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# Chapter 8. Building wealth through a stratified inclusion: the point-based hukou system in Zhuhai

Cinzia Losavio

## Abstract

In the last decade, forced to promote the social inclusion of a soaring number of migrants in cities, the Chinese central government has issued a number of measures to ease the delivery of urban *hukou*, to award subsidies for social housing, and to facilitate access to education and to social security. However, on the city level, internal migrants' integration policies are strictly intertwined with the developmentalist aspirations of local governments. The size of cities, their economic weight as well as their growth pattern have acquired special significance in their relation to social policies and population management. The point-based system is the new framework regulating urbanization patterns, controlling social benefits allocation and granting full urban membership.

Outlining the main *hukou* policies in Zhuhai, a typical third-tier city located in the Pearl River Delta, and observing their implementation, this paper explores how the point-based system has contributed to the deconstruction of the internal migrants' category, promoting a stratified and selective integration model. While handpicking the youngest, the best educated and the most qualified migrants as valuable resources for local development, the new pattern generates a highly competitive system for the “*liudong renkou*”, increasing the socio-spatial differentiation of urban space.

**Keywords:** Internal migrants; point-based hukou system; social inclusion.

## 1. Introduction

Over the past few years, rural to urban migration and integration patterns have intersected with two developments in China's current context: first, the increasing pressure on China's largest megalopolis resources due to the ever more noticeable and lasting presence of Chinese migrant-workers in urban areas; and second, the recent shift from an export-driven economy to one powered by domestic consumption to ensure a constant economic growth. These two evolving trends contributed in the last ten years in the shaping of a new urbanization scenario, which has called for the integration of a large

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**Figure 1**

A municipal billboard picturing Zhuhai's coastline. The characters say: “We can build together Zhuhai's quality”. Gangwan Avenue, Zhuhai. November, 2016. (Source: author).



number of internal migrants in cities of smaller size.

#### Note 1

In 1979 Deng Xiaoping launched the “reform and opening-up” (改革开放, *gǎigé kāifàng*) policy aiming to promote China’s modernization by shifting from a centrally planned economy to a market economy, and by opening its doors to foreign investment.

#### Note 2

For more detail see: Chan K.W., Zhang L., 1999, The Hukou System and Rural-Urban Migration in China: Processes and Changes, *The China Quarterly*, 160, 818-855.

In China, urban development and internal migrations go hand in hand with economic transformation. Since the early 1980s<sup>1</sup>, as a series of reforms have been launched to increase labour mobility in line with economic development, and as the population distribution of the country was being reshaped to enhance urban growth, the Chinese urbanization strategies have been dominated by a gradual and balanced approach. A large urban–rural economic gap needed to be addressed by “*strictly controlling the development of large cities, rationally developing medium-sized cities and vigorously promoting the development of small cities and towns*” (Shen, Cui, 1990). Thereafter a “hierarchy of settlements” (Marton, 2013) was envisaged, and initially, the growth of the top of this pyramid was mainly encouraged. Large urban centres, treated as the nucleus (核心, *héxīn*) of the economic reforms, as well as the freshly established Special Economic Zones (SEZs), concentrated most industrial activities, and increasingly attracted rural workers. However, the population mobility generated by this spatial economic restructuring was not imagined to be *de jure* permanent. Specifically, rural to urban and intra-provincial migration didn’t imply a formal transfer of migrant workers’ local residency (non-*hukou* migration), consequently denying access to social welfare and other public benefits at the destination place. The household registration booklet (户口本, *hùkǒuběn*), modelled after the Soviet propiska (internal passport) and officially adopted in 1958, classifies all Chinese individuals according to their status (类别, *lèibié*) of “agricultural” (农业, *nóngyè*) and “non-agricultural” (非农业, *fēinóngyè*) and to the place of hukou registration (户口所在地, *hùkǒu suǒzàidì*)<sup>2</sup>. To this day, the social benefits an individual is entitled to are related to these two markers and are tied up to his place of origin. A formal conversion of one’s hukou status or place of registration requires going through an administrative articulated process determined by a collection of changing criteria and quota. After the decentralisation of fiscal and administrative powers in 1994, this conversion process became more localized and the plethora of criteria and quota defining it, more dependent on local power and economic situation. The general rule is: fewer criteria and bigger quota at the bottom of the urban hierarchy, where social services are underdeveloped and job opportunities less attractive, and more entry barriers and limited quota at the top layers, offering higher wages and greater social benefits.

The opening-up reforms and the expansion of the mainly export-oriented industrial sector increased the need for a flexible *floating* population, though welfare remained spatially anchored. The result was the emergence in urban areas of a soaring number (from few million in the early 1980s to 287 million in 2017, NBSC) of non-*hukou* migrants, often referred to as a floating population (流动人口, *liúdòng rénkǒu*). Becoming the backbone of the exceptional economic growth the country experienced in the last 40 years, without benefiting from the State-provided resources, non-*hukou* migrants highly contribu-



ted to increasing the urban population rate from 26.4% in 1990 to 58.52% by the end of 2017 (NBSC)<sup>3</sup>. The growing migration phenomenon has been the engine of an “incomplete urbanization” (Chan, 2010), whose main characteristic is to exploit internal workforce minimizing the State expenses.

In the last 15 years<sup>4</sup>, following the soaring presence of non-*hukou* migrants in the urban space, there have been many official attempts from the central government to ease their integration in their place of arrival. The central state policies have intended to remove the distinction between urban and rural status (Chan, Buckingham, 2008), have expanded public services such as employment information services, vocational schools and legal aid to migrant workers (Ngok, 2012) and have opened the possibility for them to access some social services, such as health care, housing and education for their children, through the market. More recently, in line with the intention to reorient economic growth through domestic consumption, the State Council has announced a “new-type” of urbanization strategy<sup>5</sup>, which lies in the integration by 2020 of 100 million migrant workers by granting them urban *hukou* and by awarding subsidies for social housing.

However, even though the political power in China remains vertically structured, key measures are not directly enforceable by the centre, and they strongly depend on local governments. The “hierarchy of settlements” conceived in the early 1980s, has developed into a multitier urban system whose corresponding administrative and executive powers have significantly increased. The fiscal pressure and the huge amount of resources necessary to grant equal status to non-*hukou* migrants, coupled with the imperative of moving towards development<sup>6</sup>, have encouraged city level officials to find manifold ways to circumvent the central rhetoric, the last one being the adoption of a point-based system.

The point-based system is the new framework some major cities have recently adopted in order to regulate urbanization patterns, to control social benefits allocation and to grant full urban membership to newcomers.

Earlier research on migrant workers’ urban integration has highlighted the role of the household registration system (*hukou*) in generating a rural-urban dual discrimination system, which has impacted rural workers displaced in urban areas (Solinger, 1999; Chan, Buckingham, 2008). Nevertheless, since the easing of restrictions on a national level, little attention has been paid to the most recent alterations the *hukou* system has experienced at the local level. Although the weight of *hukou* status has apparently been shrinking, social welfare benefits continue to be associated to it and since the capacities of local governments for providing for those benefits remain limited, the *hukou* continues to be “traded at a high price”.

In a context of rapid urbanization and economic transformation, to what extent are migrant workers entitled to be part of urban integration in Zhuhai? In order to reply to this main research question we need to firstly investi-

#### Note 3

The percentage of people living in cities and having local *hukou* stood at 42.35% at the end of 2017. <http://finance.chinanews.com/cj/2018/02-28/8456338.shtml>

#### Note 4

“The year 2003 was the turning point of public services for migrant workers as the State Council, the central government authority in China, issued three important policy documents aimed to reduce discrimination against migrant workers in cities and to provide them with entitlements previously enjoyed only by urban residents. Since then, a number of more specific policies have been issued” (Ngok and Cheng, 2010).

#### Note 5

The new type urbanization strategy has firstly been announced in a proposal related to the 12th Five-Year plan for China’s economic and social development (2011-2015) issued by the Central Committee of The Chinese Communist Party on 16 March 2011. After several rounds of revisions, China’s New-type Urbanization Plan, 2016–2020 has been formalized in March 2014.

#### Note 6

Since the early 1980s, a Performance Evaluation system has been introduced as a mechanism to improve government functions and control all the layers of the Chinese administrative pyramid. The performance management system evaluates the local officials’ ability to maintain a stable and harmonious society as well as to promote economic and sustainable development. (Walker, Wu, 2010; Ye, Ni, 2016).



gate the nature and the scope of the newly implemented score-based *hukou* system. How does the new system work? Which are the criteria regulating the selection of migrants who can be granted with full urban membership? Is the point-based *hukou* system enabling different internal migrant groups to officially become urban residents, while developing the city in which they live and work? Outlining the main *hukou* policies in Zhuhai and referring to the highly representative case of a migrant workers' family which has been living in Zhuhai for 10 years, our paper shows that while handpicking the youngest, the best educated and the more qualified migrants as valuable resources for local development, the new points-based system generates a highly competitive system for the "floating population", increasing the socio-spatial differentiation of urban space.

Even though we decided to expose the story of one sole emblematic migrants' family, our research is based on more than 120 interviews with migrants living in Zhuhai and on a dozen interviews with local government officials made during 21 months of fieldwork from October 2016 to August 2018. The analysis of these interviews is supported by policy and regulations documents as well as by on-site observation. While most research on Chinese internal migrants focus on first- and second-tier cities, we chose Zhuhai, a typical third-tier city, as a case study for several reasons. Although the rhythm of Zhuhai's economic and spatial growth has been slower than Shenzhen and other municipalities of the Pearl River Delta (PRD) mega-city region, and its population inflow is more restrained, Zhuhai's central position in the PRD and its industry sector supported by the special economic policies has since August 1980 helped to attract thousands of rural-to-urban migrants. Furthermore, Zhuhai's recent innovation-led economic strategy sustained by the implementation of a new round of the population development plan should create new opportunities for migrants' integration. In the new phase of the Chinese urbanization, which is switching attention to cities of smaller size and to their increasingly diversified population, Zhuhai provides us with significant empirical contents on the current approach some local governments have been using to manage internal migrants' integration.

#### Figure 2

A group of migrant workers mostly from Hunan province, on a construction site in Zhuhai's High-Tech Zone. Jinding area, Zhuhai. October 2017. (Source: author).

#### Note 7

According to the 2015 national population census, Guangdong province had the largest floating population of the country (32 million), 91.94% of it being disseminated in the PRD (29.44 million, showing an increased of 2.53% compared to 2010 census).

#### Note 8

With the opening, in October 2018, of the Hong Kong-Zhuhai-Macao Bridge, the world's longest cross-sea span and the first of its kind in China, Zhuhai has become the only mainland city to directly connect Hong Kong and Macao by roadway.

## 2. *Hukou* reforms in Zhuhai: building wealth through a stratified inclusion

### 2.1 Building Zhuhai's economic wealth

Zhuhai is a prefecture level city located in the Western Pearl River Delta (PRD), which is one of the most attractive areas for Chinese migrant-workers<sup>7</sup>. Its strategic geographical location provides convenient linkages with the four key areas of the region: Guangzhou, Shenzhen, Macao and Hong Kong<sup>8</sup>. This was one of the reasons that made the central government designate Zhuhai, in August 1980 – along with Shenzhen, Shantou and Xiamen – as one of the first SEZs of the country, turning Zhuhai into one of the leading cities in spearhea-



ding the development of today's PRD "mega-city region" (Mu, Yeh, 2016).

Before 1979, when it administratively became a prefecture level city, Zhuhai was an underdeveloped rural county with a population of 360,000 ([www.stats-zh.gov.cn](http://www.stats-zh.gov.cn)). Soon after the opening up policy was adopted, in line with the national motto of "vigorously promoting the development of small towns and villages", and encouraged by special economic policies, the development of joint ventures and enterprises has been dramatically increased in Zhuhai<sup>9</sup>, impacting its population growth. At the end of 2017 its permanent population stood at 1.765 million (Zhuhai Statistical Yearbook, 2017), of which 1.3 million people were holding a local *hukou*. Despite its relatively small population compared to other cities of the PRD, in 2017 Zhuhai's GDP grew by 9.2% to 256.47 billion RMB (Zhuhai Statistical Yearbook, 2017) with the fastest growth-rate of the Guangdong province<sup>10</sup>. Its economic prosperity is also mirrored in the city's per capita GDP which amounted to 149,100 RMB Yuan<sup>11</sup> in 2017, standing higher than those of Beijing (129,992 Yuan) and Shanghai (124,536 Yuan) and ranking 3rd among Guangdong's cities.

The industry sector has been the largest contributor to Zhuhai's GDP generating added value of 110.56 billion RMB. During the first decade of the opening up reform, the majority of its economic activities were labour-intensive, small in scale and limited to light industries, textiles, electronics, and building materials, making Zhuhai rapidly attractive for peasant workers from neighbour provinces. Between 1979 and 2000, and especially after Deng Xiaoping 1992's southern tour (南巡, *nánxún*), the city's floating population increased at a relatively fast pace<sup>12</sup> rising from 0 to 497,523 people ([www.stats-zh.gov.cn](http://www.stats-zh.gov.cn)). However, unlike other cities of the PRD, such as Shenzhen and Dongguan<sup>13</sup>, where migrant population rate is higher than *hukou* population rate, Zhuhai's *liudong renkou* have increased in a more moderate rhythm (742,800 in 2017)<sup>14</sup>. That can partially be explained in terms of economic development patterns: if in Shenzhen, Dongguan and Guangzhou heavy industry was more encouraged, Zhuhai has shown a comparatively higher proportion of light industry to heavy industry, being more successful on developing its fishing and tourist industry.

Despite the official statistics on internal migration, which only take into account migrants who registered at the local police office (派出所, *pàichūsuǒ*) upon their arrival, neglecting an important part of them, the proportion of newcomers Zhuhai would officially integrate depended on the position the city was supposed to hold in the urban hierarchy we mentioned above. Setting up to be a fast-growing large city, Zhuhai needed internal migrants for the sake of economic development, but at the same time, had to strictly control the allocation of urban resources, especially when these resources became in 1994 responsibility of the local administration. The easing of government restrictions on population mobility didn't mean an easy access to urban *hukou* and all the benefits it conferred. The migrants' integration approach that Zhuhai's government has embraced since the '90s has been gradual, extremely selective and strongly dependent on the local economic needs of the moment. This appro-

#### Note 9

China Business: The Portable Encyclopedia for Doing Business with China (*World Trade Press Country Business Guides*, 1994, 194).

#### Note 10

See: Zhuhai GDP rebounds to lead province, 2016 ([http://subsites.chinadaily.com.cn/zhuhai/2016-12/23/c\\_64517.htm](http://subsites.chinadaily.com.cn/zhuhai/2016-12/23/c_64517.htm)); GDP ranking of Guangdong's cities in the first quarter of the year (2018) (广东省各城市一季度GDP排名 珠海增速领先), <http://zh.news.fang.com/open/28369227.html>.

#### Note 11

See: Zhuhai Statistical Yearbook 2017, Zhuhai Municipal Statistics Bureau and Zhuhai Economic Operation Bulletin 2017, GDP ranking of Zhuhai's districts and special economic areas (广东珠海·2017年珠海市经济运行简报·珠海各区GDP排名).

#### Note 12

Between 1990 and 2000 the annual average growth rate calculated on the floating population was of 13.7 per cent.

#### Note 13

At the end of 2017, in Shenzhen, out of a total population of 20 million, 3.67 million have an urban residency (户籍). Likewise, in Dongguan, out of a total population of 8.34 million, those having a local urban *hukou* amount to 2.11 million.

#### Note 14

Zhuhai Statistical Yearbook, 2017.



ach can be synthesized by the three main *hukou* policies the city has adopted successively from 1997 up to now: the apartment-*hukou* strategy, the investment-*hukou* policy, and the point-based *hukou* system.

## 2.2 Stratifying inclusion and deconstructing migrant workers' category: From the apartment-*hukou* strategy to the point-based *hukou* system

As early as 1997, with the “Regulations on the Management of *hukou* migration in Zhuhai” the city put in force the “apartment-*hukou* policy” (购房入户, *gòufáng rùhù*, literally “to buy an apartment to get a local *hukou*”). The policy opened the possibility to outsiders with a stable job and a permanent abode, to permanently transfer their own *hukou* – as well as that of their spouses and children – in Zhuhai, by purchasing an apartment of at least 75 square metres. Formally enforced to “help ensure the orderly management of internal migration” while facilitating the obtainment of local residency for the soaring number of migrants working in Zhuhai, the apartment strategy was indeed a way to activate the local real estate market. Only those migrants already economically integrated into the urban structure were allowed to trade local *hukou* for urban prosperity. In 2002, to further stimulate the local housing market, the policy was extended to “second-hand apartments” (二手购房入户, *èrshǒu gòufáng rùhù*, literally “to buy a second-hand apartment to get a local *hukou*”). The “*goufangrùhù*” reform marked the beginning of an administrative process aiming at deconstructing the migrant workers’ category into a pyramid where those standing on the top layers, thanks to their economic capital and their professional and personal qualification (素质, *sùzhì*)<sup>15</sup>, could easily slide to the urban side of the population, while the rest, the shapeless mass of “three-without” (三无, *sānwú*)<sup>16</sup>, could, informally, keep contributing to the urban construction, without placing too much of a burden on the city’s finance.

### Note 15

The Chinese concept of “*suzhi* (素质)” describes a person’s qualities measured in terms of behaviour, education, ethics and ambition. Since high or low *suzhi* depends on one’s education and cultural level, farmers, peasants and manual labourers are generally considered as lacking *suzhi*. Furthermore, the Chinese government has in recent years undertaken a concerted effort to create a harmonious society (和谐社会) through *suzhi* building to enable social self-governance and to avoid the threats of civil unrest (Tomba, 2009).

### Note 16

The Chinese expression “三无” (*sānwú*) translated as the “three-without” or the “three-nos” refers to those with no source of livelihood, no work ability and no legal support.

### Note 17

Zhuhai *Hukou* Net, Zhuhai’s *hukou*-apartment policy: In 2008 Zhuhai’s *hukou*-apartment policy has been cancelled (珠海买房入户、珠海买房入户政策在2008年就已取消), <http://www.zhrh.org/index.asp?fff/1848.html>.

### Note 18

珠海市人民政府令第60号, Zhuhai Municipal People’s Government Circular No. 60.

A few years after its enforcement, the apartment-*hukou* policy effectively boosted the local economy through property market, but population management problems concomitantly emerged. The fast-expanding population put huge fiscal pressure – in terms of public and social services expenditure –, on the local government, compelling the city administration to suspend the second-hand apartment regulation in 2005, and to put an end to the apartment-*hukou* strategy 3 years later<sup>17</sup>. The local authorities had “to strengthen the management on population mobility, and to optimize the demographic structure”, while “promoting economic development and improving the population quality” (提高人口素质, *tígāo rénkǒu sùzhì*)<sup>18</sup>, which meant to adopt a new, more stringent regulation to select the outsiders (外地人, *wàidìrén*) who could officially become local residents (本地人, *běndìrén*). In June 2008, the “Circular No. 60, Regulations on the Management of *hukou* migration in Zhuhai, 2008”, introduced the “investment-*hukou* policy” (投资入户, *tóuzī rùhù*, literally “investing to get a local *hukou*”). Eligibility criteria became much stricter and echoed the new economic ambition of Zhuhai: to become a key city



on the west bank of the PRD in terms of technological development and innovation. Under the new regulation, which put great emphasis on the innovation target, a new highly-qualified category of migrants could apply for *hukou* transfer in Zhuhai: young (under the age of 45) and educated (with above college degree) employees of private companies (production and Sci-Tech), who had already paid social security for 3 years. Even the companies whose employees wanted to have access to local residency had to comply with a number of specified criteria, related to their contribution to the economic development of the city in terms of taxation and investment (firms total investments must amount at least from 1 to 1.5 million RMB). In order to safeguard the financial interest of the municipality and to endorse its economic vision, the investment-*hukou* “integration” policy, added more restrictions and entry barriers for migrants at the lower layers of the pyramid instead of relaxing those already in force. In parallel, upper levels became even more stratified according to the degree of specialization migrants could offer to the city.

The investment-*hukou* strategy had, in only three years, successfully supported Zhuhai aspiration to become an international innovative city, on top of reducing the excessive financial burden on local administration caused by previously granting too many *hukou*. Between 2009 and 2011, Zhuhai was ranked among the top 50 innovative cities of the country (Fang, Ma, Wang, 2014). To enhance its economic and innovative performances, the local State was aware that the power of *hukou* in regulating urbanization patterns and controlling social benefits allocation was still effective. The *hukou* strategy should become even sharper in controlling the inflow of outstanding migrants (优秀农民工, *yōuxiù nóngmíngōng*)<sup>19</sup> and in selecting the “talents” (人才) needed to sustain the persistent industrial upgrades. The foundations for the point-based *hukou* system were being laid.

### 2.3 The point-based *hukou* policy: stratifying migrants to integrate talents

In line with the above-mentioned objectives and in order to perfect the selection of non-local talents, on January 2011, Zhuhai adopted a new policy granting urban *hukou* in exchange for qualifications measured through a system of indicators and points (积分, *jīfēn*)<sup>20</sup>. Following the pilot scheme launched in Shanghai in 2004<sup>21</sup>, and then in Zhongshan in 2009, the Guangdong government issued in June 2011 a policy guideline enforcing the point-based *hukou* system (积分入户, *jīfēn rùhù*) in the major city of the province<sup>22</sup>. The architecture of the new strategy leans on three-levels indicators and a fixed quota. The indicators are determined by the Development and Reform Bureau of each municipality in accordance with those transmitted by the provincial government and adjusted year by year according to the local developmental priorities (Article 5). The total number of points a migrant can accumulate results from the addition of three kinds of indicators:

#### Note 19

Zhuhai Municipal Public Security Bureau, 2008, Guidelines on how to handle the procedures to let outstanding migrant workers obtain a local *hukou* (优秀农民工入户城镇手续办事指南).

#### Note 20

Zhuhai Human Resources and Social Security Bureau, 2011, The rating scheme to qualify migrant workers for urban *hukou* in Zhuhai city, Guangdong (珠海市异地务工人员积分制入户评分表).

#### Note 21

The Shanghai pilot scheme was intended just for college graduates.

#### Note 22

See Zhang, 2013 and Guo, Liang 2017.





- First-level indicators that correspond to basic requirements, include age, status of health, labour contract status, participation in social security, family planning situation, housing condition and abidance by law. These basic requirements, which are compulsory to also earn points from all kind of secondary and tertiary indicators, set the general qualifications migrants must cumulate in order to take part in the selection process.
- Second-level indicators related to personal quality (素质), such as education, professional qualifications, honours and awards obtained in skills competitions;
- Third-level indicators that consist in bonus points can be earned according to one's personal and economic status (marital status, housing ownership, collective residence permit)<sup>23</sup>, participation to social and voluntary service, voluntary participation in health and epidemic prevention programs and abidance of provincial family planning regulations.

#### Note 23

Migrants registering their residency at the address of the firm they work for.

The score system is tuned using an annual quota, which allows the control of the number of qualified people who can be legally admitted to join the urban population, in accordance to the annual available social resources and the economic targets to achieve. Based on the local annual quota, qualified applicants with the highest scores will be granted a local *hukou*. If the annual quota is exceeded, eligible applicants are then ranked to fill the quota vacancies.

In Zhuhai, the minimum score to apply for the new *hukou* transfer system is 80 points. However, men over 50 and women over 40 must also have contributed to the basic retirement insurance for urban workers for over 10 years. Younger people, the more efficient labour force, are favoured over older people, who tend to increase the fiscal burden of the city in exchange for lower productivity.

By creating a stunning, minutely detailed system of migrant workers' selection, Guangdong's provincial and local State have found a new way to bypass the central government's directions on easing *hukou* restrictions, while attracting the talented workforce needed for the new innovation-driven development strategy. Apparently more inclusive, the points-quota system stratifies even more deeply the internal migrants category while generating a highly competitive environment between them.

### 2.4 The hukou point-quota system in practice: the Fang's family<sup>24</sup> in Zhuhai

In order to illustrate the way in which the point-based *hukou* system operates, we will now explore the case of the Fangs, a migrant family from central China's Hunan province that we firstly met in Tangjia village (Zhuhai) in October 2016. The case of the Fang family, which is highly representative of internal migration trajectories in Zhuhai, will help us understand the selective and competitive character of the score-based *hukou* system.

#### Note 24

For privacy reasons all names have been changed.



Mr Fang, a 33 years old migrant worker, arrived in Zhuhai in march 2007, from a rural village under the jurisdiction of the prefecture-level city of Huaihua (Hunan). Upon his arrival he worked for 3 years in a electronic factory, before finding a job in a residential compound as a maintenance worker (物业管理) where he is still working. In 2008 he met his soon-to-be wife, Mrs Hu from the Guangxi province. When I met them in 2016, they had two children aged of 6 and 3 years. They all lived in Zhuhai, with Mr Fang's younger brother and his parents. In 2016, Mr Fang, who had a regular labour contract and had been contributing to 3 different social security programs for 8 years, had the basic requirements to send his application through the new local point-based system to try to obtain the local *hukou*. Although he didn't own an apartment, thanks to his young age and his educational attainment (has a secondary education certificate and a junior-level technician title, 初级技工) he achieved a total score of 119 points, meeting the minimum threshold of 80 points and making him eligible for Zhuhai's *hukou*.

In 2016, based on a floating population of around 510 000 people, Zhuhai's quota of available *hukou* for migrants was set to 3200. The local authorities received a total of 3595 applications, of which 3554 were reviewed. Even though the minimum score set to participate in the program was of 80 points, the lowest score for that year was of 125 points, showing a high degree of competitiveness among migrants. Mr Fang who was an eligible applicant, failed to obtain the local *hukou* in 2016, a result he had faced for two consecutive years.

In 2016, among the 3200 accepted applicants 68.9% had at least a junior college degree (+ 4.68 compared to the previous year), 30.3% were senior technicians (高级技工) (+ 1.59 compared to the previous year) and 90% ranged in age from 18 to 39 year old. Only 11 applicants had a score below 90 points<sup>25</sup>. Those figures explain the way in which the new point-based policy handpicks the youngest, the best educated and the more qualified migrants as valuable resources for local development, while generating a highly competitive system for the "liudong renkou".

Mr Fang continues to live and work in Zhuhai and plans to gain enough points to get a local *hukou* in the next few years, for example, as he suggested, by getting an award or an honorary title linked to his job performance (10-50 points) or by contributing to voluntary services (10-20 points). For now the only service he can benefit from the local government is a 9 year-period of free education for his children. The point-based *hukou* system is in fact connected to the point-based education system (积分入学, *jifēn rùxué*). In Zhuhai the minimum score allowing migrants' children to enrol in local public schools changes according to the district or the special economic area where they live.

Zhuhai has three districts – Xiangzhou, Doumen and Jinwan – and five economic zones – Gaolan harbour industrial zone, Zhuhai hi-tech industrial development zone, Zhuhai free trade zone, Hengqin economic development zone, and Wanshan ocean development testing zone. In 2017 the minimum score to enrol in a primary school in Xiangzhou, the most developed and urbanized district of the city, was set to 118 points and to 81 points to enrol in the

**Figure 3**

Migrants' children waiting for their parents at the gate of a public primary school in Tangjia village. Tangjia Village, Zhuhai. November, 2016.

(Source: author).

**Note 25**

Zhuhai Human Resources and Social Security Bureau, 2016, List of workers who got Zhuhai's *hukou* in 2016 through the city migrant workers points system (2016年珠海市异地务工人员积分制入户人员名单).



junior middle school. The same scores are also applied to enrol in schools in the newly established high-tech zone (高新区, *Gāoxīnqū*), where Mr Fang is working and living with his family. Fang's total score of 119 points allow him to send both of his children to a public school. An old factory colleague of Fang, Mr Xiang, a Hubei province native, who has been living and working in Xian-gzhou district for 15 years, told me that he would like to have the same chance of enrolling his two children in a local public school in Zhuhai, but he didn't even try to apply to the score-base system because he doesn't have the basic requirements to do it. His children are therefore studying in their native town, in Hubei, where they live with Mr Xiang's parents.

In the other districts and economic zones of Zhuhai, which are less urbanized and located in more remote areas of the city, the threshold is set at a lower level (Doumen: 98 points for primary school and 50 points for junior middle schools; Jinwang: 74 and 46 points; Hengqin 60 and 42 points; and in Gaolan port economic zone: 40 points for primary school and no minimum score is set for junior high schools). For less qualified migrants, whose labour is still needed but whose qualifications and social capital is not sufficiently valuable, it is easier to settle – and send their children to school – in less developed and remote areas of the city, than in more central and equipped districts. Through the point-based education system, even migrant children's access to education is stratified. In other words, their chance to enrol in local public schools is defined according to the value of their parents' contributions to urban prosperity.

### 3. Conclusion

The analysis of *hukou* policies in Zhuhai from the opening up reform to the present day allows to study urban integration strategy from the State's point of view, in a country with one of the fastest urbanization pace and one of the most impressive internal mobility patterns. This analysis aims at better apprehending the strong link between urbanization dynamics, strongly sustained by internal migrations, and economic orientation, which appears to be increasingly developmentalist (Knight, 2014; Zhang, 2018). The point-based *hukou* policy adopted since 2011 by Guangdong's major cities, in line with the promotion of a long-term development strategy driven by scientific and technological innovation, stands as a highly selective and stratifying approach to secure the skilled workers needed to sustain this new model of economic growth. Our main research question, which intended to explore to what extent migrant workers are entitled to be part of urban integration in Zhuhai, in the new context of rapid urbanization and economic transformation, found an answer in this analysis.

The less qualified migrants, who keep contributing to the development of the city at the bottom of the pyramid, are allowed to be part of the urban workforce but are prevented from benefitting from urban social aid and full membership. They cannot even apply to the score-based system. Those with intermediate skills are given the opportunity to try to change their *hukou* status, but since the quota system limits the number of accepted applications,

#### Figure 4

A Chongqing native migrant worker who has been living in Zhuhai for more than twenty years. Tangjia Village, Zhuhai. September 2018. (Source: author).



they keep being disqualified for the transfer. To get more points they need more qualifications and better job performances. This “keep trying until you succeed” strategy, generates strong competition among migrants. Finally, on the top of the hierarchy, the youngest, and the most highly qualified and best-educated migrants, are the most welcomed to transfer their *hukou* in Zhuhai, where they can devote to the construction of urban wealth and simultaneously perfect the image of the city.

While offering an apparently greater leeway for migrants who want to officially settle down in sought-after cities, the newly implemented points-based *hukou* policy does contribute to stratify migrants’ category in a hierarchy of merit in order to integrate talents. Concomitantly, the points policy leads to an increased socio-spatial differentiation of the urban space, enabling the municipal governments’ interests to prevail over other social concerns.

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