么？

根据数据保护法，我必须告诉你，我们处理你的个人数据的法律依据是 "为执行一项为公共利益而进行的任务而必须处理"（第 6（1）（e）条）。进一步的信息可以在大学的隐私通知中找到，<https://www.sheffield.ac.uk/govern/data-protection/privacy/general>。

10.所收集的数据以及研究项目的结果将如何处理？

项目结束后，物理数据将被销毁。录音将在我完成笔录后很快被销毁。匿名的访谈记录将在数据档案中存档 3 年。

11.谁在组织和资助这项研究？

该研究是自筹资金的。

12.谁是数据控制者？

谢菲尔德大学将作为本研究的数据控制者。这意味着大学负责照顾你的信息并正确使用。

13.谁对该项目进行了伦理审查？

本项目已通过谢菲尔德大学社会学研究系管理的伦理审查程序获得伦理批准。

14.如果出了问题，我想对研究进行投诉或报告一个关切或事件，怎么办？

如果你对研究的任何方面不满意并希望进行投诉，请在第一时间联系我（BYin8@sheffield.ac.uk）或我的导师 Sarah Neal 教授（s.neal@sheffield.ac.uk）和 Katherine Davies 博士（k.davies@sheffield.ac.uk）。如果你觉得你的投诉没有得到满意的处理，你可以联系社会学研究系主任 Nathan Hughes 教授（nathan.hughes@sheffield.ac.uk）。如果投诉涉及到你的个人数据的处理方式，你可以在大学的隐私通知中找到关于如何提出投诉的信息：
<https://www.sheffield.ac.uk/govern/data-protection/privacy/general>。

15.进一步信息的联系

如果你需要任何其他信息，请不要犹豫，与我联系。我的微信号码是 yby9633，[我的电子邮件地址是 BYin8@sheffield.ac.uk](mailto:BYin8@sheffield.ac.uk)。

非常感谢您!

Appendix 2. Information Sheet for Teachers

Department of Sociological Studies

Boyang Yin

Postgraduate Research Student

Wechat: yby9633

Email: Byin8@sheffield.ac.uk



The
University
Of
Sheffield.

Participant Information Sheet for Teachers

Rural-Urban Migrant Children's Friendships and Education Policies in China



1. Who I am?

My name is Boyang Yin and I am currently a PhD student in Sociological Studies at the University of Sheffield.

My research examines children's friendship patterns and has a particular focus on rural-to-urban children and their friendships in primary school in China. I also have experience in teaching and working with migrant children. I will also provide my Certificate of non-criminal Record in China.

2. What is the project's purpose?

The research is being carried out as part of my Ph.D. in the Department of Sociological Studies at the University of Sheffield. There will be research in one primary school in Beijing. The research will last around a whole academic year.

My research aims to investigate and understand migrant children's own perceptions and experiences of peer friendships and how schools and policies act in shaping and influencing children's friendships in China. The research will facilitate the understanding of migrant children's friendships in China and will further help educators to improve inclusion within school settings.

3. Why have I been approached?

I would like to listen to and learn from children who have migration experience or have the experience of studying with them. I would like to access the classroom, listen and talk to children in the classroom to understand their friendship patterns. I would also

like to hear about the experiences of teachers and parents who have lived with the children.

I have gained the permission of the school to do the research.

As children's teacher, I'm also approaching and seeking consent from you because I need your agreement to participation in the research. I would like to do observations in the class and do interviews with you so I can get to hear your views on your children's friendships and what is important to you about your children's friendships in school.

4. Do I have to take part?

It is entirely up to you if you want to take part in the project. If you read the information sheets, you can then decide whether you want to progress and then sign the consent form if you are willing to participate in the study.

You can withdraw at any time without giving any reason and without any negative consequences. If you wish to withdraw from the research, just please let me know. You can talk to me in school or contact me by Wechat yby9633 or by email at Byin8@Sheffield.ac.uk.

5. What will happen if I agree taking part?

I will be based in the classroom and spend lots of time getting to know the children and helping the teacher. I will be in the classroom three days a week and the research will take around two semesters (6 months). I will also assist in the classroom. I will observe their interactions, behaviours, and friendship patterns in the classroom and at playtime in the playground.

I will also conduct paired interviews with the children. These will take about 45 minutes each and will place in the school bit outside of the classroom in a separate, comfortable school room. The interviews will ask the children about who they are friends with, why and what they like to do. I will encourage them to draw a map with their friends on.

The process of doing interviews and drawing will be recorded. But I will delete the recordings after making the transcript and all children's personal information will be confidential and will not appear in any following publications or presentations.

For teachers who will take part in the interviews, the interviews may last around 45 minutes. You can choose where you feel comfortable talking. For example, we can use a room in the school, or we can meet in a local café or in the local park. During the interviews, we can talk about children's experiences of friendships and how you feel about their children's friendships. We may also talk about how migration affects their

children's friendships. The interview will be audio-recorded and will be deleted soon after I transcript. I will use the data for future thesis and publications, but any of your personal information will not appear in any further publications or presentations.

6. What are the possible disadvantages of taking part?

Hopefully, this research won't cause any possible disadvantages. However, talking about friendships may be emotional for some children, and taking part in interviews and drawing activities will involve your time and the children taking a short time being out of the class. I will try not to take extra time or influence children's everyday studies and activities.

7. What are the possible benefits of taking part?

Whilst there are no immediate benefits for those people participating in the project, it is hoped that this work will have a positive impact for children's wellbeing in school and learning more about the children's experience and the ways in which they make and maintain their friendships with rural migrant and non-migrant children and how can school learn from and respond to children's friendships and develop inclusive schools.

8. Will my taking part in the project be kept confidential?

All the information that I collect about you during the research will be kept strictly confidential and secured securely on the password protected University of Sheffield data storage system and will only be accessible to members of the research team (my supervisors and me). The school, the interviews and my notes will all be completely anonymised. No child or adult participant will be able to be identified in my thesis or any reports or publications.

9. What is the legal basis for processing my personal data?

According to data protection legislation, I am required to inform you that the legal basis we are applying in order to process your personal data is that 'processing is necessary for the performance of a task carried out in the public interest' (Article 6(1)(e)). Further information can be found in the University's Privacy Notice <https://www.sheffield.ac.uk/govern/data-protection/privacy/general>.

10. What will happen to the data collected, and the results of the research project?

After the project is finished, physical data will be destroyed. Audio recordings will be destroyed soon after I finish the transcribing them from audio into written text. The

anonymized interview transcripts will be archived in a secure University of Sheffield data archive for up to three years. The anonymized data will be used in my future thesis and publications.

11. Who is organising and funding the research?

The research is completely self-funded and supervised by my supervisors at the University of Sheffield (Prof. Sarah Neal and Dr. Katherine Davies).

12. Who is the data controller?

The University of Sheffield will act as the Data Controller for this study. This means that the University is responsible for looking after your information and using it properly.

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This project has been ethically approved via the University of Sheffield's Ethics Review Procedure, as administered by the Department of Sociological Studies.

14. What if something goes wrong and I wish to complain about the research or report a concern or incident?

If you are dissatisfied with any aspect of the research and wish to make a complaint, please contact me (BYin8@sheffield.ac.uk) or my supervisors Prof. Sarah Neal (s.neal@sheffield.ac.uk) and Dr. Katherine Davies (k.davies@sheffield.ac.uk) in the first instance. If you feel your complaint has not been handled in a satisfactory way you can contact the Head of the Department of Sociological Studies Prof. Nathan Hughes (nathan.hughes@sheffield.ac.uk). If the complaint relates to how your personal data has been handled, you can find information about how to raise a complaint in the University's Privacy Notice: <https://www.sheffield.ac.uk/govern/data-protection/privacy/general>.

15. Contact for further information

Please do not hesitate to contact me if you need any additional information. My Wechat number is yby9633 and my email address is BYin8@sheffield.ac.uk.

Thank you very much in advance!

Department of Sociological Studies

Boyang Yin

Postgraduate Research Student

Wechat: yby9633

Email: Byin8@sheffield.ac.uk



研究情况说明

1. 自我介绍

我的名字是阴博阳，我目前是谢菲尔德大学社会学研究的博士学生。

我对中国的城乡流动儿童友谊和教育政策有着浓厚的兴趣。我也有教授和与移民儿童一起工作的经验。我还将提供我在中国的非犯罪记录证明。

2. 这个项目的目的是什么？

这项研究是作为我在谢菲尔德大学社会学研究系的博士论文的一部分进行的。将在一所小学进行研究，持续一学年左右。

我的研究旨在调查和了解移民儿童对同龄人友谊的看法和经验，以及学校和政策如何在中国塑造和影响儿童的友谊。

我将采用以下研究方法：在学校观察（在观察的同时，我也会做现场记录），采访家长、老师和孩子，以及在采访中与孩子进行绘画活动。儿童表演友谊的策略将在我的研究中得到强调。在研究过程中，参与者可以自由分享他们的意见和观点。

3. 为什么我被选中？

我想倾听和学习有移民经历或有移民学习经历的孩子们的意见。我还想听听那些与孩子们一起生活的老师和家长的经验。

4. 我必须参加吗？

参加与否完全由你自己决定。如果你阅读了信息表并有兴趣参加，你可以在同意书上签字。你可以在任何时候退出，而没有任何负面的后果。你不需要为此给出理由。如果你想退出研究，请通过微信 yby9633 或电子邮件 Byin8@Sheffield.ac.uk 联系。

5. 如果我参加了，会发生什么？我必须做什么？

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程中，我们可以决定和开展任何你喜欢的其他活动。做访谈和绘画的过程会被记录下来。但我将在记录后删除它们，你的所有个人信息将不会出现在任何后续的出版物或演示中。对于参加访谈的家长 and 教师，访谈可能持续 45 分钟左右。对于教育工作者来说，采访将在学校进行，因此不会产生旅行费用。对于家长来说，你可以选择你觉得合适的地点参加访谈，所造成的交通费用由我来承担。在访谈中，我们可以讨论儿童的友谊经验，以及家长和老师对儿童的友谊认知和表现的看法和反应。我们还可以谈论中国的教育政策，以及这些政策在学校日常生活中是如何体现的。我们可以谈论诸如优质教育、反欺凌政策、儿童友好型城市政策以及社会和情感学习等政策。我还将观察教师对儿童在学校中的友谊的反应。观察将与我的实地记录一起进行。采访将被录音，并在我记录后很快被删除。你的任何个人信息都不会出现在任何进一步的出版物或演讲中。

6.参加研究可能会有什么坏处？

希望这项研究不会造成任何可能的不利因素。然而，谈论友谊对一些孩子来说可能是情绪化的，参加采访和绘画活动可能会花费你的时间。但我将尽量不占用额外的时间，也不影响儿童的日常学习和生活活动。如果孩子们透露自己在谈论敏感问题，我会和家长商量。

7.参加活动可能有什么好处？

虽然参加这个项目的人没有直接的好处，但希望这项工作能对孩子和学校产生积极的影响。

8.我参加这个项目是否会被保密？

我在研究过程中收集到的关于你的所有信息将被严格保密，只有研究小组的成员（我的导师和我）才能看到。除非你明确表示同意，否则你将不能在任何报告或出版物中被确认。

9.处理我的个人数据的法律依据是什么？

根据数据保护法，我必须告诉你，我们处理你的个人数据的法律依据是 "为执行一项为公共利益而进行的任务而必须处理"（第 6（1）（e）条）。进一步的信息可以在大学的隐私通知中找到，<https://www.sheffield.ac.uk/govern/data-protection/privacy/general>。

10.所收集的数据以及研究项目的结果将如何处理？

项目结束后，物理数据将被销毁。录音将在我完成笔录后很快被销毁。匿名的访谈记录将在数据档案中存档 3 年。

11.谁在组织和资助这项研究？

该研究是自筹资金的。

12.谁是数据控制者？

谢菲尔德大学将作为本研究的数据控制者。这意味着大学负责照顾你的信息并正确使用。

13.谁对该项目进行了伦理审查？

本项目已通过谢菲尔德大学社会学研究系管理的伦理审查程序获得伦理批准。

14.如果出了问题，我想对研究进行投诉或报告一个关切或事件，怎么办？

如果你对研究的任何方面不满意并希望进行投诉，请在第一时间联系我（BYin8@sheffield.ac.uk）或我的导师 Sarah Neal 教授（s.neal@sheffield.ac.uk）和 Katherine Davies 博士（k.davies@sheffield.ac.uk）。如果你觉得你的投诉没有得到满意的处理，你可以联系社会学研究系主任 Nathan Hughes 教授（nathan.hughes@sheffield.ac.uk）。如果投诉涉及到你的个人数据的处理方式，你可以在大学的隐私通知中找到关于如何提出投诉的信息：
<https://www.sheffield.ac.uk/govern/data-protection/privacy/general>。

15.进一步信息的联系

如果你需要任何其他信息，请不要犹豫，与我联系。我的微信号码是 yby9633，[我的电子邮件地址是 BYin8@sheffield.ac.uk](mailto:BYin8@sheffield.ac.uk)。

非常感谢您!

Appendix 3. Information Sheet for Parents (Child to Participate)

Department of Sociological Studies

Boyang Yin

Postgraduate Research Student

Wechat: yby9633

Email: Byin8@sheffield.ac.uk



The
University
Of
Sheffield.

Hello,

My name is Boyang Yin and I am currently a PhD student in Sociological Studies at the University of Sheffield in the UK. My research examines children's friendship patterns and has a particular focus on rural-to-urban children and their friendships in primary school in China. I also have experience in teaching and working in schools and with migrant and non-migrant children.

I'm writing to invite you to consider taking part in my research project titled **Rural-Urban Migrant Children's Friendships and Education Policies in China**.

This is the information sheet about my research, including the purpose and research methods of my research as well as the ethical considerations. Hopefully, the information sheet could answer your questions about my research. But if you have any questions or concerns, please do not hesitate to contact me at any time of your convenience.

Many thanks,

Boyang Yin

Participant Information Sheet for Parents (Child to Participate)

Rural-Urban Migrant Children's Friendships and Education Policies in China



1. Who I am?

My name is Boyang Yin and I am currently a PhD student in Sociological Studies at the University of Sheffield.

My research examines children's friendship patterns and has a particular focus on rural-to-urban children and their friendships in primary school in China. I also have experience in teaching and working with migrant children. I will also provide my Certificate of non-criminal Record in China.

2. What is the project's purpose?

The research is being carried out as part of my PhD in the Department of Sociological Studies at the University of Sheffield. There will be research will be taking place in this primary school. The research will take place over this academic year.

My research aims to investigate and understand migrant children's own perceptions and experiences of peer friendships and how schools and policies act in shaping and influencing children's friendships in China. The research will facilitate the understanding of migrant children's friendships in China and will further help educators to improve inclusion within school settings.

3. Why have I been approached?

I would like to listen to and learn from children from Grade 3 who have migration experience or have the experience of studying with them. I would listen and talk to children in the classroom to understand their friendship patterns. I would also like to hear about the experiences of teachers and parents who have lived with the children. Therefore, as children's parents and/or children's guardians, I'm approaching and seeking consent from you because I need your agreement of your children's participation of the research.

I have gained the permission of the school to do the research.

4. Do my child have to take part?

It is entirely up to you if you are willing to take part in the project. After reading the project information sheets and talking to me you agree to take part, you will be asked

to sign in a consent form showing you understand what the project is about and that you are happy for your child to participate in it. Your child will also be given an easy-to-read Information Sheet and consent form and will be able to choose if they want to take part in the research.

You and your child can withdraw at any time without giving any reason and without any negative consequences. If you are not further allowed or your child wish to withdraw from the research, just please let me know. Both you and your child can talk to me in school or contact me by Wechat yby9633 or by email at Byin8@Sheffield.ac.uk.

5. What will happen if I agree to my child taking part? What does my child do?

I will be based in the classroom and spend lots of time getting to know the children and helping the teacher. I will be someone the children get to feel comfortable with. I will observe their interactions, behaviors and friendship patterns in the classroom and at playtime in the playground.

I will also conduct all my interviews with two children at a time. These will take about 30 minutes and will take place in the school in a separate, comfortable school room outside but near their classroom and teacher. The interviews will ask the children about who they are friends with, why and what they like to do. I will provide paper and colored pencils and encourage each child to draw a picture or map about who their friends are. The interviews will be audio recorded and then written up. I will not use you or your child's name at any point. I will not use the name of the school or local area. The data will be used for writing my PhD and with future publications from it.

Once I have written up the interview, I will delete the audio recording of the interview. All personal information will be confidential and will not appear in any following publications or presentations.

6. What are the possible disadvantages of taking part?

Hopefully, this research won't cause any possible disadvantages. However, talking about friendships may be emotional for some children, and taking part in interviews and drawing activities will involve your time and the children taking a short time being out of the class. As an experienced teacher I will take care to make sure the children always feel safe and cared for in the interview. But I will try not to take extra time or influence children's everyday studies and activities. If children share any safeguarding concerns or information in my interviews, I will need to inform the classroom teacher.

7. What are the possible benefits of taking part?

Whilst there are no immediate benefits for those people participating in the project, it is hoped that this work will have a positive impact for children's wellbeing in school and learning more about the children's experience and the ways in which they make and maintain their friendships with rural migrant and non-migrant children and how can school learn from and respond to children's friendships and develop inclusive schools.

8. Will my taking part in the project be kept confidential?

All the information that I collect about you during the research will be kept strictly confidential and secured securely on the password protected University of Sheffield data storage system and will only be accessible to members of the research team (my supervisors and me). The school, the interviews and my notes will all be completely anonymised. No child or adult participant will be able to be identified in my thesis or any reports or publications.

9. What is the legal basis for processing my personal data?

According to data protection legislation, I am required to inform you that the legal basis we are applying in order to process your personal data is that 'processing is necessary for the performance of a task carried out in the public interest' (Article 6(1)(e)). Further information can be found in the University's Privacy Notice <https://www.sheffield.ac.uk/govern/data-protection/privacy/general>.

10. What will happen to the data collected, and the results of the research project?

After the project is finished, physical data will be destroyed. Audio recordings will be destroyed soon after I finish the transcribing them from audio into written text. The anonymized interview transcripts will be archived in a secure University of Sheffield data archive for up to three years. The results of the research will be written up for my PhD.

11. Who is organising and funding the research?

The research is completely self-funded and supervised by my supervisors at the University of Sheffield (Prof. Sarah Neal and Dr. Katherine Davies).

12. Who is the data controller?

The University of Sheffield will act as the Data Controller for this study. This means that the University is responsible for looking after your information and using it properly.

13. Who has ethically reviewed the project?

This project has been ethically approved via the University of Sheffield's Ethics Review Procedure, as administered by the Department of Sociological Studies.

14. What if something goes wrong and I wish to complain about the research or report a concern or incident?

If you are dissatisfied with any aspect of the research and wish to make a complaint, please contact me (BYin8@sheffield.ac.uk) or my supervisors Prof. Sarah Neal (s.neal@sheffield.ac.uk) and Dr. Katherine Davies (k.davies@sheffield.ac.uk) in the first instance. If you feel your complaint has not been handled in a satisfactory way you can contact the Head of the Department of Sociological Studies Prof. Nathan Hughes (nathan.hughes@sheffield.ac.uk). If the complaint relates to how your personal data has been handled, you can find information about how to raise a complaint in the University's Privacy Notice: <https://www.sheffield.ac.uk/govern/data-protection/privacy/general>.

15. Contact for further information

Please do not hesitate to contact me if you need any additional information. My Wechat number is yby9633 and my email address is BYin8@sheffield.ac.uk.

Thank you very much in advance!



**The
University
Of
Sheffield.**

Department of Sociological Studies

Boyang Yin

Postgraduate Research Student

Wechat: yby9633

Email: Byin8@sheffield.ac.uk

您好，

我叫阴博阳，目前是谢菲尔德大学社会学研究专业的研究生。我对中国农村-城市流动儿童的友谊和教育政策有浓厚的兴趣。我也有教学和与流动儿童一起工作的经验。

我写信邀请你考虑参加我的研究项目，题目是城乡流动儿童的友谊和教育政策。

接下来的文字是关于我的研究的信息表，包括我的研究目的和研究方法，以及伦理方面的考虑。希望信息表能回答你关于我的研究的问题。但如果你有任何问题或疑虑，请不要犹豫，在你方便的任何时候与我联系。

非常感谢。

阴博阳

Department of Sociological Studies

Boyang Yin

Postgraduate Research Student

Wechat: yby9633

Email: Byin8@sheffield.ac.uk



研究情况说明

1. 自我介绍

我的名字是阴博阳，我目前是谢菲尔德大学社会学研究的博士学生。

我对中国的城乡流动儿童友谊和教育政策有着浓厚的兴趣。我也有教授和与移民儿童一起工作的经验。我还将提供我在中国的非犯罪记录证明。

2. 这个项目的目的是什么？

这项研究是作为我在谢菲尔德大学社会学研究系的博士论文的一部分进行的。将在一所小学进行研究，持续一学年左右。

我的研究旨在调查和了解移民儿童对同龄人友谊的看法和经验，以及学校和政策如何在中国塑造和影响儿童的友谊。

我将采用以下研究方法：在学校观察（在观察的同时，我也会做现场记录），采访家长、老师和孩子，以及在采访中与孩子进行绘画活动。儿童表演友谊的策略将在我的研究中得到强调。在研究过程中，参与者可以自由分享他们的意见和观点。

3. 为什么我被选中？

我想倾听和学习有移民经历或有移民学习经历的孩子们的意见。我还想听听那些与孩子们一起生活的老师和家长的经验。

4. 我必须参加吗？

参加与否完全由你自己决定。如果你阅读了信息表并有兴趣参加，你可以在同意书上签字。你可以在任何时候退出，而没有任何负面的后果。你不需要为此给出理由。如果你想退出研究，请通过微信 yby9633 或电子邮件 Byin8@Sheffield.ac.uk 联系。

5. 如果我参加了，会发生什么？我必须做什么？

对于孩子的参与，我将在你上学期间和你在一起，观察你是如何进行友谊的。这意味着我将密切关注你在学校的日常活动，我还将做实地考察记录。我也会与你进行访谈，在访谈中，你可以自由谈论你的交友经验，你也可以谈论你的社会地图。当然，在研究过

程中，我们可以决定和开展任何你喜欢的其他活动。做访谈和绘画的过程会被记录下来。但我将在记录后删除它们，你的所有个人信息将不会出现在任何后续的出版物或演示中。对于参加访谈的家长 and 教师，访谈可能持续 45 分钟左右。对于教育工作者来说，采访将在学校进行，因此不会产生旅行费用。对于家长来说，你可以选择你觉得合适的地点参加访谈，所造成的交通费用由我来承担。在访谈中，我们可以讨论儿童的友谊经验，以及家长和老师对儿童的友谊认知和表现的看法和反应。我们还可以谈论中国的教育政策，以及这些政策在学校日常生活中是如何体现的。我们可以谈论诸如优质教育、反欺凌政策、儿童友好型城市政策以及社会和情感学习等政策。我还将观察教师对儿童在学校中的友谊的反应。观察将与我的实地记录一起进行。采访将被录音，并在我记录后很快被删除。你的任何个人信息都不会出现在任何进一步的出版物或演讲中。

6.参加研究可能会有什么坏处？

希望这项研究不会造成任何可能的不利因素。然而，谈论友谊对一些孩子来说可能是情绪化的，参加采访和绘画活动可能会花费你的时间。但我将尽量不占用额外的时间，也不影响儿童的日常学习和生活活动。如果孩子们透露自己在谈论敏感问题，我会和家长商量。

7.参加活动可能有什么好处？

虽然参加这个项目的人没有直接的好处，但希望这项工作能对孩子和学校产生积极的影响。

8.我参加这个项目是否会被保密？

我在研究过程中收集到的关于你的所有信息将被严格保密，只有研究小组的成员（我的导师和我）才能看到。除非你明确表示同意，否则你将不能在任何报告或出版物中被确认。

9.处理我的个人数据的法律依据是什么？

根据数据保护法，我必须告诉你，我们处理你的个人数据的法律依据是 "为执行一项为公共利益而进行的任务而必须处理"（第 6（1）（e）条）。进一步的信息可以在大学的隐私通知中找到，<https://www.sheffield.ac.uk/govern/data-protection/privacy/general>。

10.所收集的数据以及研究项目的结果将如何处理？

项目结束后，物理数据将被销毁。录音将在我完成笔录后很快被销毁。匿名的访谈记录将在数据档案中存档 3 年。

11.谁在组织和资助这项研究？

该研究是自筹资金的。

12.谁是数据控制者？

谢菲尔德大学将作为本研究的数据控制者。这意味着大学负责照顾你的信息并正确使用。

13.谁对该项目进行了伦理审查？

本项目已通过谢菲尔德大学社会学研究系管理的伦理审查程序获得伦理批准。

14.如果出了问题，我想对研究进行投诉或报告一个关切或事件，怎么办？

如果你对研究的任何方面不满意并希望进行投诉，请在第一时间联系我（BYin8@sheffield.ac.uk）或我的导师 Sarah Neal 教授（s.neal@sheffield.ac.uk）和 Katherine Davies 博士（k.davies@sheffield.ac.uk）。如果你觉得你的投诉没有得到满意的处理，你可以联系社会学研究系主任 Nathan Hughes 教授（nathan.hughes@sheffield.ac.uk）。如果投诉涉及到你的个人数据的处理方式，你可以在大学的隐私通知中找到关于如何提出投诉的信息：
<https://www.sheffield.ac.uk/govern/data-protection/privacy/general>。

15.进一步信息的联系

如果你需要任何其他信息，请不要犹豫，与我联系。我的微信号码是 yby9633，[我的电子邮件地址是 BYin8@sheffield.ac.uk](mailto:BYin8@sheffield.ac.uk)。

非常感谢您!

Appendix 4. Information Sheet for Parents (Parent Interview)

Department of Sociological Studies

Boyang Yin

Postgraduate Research Student

Wechat: yby9633

Email: Byin8@sheffield.ac.uk



The
University
Of
Sheffield.

Hello,

My name is Boyang Yin and I am currently a PhD student in Sociological Studies at the University of Sheffield in the UK. My research examines children's friendship patterns and has a particular focus on rural-to-urban children and their friendships in primary school in China. I also have experience in teaching and working in schools and with migrant and non-migrant children.

I'm writing to invite you to consider your child taking part in my research project titled **Rural-Urban Migrant Children's Friendships and Education Policies in China**.

This is the information sheet about my research, including the purpose and research methods of my research as well as the ethical considerations. Hopefully, the information sheet could answer your questions about my research. But if you have any questions or concerns, please do not hesitate to contact me at any time of your convenience.

Many thanks,

Boyang Yin

Participant Information Sheet for Parents (parent interview)

Rural-Urban Migrant Children's Friendships and Education Policy



1. Who I am?

My name is Boyang Yin and I am currently a PhD student in Sociological Studies at the University of Sheffield.

My research examines children's friendship patterns and has a particular focus on rural-to-urban children and their friendships in primary school in China. I also have experience in teaching and working with migrant children. I will also provide my Certificate of non-criminal Record in China.

2. What is the project's purpose?

The research is being carried out as part of my PhD in the Department of Sociological Studies at the University of Sheffield. There will be research in one primary school in Beijing. The research will last around a whole academic year.

My research aims to investigate and understand migrant children's own perceptions and experiences of peer friendships and how schools and policies act in shaping and influencing children's friendships in China. The research will facilitate the understanding of migrant children's friendships in China and will further help educators to improve inclusion within school settings. All research data will be anonymised and the school and all participants will not be identifiable.

3. Why have I been approached?

I would like to listen to and learn from children and parents who have migration experience, children who are classmates with migrant children, and parents who have migrant children in their own children's classes. Therefore, I would like to do interviews with the parents of the children in the class so I can get to hear your views on your children's friendships and what is important to you about your children's friendships in school.

I have gained permission of the school to do the research.

4. Do I have to take part?

It is entirely up to you if you want to take part in the project. If you read the information sheets and agree to take part, you can sign in a consent form I have prepared.

You can withdraw at any time without giving any reason and without any consequences. Any information you have given will be destroyed. If you wish to withdraw from the research, just please let me know. You can talk to me in school or contact me by Wechat yby9633 or by email at Byin8@Sheffield.ac.uk.

5. What will happen if I agree to take part?

I will invite you to take part in parent interviews. For parents who will take part in the interviews, the interview will last around 45 minutes. You can choose where you feel comfortable talking. For example, I can arrange for us to use a room in the school, or we can meet in a local café or in the local park. During the interviews, we can talk about children's experiences of friendships and how parents feel about their children's friendships and what they think is important about their children's friendships. We may also talk about how migration affects their children's friendships. The interview will be audio-recorded and secured on an encrypted University data storage facility. The recording will be deleted as soon as I have transcribed the interview. The data will be anonymised and you will not be identifiable. The data will be used for my future thesis and publications, but any of your personal information will not appear in any further publications or presentations.

6. What are the possible disadvantages of taking part?

There are no perceived disadvantages to you taking part in the research. However, taking part in interviews will involve your time talking to me. I will try not to take extra time and I will fit into your schedule and when is convenient for you. We will arrange to do the interview in a place you choose and where you feel comfortable.

7. What are the possible benefits of taking part?

Whilst there are no immediate benefits for those people participating in the project, it is hoped that this work will have a positive impact for children's wellbeing in school and for learning more about the children's experience and the ways in which they make and maintain their friendships with rural migrant and non-migrant children and how can school learn from and respond to children's friendships and develop inclusive schools.

8. Will my taking part in the project be kept confidential?

All the information that I collect about you during the research will be kept strictly confidential and secured securely on the password protected University of Sheffield data storage system and will only be accessible to members of the research team (my

supervisors and me).. The school, the interviews and my notes will all be completely anonymised. No child or adult participant will be able to be identified in my thesis or any reports or publications.

9. What is the legal basis for processing my personal data?

According to data protection legislation, I am required to inform you that the legal basis we are applying in order to process your personal data is that 'processing is necessary for the performance of a task carried out in the public interest' (Article 6(1)(e)). Further information can be found in the University's Privacy Notice <https://www.sheffield.ac.uk/govern/data-protection/privacy/general>.'

10. What will happen to the data collected, and the results of the research project?

After the project is finished, physical data will be destroyed. Audio recordings will be destroyed after I finish the transcribing them from audio into written text. The anonymized interview transcripts will be archived in a secure University of Sheffield data archive for up to three years.

11. Who is organising and funding the research?

The research is completely self-funded and supervised by my supervisors at the University of Sheffield (Prof. Sarah Neal and Dr. Katherine Davies).

12. Who is the data controller?

The University of Sheffield will act as the Data Controller for this study. This means that the University is responsible for looking after your information and using it properly.

13. Who has ethically reviewed the project?

This project has been ethically approved via the University of Sheffield's Ethics Review Procedure, as administered by the Department of Sociological Studies.

14. What if something goes wrong and I wish to complain about the research or report a concern or incident?

If you are dissatisfied with any aspect of the research and wish to make a complaint, please contact me (BYin8@sheffield.ac.uk) or my supervisors Prof. Sarah Neal (s.neal@sheffield.ac.uk) and Dr. Katherine Davies (k.davies@sheffield.ac.uk) in the first instance. If you feel your complaint has not been handled in a satisfactory way you can contact the Head of the Department of Sociological Studies Prof. Nathan Hughes

(nathan.hughes@sheffield.ac.uk). If the complaint relates to how your personal data has been handled, you can find information about how to raise a complaint in the University's Privacy Notice: <https://www.sheffield.ac.uk/govern/data-protection/privacy/general>.

15.Contact for further information

Please do not hesitate to contact me if you need any additional information. My Wechat number is yby9633 and my email address is BYin8@sheffield.ac.uk.

Thank you very much in advance!



The
University
Of
Sheffield.

Department of Sociological Studies

Boyang Yin

Postgraduate Research Student

Wechat: yby9633

Email: Byin8@sheffield.ac.uk

您好，

我叫阴博阳，目前是谢菲尔德大学社会学研究专业的研究生。我对中国农村-城市流动儿童的友谊和教育政策有浓厚的兴趣。我也有教学和与流动儿童一起工作的经验。

我写信邀请你考虑参加我的研究项目，题目是城乡流动儿童的友谊和教育政策。

接下来的文字是关于我的研究的信息表，包括我的研究目的和研究方法，以及伦理方面的考虑。希望信息表能回答你关于我的研究的问题。但如果你有任何问题或疑虑，请不要犹豫，在你方便的任何时候与我联系。

非常感谢。

阴博阳

Department of Sociological Studies

Boyang Yin

Postgraduate Research Student

Wechat: yby9633

Email: Byin8@sheffield.ac.uk



研究情况说明

1. 自我介绍

我的名字是阴博阳，我目前是谢菲尔德大学社会学研究的博士学生。

我对中国的城乡流动儿童友谊和教育政策有着浓厚的兴趣。我也有教授和与移民儿童一起工作的经验。我还将提供我在中国的非犯罪记录证明。

2. 这个项目的目的是什么？

这项研究是作为我在谢菲尔德大学社会学研究系的博士论文的一部分进行的。将在一所小学进行研究，持续一学年左右。

我的研究旨在调查和了解移民儿童对同龄人友谊的看法和经验，以及学校和政策如何在中国塑造和影响儿童的友谊。

我将采用以下研究方法：在学校观察（在观察的同时，我也会做现场记录），采访家长、老师和孩子，以及在采访中与孩子进行绘画活动。儿童表演友谊的策略将在我的研究中得到强调。在研究过程中，参与者可以自由分享他们的意见和观点。

3. 为什么我被选中？

我想倾听和学习有移民经历或有移民学习经历的孩子们的意见。我还想听听那些与孩子们一起生活的老师和家长的经验。

4. 我必须参加吗？

参加与否完全由你自己决定。如果你阅读了信息表并有兴趣参加，你可以在同意书上签字。你可以在任何时候退出，而没有任何负面的后果。你不需要为此给出理由。如果你想退出研究，请通过微信 yby9633 或电子邮件 Byin8@Sheffield.ac.uk 联系。

5. 如果我参加了，会发生什么？我必须做什么？

对于孩子的参与，我将在你上学期间和你在一起，观察你是如何进行友谊的。这意味着我将密切关注你在学校的日常活动，我还将做实地考察记录。我也会与你进行访谈，在访谈中，你可以自由谈论你的交友经验，你也可以谈论你的社会地图。当然，在研究过

程中，我们可以决定和开展任何你喜欢的其他活动。做访谈和绘画的过程会被记录下来。但我将在记录后删除它们，你的所有个人信息将不会出现在任何后续的出版物或演示中。对于参加访谈的家长 and 教师，访谈可能持续 45 分钟左右。对于教育工作者来说，采访将在学校进行，因此不会产生旅行费用。对于家长来说，你可以选择你觉得合适的地点参加访谈，所造成的交通费用由我来承担。在访谈中，我们可以讨论儿童的友谊经验，以及家长和老师对儿童的友谊认知和表现的看法和反应。我们还可以谈论中国的教育政策，以及这些政策在学校日常生活中是如何体现的。我们可以谈论诸如优质教育、反欺凌政策、儿童友好型城市政策以及社会和情感学习等政策。我还将观察教师对儿童在学校中的友谊的反应。观察将与我的实地记录一起进行。采访将被录音，并在我记录后很快被删除。你的任何个人信息都不会出现在任何进一步的出版物或演讲中。

6.参加研究可能会有什么坏处？

希望这项研究不会造成任何可能的不利因素。然而，谈论友谊对一些孩子来说可能是情绪化的，参加采访和绘画活动可能会花费你的时间。但我将尽量不占用额外的时间，也不影响儿童的日常学习和生活活动。如果孩子们透露自己在谈论敏感问题，我会和家长商量。

7.参加活动可能有什么好处？

虽然参加这个项目的人没有直接的好处，但希望这项工作能对孩子和学校产生积极的影响。

8.我参加这个项目是否会被保密？

我在研究过程中收集到的关于你的所有信息将被严格保密，只有研究小组的成员（我的导师和我）才能看到。除非你明确表示同意，否则你将不能在任何报告或出版物中被确认。

9.处理我的个人数据的法律依据是什么？

根据数据保护法，我必须告诉你，我们处理你的个人数据的法律依据是 "为执行一项为公共利益而进行的任务而必须处理"（第 6（1）（e）条）。进一步的信息可以在大学的隐私通知中找到，<https://www.sheffield.ac.uk/govern/data-protection/privacy/general>。

10.所收集的数据以及研究项目的结果将如何处理？

项目结束后，物理数据将被销毁。录音将在我完成笔录后很快被销毁。匿名的访谈记录将在数据档案中存档 3 年。

11.谁在组织和资助这项研究？

该研究是自筹资金的。

12.谁是数据控制者？

谢菲尔德大学将作为本研究的数据控制者。这意味着大学负责照顾你的信息并正确使用。

13.谁对该项目进行了伦理审查？

本项目已通过谢菲尔德大学社会学研究系管理的伦理审查程序获得伦理批准。

14.如果出了问题，我想对研究进行投诉或报告一个关切或事件，怎么办？

如果你对研究的任何方面不满意并希望进行投诉，请在第一时间联系我（BYin8@sheffield.ac.uk）或我的导师 Sarah Neal 教授（s.neal@sheffield.ac.uk）和 Katherine Davies 博士（k.davies@sheffield.ac.uk）。如果你觉得你的投诉没有得到满意的处理，你可以联系社会学研究系主任 Nathan Hughes 教授（nathan.hughes@sheffield.ac.uk）。如果投诉涉及到你的个人数据的处理方式，你可以在大学的隐私通知中找到关于如何提出投诉的信息：
<https://www.sheffield.ac.uk/govern/data-protection/privacy/general>。

15.进一步信息的联系

如果你需要任何其他信息，请不要犹豫，与我联系。我的微信号码是 yby9633，[我的电子邮件地址是 BYin8@sheffield.ac.uk](mailto:BYin8@sheffield.ac.uk)。

非常感谢您!

Appendix 5. Information Sheet for Children

Department of Sociological Studies

Boyang Yin

Postgraduate Research Student

Wechat: yby9633

Email: Byin8@sheffield.ac.uk



The
University
Of
Sheffield.

Information Leaflets about the study (for children)

Rural-Urban Migrant Children's Friendships and Education Policies in China



Who am I?

My name is Boyang Yin, and I am a research student at the University of Sheffield in the UK. I used to be a teacher teaching primary school students, now I'm a student 🧑 again, but at a university.



What is the research about?

I am interested in understanding more about children's friendships 👬👭🧑🧒🤝🧑🧒 and how friendships at school work between children who have come from rural areas and children who have always lived in Beijing.

To find out about how you feel about who your friends are and what you think is important about your friends as well as hear about how you make friends with other children in your class and the school.

To find out about what your teachers' 👩🏫👨🏫🧑🧒🧑🧒 and your parents' 👨👩👧👦 think about children's friendships and what is important to them about your friendships.



How am I going to do it?

I am going to be with you and the teachers in your school for two terms so we can get to know each other well. I will spend a lot of time hanging around in the class and

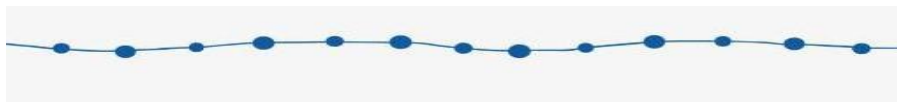
helping with your work and joining in activities. I will be paying attention to what will you do with your friends and will make some notes about all the things I have seen in class at the end of every day 📖.

I will also invite you and another child in class to do an interview with me in which we just talk all about who your friends are and why and what you do together. The interview will be in a different room in school, and it will take about 45 minutes. If you are happy too, we will do special drawings 😊 of you and your friends and family and things you do, and we can talk about what you have drawn. I will make sure you have lots of colouring pens and paper. I would love to keep the drawings and use them to help me understand about children's friendships.



Confidentiality – or how I will keep what you tell me private

I will use the data for publications (e.g., my thesis-a final big essay, essay in journals and presentations in front of lots of people). But I won't tell anyone about who you are or your name and any of your personal details. However, if you tell me about things that have hurt you or that make you worried 😞, I will then need to share this information with the classroom teacher so that they know what is going on and can help you. So only in that situation I will have to share your personal information with the headteacher 🧑🏫 🏫 who may help you.



What happens if I change my mind?

It is absolutely up to you if you want to take part in the project and do the interview and the drawings. If you say yes but then change your mind that is also absolutely fine, just let me know and you don't have to give me any reason for this.



What will the research be used for – why will it be helpful?

Hopefully, the activities especially drawing will be a joyful experience for you. At the end of the research, I will share what I have learnt from you and your school to everyone in the class. I hope what we have did and learnt together will help you in your future school life.



If you have any further questions, you can talk to me. My Wechat number is yby9633 and my email address is BYin8@sheffield.ac.uk. You can also talk to your teachers. If you are worried or not happy about the project, you can also talk to my teachers at my university:

Prof. Sarah Neal, s.neal@sheffield.ac.uk

Dr. Katherine Davies, k.davies@sheffield.ac.uk

Prof. Nathan Hughes, nathan.hughes@sheffield.ac.uk

Thank you very much for reading the leaflet!



社会研究学院
阴博阳
微信: yby9633
Byin8@sheffield.ac.uk



The
University
Of
Sheffield.

Who am I? 我是谁

我叫阴博阳，是英国谢菲尔德大学的研究生。

我曾经是一名教小学生的老师，现在我又是一名学生 🧑，在一所大学。



What is the research about? 这是一项什么研究

我有兴趣更多地了解孩子们的友谊 👧👦👧👦👧👦，以及来自农村地区的孩子和一直住在北京的孩子在学校的友谊是如何运作的。了解您对朋友的感受，以及您认为朋友的重要性，以及您如何与班级和学校其他孩子交朋友。了解您的老师 👩👨👩👨 和父母对 👧👦👧👦👧👦 孩子友谊的看法，以及他们对友谊的重要性。



How am I going to do it? 我要怎么做

我将和你和你学校的老师一起度过两个学期，这样我们就可以很好地相互了解。我会花很多时间在课堂上闲逛，帮助你的工作和参加活动。我会注意你会和你的朋友一起做什么，并在每天 📅 结束时记录我在课堂上看到的所有事情。

我也会邀请你和另一个孩子在课堂上对我进行一次采访，在采访中，我们只是谈论你的朋友是谁，为什么和你们一起做什么。面试将在学校的另一个房间里进行，大约需要 45 分钟。如果你也很高兴，我们会为你和你的朋友和家人做你做的事情做特别的画 🎨，我们可以谈谈你画了什么。我会确保你有很多着色笔和纸。我很想保留这些图纸，并用它们来帮助我了解孩子们的友谊。

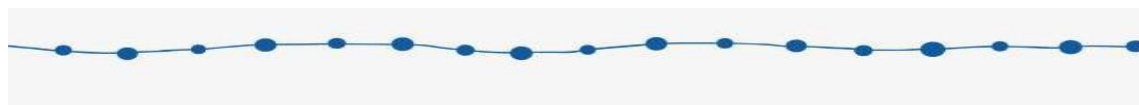


Confidentiality – or how I will keep what you tell me private 关于信息保密

我不会告诉任何人你是谁，你的名字和你的任何个人细节。但是，如果你告诉我那些伤害你或让你担心 😟 的事情，那么我需要与课堂老师分享这些信息，以便他们知道发生了



什么，并可以帮助你。因此，只有在这种情况下，我才能与可能帮助您的班主任分享您的
的 个 人 信 息 。



What happens if I change my mind? 如果我要改变想法呢

如果你想参与这个项目，做面试和绘图，这绝对取决于你。如果你说是的，但后来改变主意，那也绝对没问题，只要让我知道，你不必给我任何理由。



What will the research be used for – why will it be helpful? 这项研究用来做什么

希望这些活动特别是绘画对您来说是一种愉快的体验。

在研究结束时，我将向班上的每个人分享我从您和您的学校学到的知识。我希望我们一起做过和学到的东西能帮助你未来的学校生活。



如果您还有其他问题，可以与我交谈。我的微信号码是 yby9633，我的电子邮件地址是 BYin8@sheffield.ac.uk。你也可以和你的老师谈谈。

如果你对这个项目感到担心或不高兴，你也可以和我所在大学的老师谈谈：

莎拉·尼尔教授， s.neal@sheffield.ac.uk

凯瑟琳·戴维斯博士， k.davies@sheffield.ac.uk

内森·休斯教授， nathan.hughes@sheffield.ac.uk

感谢你的阅读！



Appendix 6. Consent Form for the School

Rural-Urban Migrant Children's Friendships and Education Policies in China

<i>Please tick the appropriate boxes</i>	Yes	No
Taking Part in the Project		
I have read and understood the project information sheet dated 20/Oct/2022 and the project has been fully explained to the school. (If you will answer No to this question, please do not proceed with this consent form until you are fully aware of what your participation in the project will mean.)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
The school has been given the opportunity to ask questions about the project.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
The school agrees that one class from Grade3 will take part in the project. We understand that taking part in the project will include Boyang's observation in the school and the class, and Boyang will take fieldnote along with her observation. I also understand that Boyang will invite children, some parents and some teachers for her interview.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
The school understands that the school's taking part is voluntary and that the school can withdraw from the study at any time up until the post that the thesis is written; We do not have to give any reasons for why we no longer want to take part and there will be no adverse consequences if we choose to withdraw.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
How my information will be used during and after the project		

The school understands the school's, our staffs' and children's personal details such as name, phone number, address and email address etc. will not be revealed to people outside the project.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
The school understands and agrees that our words may be quoted in publications, reports, web pages, and other research outputs. The school understand that we will not be named in these outputs unless we specifically request this.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
The school understands and agrees that other authorised researchers will have access to this data only if they agree to preserve the confidentiality of the information as requested in this form.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
The school understands and agree that other authorised researchers may use my data in publications, reports, web pages, and other research outputs, only if they agree to preserve the confidentiality of the information as requested in this form.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
The school gives permission for the data of Boyang's fieldnote (will be anonymized), which generates from her observation, to be deposited in a Data Archive so it can be used for future research and learning.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
So that the information you provide can be used legally by the researchers		
The school agrees to assign the copyright I hold in any materials generated as part of this project to The University of Sheffield.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Name of participant [printed]

Signature

Date

Name of Researcher [printed]

Signature

Date

Project contact details for further information:

The researcher: Boyang Yin, BYin8@sheffield.ac.uk

Boyang's supervisors: Prof. Sarah Neal, s.neal@sheffield.ac.uk, Dr. Katherine Davies, k.davies@sheffield.ac.uk

The head of the Department of Sociological Studies at the University of Sheffield: Prof. Nathan Hughes, nathan.hughes@sheffield.ac.uk

Address: Elmfield Building, Department of Sociological Studies, University of Sheffield, Northumberland Road, Sheffield, S10 2TU.

Thank you very much for your participation!

请在适当的方框内打勾	是	否
是否参与研究		
我已经阅读并理解了 2022 年 10 月 20 日版的研究信息表，并且研究者已经向我充分解释了这个项目。（如果你对这个问题的回答是 "否"，请不要继续填写本同意书，直到你完全了解你参与该项目意味着什么。）	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
研究者给了我机会提出问题。	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
学校同意三年级的一个班级参与本项目。我们理解，参与本项目包括博阳在学校及班级的观察活动，博阳将在观察过程中撰写田野笔记。同时我们理解，博阳将邀请部分儿童、家长和教师参与访谈。	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
学校明白学校的参与是自愿的并可以在任何时候退出研究；学校不需要给出任何理由说明为什么不再想参与，如果选择退出也不会有任何不利的后果。	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
我的信息在研究结束后将如何被使用		
学校理解并确认，学校、教职员工及儿童的个人信息，包括姓名、电话号码、地址及电子邮箱等，均不会向项目外部人员公开。	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
学校理解并同意，本机构的表述可能会在出版物、报告、网页及其他研究成果中被引用。学校理解除非特别提出要求，否则这些成果中将不会出现本机构的名称。	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
学校理解并同意，其他经授权的研究人员仅在其承诺遵守本表格所要求的保密义务的前提下，方可访问相关数据。	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
学校理解并同意，其他被授权的研究人员可以在出版物、报告、网页和其他研究成果中使用我的数据，但他们必须同意按照本表的要求对信息进行保密。	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
学校同意将博阳在观察中产生的田野笔记的数据存入数据档案，以便用于未来的研究和学习。	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
所以您提供的信息能够被研究人员合法地使用		
学校同意将我在本项目中产生的任何材料的版权转让给谢菲尔德大学。	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

研究者姓名 签字 日期

研究人员： 阴博阳， BYin8@sheffield.ac.uk

Thank you very much for your participation!

Appendix 7. Consent Form for the Teachers (for Observation)

Rural-Urban Migrant Children's Friendships and Education Policies in China

Please tick the appropriate boxes	Yes	No
Taking Part in the Project		
I have read and understood the project information sheet dated 20/Oct/2022 and the project has been fully explained to me. (If you will answer No to this question, please do not proceed with this consent form until you are fully aware of what your participation in the project will mean.)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I have been given the opportunity to ask questions about the project.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I agree to take part in the project. I understand that taking part in the project will include Boyang's observation in the school and the class, and Boyang will take fieldnote along with her observation.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I understand that my taking part is voluntary and that I can withdraw from the study at any time; I do not have to give any reasons for why I no longer want to take part and there will be no adverse consequences if I choose to withdraw.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
How my information will be used during and after the project		
I understand my personal details such as name, phone number, address and email address etc. will not be revealed to people outside the project.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I understand and agree that my words may be quoted in publications, reports, web pages, and other research outputs. I understand that I will not be named in these outputs unless I specifically request this.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I understand and agree that other authorised researchers will have access to this data only if they agree to preserve the confidentiality of the information as requested in this form.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I understand and agree that other authorised researchers may use my data in publications, reports, web pages, and other research outputs, only if they agree to preserve the confidentiality of the information as requested in this form.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I give permission for the data of Boyang's fieldnote (will be anonymized), which generates from her observation, to be deposited in a Data Archive so it can be used for future research and learning	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
So that the information you provide can be used legally by the researchers		
I agree to assign the copyright I hold in any materials generated as part of this project to The University of Sheffield.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Name of participant [printed]

Signature

Date

Name of Researcher [printed]

Signature

Date

Project contact details for further information:

The researcher: Boyang Yin, BYin8@sheffield.ac.uk

Boyang's supervisors: Prof. Sarah Neal, s.neal@sheffield.ac.uk, Dr. Katherine Davies, k.davies@sheffield.ac.uk

The head of the Department of Sociological Studies at the University of Sheffield: Prof. Nathan Hughes, nathan.hughes@sheffield.ac.uk

Appendix 8. Consent Form for the Teachers (for Interview)

Rural-Urban Migrant Children's Friendships and Education Policies in China

<i>Please tick the appropriate boxes</i>	Yes	No
Taking Part in the Project		
I have read and understood the project information sheet dated 20/Oct/2022 and the project has been fully explained to me. (If you will answer No to this question, please do not proceed with this consent form until you are fully aware of what your participation in the project will mean.)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I have been given the opportunity to ask questions about the project.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I agree to take part in the project. I understand that taking part in the project means that I will be interviewed by Boyang. The interview will last around 45 minutes and will be recorded.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I understand that my taking part is voluntary and that I can withdraw from the study at any time; I do not have to give any reasons for why I no longer want to take part and there will be no adverse consequences if I choose to withdraw.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
How my information will be used during and after the project		
I understand my personal details such as name, phone number, address and email address etc. will not be revealed to people outside the project.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I understand and agree that my words may be quoted in publications, reports, web pages, and other research outputs. I understand that I will not be named in these outputs unless I specifically request this.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I understand and agree that other authorised researchers will have access to this data only if they agree to preserve the confidentiality of the information as requested in this form.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I understand and agree that other authorised researchers may use my data in publications, reports, web pages, and other research outputs, only if they agree to preserve the confidentiality of the information as requested in this form.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I give permission for the data of Boyang's fieldnote (will be anonymized), which generates from her observation, to be deposited in a Data Archive so it can be used for future research and learning	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
So that the information you provide can be used legally by the researchers		
I agree to assign the copyright I hold in any materials generated as part of this project to The University of Sheffield.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Name of participant [printed]

Signature

Date

Name of Researcher [printed]

Signature

Date

Project contact details for further information:

The researcher: Boyang Yin, BYin8@sheffield.ac.uk

Boyang's supervisors: Prof. Sarah Neal, s.neal@sheffield.ac.uk, Dr. Katherine Davies, k.davies@sheffield.ac.uk

The head of the Department of Sociological Studies at the University of Sheffield: Prof. Nathan Hughes, nathan.hughes@sheffield.ac.uk

Address: Elmfield Building, Department of Sociological Studies, University of Sheffield, Northumberland Road, Sheffield, S10 2TU. Thank you very much for your participation!

请在适当的方框内打勾	是	否
是否参与研究		
我已经阅读并理解了 2022 年 10 月 20 日版的研究信息表，并且研究者已经向我充分解释了这个项目。（如果你对这个问题的回答是 "否"，请不要继续填写本同意书，直到你完全了解你参与该项目意味着什么。）	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
研究者给了我机会提出问题。	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
本人同意参与本项目。我理解参与本项目意味着将接受博阳的访谈，访谈时长约 45 分钟并将进行录音。	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
我明白我的参与是自愿的，我可以在任何时候退出研究；我不需要给出任何理由说明我为什么不再想参与，如果我选择退出也不会有任何不利的后果。	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
我的信息在研究结束后将如何被使用		
我明白我的个人资料，如姓名、电话号码、地址和电子邮件地址等，将不会透露给项目以外的人。	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
我理解并同意在出版物、报告、网页和其他研究成果中可以引用我的话。我明白，除非我特别要求，否则我不会在这些成果中被提及。	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
我理解并同意，其他被授权的研究人员只有在同意按照本表的要求对信息进行保密的情况下，才有可能接触到这些数据。	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
我理解并同意，其他被授权的研究人员可以在出版物、报告、网页和其他研究成果中使用我的数据，但他们必须同意按照本表的要求对信息进行保密。	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
我同意将博阳在观察中产生的田野笔记的数据存入数据档案，以便用于未来的研究和学习。	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
所以您提供的信息能够被研究人员合法地使用		
我同意将我在本项目中产生的任何材料的版权转让给谢菲尔德大学。	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

研究者姓名 签字 日期

项目的详细联系方式，供进一步了解：

博阳的导师: Sarah Neal 教授, s.neal@sheffield.ac.uk, Katherine Davies 博士, k.davies@sheffield.ac.uk

谢菲尔德大学社会学研究系主任: Nathan Hughes 教授, nathan.hughes@sheffield.ac.uk

地址: Elmfield Building, Department of Sociological Studies, University of Sheffield, Northumberland Road,
Sheffield, S10 2TU.

Appendix 9. Consent Form for Parents (Child to Participate)

Rural-Urban Migrant Children's Friendships and Education Policies in China

Please tick the appropriate boxes	Yes	No
Taking Part in the Project		
I have read and understood the project information sheet dated 20/Oct/2022 and the project has been fully explained to me. (If you will answer No to this question, please do not proceed with this consent form until you are fully aware of what your participation in the project will mean.)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I have been given the opportunity to ask questions about the project.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I agree that my child will take part in the project. I understand that taking part in the project will include Boyang's observation in the school and in the class, and Boyang will take fieldnote along with her observation. I understand and agree that my child will take part in Boyang's interview, which will take around 45 minutes, take place in the school and will include an activity of children drawing their social maps of who their friends are. The interview will be recorded.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I understand that my child's taking part is voluntary and that he/she can withdraw from the study at any time; He/She do not have to give any reasons for why he/she no longer want to take part and there will be no adverse consequences if he/she choose to withdraw.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
How my information will be used during and after the project		
I understand my child's personal details such as name, phone number, address and email address etc. will not be revealed to people outside the project.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I understand and agree that my child's words may be quoted in publications, reports, web pages, and other research outputs. I understand that my child will not be named in these outputs unless he/she specifically request this.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I understand and agree that other authorised researchers will have access to this data only if they agree to preserve the confidentiality of the information as requested in this form.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I understand and agree that other authorised researchers may use my child's data in publications, reports, web pages, and other research outputs, only if they agree to preserve the confidentiality of the information as requested in this form.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I give permission for data that my child provides (all will be anonymized) to be deposited in a Data Archive so it can be used for future research and learning	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
So that the information you provide can be used legally by the researchers		
I agree to assign the copyright my child hold in any materials generated as part of this project to The University of Sheffield.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Name _____ of _____ participant Signature _____
(parents/guardians)

Date _____

Name of Researcher _____

Signature _____

Date _____

Project contact details for further information:

The researcher: Boyang Yin, BYin8@sheffield.ac.uk

Boyang's supervisors: Prof. Sarah Neal, s.neal@sheffield.ac.uk, Dr. Katherine Davies, k.davies@sheffield.ac.uk

The head of the Department of Sociological Studies at the University of Sheffield: Prof. Nathan Hughes, nathan.hughes@sheffield.ac.uk

Address: Elmfield Building, Department of Sociological Studies, University of Sheffield, Northumberland Road, Sheffield, S10 2TU. Thank you very much for your participation !

请在适当的方框内打勾	是	否
是否参与研究		
我已经阅读并理解了 2022 年 10 月 20 日版的研究信息表，并且研究者已经向我充分解释了这个项目。（如果你对这个问题的回答是 "否"，请不要继续填写本同意书，直到你完全了解你参与该项目意味着什么。）	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
研究者给了我机会提出问题。	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
本人同意我的子女参与本项目。我理解参与本项目将包括博阳在学校及班级中的观察活动，且博阳将在观察过程中记录田野笔记。我理解并同意我的子女将参与博阳的访谈，访谈时长约 45 分钟，在校内进行，并包含一项儿童绘制其朋友社交图的活动。访谈过程将被录音。	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
我明白我的参与是自愿的，我可以在任何时候退出研究；我不需要给出任何理由说明我为什么不再想参与，如果我选择退出也不会有任何不利的后果。	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
我的信息在研究结束后将如何被使用		
我明白我孩子的个人资料，如姓名、电话号码、地址和电子邮件地址等，将不会透露给项目以外的人。	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
我理解并同意在出版物、报告、网页和其他研究成果中可以引用我孩子的话。我明白，除非我特别要求，否则我不会在这些成果中被提及。	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
我理解并同意，其他被授权的研究人员只有在同意按照本表的要求对信息进行保密的情况下，才有可能接触到这些数据。	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
我理解并同意，其他被授权的研究人员可以在出版物、报告、网页和其他研究成果中使用我的数据，但他们必须同意按照本表的要求对信息进行保密。	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
我同意将我孩子提供的数据存入数据档案，以便用于未来的研究和学习。	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
所以您提供的信息能够被研究人员合法地使用		
我同意将我孩子在本项目中产生的任何材料的版权转让给谢菲尔德大学。	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

研究者姓名 _____ 签字 _____ 日期 _____

研究人员：阴博阳，BYin8@sheffield.ac.uk

博阳的导师: Sarah Neal 教授, s.neal@sheffield.ac.uk, Katherine Davies 博士, k.davies@sheffield.ac.uk

谢菲尔德大学社会学研究系主任: Nathan Hughes 教授, nathan.hughes@sheffield.ac.uk

地址: Elmfield Building, Department of Sociological Studies, University of Sheffield, Northumberland Road,
Sheffield, S10 2TU.

Thank you very much for your participation!

Appendix 10. Consent Form for Parents (Interview)

Rural-Urban Migrant Children's Friendships and Education Policies in China

Please tick the appropriate boxes	Yes	No
Taking Part in the Project		
I have read and understood the project information sheet dated 20/Oct/2022 and the project has been fully explained to me. (If you will answer No to this question, please do not proceed with this consent form until you are fully aware of what your participation in the project will mean.)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I have been given the opportunity to ask questions about the project.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I agree to take part in the project. I understand that taking part in the project will include being interviewed by Boyang. The interview will take around 45 minutes and will be recorded.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I understand that me taking part is voluntary and that I can withdraw from the study at any time; I do not have to give any reasons for I no longer want to take part and there will be no adverse consequences if I choose to withdraw.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
How my information will be used during and after the project		
I understand my personal details such as name, phone number, address and email address etc. will not be revealed to people outside the project.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I understand and agree that my words may be quoted in publications, reports, web pages, and other research outputs. I understand that I will not be named in these outputs unless I specifically request this.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I understand and agree that other authorised researchers will have access to this data only if they agree to preserve the confidentiality of the information as requested in this form.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I understand and agree that other authorised researchers may use my data in publications, reports, web pages, and other research outputs, only if they agree to preserve the confidentiality of the information as requested in this form.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I give permission for data that I provide to be deposited in a Data Archive (all will be anonymized) so it can be used for future research and learning	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
So that the information you provide can be used legally by the researchers		
I agree to assign the copyright I hold in any materials generated as part of this project to The University of Sheffield.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Name _____ of _____ participant Signature _____
(parents/guardians)

Date _____

Name of Researcher _____

Signature _____

Date _____

Project contact details for further information:

The researcher: Boyang Yin, BYin8@sheffield.ac.uk

Boyang's supervisors: Prof. Sarah Neal, s.neal@sheffield.ac.uk, Dr. Katherine Davies, k.davies@sheffield.ac.uk

The head of the Department of Sociological Studies at the University of Sheffield: Prof. Nathan Hughes, nathan.hughes@sheffield.ac.uk

Address: Elmfield Building, Department of Sociological Studies, University of Sheffield, Northumberland Road, Sheffield, S10 2TU. Thank you very much for your participation!

<i>请在适当的方框内打勾</i>	是	否
是否参与研究		
我已经阅读并理解了 2022 年 10 月 20 日版的研究信息表，并且研究者已经向我充分解释了这个项目。（如果你对这个问题的回答是 "否"，请不要继续填写本同意书，直到你完全了解你参与该项目意味着什么。）	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
研究者给了我机会提出问题。	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
本人同意参与本项目。我理解参与本项目意味着将接受博阳的访谈，访谈时长约 45 分钟并将进行录音。	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
我明白我的参与是自愿的，我可以在任何时候退出研究；我不需要给出任何理由说明我为什么不再想参与，如果我选择退出也不会有任何不利的后果。	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
我的信息在研究结束后将如何被使用		
我明白我孩子的个人资料，如姓名、电话号码、地址和电子邮件地址等，将不会透露给项目以外的人。	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
我理解并同意在出版物、报告、网页和其他研究成果中可以引用我孩子的话。我明白，除非我特别要求，否则我不会在这些成果中被提及。	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
我理解并同意，其他被授权的研究人员只有在同意按照本表的要求对信息进行保密的情况下，才有可能接触到这些数据。	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
我理解并同意，其他被授权的研究人员可以在出版物、报告、网页和其他研究成果中使用我的数据，但他们必须同意按照本表的要求对信息进行保密。	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
我同意将我孩子提供的数据存入数据档案，以便用于未来的研究和学习。	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
所以您提供的信息能够被研究人员合法地使用		
我同意将我孩子在本项目中产生的任何材料的版权转让给谢菲尔德大学。	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

研究者姓名 _____ 签字 _____ 日期 _____

研究人员： 阴博阳， BYin8@sheffield.ac.uk

谢菲尔德大学社会学研究系主任: Nathan Hughes 教授, nathan.hughes@sheffield.ac.uk

Thank you very much for your participation!

Appendix 11. Consent Form for Children

Hi, do you agree?

Hi, my name is Boyang Yin



It is okay to say no!!!

If you want to contact me: I am a PhD student at the University of Sheffield



Email:

BYin8@sheffield.ac.uk

Thank you for being interested in the research!



Before we start, please read the points below carefully, and mark ✓ for agree and × for disagree.

Rural-Urban Migrant Children's Friendships and Education Policies in China

I have read and understand the research information sheet. ☐

I understand that I can stop being involved anytime during the research. ☐

I understand that Boyang will keep all my information safely, no one will know my personal information but if Boyang is worried about me at significant harm, she will only tell my class teacher to help me. ☐

I understand and agree that Boyang will do observation in my classroom, she will take fieldnotes. ☐

I understand and agree to take part in Boyang's interviews, this will take around 45 minutes and will be recorded unless I reject. I will participate in the interview with another classmate. ☐

I understand and agree that I will be invited to do draw a social map while taking interviews. ☐

If you understand and agree to participate, please write down your name here:

Thank you!



你好，你同意吗？

你好我是阴博阳



不同意也没有关系

(*^_^*)

我是谢菲尔德大学博士二年级的学生如果你想联系我：



电子邮箱：

nyin8@sheffield.ac.uk

谢谢你对我研究的兴趣！



流动儿童的同伴关系与中国教育政策

在我们开始之前，请仔细阅读

同意的话请标✓

不同意请标✗

1. 我已经阅读了研究说明并且充分理解了。
2. 我明白我可以在研究期间随时退出。
3. 我理解博阳会对我的所有信息进行保密，但如果博阳担心我面临重大伤害，她不能对我的信息进行保密，因为她需要让有专业人士参与帮助我。
4. 我明白博阳会在我的课堂上进行观察，她会做现场记录。
5. 我明白我将参加博阳的访谈，这会持续 45 分钟，在访谈时我将被邀请做绘画活动。我明白在访谈中我将被录音，除非我拒绝。（如果我不想参加可以画✗）
6. 我明白并理解我会参与画图。

如果你理解并同意参加研究，请写下你的名字：



谢谢你呀！

Appendix 12. Interview Schedule with Teachers

Interview schedule (with teachers)

Hi, good morning/afternoon/evening. As you'll have read the research's information sheet, we are now going to do an interview as part of my PhD research.

Firstly, I really appreciate your time and permission to do the interview online. Today, we are going to talk about children's friendships. Before we start, I'd like to stress that there are no right or wrong answers to any of the questions, and I'm interested in your opinions and experiences. If you don't want to answer some of the questions, or if you want to withdraw from the interview, that's fine, and you can just let me know. The interview is going to take place via an online video call on WeChat (or a phone call). Everything you say will be treated confidentially, and your identity will be anonymous. I will record the interview with a recording pen to capture our conversation accurately. I will give you the Interview Demographics Sheet (mainly about your basic personal information) for you to fill in. You can send it back to me by WeChat or email after we finish our interview. Before we start, I just want to recheck if I have explained everything clearly. Do you have any other questions about the interview? If you are okay with these, then let's start!

Basic information and warm-up questions

1. Could you talk to me about yourself first? What does your job mainly involve? What is your typical working day like?
2. Could you briefly describe the school and the class (e.g. the area the school is in, the children and their families, etc.)? What is it like working here?

Children's friendships and social mixing in school

4. Could you tell me about children's friendship patterns in the classroom? e.g. How do children show friendships? What are their friendship practices? What forms of friendships are there? Do children tend to have best friends or establish groups of friends? Do friendship patterns change and/or break down?
5. Children here are from diverse backgrounds (migration, family backgrounds...). what do you think are the effects of this in terms of friendships? To what extent do you think coming from rural or urban areas or being a migrant children influence children's friendships?
6. Do children tend to play with other children who are similar or different to them in various ways (e.g. migration, accent, gender, school performance)? Can you give some examples?

9. Why might children not play with other children? Any examples? Are there any times that bullying has taken place (e.g. name-calling, teasing)? What do you think are the reasons (rural migrants)? And how has this been managed? What policies have been developed in the school?

School and class management

10. In what ways are children's friendships important to you as a teacher/school principal?

11. In what ways do you see children's abilities to make friends and befriend others from different backgrounds? Is this important for them and the school?

12. How do you use and accommodate children's friendships in your everyday teaching and class management (school management for the principal)? How do you approach children's emotional well-being and their friendships in your classroom (e.g. circle time, group activities, school festivals)?

15. Are there any pieces of training or documents that are helpful for you to support children's friendships and well-being? Any Examples? Are these parts of the school's training or part of your qualifications?

Home-school relationships

16. Do you have a sense of the relationships and friendships among parents themselves outside the school and how these affect the children's friendships? how aware they are of children's friendships and friendship activities outside of school.

17. How involved are parents in children's school lives, and how do they engage with you around their children's friendships? Are there any differences in which parents get involved (especially about rural/urban backgrounds)?

18. Would you engage parents with issues of children's friendships? Can you give me an example of how you've done this?

This is the end of my questions for you.

Is there anything you would like to add or any questions you would like to ask?

Thank you so much for your participation!

Appendix 13. Interview schedule for parents

Interview schedule (with parents)

Hi, good morning/afternoon/evening. As you'll have read the research's information sheet, we are now going to interview as part of my PhD research.

Firstly, I really appreciate your time and permission to do the interview. Today, we are going to talk about children's friendships. Before we start, I'd like to stress that there are no right or wrong answers to any of the questions, and I'm interested in your opinions and experiences. If you don't want to answer some of the questions, or if you want to withdraw from the interview, that's fine, and you can just let me know. Everything you say will be treated confidentially, and your identity will be anonymous. I will record the interview with a recording pen to capture our conversation accurately. I will give you the Interview Demographics Sheet (mainly about your basic personal information) for you to fill in. You can send it back to me by WeChat or email after we finish our interview. You can also give the sheet to your children, and they can give it to me in school. Before we start, I just want to recheck if I have explained everything clearly. Do you have any other questions about the interview? If you are okay with these, then let's start!

Basic information

- Could you talk to me about yourself and your family first? e.g. What do you do? How do your daily routines interact with the activities or routines of your children?
- (a question for migrant parents) Could you share your migration experience with me? e.g. How long have you been migrating? How many cities have you been to? Were you sticking on the same job all these years?
- Shall we then move on to the family life? How many children are there in your family? Who normally takes the responsibility of taking care of the children and negotiating with teachers, parents or grandparents? Why?
- (a question for migrant parents) How many children are in your family? All of the children have migrated here in Beijing or are there still children living in your hometown? Since when do your children start migrating?

Children's experiences and friendships in the school

- What kind of friendship do you want your child to have or experience? Or what kind of children do you dislike your child to play with?
- Could you tell me how your child is getting on in school? Does your child normally talk with you about his/her school life? Is he/she enjoying the time there? What does your child enjoy and not enjoy?

- Are there any celebrities, festivals or special features of this school that you really like or dislike?
- In general, what do you think of children's peer relationships at school?
- Who does your child like playing with? Do you encourage your child playing with them?
- Is there anybody your child doesn't like to play with? Do you worry about who your child is friends with? Are there children you would prefer your child not to be friends with? What do you think about this?
- Do you think children's friendships are important for them and you? In what ways?
- Do you think the class and the school are diverse for you and your child? Do you think the school helps your child make friends? What do you think about the diversity?

Home-School relationships and relationships among parents

- Do you like the school, and do you feel comfortable going to it? Are you involved in the school in any way? Do you go to school events?
- Has there been anything that you have worried about your child in school? If yes, how did you manage this? Did you speak to the teachers, or did the parents negotiate this with the teachers?
- How do you feel when you talk to the teachers and the parents as well?
- Do you know any parents from this class? How do you feel about talking to these parents? Have you built relationships or even friendships with them?

Time outside the school and everyday lives

- Whom do your child normally spend time with outside the school? Are they friends in this class? Could you tell me more about it? e.g. What do they normally do, where, and with whom?
- How do you help your child make friends outside the school? e.g. go to parks together, sleep-over...
- How long have you lived here, in this neighborhood? Do you see parents socially and/or with the children?
- (a question for migrant parents) How often does you go back to your hometown? Do you miss it? How often do you take your child to their hometown? Do they like it, or do they prefer lives here in Beijing?

This is the end of my questions for you.

Is there anything you would like to add or any questions you would like to ask?

Thank you so much for your participation!

Appendix 14. Interview Schedule for Children

Interview Schedule (for children)

Hello, my name is Boyang Yin, and I'm a PhD student at the University of Sheffield.

As you'll have read in the research information sheet, we are doing the drawing activity and interview as part of my research together.

For drawing the social map, you can use the paper and other drawing materials I provided. You can draw yourself at the center of the paper, and your friends surrounding you. You can draw your closest friend(s) closest to you. You are encouraged to introduce your drawing, and we can discuss your maps during the drawing activity.

For the interview, I'd like to discuss your views on friendships. During the interview, I'll ask you some questions. There are no right or wrong answers, you can talk about anything that you would like to share related to the topic. If you don't want to answer some of these questions, this is totally fine, and you can just let me know.

I also want to stress that under normal circumstances, anything you tell me will be confidential, your identity will be anonymous, and no one else will know what you have said. However, if the story or thoughts you shared with me lead me to think that you, or any other person, are likely to be in danger, then I shall tell the headteacher, who can help.

The interview (including the drawing activity) will be around 45 minutes, you can withdraw at any time without giving me any particular reasons.

Do you mind if I tape-record the interview so that I can capture all the things that we have talked about? Do you have any other questions for me before we start? If you are happy with all the things we have talked about, then let's start!

To start with, could you tell me something about yourself and your friends. (Questions I may prompt during the drawing or at the beginning of the interview.)

- Can you tell me who your friends are? Can you describe them to me?
- How did you become friends? How do you usually make friends?
- What do you do with your friends?
- Are your friends the same or different to you? In what ways?

- What makes you think other children in class are different to you?
- What makes other children the same as you?
- What do you think a good friend for you will be like?

Let's then move on to your school life.

- How do you spend your time in school days? What do you think are the important things in your school life? (Things or people that make you happy or sad).
- Where do you sit at school? Do you play a lot with children who sit near you?
- Do you think children in your class are friends with each other or who may get left out or teased? And what do you think are the reasons?
- What will you do when you find the children who got left out? What do the teachers do when they notice it?
- Do you think the school and the class help you make friends? In what ways?
- Are there any celebrations/events/activities/lessons/posters in the school that you like or are important to you?
- How do you feel about school? Are you enjoying your time here? Or is there anything that you don't enjoy?

I wonder if we could talk a little bit more about your life after school.

- What do you usually do after school hours?
- What do you and your friends do together outside school?
- Where do you see your friends outside school?
- Which of your friends do you see outside of school?

I have no further questions. Thank you so much for taking part in the interview! Is there anything you want to bring up before we finish?

Appendix 15. Participant Demographic Sheet for teachers (English version)

Demographic Sheet (for teachers)

- **Name**

.....

- **How would you describe your gender**

.....

- **Ethnicity**

.....

- **Age**

22-25 ☐ 26-30 ☐ 31-35 ☐ 36-40 ☐ 41-45 ☐ 46-50 ☐ 50 and above ☐

- **What subject are you teaching?**

.....

- **Where is your hometown?**

.....

- **How long have you been in Beijing?**

0-5 years ☐ 6-10 years ☐ 11-15 years ☐ 16-20 years ☐ 20 years and above ☐

- **How long have you been a teacher?**

0-5 years ☐ 6-10 years ☐ 11-15 years ☐ 16-20 years ☐ 20 years and above ☐

- **What is your highest level of qualification?**

Junior College ☐ Bachelor's Degree ☐ Master's Degree ☐ Doctoral Degree ☐

- **What was your major**

- **How long have you been in this school?**

0-5 years ☐ 6-10 years ☐ 11-15 years ☐

16-20 years ☐ 20 years and above ☐

Appendix 16. Participant Demographic Sheet for parents (English version)

Demographic Sheet (for parents)

- **Name**

.....

- **Gender**

.....

- **Ethnicity**

.....

- **Age**

26-30 ☐ 31-35 ☐ 36-40 ☐ 41-45 ☐ 46-50 ☐ 50 and above ☐

- **Where is your hometown?**

.....

- **How long have you been migrating?**

0-5 years ☐ 6-10 years ☐ 11-15 years ☐

16-20 years ☐ 20 years and above ☐

- **How long have you been in Beijing?**

0-5 years ☐ 6-10 years ☐ 11-15 years ☐

16-20 years ☐ 20 years and above ☐

- **What is your highest level of qualification?**

Junior College ☐ Bachelor's Degree ☐ Master's Degree ☐ Doctoral Degree ☐

Appendix 17. Ethics Approval letter



Downloaded: 25/10/2022 Approved: 25/10/2022

Boyang Yin

Registration number: 210155567 Sociological Studies

Programme: Sociological Studies (PhD/Sociology FT) - SCSR31 Dear Boyang

PROJECT TITLE: Rural-Urban Migrant Children's Friendships and Education Policies in China

APPLICATION: Reference Number 049162

On behalf of the University ethics reviewers who reviewed your project, I am pleased to inform you that on 25/10/2022 the above-named project was **approved** on ethics grounds, on the basis that you will adhere to the following documentation that you submitted for ethics review:

- University research ethics application form 049162 (form submission date: 24/10/2022); (expected project end date: 02/07/2023).
- Participant information sheet 1110739 version 11 (24/10/2022).
- Participant information sheet 1111394 version 1 (18/08/2022).
- Participant information sheet 1111393 version 1 (18/08/2022).
- Participant information sheet 1111392 version 1 (18/08/2022).
- Participant information sheet 1111391 version 1 (18/08/2022).
- Participant information sheet 1111371 version 4 (17/08/2022).
- Participant information sheet 1112894 version 5 (24/10/2022).
- Participant consent form 1110743 version 1 (25/07/2022).
- Participant consent form 1110742 version 1 (25/07/2022).
- Participant consent form 1111143 version 1 (05/08/2022).
- Participant consent form 1111122 version 1 (05/08/2022).
- Participant consent form 1112877 version 6 (24/10/2022).
- Participant consent form 1112878 version 2 (24/10/2022).
- Participant consent form 1110741 version 1 (25/07/2022).
- Participant consent form 1110740 version 2 (05/08/2022).
- Participant consent form 1110745 version 1 (25/07/2022).
- Participant consent form 1110744 version 1 (25/07/2022).
- Participant consent form 1111120 version 1 (05/08/2022).
- Participant consent form 1111119 version 1 (05/08/2022).
- Participant consent form 1111118 version 1 (05/08/2022).
- Participant consent form 1111117

version 1 (05/08/2022). • Participant consent form 1111116 version 1 (05/08/2022). • Participant consent form 1111379 version 1 (17/08/2022). • Participant consent form 1111377 version 1 (17/08/2022). • Participant consent form 1111376 version 1 (17/08/2022). • Participant consent form 1111375 version 1 (17/08/2022). • Participant consent form 1111374 version 1 (17/08/2022). • Participant consent form 1111373 version 1 (17/08/2022). • Participant consent form 1111372 version 1 (17/08/2022). • Participant consent form 1112895 version 8 (24/10/2022).

If during the course of the project you need to [deviate significantly from the above-approved documentation](#) please inform me since written approval will be required.

Your responsibilities in delivering this research project are set out at the end of this letter. Yours sincerely

Rebecca Milner Ethics Administrator Sociological Studies

Please note the following responsibilities of the researcher in delivering the research project:

- [The project must abide by the University's Research Ethics Policy:https://www.sheffield.ac.uk/research-services/ethics- integrity/policy](https://www.sheffield.ac.uk/research-services/ethics-integrity/policy)
- The project must abide by the University's Good Research & Innovation Practices Policy: https://www.sheffield.ac.uk/polopoly_fs/1.671066!/file/GRIPPolicy.pdf

- The researcher must inform their supervisor (in the case of a student) or Ethics Administrator (in the case of a member of staff) of any significant changes to the project or the approved documentation.
- The researcher must comply with the requirements of the law and relevant guidelines relating to security and confidentiality of personal data.

The researcher is responsible for effectively managing the data collected both during and after the end of the project in line with best practice, and any relevant legislative, reg

Appendix 18. Children's Profiles

Children Profile Form

Name	Gender	Ethnicity	Migration Status	Family Background
1. Wangyin	girl	Han	urban	Both parents work at local public institutions
2. Wangyao	girl	Han	urban	Both parents work at local public institutions
3. Jiayi	girl	Han	urban	Parents work as a doctor and nurse
4. Zihan	boy	Han	rural migrant	parents operate a small grocery store
5. Ran	boy	Han	urban	parents run a small noodle restaurant
6. Yurun	boy	Han	rural migrant	parents run a small tea shop
7. Yubao	boy	Han	rural migrant	The family runs a breakfast shop
8. Enyu	girl	Han	urban	parents work in local public institutions
9. Tianyi	girl	Han	rural migrant	the family runs a large restaurant and an express-service shop

10. Siyu	girl	Han	urban	father works in a hotel and mother works on a railway
11. Mei	girl	Han	rural migrant	mother works in a local clothing factory, and the father works as a chef in a company
12. Yuan	boy	Han	rural migrant	the family operates a small restaurant
13. Yiyou	boy	Han	rural migrant	family owns a sizable auto repair shop
14. Chenxian	girl	Hui	urban	the father works as a taxi driver and the mother is an assistant at a kindergarten
15. Yutong	girl	Han	urban	parents work in a factory
16. Yiming	boy	Han	urban	father works in a local furniture market, and the mother works in a local flower market
17. Zhuorui	Girl	Han	urban	Parents work at a public institution
18. Zixing	girl	Han	urban	the mother is a teacher, and her husband works in a foreign company
19. Tianxiong	boy	Han	urban	father works as a real estate agent and mother as a clerk
20. Muzhao	boy	Han	urban	father as a pharmacist and mother as a nurse

21. Dongding	boy	Han	urban	father works as a hotel manager and mother as a teacher
22. Yisan	boy	Han	rural migrant	father worked at a local factory and mother worked as a waitress
23. Huohou	boy	Han	rural migrant	his father is a truck driver, and he lives with his aunt and cousin
24. Jiaxuan	girl	Han	urban	the father working in a factory and the mother not working
25. Wangwang	boy	Han	urban	parents working in a manufacturing company
26. Ming	boy	Han	rural migrant	working at a construction site
27. Tianze	boy	Han	urban	father works as a legal consultant and mother works as a yoga teacher
28. Yaoxin	girl	Han	rural migrant	the family runs a local flower shop
29. Xiayun	boy	Han	rural migrant	<i>parents run a fishery shop</i>
30. Jiaxi	girl	Han	urban	parents working at public institutions
31. Shiyun	girl	Han	rural migrant	parents own and operate a popular, large speciality food restaurant

32. Duanduan	girl	Han	urban	parents are doctors and nurses in a local hospital
33. Shige	girl	Han	rural migrant	the family runs a small noodle restaurant near the school
34. Ziyi	girl	Han	urban	father works as a real estate agent and mother an event planner
35. Chengxi	girl	Han	rural migrant	parents work at a local transport station
36. Shihao	boy	Han	rural migrant	the family runs a fruit and gift shop
37. Songyi	boy	Han	rural migrant	father works as a photographer and the mother works in a kindergarten
38. Yixia	girl	Han	urban	parents work as a teacher and a clerk

Appendix 19. Teachers' Profiles

Name	Gender	Ethnicity	Age Group	Education	Teaching Subject	Migration Status	Frequency meeting Class A
Ms. Xu	Female	Han	36-40	Bachelor	Chinese (the Head Teacher)	Local, urban	Everyday
Ms. Wei	Female	Han	41-45	Bachelor	Math	Rural Migrant	Everyday
Ms. Wang	Female	Han	26-30	Master	English	Local, urban	Three times a week
Mr. Li	Male	Han	26-30	Master	PE	Rural Migrant	Two times a week
Ms. Wang	Female	Han	31-35	Bachelor	Art	Local, urban	Two times a week
Ms. Wang	Female	Han	41-45	Bachelor	Director of Moral and Studies	Rural Migrant	Do not need to meet a specific class
Ms. Zhao	Female	Han	46-50	Master	School Principal	Local, urban	Do not need to meet a specific class

Appendix 20. Parents' and Grandparents' Profiles

Name	Gender	Age group	Ethnicity	Years have been migrating	Child's Name	Child's gender	Relation with the Child	Migration Status	Education	Occupation
Lisan	female	36-40	Han	14	Mei	girl	mother	rural migrant	high school degree	works in a local clothing factory
Jin	female	31-35	Han	6	Tianyi	girl	mother	rural migrant	a bachelor's degree	an owner of a courier service company
Fangyu	female	36-40	Han	17	Yaoxin	girl	mother	rural migrant	high school degree	an owner of a flower shop
Tianwei	male	36-40	Han	9	Yiyou	boy	father	rural migrant	middle school degree	an owner of a sizable auto repair shop
Dawei	Male	31-35	Han	13	Huohou	boy	father	rural migrant	middle school degree	a truck driver
Xiuqin	female	61-65	Han	6	Chengxi	girl	grandmother	rural migrant	primary school	a farmer

Sifeng	female	56-60	Han	3	Shige	girl	grandmother	rural migrant	not have been to schools	a farmer
Tie	male	61-65	Han	3	Zihan	boy	grandfather	rural migrant	Primary school degree	a farmer
Dan	female	31-35	Han	x	Zixing	girl	mother	urban	a bachelor's degree	a local middle school teacher
Qiyao	female	31-35	Han	x	Jiayi	girl	mother	urban	a bachelor's degree	works in a local hospital
Duanyu	female	36-40	Han	x	Zhuorui	girl	mother	urban	a bachelor's degree	works in a local public institution
Zhiji	female	31-35	Han	x	Enyu	girl	mother	urban	a bachelor's degree	works in a local public institution
Zhuowei	male	31-35	Han	x	Yiming	boy	father	urban	high school degree	works in a local furniture market

Appendix 21. Codebook

Rural-urban hierarchy and children's friendships in China

Nodes

Name	Description	Files	References
Children			
children displaying friendships		105	289
showing intimacy	e.g. how children use games, activities, and physical contact to show their love and care for friends	20	57
conflicts and break down	e.g. how children manage conflicts and break down with friends	28	23
position in the group	e.g. how children act as being 'central' or 'periphery' of the group, how children 'travel' among different groups	22	17
Children's relationships in class	This is the general description of children's relationships and networks in class	35	92
being as friends or simply classmates	This indicates children's levels of intimacy and social distance in class. For example, children may allow their friends or children who like to copy their homework, while	28	75

	others are not allowed. This also involves, for example, polite exclusion such as with whom children may greet in corridors.		
being discriminated against, stigmatized, worried about being alone	e.g. how children discriminate others and how children being discriminated against or stigmatized react to it	25	54
being popular or 'possessing power'	e.g. how do popular kids or class leaders show their 'superiority' and how do other children react to these	35	60
being as 'a class'	As convivial and collective culture is highly valued by the school, this indicates how children, as a collective identity 'Class 8', even have prejudice over others can show their solidarity and collective identity in school events such as sports matches	21	37
Children's understandings of friendships	e.g. how children think and interpret 'what is friendship' and 'what is a good friend to me'	43	142
having fun		18	67
help		11	43

Share secret		19	57
quantity		16	20
Intersectional factors influencing children's making and maintaining friendships	Being popular and 'useful' are often stressed by teachers and parents, such as to 'play with children with good grades' while 'avoid playing with naughty kids'. This code contains factors leading to children's being popular or 'useful' in their class or small groups.	97	297
Gender+ migration experience	<p>Gender: including how children challenge or align with the stereotype of 'feminism' and 'masculinity' in their friendships, and how gender influences their friendships.</p> <p>Migration experience: e.g. change of class and social position due to migration (some migrant children often talk about their emotional attachment to their hometown and the fact that they were the affluent families back there and things changed after migration), displaying rural or urban habitus, being a 'cultural outsider'</p>	23	50
Gender + language (dialect and codes)	This is also linked with gendered stereotypes like girls would be isolated if they use 'dirty words', while boys were less likely because of this	17	21

Migration experience + language	e.g. Beijing dialect seemed more 'legitimate' as they are 'cultural insiders', Mandarin seems to be more advanced than other regional dialects, and accent can sometimes be linked with rural habitus	63	115
Language + Socio-economic background	e.g. teachers often assume that children from better family backgrounds have the ability to use a wider range of vocabulary and can be a better communicator, this is encouraged by the school. Some children also think of some of their classmates as 'can't say anything nice' or unable to negotiate with others well.	36	56
Some affluent migrant families	Some parents and children in this research showed that on the contrary to previous research, they are more affluent and are not the stereotyped rural migrants with poverty	68	97
Limitation of possessions and friendships	How due to the limitation of possessions, such as toys and undesired clothes influence children's friendships and position in class	67	78
Family: parents and grandparents			
home-school cooperation	e.g. how parents and teachers discussed and coordinated when children were caught in a fight or other trouble	15	41

Parents' and grandparents' management of children's friendships	This theme examines how parents and grandparents influence their children's friendships. It includes guiding children toward certain peer relationships, encouraging specific social behaviors, and addressing concerns about negative influences. Additionally, it explores how they help children navigate friendship challenges and promote social skills in line with family values.	25	79
avoidance	e.g. parents sometimes persuade children to avoid playing with certain kids at school	6	37
Building network	e.g. some parents may arrange family trips or parties to help their children befriend certain kids	14	47
family cooperation	e.g. normally, parents, especially moms 'choose' children's friends but are occupied with work, so it is the grandparents' duty to arrange the party or sleep-over, but grandparents sometimes could have different 'preferences' in terms of children's friends	16	67
Parents' and grandparents' understanding of children's friendships		13	41
Value of diversity	e.g. emphasize diversity, inclusion and social skills	10	17

For inclusion	e.g. refusing diversity, worrying about inclusion or exclusion, taking 'playing with friends' as bad for concentrating on study	7	18
Social skills	e.g. parents believe the ability to build friendships are social skills	10	20
help	e.g. parents believe friendships can provide help for their children	8	15
Teachers and the school			
Policy and school life	How policy is embedded in school life, interpreted by the school and influence children's friendships (e.g. Quality Education)	18	55
School activities	This involves how the school uses the building, decorations, activities, slogans, vows, and celebrations to promote inclusion	15	48
Teachers' management of children's relationships		60	115
building collective identity	e.g. using slogans, class badge and activities to build and emphasize the collective culture of the class	18	54

Class-leader mechanism	e.g. using class monitor, group leaders, and Class Representative to manage the class and teach children about obedience	17	23
react to bullying and conflict	e.g. how teachers react to bullying and children's conflicts	23	43
reinforce of gender	e.g. managing the class by emphasizing gendered roles, such as girls can hit boys while boys cannot hit girls, girls should be gentle and caring to others	12	21
reinforce of rural-urban hierarchy	e.g. downplaying certain migrant children's knowledge about agriculture and farming while highlighting urban children's 'urban and middle-class' knowledge, especially during essay writing classes	37	52
seat arrangement	e.g. group children who can help each other study while separating children who sit together and become friends	27	40
Correcting accent	e.g. emphasizing Mandarin	26	41
teachers' understandings of friendships		7	15
For study	e.g. emphasize the importance of children's friendships in helping them study	4	12

For overcoming social divisions	e.g. teachers use friendships to cultivate the sense of unity to blur division such as rural-urban	5	10
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