

The "Brought-Aside" Children: Would Migrant Parents Carry Along Their Kids After 2014 Hukou Reform

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Outline

- 1 Background
 - 2014 Hukou Reform
 - The Left-Behind Children
- 2 Literature Review
 - Hukou Matters
 - Education Matters
- 3 Analysis
 - Research Questions
 - Theoretical Analysis
 - Evidence from Literature & Data
- 4 Conclusion
 - Summary
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2014 Hukou Reform

Chinese central government proposed the "Opinions of the State Council on Further Promoting the Reform of the Household Registration System" on July 30, 2014.

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**国务院关于进一步推进
户籍制度改革的意见**
国发〔2014〕25号

各省、自治区、直辖市人民政府，国务院各部委、各直属机构：

为深入贯彻落实党的十八大、十八届三中全会和中央城镇化工作会议关于进一步推进户籍制度改革的要求，促进有能力在城镇稳定就业和生活的常住人口有序实现市民化，稳步推进城镇基本公共服务常住人口全覆盖，现提出以下意见。

一、总体要求

（一）指导思想。以邓小平理论、“三个代表”重要思想、科学发展观为指导，适应推进新型城镇化要求，进一步改革户籍制度，落实放宽户口迁移政策，统筹推进工业化、信息化、城镇化和农业现代化同步发展，推动大中小城市和小城镇协调发展、产业和城镇融合发展，使户籍制度改革和相关经济社会领域改革，合理引导农业人口有序向城镇转移，有序推进农业转移人口市民化。

（二）基本原则。

- 坚持积极稳妥、规范有序。立足基本国情，积极稳妥推进，优先解决存量，有序引导增量，合理引导农业转移人口落户城镇的预期和选择。
- 坚持以人为本、尊重群众意愿。尊重城乡居民自主意愿，依法保障农业转移人口及其他常住人口合法权益，不得采取强迫做法办理落户。

Figure: Opinions of the State Council on Further Promoting the Reform of the Household Registration System

Three Types of Cities & Implementation

Table: Three Types of Cities of 2014 Hukou Reform

City Types Regarding Population	Restrictions	Reform
< 1 million (small)	no restrictions	full liberalization
1-5 million (medium)	stable work, somewhere to live	properly liberalize
> 5 million (big)	stringent restrictions	develop

- Further adjustment of the hukou migration policy
- Expand access to basic public services
 - Comprehensively provide government-subsidized vocational skills training services for **rural migrants**, increase support for entrepreneurship, and promote the employment of **rural migrant labor**.
 - Ensuring that the children of rural migrants and other permanent residents enjoy **the equal right to education**
 - Combined with the continuous school years of the migrant children, the gradual implementation of the migrant children to take the **local high school entrance examination and college entrance examination**.

Zipf's Law in 2014

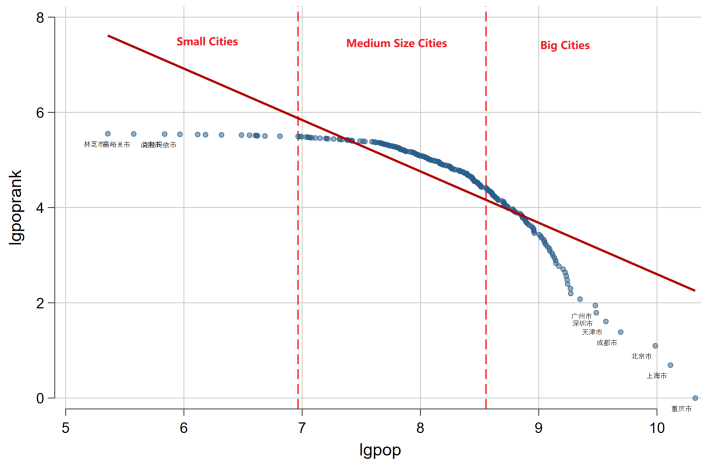


Figure: Zipf's Law in 2014

Definition

- **Left-behind children** are children whose parents have migrated and who remain in their place of origin and cannot live with their parents.
 - Left-behind children in rural areas refer to left-behind children whose household registration is in rural areas.

Sad Fact

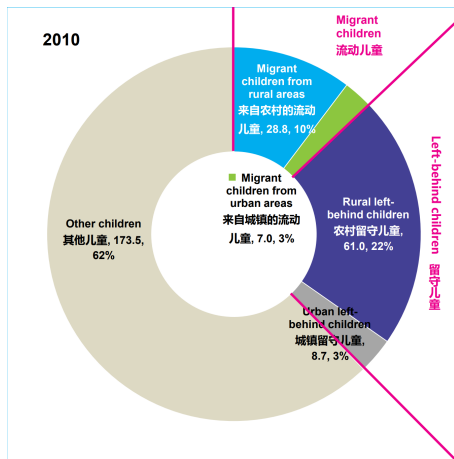


Figure: The number and composition of migrant and left-behind children¹

¹Ref: What Census Data Can Tell Us About Children in China: Facts and Figures 2013

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Hukou Matters

- Hukou status affects people's **migration decision, expected wage, labor mobility, employment, decision to buy house** and etc. (He and Luo, 2020; Chen et al., 2019; Feng et al., 2023; Bosker et al., 2012; Jin and Zhang, 2023)
- The Hukou reform could
 - increase migration (Jin and Zhang, 2023)
 - increase the labor mobility (Bosker et al., 2012)
 - increase the labor market flexibility (Wang et al., 2021)
 - reshape the unfairness perceptions due to wealth inequality and hukou status (Lin et al., 2024)
- The migrant kids couldn't enjoy the same **education** as urban children for the lack of local hukou (Chen and Feng, 2013)

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Education Matters

- Parents care about children's education
 - parents see children as a support at old age (Bau, 2021)
 - children's education matter for parents' health and cognition (Ma, 2019)
 - high housing prices in school districts, Gaokao migration... (Black, 1999; Li and Zhang, 2023)

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Research Questions

The "Brought-Aside" Children: Would Migrant Parents Carry Along Their Kids After 2014-HuKou Reform?

- Migrant parents indeed want to carry along their children - [the Push Force](#)
- The hukou reform brings benefits - [the Pull Force](#)

The Unwilling Departure

Migrant parents want to carry along their kids to enjoy **higher-quality education, mental accompany**, and other social benefits.

They feel really guilty about leaving behind their kids but have no way.²

- Education matters while lacking local hukou
- Migrant parents indeed want to carry along their kids but they are facing **high living costs** and **intensive work burden**
 - Most migrant parents are doing streamlined work, which is low pay while high-intensity.
 - They couldn't afford a whole family's expense.
 - Intensive work means limited free time with children

²Ref: The future of the city: The pain of parents of children who have been left behind

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Hukou Reform Offers Lower Cost

The 2014 hukou reform proposed steadily promoting the coverage of basic urban public services

- On the one hand, **migrant individuals** could enjoy some social benefits, lowering their living costs
 - employment services, basic old-age care, basic medical and health care
 - housing security to the entire permanent population
- On the other hand, the policy stipulates ensuring equal access to education for these **brought-aside** children
 - compulsory education
 - same access to the high school entrance exam as well as the college entrance exam

Different Migration Choices Between 2005 and 2015

- Hsu and Ma, 2021 found a striking contrast in migration patterns between the years 2005 and 2015
 - Rural people tended to move more to **large** cities in 2005
 - More to **small-** and **medium-sized** cities in 2015
 - The relaxation of hukou changes people's behavior

The Composition of Chinese Left-Behind Children

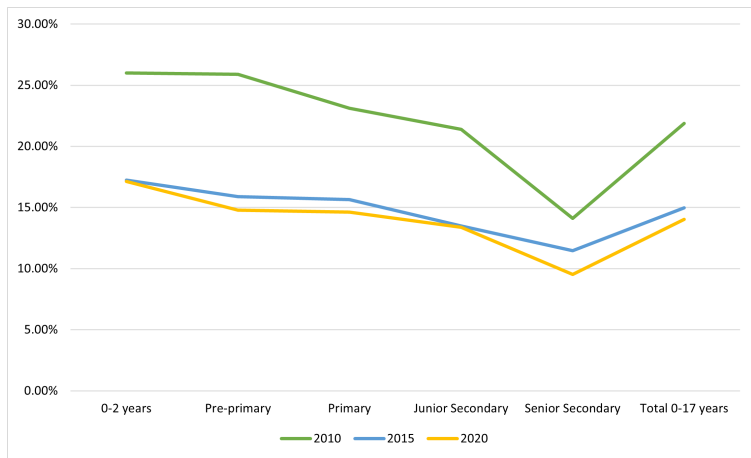


Figure: The composition of China's child population in 2010, 2015, 2020³

³Data Source: What Census Data Can Tell Us About Children in China: Facts and Figures

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Summary

- Most migrant parents want to bring their children along to enjoy higher-quality education in big cities.
- 2014 Hukou reform offers migrant parents the opportunity to carry along their children.
 - more equal education treatment for their kids
 - bigger coverage of basic urban public services lower their living costs

"Brought-Aside" Children → Migrant Children

- When the migrant parents carry their **left-behind children**, kids become the **migrant children**.
- The migrant children still face some unequal treatment, though this was alleviated to some extent through the reform
 - Elite Primary School Segregates Campus to Keep Migrant and Local Children Separated⁴



Figure: The barrier that segregates the campus into two parts⁴

⁴Ref: Elite Primary School Segregates Campus to Keep Migrant and Local Children Separated

Other Channels to Further Explore

Besides what I argued in this analysis, there may be other channels driving parents to carry along their kids.

- **Left-behind children** with the parental absence are facing the persistent depressing influence (Zheng et al., 2022; Yang and Bansak, 2020)
 - both negative **cognitive** and **physical** effect
 - lower human capital outcomes

Thank you!

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