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Migration, Remittances and Education:

A Review of the Educational Performance of Left-behind Children in Rural China

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Abstract

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The massive rural-urban population flow has been proceeding in China for decades ever since the 1980s. Millions of labor migrants move to industrialized cities for a better future for themselves, as well as their families. The increasing amount of migrants has led to the phenomenon of the “left-behind”. Among the left-behind group, left-behind children seem to be at a relatively vulnerable situation. These children are living without parental care and are seen by previous scholars as negatively affected. This research is aimed to examine the impacts of parental migration on left-behind children’s educational performance. The New Economics theory, human capital theory, cultural capital theory and the concept of intersectionality will be applied to analyze and discuss how economic and social remittances influence the education of the children. This study is designed as a qualitative study that is based on literature review and uses meta-ethnography. The study explores the roles and limitations of remittances in making a conducive environment for left-behind children’s educational performance, and the impacts of other determinants within and beyond the household level. The study finds out that left-behind children’s educational performance is affected by remittances, and also intersects with family arrangements, gender and age, and school facilities.

Key words: Parental migration, Rural-urban, China, Remittance, Left-behind children, Educational performance

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1. Introduction

“My mother said she will come to see me when I go to middle school and take me to big cities in the future. I do not want toys and new clothes. I just want to be with them together, even a few days” said by Xin, a 12 years old boy, who has been left behind for three years after his parents migrated to work in Tianjin (Lv, 2011). More and more rural labors like Xin’s parents have been attracted to move to urban China to work. Economically developed urban China has functioning welfare system and loads of job opportunities that have a tempting influence on labor migrants. In the 1950s, a residential permit system (*Hukou*) separated rural and urban residents, and urban industrial development became the focal point of China’s economic plan (Park, 2008). In addition, after the reforms of 1979, China established the first four special economic zones (SEZs) that were aimed to attract overseas companies to invest and manufacture export goods (Potter, 2008). Thereby, rural and urban inequality occurred. The number of migrant labors is increasing due to this enlarging economic gap between rural and urban areas in China and the demand for cheap labors in industrialized cities. Labor migrants built up thousands of skyscrapers and highways to serve China and they are hoping to build a brighter and better future for themselves and their families. China has around 145 million rural migrant workers who are working outside of their hometowns and the majority are married and have children (China Labour Bulletin, 2013). Migration is a socially complex phenomenon which not only brings high returns to the migrants themselves, but most importantly affects the families left behind in sending areas/countries. “While the economic necessity of migration has been widely recognized, the concerns of the social stress related to migration, particularly those shouldered by the left-behind, also increase” (Biao 2005: 178).

Due to certain resident issues and rural and urban differences, mostly school-aged children of labor migrants are usually left at home and therefore become ‘left behind’. The increasing scale and potential serious consequences are the reasons why left-behind children have received growing attention from the society (Hou, 2015). According to the latest statistics from All-China Woman’s Federation, there are approximately 61 million non-migrant children who are living without one or both parents, and are taken care of by either grandparents, other relatives or other villagers

(Worldpolicy.org, 2013). In most cases, these left-behind children are known as growing up with a lot of troubles. The migration of their parents has caused significant impact on their wellbeing, and result in low self-esteem, emotional difficulties, poor school performance etc. (Lv, 2011; Zhao et al., 2012).

1.1 Research Aim and Questions

The aim of the research is to scrutinize and analyze the impact of internal parental migration on the educational performance of children left behind in rural China. The research questions are approached by reviewing qualitative studies. Educational performance here refers left-behind children's school or academic performance and achievement. The research intends to look at how school performance of left-behind children is affected by different factors such as new guardianships, different types of migration, sex and age, school conditions etc. In the research, it is important to emphasize on the left-behind children's school performance, and analyze what leads to their current performance with the help of a theoretical framework. The New Economics theory and human capital theory are used to specify the effects of both economic and social remittances. While cultural capital theory and intersectionality explain the roles of different intersecting factors, and factors that are beyond household level. Educational performance reflects anyhow children's well-being because it shows how well children live or deal with issues, and additionally reflects their future aspirations (Schoon, 2006).

Human capital theory argues that migration is a strategy to break intergenerational transmission of poverty, while this study intends to problematize this way of thinking (Fitzsimons, 1999). It is also important to look at the roles and limits of remittances when analyzing the impact of parental migration on left-behind children's school performance. The main research question is: how does internal parental migration affect the educational performance of left-behind children in rural China. In addition, one sub-question is generated: what are the roles and limitations of remittances in creating a conducive environment for left-behind children's school performance. One more sub-question has been formulated: how are left-behind children's educational performance shaped by different intersecting factors such as gender, age and class, including family arrangements (who plays the role of guardian. Besides, community level factors also have impacts on the children's school enrolment, completion and grades.

1.2 Significance of the study

The situations of left-behind children in migrant households have attracted a lot of scholars' attention in recent decades (Chan, 2009; China Labour Bulletin, 2013). Also, it is significant to study and analyze the children's experiences of being left-behind. Most of the studies emphasize overall development of left-behind children which included many aspects of their lives such as daily life, emotions, physical problems and education. In this study, the educational performance of the children is in focus by reviewing secondary data. By analyzing previous studies the author has the opportunity to learn from other scholars and to be critical to their findings. Therefore the author may have a clearer understanding of the consequences of parental migration on left-behind children's educational performance. Since the relationship between migration and its impacts is very complex, it would be interesting to see what the potential determinants are and how they intersect with each other.

1.3 Delimitations

Once again this thesis is based on secondary data collected by other researchers. This means that it is possible that the analysis of this thesis become either biased or affected by the other researchers' thoughts. It is therefore crucial to keep in mind the initial purpose of the study. China is a very big and diverse country where all the regions or provinces might differ from each other. It is therefore complex to look at China as a whole when conducting research. However, due to the fact that the studies on migration and education of left-behind children cover different parts of China and no one region has been the focus of many enough studies, this study chooses to focus on the whole China than just one specific region. The author is aware of the fact that the chosen materials does not fully represent the entire picture of China and could cause difficulty when generating conclusions. The purpose is not to compare the results since it is way beyond the level of a bachelor thesis to conduct a comparative study. Gender inequality is a severe social issue in China and is growing as time goes by. Large attention has been drawn on this topic and there is obvious difference between left-behind girls' and boys' educational performance. The author finds it important to include this gender aspect; however it will not get too much further. Moreover, instead of looking at quantitative measurement of educational performance, this study will focus on determinants that lead to a conducive environment for the educational performance of the left-behind children.

1.4 Outline of the thesis

The thesis consists of seven sections. The first section gives an introduction of the study, as well as its aim and research questions. The second section presents the background information of migration in China, reasons why there are left-behind children and the relationship between migration and education. It also explains the concept of left behind and family arrangements. The third section is a literature review on previous research that studied the impact of migration on children left behind in both China and other countries like Mexico, Ecuador and the Philippines. The fourth section sets out the theoretical framework that is going to be applied in the analysis and discussion. Following that is a section on methodology which outlines how this research is conducted and what kind of data was applied. The analysis and discussion of data is presented in the sixth section. This section emphasizes how children's educational performance is affected with regards to the roles and limitations of remittances, and then brings out the impacts of family arrangements, gender and age. The last section provides a summary of the entire research and a conclusion of the research findings.

2. Background of research area

2.1 Why are children left-behind

By looking at the lives of migrant children in urban China, it is not difficult to understand why the left-behind children are left-behind. Apart from the children who stay at their hometowns, the number of rural migrant children in urban cities is growing. According to a survey conducted by All-China Women's Federation in 2010, the number of migrant children in urban China was 35.8 million, which had increased 41 percent since 2005 (China Labour Bulletin, 2015). Rural-urban migrant children followed their parents for the purpose of better welfare and living conditions, but it is a rough road before achieving better lives. The existing rules and other social issues are challenging these children's lives, and therefore explain why some migrant parents left their children at home. The residence registration system (*Hukou*) which devised in the 1950s stated that every single Chinese citizen should be registered to the place of birth, and it categorized people into two social statuses: rural peasants and

urban residents (Afridi, Li and Ren, 2015). To some extent, all citizens' schooling, employment, health care and pension are dependent on their registration places. The strict household registration (Hukou) system was initially one of actions to control rural-urban migration, however the constraints seem to be loosening due to the fact that more and more migrant families can live in urban China without having local registered residence (China Labour Bulletin, 2013; Lu, 2008). Despite some migrant children have lived in big cities for a very long time, they are still facing exclusion and discrimination when it comes to health care, education and other social protections. Most of the migrant children do not have access to the same quality of education as urban resident children and usually end up in some unqualified schools specifically for migrants, unless they pay exorbitant fees to go to state schools (Chan, 2009). On average, expenditures on schooling of a migrant child are three times as much as a local child in Shenzhen (Chan, 2009). Together with the high living costs in the industrialized cities, it creates a big burden on migrant family. Moreover, most of migrant parents have long working hours and are not feasible to take care of their children (Ye, Murray, and Wang, 2011). On the other hand, rural-urban migrant children who go to state schools face social and cultural isolation, and are often teased. Taking all these into account, one can fully understand why Chinese migrant parents leave their children back home in the countryside.

2.2 Family, education and migration

Migration plays a prominent role in pushing China's economic growth and contributing to long-term welfare (Park, 2008). The labor migration is considered to be a family strategy and this phenomenon is inevitable. Moreover, migration also has significantly strong impacts on the families left behind, especially the children (Zhao et al., 2012). On the one hand, remittances sent back home can reduce some household burdens and therefore families can afford to pay for their children's further schooling. On the other hand, the absence of parental care has a negative impact on the well-being of their children, including educational and psychological performance. Most of the studies that are carried out on left-behind children show that these children might have several difficulties due to the separation from migrant parents (China Labour Bulletin, 2013). Fan and Sang (2005) have found that left-behind children have high risks of suffering from psychological and behavioural issues. These children are more likely to live under depression due to loneliness, and have low level of happiness (Su et al., 2012).

2.2.1 Migration and education

China's educational reform in the 1980s changed the old view of education as "an extension and reflection of the political-economic superstructure and instrument of class struggle", and considered education as a pathway to the development of skills and increase of knowledge (Deng, 2013). Political leaders believed that education led to the production of advanced human capital, as well as individual prosperity and national economic growth (ibid.). This idea of higher educational level was widely spread due to the large influence of these leaders. The Compulsory Education Law was published in 1986 which universalized nine-year mandatory basic education, with the aim of providing school-age children with free education and reducing illiteracy (Deng, 2013). This law allowed more individuals and their families to realize the advantage of high-level education, and thus indirectly stimulate the poor rural population to move out of their hometowns. Moreover, an increase in the years of education is shown between the first and second generation migrants. The first generation which migrated in the end of 1980s put finance at first place instead of high education; while the second generation believed that those with advanced education could obtain better living conditions (Murphy, 2014).

According to UNESCO (2010), the net enrolment ratio in primary education increased from 80 to 86 percent from 1999 to 2007 in developing countries due to large national income invested in education. In recent decades, the importance of education has been realized by the majority of rural families, and children are being told that study hard is the only way to escape poverty, which is referred to as social mobility (Murphy, 2014). However, the nation's growing emphasis on education has made parents and teachers put too much pressure on the children: primary school children attend long-hours after-school class or stay in school to finish homework till very late (ibid.). Murphy (2014) also brings out that left-behind children are aware of the fact that their parents have sacrificed for their education, and they need to achieve good results in order to repay their parents. Despite the nine-year (primary and junior high school) compulsory education is free in China, tuition fees for further education like senior high school and college constitute a big burden to most of the rural families. Particularly in rural areas where there is a lack of school materials and local revenues, children need to pay more to the schools (Wang, 2013). And this has

become one of the main reasons causing labor migration. Thus, one of the motivations behind labor migration is to provide children left behind in the hometowns with sufficient financial support so that they can go to school and receive better education. To sum up, migration is sort of an investment of parents to fulfil their aspirations for children's education and future. According to Chan (2009), migrant parents usually call home to ask about their children's school grades and barely asked about the children's mental feelings.

2.3 Left-behind Children

The internal labor migration in China is different from that in other countries. Because of the *Hukou* system, rural labor migrants cannot benefit from the same welfare as urban residents. Additionally, high expenditures on living and schooling force migrants leave their children behind in the countryside. Along with the growing population flow, the number of left-behind children is increasing too. The term "left-behind children" refers to children who live with their grandparents, one parent or other relatives in rural areas because their parents are away working in urban areas or countries (Yu and Gong, 2014; Wang, 2013). Nevertheless, there is no clear definition of the age of left-behind children. Some scholars define left-behind children as those who are under 16 years old and live with other relatives, others refer this term to those children below 14 who have one or both parents migrating (Lv, 2011). In this study, taking the diversity of left-behind children and the lack of relevant resources into consideration, school-aged children who have both their parents migrating are considered left-behind. This social phenomenon emerged long ago due to rural-urban parental migration. Some of these children get to see their parents several times a year, but some can only see their parents on Chinese New Year when parent come back home and bring them gifts. However, the reunion is only temporary and right after New Year the parents have to head back to the big cities again. In most cases, the grandparents are in bad health conditions or have long hours' farm work. As a result, the children have to bear heavy responsibilities of taking care of a household (Browne, 2014). Being separated from parents for too long can even cause mental distress for the children, particularly those who are at a young age, who are likely to have psychological disorders (Chan, 2009). The term "left-behind syndrome" has appeared in Chinese media for quite many times, which refers to children who easily get emotional, anxious, withdrawn and have low self-esteem (ibid.).

2.4 Family Arrangements

In this context, family arrangements mean the arrangement of who looks after the children after the parents migrated. Change in family arrangement is one of the consequences of migration. The absence of parents leads to care re-arrangement of left-behind children's guardianship. Even though migrant parents usually discuss and negotiate about the role of new guardians, the children's wellbeing is affected to some extent. Li (2002) divided the guardianships into three categories: children who are taken care of by grandparents, parents' generation or themselves (or older siblings). The most common guardians are other family members, "in the socio-cultural context, the kinship systems existing families have emphasized the responsibility and obligation to protect the family lineage" (Wang 2013: 54). The traditional idea in terms of guardianship arrangement is to turn to the older generation (grandparents) for help. Grandparents are considered to have the closest kinship to left-behind children beside their parents; however when they are unable to take care of the children migrant parents will ask their siblings or other families for help (Ye, Murray and Wang, 2011; Wang, 2013).

2.4.1 Surrogate family

Professional surrogate family, or foster family, is a new form of guardianship which offers daily care and supervision to left-behind children (Wang, 2013). Migrant parents who have enough amount of income are likely to hire a professional family because of their advantages and good reputation: firstly, a surrogate family provides left-behind children with secure guardianship and sufficient daily needs such as food and clothes; secondly, surrogate parents can supervise and even help the children with their school works; thirdly, left-behind children's communication with other children in the same family can reduce their feeling of loneliness (Lv, 2011). Guardianship like this is able to give left-behind children basic livelihood needs and educational care; however there are still flaws in its development. For instance, surrogate family requires a certain fees, and it often neglects the children's mental problems as they "tend to simplify their mission to guarding and managing" (Lv 2011: 34).

3. Research Overview

3.1 Left-behind children's educational performance in China

A large amount of research has been conducted with the purpose of examining the consequences of migration on educational performance of the children left behind, due to the rapidly increasing number of left-behind children and their living situation (Zhao et al., 2012; Zhou, Murphy & Tao, 2014). The absence of parents could have decisive impact on left-behind children's values and interests on education, which would cause unproductive management on their studies (Ye, Murray and Wang, 2011). Huang and Zhan (2008) express that the education of left-behind children gets improved because the money their migrant parents send back home is mostly invested in the children's basic education. On the contrary, Hu (2013) argues that the educational performance of left-behind children is negatively affected because of the absence of parents, however economic remittances compensate a bit. There are some researchers believing that left-behind children's school performance is not necessarily affected by their parents' migration. Su et al (2012) find that the movement of parents does not lead to significant change in the children's academic performance, while the feeling of loneliness should be emphasized. Chen's (2009) study on rural areas of Shaanxi province does not show a significant negative effect of migration on the children's educational performance either, however there is a progress of education of children who have a migrant father. Furthermore, Leng and Park (2010) argue that the flow of human capital from migrant receiving areas to sending areas, so-called 'brain gain', stimulates returns to schools and further education.

Even though the majority of left-behind children are raised by other caretakers, the role of parents cannot be easily replaced and the lack of parental disciplines does have some negative impacts on children's schooling. For example, one study shows that left-behind children tend to have high drop-out rates, low academic grades and social and behavioural problems (Zhou, Murphy & Tao 2014). The role of guardians can also have evident influence on left-behind children's educational performance. Xiang (2005) points out that the children who live with grandparents commonly end up being aggressive because the grandparents spoil them too much or do not care much about their emotions.

On the other hand, there are researchers who believe that the influence of other determinants cannot be ignored, such as the gender and age of the children, the duration of migration and the gender of the migrant parent. Hou (2015) examined that the education performance of children without migrant parents is higher than children with one or two migrant parents; and also left-behind girls seem to be more vulnerable than other left-behind, because girls are more likely to help with household work such as cooking, cleaning and taking care of young siblings. However, studies on this perspective are lacking.

Evidence from Leng and Park's (2010) research presents that left-behind children who have a migrant father have both positive and negative performance on education. Additionally, when a father migrates his son tends to have high drop-out rate, while no obvious effect has been shown on the girl's schooling (Leng and Park, 2010). On the contrary, Hu's (2013) study finds out that left-behind girls' educational performance is more negatively affected than the boys' by the movement of parents. Moreover, Hou (2015) presents that improvements have been found in left-behind boys' math grade and girls' language grade. She also comes to the conclusion that boys' school performance is positively influenced by their fathers' migration.

When it comes to the duration of the parents' migration, different results are seen as well. Hou (2015) argues that short-term parental migration has no significant impact on left-behind children's education, while long-term migration (over three years) brings advantages to the children's academic performance. Conversely, some scholars state that test scores get worse along with the increasing migrant duration of parents (Zhou, Murphy & Tao, 2014).

3.2 Left-behind children's educational performance in other countries

Empirical studies on the impact of migration remain insufficient, particularly dealing with children left behind. Empirical studies from other countries can possibly present a broader view of this phenomenon. Positive outcomes have arisen from recent empirical studies from other countries due to the remittances sent by migrant parents. Remittance plays a significant role in family income and family investment in human capital. For instance, remittances decreased school dropout rate in El Salvador and had positive impact on increasing school enrolment in Ecuador (Edwards and Ureta, 2003; Caleo et al., 2009). Conversely, Garza (2010) argues that migration has a

negative impact on rural Mexican boys' schooling, with the age of 16 to 18. In addition, more studies show similar results. studies on Mexico and Albania point out that parental migration has negative influence on left-behind children's school attendance and lead to increasing school drop-out rate and low possibilities in high-school completion (McKenzie and Rapoport, 2006; Giannelli and Mangiavacchi, 2010).

Parental migration causes psychological issues and changes in family arrangement, meaning that children suffered from the absence of parental care and supervision, and children may have to put more effort on household work than school work. Older children usually take the responsibilities to take care of young siblings and help out with household, which reduces their time on doing school work. However, adverse result has been found that the absence of parents and changes in family structure do not always bring negative impacts on children. A study on left-behind children in Philippines showed that older children could play active roles in this left-behind situation: they learned how to cope when they encountered household or school-related problems (Asis 2006).

4. Theoretical Approach

Before exploring the impacts of migration on creating a beneficial environment for left-behind children's educational performance, it is important to account for theories which will be used in analyzing the empirical material. This section will present and discuss the theoretical approaches used in the research: the new economics theory, human capital theory, cultural capital theory and the concept of intersectionality. A combination of these theories intends to explain how migration can limit the intergenerational transmission of poverty, and problematize this ability of migration by examining how economic and social remittances affect left-behind children's educational performance, as well as the impacts of other sociological factors.

4.1 Migration, education and poverty

The New Economics Theory

The New Economics of Labor Market theory (NELM) presents some new perspectives of the neoclassical economic theory, for example one of its arguments is that migration is more of a family decision than an individual one. In other words, the

new economics of migration argues that migration decision is made by a unit of related people, such as family members, in order to reduce household's economic difficulties by allocating family members (Massey et al., 1993). According to the new economics theory, migration is a response to income difficulties and family members are seen as predominant role in households' risk diversification strategy (Morawska, 2007). Thus, the remittances are seen as income insurance. "In addition to its contribution to more stable and secure household livelihoods, NELM scholars argue that migration plays a vital role in providing a potential source of investment capital, which is especially important in the context of the imperfect credit (capital) and risk (insurance) markets that prevail in most developing countries" (Hein, 2007). The well-being of children is one of the main considerations behind the migration decision (Chan, 2009). Given the poor living conditions in rural China such as low income, no or dysfunctional insurance system, most of rural parents migrate because they want to support family financially and they wish to provide their children a better future. All together makes migration a family decision.

Human Capital and remittances

The main point of human capital theory is that in labor economics workers make different kinds of investments using some forms of capitals, which involve a variety of characteristics as part of human capital investment such as skills or schooling. (Acemoglu and Autor, 2014). It basically explains the relationship between income level and the duration and level of education. According to 'the Becker view', human capital is commonly used in the production process, "human capital increases a worker's productivity in all tasks, though possibly differentially in different tasks, organizations, and situations" (Acemoglu and Autor, 2014: 4). In recent decades, education has become a key element of the achievement of good economic performance within human capital theory, and plays a significant role in people's participation in the global economy (Fitzsimons, 1999). In other words, parents migrate in order to earn more money so that they can invest more in their children's education, with which the children are able to receive better economic returns, thus gradually weaken the intergenerational transmission of poverty. Therefore, the thought of more investment in education is not only taken by migrant parents themselves but also is sent back home to their children. Migrant parents' human capital affects left-behind children's human capital. Most of the migrant households

see education, the most common form of human capital investment, as an efficient economic development (Chan, 2009). Successful migrant parents have the desire to invest more in the education of their children left behind, which will provide them with more and better job opportunities (De La Garza, 2010).

Scholars of the new economics and human capital theory argue that migration is a family decision with the aim to weaken or break the intergenerational circle of poverty within the rural household. Schooling and the quality of schooling are the two sources of the formation of human capital, which can be affected by components such as remittances (Acemoglu and Autor, 2014).

Remittances

The movement of rural-urban migrant parents is very likely to be beneficial for the family left behind, for example in the form of remittances, investments, knowledge, skills and so on (Hein, 2007). Migrant parents encourage their children's education by spending large amount of economic remittances on schooling, although emotional cost caused by separation is high. A study in Guatemala shows that migrant families with economic remittances spend 45.2 per cent more on education than migrant families without economic remittances (Hein, 2007). One can say that investment in the education of children is viewed as insurance in family's income. One family from Inner Mongolia expresses that they left poverty after 2000 after the migration of two daughters. They received around 9000 RMB from the two daughters in 2004 and used these money for health care, younger children's education and so on (Huang and Zhan, 2008). Although statistics show that labor migration leads to an increase of 8.5 – 13.1 per cent in the household income in rural China, poverty elimination is still less likely to happen because those who migrate are usually not the poorest (Hein, 2007). Thereby the contribution of migration to break poverty is questioned.

Similar findings have been obtained by some researchers who believe that social remittances result in positive outcomes in left-behind children's school attendance and educational achievement (Hein, 2007; Wang, 2013). As it has been discussed in the first chapter, migrant parents who have made success in urban China intend to pass the idea of 'study their way out of poverty' to their children so that the children can follow this migration path and build a better future (Murphy, 2014; Hein, 2007). The parents want their children to realize the significance of education and its impact on

economic development. Apart from being told to study hard and leave poverty, left-behind children themselves get motivated by the information of successful migrant parents' living and working conditions (Ye, Murray and Wang, 2011). Moving to urban cities gives labor migrants the opportunity to build financial foundation and investment for themselves and their households, as well as to pass on social remittances that are sent to the family members left behind.

4.2 Cultural capital

The theory of cultural capital, or cultural reproduction, is generated by Bourdieu with a focus on social status disparities (Sullivan, 2002). Bourdieu believes that cultural capital dominates the education system, and different social classes produce different cultural capital (ibid). According to Davies, Qiu and Davies's (2014) definition, cultural capital is a term which refers to expectations and tastes which are transmitted through parents' interactions such as phone calls and letters. They also state that cultural capital support children's educational achievement in a way that children's formation of cultural capital is influenced by parents' decisions, as well as children's participation in cultural activities (Davies, Qiu and Davies, 2014). Therefore, migrant parents' cultural capital varies with their educational level and can result in difference in educational investment in their left-behind children. Migrant parents who do not believe that education brings significant changes might spread the notion of 'study is useless' to their children, while migrant parents who have high aspirations on education may make children stimulated and motivated to study hard (Ye, Murray and Wang, 2011). Furthermore, not only the migrant parents' cultural capital, but also the caregivers or guardians' cultural capital makes a big influence on the children's educational performance. For instance their educational level and attitudes on education can be concerned as determinants of the children's school performance (Zhou, Murphy and Tao, 2014; Ye, Murray and Wang, 2011).

In this case, cultural capital theory implies that the educational level and the attitudes of education of migrant households influence left-behind children's school performance; while human capital theory argues that parents' investment through remittances has positive impacts on their educational performance.

4.3 Intersectionality

The main concept of intersectionality theory is to realize the relationships and connections between different social categories or forms (Collins, 2002). It is most commonly used in feminist studies in order to emphasize the interdependence and interconnection of the norms of gender, race and class (Bastia, 2014). Therefore, intersectionality can be applied to explain the intersections between the components that affect people's lives. In this study, the consequences of parental migration on left-behind children's educational performance cannot be explained only in terms of remittances, family environment and factors beyond family level need to be included. For instance, family arrangements of who to look after the children when their parents are away, the gender and age of left-behind children, or the school conditions and teaching materials. Also, an interesting point will be made on the intersection between gender, age and class in this study. Xiang Biao (2005) argues that migrant parents' remittances can only marginally benefit rural education without well-functioning public institutions. As stated above, intersectionality aims for exposing the complexity and interconnections of social categories (Bastia, 2014). Left-behind children's school performance cannot be possibly examined by only one variable. It is crucial to look at different perspectives because of the complex relationship between migration and its impacts. Two left-behind children from the same family, for example, might have different educational performance in terms of their gender and age (Hou 2015; Hu, 2013).

5. Methodology

Methodology that will be used can be summarized as meta-ethnography. Meta-ethnography is regarded as one of the most appropriate approaches when it comes to synthesis of qualitative study. Qualitative synthesis is aimed to achieve 'invention or employment of concepts not found in the characterization of the parts as a means of creating the whole' (Campbell et al., 2011). Therefore, a new theory is expected to come out of some individual studies. Britten et al. (2002) summarized Noblit and Hare (1988)'s seven-steps of meta-ethnography as below:

1. *Getting started: select a specific research question and area to seek for answers*

- 2. Deciding what is relevant to the initial interest: decide the scope of a synthesis and find worked examples that can be used in the study*
- 3. Reading the studies: carefully go through the chosen studies in order to gather main concepts*
- 4. Determining how the studies are related: deeply analyze the chosen studies and look for common findings*
- 5. Translating the studies into one another: identify concepts in the chosen studies and make sure they are encompassed*
- 6. Synthesising translations: establish relationships between the chosen studies*
- 7. Expressing synthesis: emphasize on the details of the methodology and further questions on the research.*

Since this study is a research overview, secondary data will be used in order to give a better understanding of left-behind children's life and how parental migration influence their academic performance. Qualitative data such as relevant academic articles and reports will be applied later on to analyze the consequences of parental migration on left-behind children's educational performance in rural China. Resources from Chinese media probably present different findings from researches conducted by Western researchers. However, there is a risk that some of the resources from Chinese media can be biased due to government control. The use of secondary data provides the researcher with more time on in-depth analysis and to draw his/her own conclusion. New findings are expected to be made, even though the data is collected by other scholars and perhaps for a different purpose. According to Bryman (2008), new interpretations will be attained after using other scholars' work, and also, it is important to apply source criticism to ensure the quality of the data.

Resources used in this thesis have mainly adopted semi-structured interviews and case studies. It shows a very close relationship between the researcher and the left-behind, and therefore it is easier to gather information from left-behind children's experiences (Bryman 2008: 435). It is also significant to analyze interviews with guardians and teachers to get different perspectives on left-behind children's educational performance. Some key words were used during the selection of

secondary resources, for example internal migration, remittances, left-behind children, education, enrolment.

6. Analysis

This section draws on an analysis and discussion of secondary data that is used in this research in order to answer the research questions. Internal parental migration in China results in increase in household income, the absence of parental care and changes in family structure. These all affect the educational performance of left-behind children in some respects. The analysis starts with a discussion on the positive impacts of economic and social remittances on building a beneficial environment for left-behind children's educational performance, then points out the limitations of remittances and how other factors affect the educational performance of left-behind children in rural China.

6.1 Remittances

6.1.1 Economic remittances and its limitations

Wang (2013) carried out a qualitative research with the aim of exploring different aspects of left-behind children's experiences in Suqian City, located in north Jiangsu Province. Data was collected through qualitative methods such as participant observation, semi-structured interviews, focus group discussion and some visual methods (drawings, photography and writings) (Wang, 2013). One of the findings is that parents' migration brings economic benefits to the left-behind household so that the household is able to fulfil daily needs and to provide basic education for the children. One little boy who was involved in the research said his daily life was dependent on the money his parents sent back home:

“My parents send money back home regularly. The money is used to buy food and clothes, pay health treatment, pay my school fees and pocket money...But there was a time when my parents did not send money back because of the delayed payment of their employers. Thus we went through some hardships making it difficult to buy food and clothing, or pay the school fees.”(Wang, 2013: 74)

Migrant parents often pay much more attention on their children's education than parents who have not migrated. It is discussed in the earlier section that better education for children is one of the motivations behind parental migration in rural China (Murphy, 2014). The household therefore spends the majority of remittances on children's education which gives children the opportunities to go to schools or continue with further education.

Moreover, families that receive enough amounts of economic remittances are able to send left-behind children to professional surrogate families, which are paid to take care of the children and be responsible for their studies (Lv, 2011). Mrs. Wang and her husband are both retired teachers who run a surrogate family which involves eight left-behind children (Wang, 2013). They help the children formulate time tables and give educational care to the children, as well as report the children's overall conditions to their parents. Professional surrogate family is a new type of guardianship which is chosen by more and more migrant parents. Both Lv (2011) and Wang (2013) argue that remittance-receiving households have the economic foundation to send the children to these 'foster families', where sufficient daily needs and strict supervision on school works are provided.

Even though economic remittance enables the access of left-behind children to schools or increases school enrolment, it does not ensure that good educational performance will be achieved. A study of Zhao et al. (2012) intended to explore the effect of parental migration on left-behind children's school performance and whether migration is an exogenous decision, through survey data collected from students in grade 4 and 5 in rural Ningxia and Qinghai in Northwest China. The result presents that the children perform negatively in school because of the absence of parents, despite of the money their migrant parents transferred. Moreover, it requires sufficient economic foundation to send the children to professional surrogate families (Lv, 2011).

The income level of a family decides its level of social class, as well as the educational level of the children in the family, as Bourdieu says that cultural capital enables children from high-class families to obtain better education than those from lower-class (Sullivan, 2002). Some 'high-income' families can not only send the children to surrogate families but also provide them with better study conditions. For families that receive very small amounts of economic remittances, it is hardly possible

for them to hire surrogate families for children left-behind. For instances, one rural family pays 700 RMB for the surrogate parents while the average earning of migrant parents is 3000 RMB per month (Wang, 2013).

Also, the remittances send back to the households cannot benefit the community or the schools. It is up to the local government and corporations to invest in improving local facilities and school conditions, for example education department of Wuxi county, Chongqing, donated 200,000 RMB in books, uniforms and school-related activities (Beh and Yao, 2012).

6.1.2 Social remittances and its limitations

Social remittance, as the transmission of beliefs and experiences, also has notable impact on the school performance of left-behind children (Levitt and Lamba-Nieves, 2010). Leng and Park (2010) state that migrant parents could learn new views and ideas about the returns to human capital investment from the “outside world”, and then pass on to their children. “Children’s views of their lives are very much related to their family condition and parents’ words and deeds. The left-behind children are likely influenced by new information and ideas their migrant parents may routinely convey through various channels of parent-child communication and interaction” (Wang 2013: 74). Life in industrialized urban cities exposes migrant parents a new world where view, value and knowledge are probably so different from where they come from (Leng and Park, 2010). It is very likely that they change their social values and strengthen the idea that higher education brings better future. Thus, high expectations on children’s education are generated. Sometimes, the bitterness and hardship of the parents’ lives can also motivate the children’s determination of achieving good educational performance. The children realize how hard it is to *dagong* (working outside) by observing parents’ lives and health conditions, “The last time my mother returned she was very thin and her complexion was dark and rough. She didn’t look well...If I can get into university then I won’t *dagong*. *Dagong* is exhausting” (Murphy 2014: 42). Cuili expressed the same feeling: “I will not *dagong*. I’ve already told my parents that I will pass the exam for university. They tole me: ‘Your study is not for us, it is for you. You do not want to be like us...’” (Murphy 2014: 43). By looking at the parents’ lives in the “outside world”, the children are

encouraged to study hard and move away to big cities. Children are informed of the bitterness of dagong and the importance to study hard in order to avoid this fate.

Parents who migrate with the aim of providing children good education of course put their children's studies in the first place. Murphy's (2014) research in Jiangxi shows a mixed picture: left-behind children achieved good school performance because they wanted their parents to be happy and could come back home early. Almost every left-behind child in Murphy's (2014) research is aware of that their parents migrated for their education, and they have been repeatedly told that their parents will come back but they must study hard. For example, Cuili said:

It is not good at all that my parents are outside because there is no one to take care of me. Sometimes I say to my older sister: 'Why have they still not returned? I really miss them'. Then my sister says: 'Don't worry. Study hard. They are earning money. Don't disappoint them'. My parents really endure hardship. I will study hard. (Murphy, 2014: 40)

One left-behind boy who has his parents migrated to Jiangsu Province said that he wanted to help out his family pay a debt, but he was told that if he did not study he would be unfit for labor migration, therefore he needs to study hard (Ye, Murray and Wang, 2011). According to Murphy (2014) and Ye (2011), whereby the parents' experiences and lives in big cities the children are motivated to study hard as they see education as the only way to earn more money and get a better future. The idea of 'study your way out of poverty' from the parents has been deeply transmitted to left-behind children's mind. The emergence of the obligation to achieve good school performance is put on the children's shoulders.

Nevertheless, too much emphasis on the children's educational performance could lead to negative outcome, for instance de-motivate children's will on education and distant the parent-child relationship (Murphy, 2014). Children who do not get high grades in school works may feel stressed for making their parents disappointed. Murphy (2014) finds that these children gradually grow the fear of studying and lose self-confidence in education; also they refuse to talk to parents when parents call. Additionally, the age and gender of left-behind children would affect the children's educational performance that social remittances do not play a role in. In the next

section, the impact of other social categories such as disparities between guardianships, class, the gender and age of left-behind children is discussed.

6.2 Guardianship

As discussed before, new guardians and caretakers of left-behind children play significant roles in the children's educational life. Migrant parents also arrange carefully when it comes to the decision-making of who should look after the children before their departure (Lv, 2011). One of the major resources used in the analysis is Lv (2011)'s three-year qualitative research carried out in Inner Mongolia with a focus on the consequences of parental migration on left-behind children's overall well-being in rural China. Lv (2011) studied on both left-behind and non-left-behind children from three different schools in Inner Mongolia for three years. During these three years, case studies were conducted on four children. By analyzing the case studies, it presents a clearer picture of how different guardianships affect the school performance of children left behind. Case studies from other scholars are used and analyzed as well.

Grandparents as guardians

Cheng, a 13 years old boy, lived with his maternal grandparents in his early period of being a left-behind. Due to the low discipline and that his maternal grandparents spoiled him too much, he started acting secretly and having conflicts with the grandparents. He then moved to his parental grandparents who had neither cared much about his life and studies. Big decrease in Cheng's academic performance was made. Cheng expressed that:

“My mother used to check my homework. After they left home, I started finishing my homework very fast and not minding whether it was fine or rubbish.” (Lv, 2011: 115)

He also mentioned that he often missed his parents and could not focus in class. Parents usually play the role of supervisor or tutor and they are quite strict to their children's education (Wang, 2013). It might not be necessary for the children to adjust to new living environment if they live with the grandparents, but negative impacts are shown. As explained in the earlier section, grandparents and the children are blood-related and the children have the closest relationship with grandparents besides their

own parents. However, when parents are away, the responsibility of disciplining the children's school work does not seem to be taken by grandparents. Or even if the grandparents want to tutor and help out the grandchildren's studies, they are not capable to, for example, one grandfather stated that he can only help a little in his granddaughter's school work after her parents migrated, but he can have already forgotten what he learned in primary school, "Let it alone that children are learning things like English, while I totally have no idea about these things" (Ye, Murray and Wang 2011: 51). Grandparents see the children's material needs as priority and pay less attention on how they perform in education. Moreover, the cultural capital of the grandparents affects left-behind children's educational performance. The elderly in rural China are less likely to have high educational level and the majority has been peasant their whole life (Ye, Murray and Wang, 2011; Lv, 2011). It is very hard for them to assist their grandchildren's education even though some of the grandparents have tried to supervise the children. One more example here is a grandfather who expressed that he bought his grandson English cassettes for his English study. He wakes his grandson up early in the morning and listen to the tapes, however he is not able to know whether his grandson is focused on study or not (Ye, Murray and Wang, 2011). The lack of discipline can lead to negative outcome in left-behind children's educational performance. The health condition of the elderly is also a potential determinant in the children's school performance. If the grandparents are in bad health condition and have disease, the children then have to take the responsibility of managing household work, which means that less effort will be put on their studies (Lv, 2011).

Studies show that this type of guardianship results in gender inequality in the children's school performance. Hou (2015) argues that parental migration has a negative impact on left-behind girls' academic performance because in some impoverished villages females are still viewed as subordinations and are ought to put more effort in doing household work. When the grandparents are guardians, they tend to favour the grandsons' education and let the granddaughters do more household chores such as cooking and washing clothes. An intersection between gender and age appears in Hu's (2013) study which points out that being the oldest left-behind children in the family has more influence on the girls' school performance than boys. Ye, Murray and Wang (2011) interviewed a left-behind girl who experienced

inequality in treatment. She is told by both parents and grandparents to tutor her younger brother and sister while she also has homework to do. The girls have to take care of both younger siblings and household work, while the boys are expected to be the future income earners. However, the gender and age of left-behind children are seldom taken into consideration by researchers because they have found no significant influences of these factors (Wang, 2013).

Parents' generation as guardians

It is taken seriously by migrant parents to decide who to take care of the children. Parents would go through a lot discussions and negotiations on making new household arrangement so that they could reduce the harm and risk on their children (Wang, 2013; Ye, Murray and Wang, 2011). In terms of new guardians, migrant parents consider the grandparents first, and if they are unable to look after the children the parents will go to their siblings. Yu is 12 years old boy who lived with his uncle and aunt in the beginning after his parents migrated because his mother thought that her brother could give Yu same care and discipline as she could have. However, he received very low score and did not pass the exam to go to fifth grade. According to his teacher, Yu's school performance got worse and worse the longer he stayed at his uncle's. His teacher said:

"He seldom did his homework this term and often told lies that he'd lost his exercise books or left them at home. He became obsessed by online games in the Cyber Centre. You could find him in some internet bar after school. His uncle never disciplined him, he is too busy. His aunt only cared about her own son. They did not want to spend any time on him. They just provided him with food and shelter." (Lv, 2011: 134)

A 15 years old girl who lives with her aunt feels that her aunt supervises her and urges her to study, but she still senses that her aunt only cares about her own children. She even fears for telling her aunt when she has a cold (Ye, Murray and Wang, 2011). One can see that children who live with their uncles or aunts are more likely to have negative influence on educational performance. Guardians like this usually have their own children to look after, and do not take as same amount of responsibilities for the left-behind children as for their children. They provide the children with basic daily

needs, for example food and clothes but do not care so much about the children's school work (Lv, 2011).

Surrogate families as guardians

After Yu's mother's consideration, he was sent to live in a professional surrogate family with four other children. In this kind of family, the one or two 'parents' are normally voluntary teachers or retired teachers, and are paid to care about the children's daily life and to supervise their studies (Wang, 2013; Lv, 2011). His achievement in school exams has been increasing since he was sent to the surrogate family, due to the new guardians' strict supervision and discipline on study. His mother is very satisfied with this arrangement. Xin is a 12 years old boy who lives in the same family. He had lived with his grandmother who did not like him for one year, and he achieved bad results in school, while it has changed since he moved into the professional surrogate family. Large improvement was seen in his educational performance, as well as his study habits (Lv, 2011). Wang (2013) finds similar result that left-behind children who are cared by surrogate parents have cultivated regular study schedule and strong self-discipline.

The role of surrogate family affects the children's educational performance positively. Since the surrogate parents are paid to take care of the left-behind, one can say that it is their job to make sure the children develop well, both in education and in overall well-being. However, living with a surrogate family does not create a home-like environment for left-behind children. Therefore they need to take time to adjust themselves to new living sources.

Self-guardianship

One case study in Ye, Murray and Wang's (2011) research presents a left-behind child who lives in school on weekdays and comes home to her sister on weekends. She helps her sister to deal with household and field chores when she is at home, but has very little time for her study. Lv (2011) also points out that this sort of arrangement may get the children distracted from education. Xu said that he likes his school because he has friends there and he does not feel lonely, but at home he has to do most of the housework (Jin, 2014). Being guardians themselves may cause high

pressure on the children, but it could affect their school performance both negatively and positively depending on the children's capabilities.

6.2.1 The emotions of left-behind children

It has been repeated several times in most of the literatures that the children feel lonely and depressed. Expressions like 'much happier when parents are home' and 'miss parents so much and often cry' are shown among left-behind children (Ye, Murray and Wang, 2011; Lv, 2011). From psychological perspective, childhood is a very important period when children learn to form their capacities to cope with emotional problems with the support from guardians (Wang, 2013). Most of left-behind children lack this kind of support and communication with their parents, even though their parents would manage reunion and make phone calls (ibid). Children cannot focus on their studies because they miss parents too much, and their emotional world is often overlooked by guardians (Ye, Murray and Wang, 2011; Wang, 2013; Su et al., 2012).

6.3 Beyond household level

Apart from the households, the community and schools play significant roles in impacting left-behind children's school performance as well. Jin (2014) stresses the importance of school facilities and teaching materials. School facilities and equipment such as clean water, toilets, cooling and heating systems, and computers are very important for children's education; however most of the schools in rural China lack these conditions (Jin, 2014). Furthermore, the quality of teaching material in rural schools is also emphasized. Firstly, due to the low wage provided in rural schools, there are not many teachers who want to work in rural areas; secondly, teacher in rural school do not require high education (Jin, 2014). It is hard to find a well-educated teacher who wants to work there. In some cases, even though the teachers have advanced education, their cultural capital such as attitudes could affect the children. Some teachers tend to treat left-behind children and non-left-behind children differently because they view left-behind children as those who are bad in study and ethnics, and therefore care less about the children as long as they follow the discipline (Ye, Murray and Wang, 2011). An 8 years old participant from Yu and Gong's (2014) study said that his school provides a few teachers but they will leave after a while, they are only volunteers.

Chinese government has taken actions on improving educational environment for the left-behind. For instance, Chongqing government issued a project which aimed in setting up 400 boarding schools, “Left-behind children care centre” and etc. for 1.3 million rural left-behind children; additionally, education department of Wuxi county organized 50 university-level student volunteers to be surrogate parents to teach and take care of the children (Beh and Yao, 2012). These ongoing actions are expected to assist the children’s school performance by providing them with better study circumstances in the long run.

7. Conclusion

The study starts by introducing China’s current migration situation; and then bringing out that the impacts of internal migration in China on the left-behind is noteworthy. The objective of the study is to examine how internal parental migration influences the educational performance of left-behind children. By doing so, the focus is put on exploring the roles and limitations of remittances in the creation of a beneficial environment for education. Previous studies show a mixed picture of left-behind children’s educational performance, although the resources are quite insufficient in terms of gender and age aspects, the children’s emotional development and community level factors. Clearly, the relationship between migration and education is multi-faced.

In the analytical section, the author firstly applies the new economics and human capital theory to explain the original ‘function’ of migration in breaking poverty through transmitting economic and social remittances. However, the study criticizes these two theories for being too simplistic and do not hold the view of ‘migration can break intergenerational transmission of poverty’. This review has shown that economic remittances benefit family funding in left-behind children’s education but do not have direct impact on their educational performance. Economic remittances have more positive impact on high-income families than on low-income families. While social remittances, in the forms of parents’ beliefs or experiences, tend to stimulate the children’s studies. A kind of obligation is also created on left-behind children to study hard in school and achieve good academic performance. However, the author argues that the information parents send back do not always have a positive effect on the children’s education.

What will happen if the children receive ‘bad’ information? Reviewed studies only show the bright side of parents’ information. As time goes by, the children would realize the difficulties to settle down in big cities and the potential risks, and therefore generate fear for migration. Also, the results of the review indicate that left-behind children would generate the idea of ‘education is not as important as money’, and quit school to join labor market at an early age. The reviewed literature is missing research on this aspect. Additionally, social remittance only make children motivated and further motivate children who have strong self-discipline, however negatively affect children who cannot discipline themselves. The children’s personality could impact their education although they both receive social remittances, for example a child with strong self-discipline and a child with low self-control.

Moreover, the review has shown that guardians have significant impacts on the children’s school performance as well, and it is inter-related with cultural capital. Guardianships here are divided into parents as guardians, parents’ siblings as guardians, surrogate families and self-guardians. In the study, the author has created a term of ‘educational care’, which refers to the discipline, supervision and concern of guardians on children. As suggested by the findings, the lack of educational care and low level of education of grandparents are likely to have negative impact on the children’s studies; however they provide the children with a home-like environment which helps reduce the children’s feeling of loneliness to some extent. Also, grandparents who have high cultural capital would put more effort on the children’s education. Within this type of guardianship, the gender and age of the children seem to intersect: if the oldest child in the family is a girl, she is more likely to bear the burden of taking care of both household work and her younger siblings. Negative outcomes have shown among children who live with their uncles or aunts: even though the daily needs are fulfilled, very little educational care is put on the children. However, living with surrogate families tends to improve the children’s educational performance. Self-guardianship of the children reduces a lot of time for study, but the author argues that independence can be built upon them since they have to learn how to cope without the help from guardians. These findings can perhaps imply two consequences: children who have low self-discipline tend to become more vulnerable and quit when they face difficulties in studies; children who are strong in self-

supervision become more responsible for themselves. Nevertheless, the emotional world of left-behind children is often ignored.

Other factors such as school facilities, teaching materials and community support can also make influences on the children's schooling. Only a few sources have discussed the role of these determinants, and not enough attention is put on this aspect.

Furthermore, reviewed studies do not show the impacts of regional differences on the children's educational performance. However, the author assumes there is a difference since different villages vary from their infrastructures and local conditions, for example the distance from home to school, local transportation and weather. Further researches can take this aspect into consideration.

One cannot examine the factors impacting children's educational performance at the same time. The scales of different social categories need to be emphasized. The author argues that all of the factors are significant and should be taken into account when analyzing the causes behind left-behind children's school performance. The study suggest that more attention should be put on the children's emotions; and more researches could be conducted in terms of the role of local community in supporting left-behind children's educational performance.

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