

Unequal Compulsory Education in China's Great Migration Era*

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Abstract

This paper seeks to offer a comprehensive description and explanation of compulsory education inequality in China's Great Migration Era. We integrate theories on social stratification, migration, and sociology of education; utilize unique national data on junior-high students; apply rigorous demographic methods; and present detailed descriptive and analytic patterns. Our findings provide the first strong and consistent evidence to support two central points. First, China's high enrollment rates in compulsory education should not conceal the astonishing disparities in learning opportunities and developmental outcomes between rural-origin and urban children. Second, the spatial redistribution of compulsory education inequality due to rural-urban migration debunks the popular thought that compulsory education inequality is a development issue. The "one country, two societies" past has become a "one country, two-by-two societies" reality. Policymakers should address the problems as a whole, given the interactive social forces emerging from the rural-urban divide, the hukou stratifier, and rural-urban migration.

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