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*Education migrants and rural-urban relations in Hubei Province, China*

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## **Everybody Educated?** **Education Migrants and Rural-Urban Relations in Hubei Province, China**

This dissertation tells the stories of China's 'education migrants', the growing number of Chinese rural youth who migrate to the city via the country's higher education system. These youths' increased enrolment in Chinese universities has driven the rapid expansion of the Chinese higher education system since 1998. Despite being the first in their families to go to university, education migrants struggle in the city as a result of their substandard degrees and the stigmatisation of rural people in urban China. Yet, driven by their family members' need of support and a lack of alternative options, these youths continue to strive for success in China's urban society.

Everybody Educated? Education Migrants and Rural-Urban Relations in Hubei Province, China

Willy Sier

# **Everybody Educated?**

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by Willy Sier

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**Education Migrants and Rural-Urban Relations in Hubei Province, China**

Willy Sier

# Everybody Educated?

**Education Migrants and Rural-Urban Relations in Hubei Province, China**

ACADEMISCH PROEFSCHRIFT

ter verkrijging van de graad van doctor  
aan de Universiteit van Amsterdam  
op gezag van de Rector Magnificus prof. Karen Maex

ten overstaan van een door het College voor Promoties ingestelde  
commissie, in het openbaar te verdedigen in de Agnietenkapel  
op donderdag 20 februari, te 14:00 uur

door Wolmoed Maria Sier  
geboren te Volendam.

Everybody Educated?  
Education Migrants and Rural-Urban Relations in Hubei Province, China

Willy Sier

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## Table of Contents

List of Figures & Photos	10
Glossary	11
Time Line	12
Maps	13
Overview of Characters	14-19
Introduction	21-53
Chapter 1: Beyond Rural-Urban	55-75
Chapter 2: Everybody Educated?	77-104
Chapter 3: White-Collar Hustling	107-134
Chapter 4: Marrying Well versus Doing Well	137-155
Conclusion	157-172
List of References	173-181
Summary	182
Nederlandse samenvatting	183

## List of Figures & Photos

### Figures

- Figure 1: Map indicating the location of Hubei province in China  
Figure 2: Map indicating relevant research locations within Hubei province  
Figure 3: Overview of Hubei province score line 2015  
Figure 4: Overview of Hubei province's education System 2014  
Figure 5: Structure of the labour market from the perspective of education migrants

### Photos

- Photo 1: Youth hanging out at a mall at Wuhan's Optics Valley Square  
Photo 2: Impression of Wuchang district, Wuhan  
Photo 3: View from my studio window on a polluted day, near Yuejiazui  
Photo 4: Intricate infrastructures and newly-built buildings for sale  
Photo 5: Entrance to the Foxconn factory grounds  
Photo 6: Parents demonstrate in front of the Hubei Ministry of Education, May 2016  
Photo 7: Display outside of Duodaoshi High School informing about last year's results  
Photo 8: Decoration on Misty's office wall  
Photo 9: Misty's office

## Glossary

- Ant tribe / *Yizu* A term popular in academic literature in reference to educated, rural youth in cities.
- Eating bitterness / *Chiku* Bearing hardship.
- Gaokao* The university entrance exam.
- Guangjie* Go out window shopping, roaming the streets or a mall.
- Hukou* system Chinese system of residence registration.
- Key point university Universities belonging to the top segment of the education system, funded by the 985- and 211-projects.
- Left-over woman / *Shengnü* A derogatory term to refer to a highly-educated, unmarried woman.
- Marriage Agent / *Meipo* A female matchmaker in the village who matches young men to potential brides for a fee.
- Marriage House / *Hunjia* The house a groom is expected to buy before marriage.
- Outside / *Waidi* 'Going outside' generally means 'to migrate' or 'do migrant labour'. 'Coming from outside' or 'being an outsider' means 'to be a migrant' or 'not a local'.
- Phoenix boy / *Fenghuangnan* A derogatory term to refer to a boy who grew up in China's countryside, and is now successful in the city.
- Shuangxiu* Getting two days off per week on a job.
- Taobao* An online marketplace.
- Tiaocao* Job-hopping.
- WeChat / *Weixin* China's most popular social media application. It combines functions of social media applications Facebook and Whatsapp.
- Zhai* Popular internet-term, meaning: not often wanting to go outside, being shy, keeping to oneself.

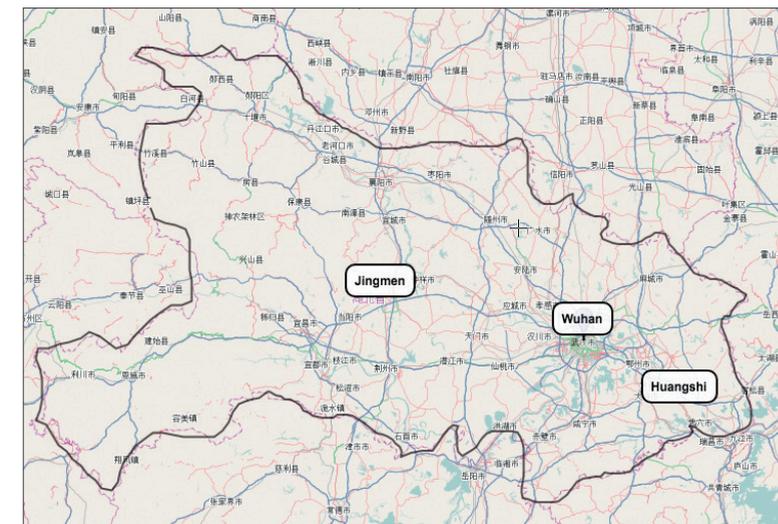
## Time Line

- 1949: The China Communist Party (CCP) comes to power, and the People's Republic of China (PRC) is founded.
- 1976: Death of Mao Zedong.
- 1978: Start of the reform period under the leadership of Deng Xiaoping.
- 1986: Implementation of nine years of compulsory education.
- 1990: Stagnation of the rural economy, which develops into 'rural crisis'.
- 1997: Asian Economic Crisis.
- 1998: Start of the radical expansion of the Chinese higher education system.
- 2004: Launch of the rural primary school merger programme.
- 2010: Publication National Outline for Medium and Long-Term Education Reform and Development.
- 2014: Launch of the National New-Type Urbanisation Plan (2014-2020).
- 2017: Rural graduates can now apply for urban *hukou*-registrations in second-tier cities.

## Maps



**Figure 1:** Map indicating the location of Hubei province in China  
Made by: Willy Sier



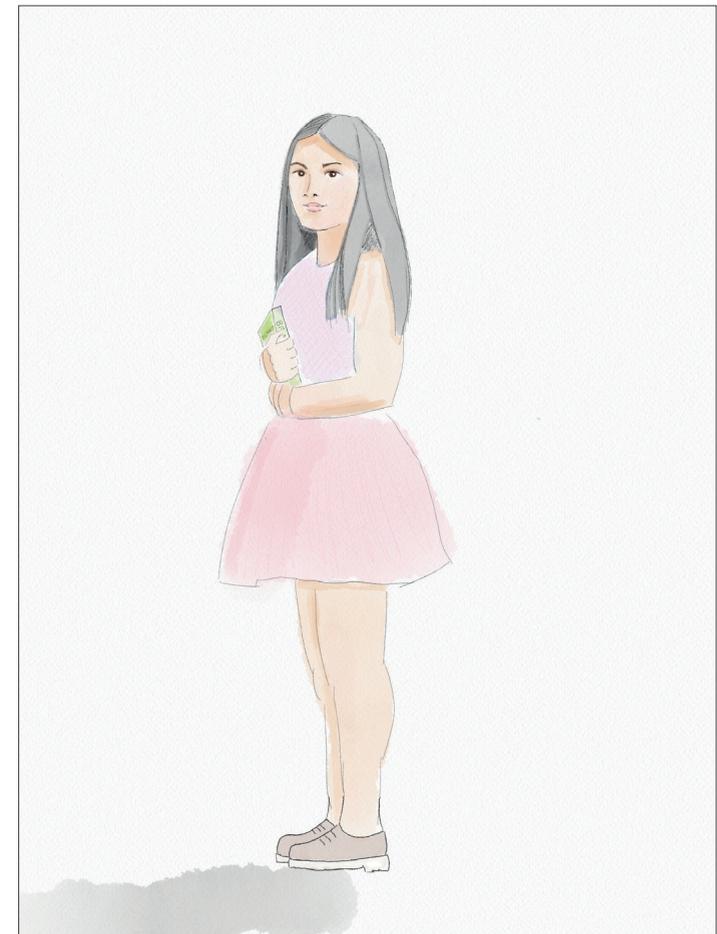
**Figure 2:** Map indicating relevant research locations within Hubei province  
Made by: Willy Sier

## Overview of Main Characters



MORNING SUNSHINE

1994  
University dropout  
Major: accountancy  
Zhuanke university  
Two sisters, one brother  
Parents practice labour migration  
Married in 2018



ANNA

1993  
Foxconn office employee  
Major: editing  
Class 2 university  
One brother  
Parents practice labour migration  
Plays piano



LI TANG

1988

Car salesman

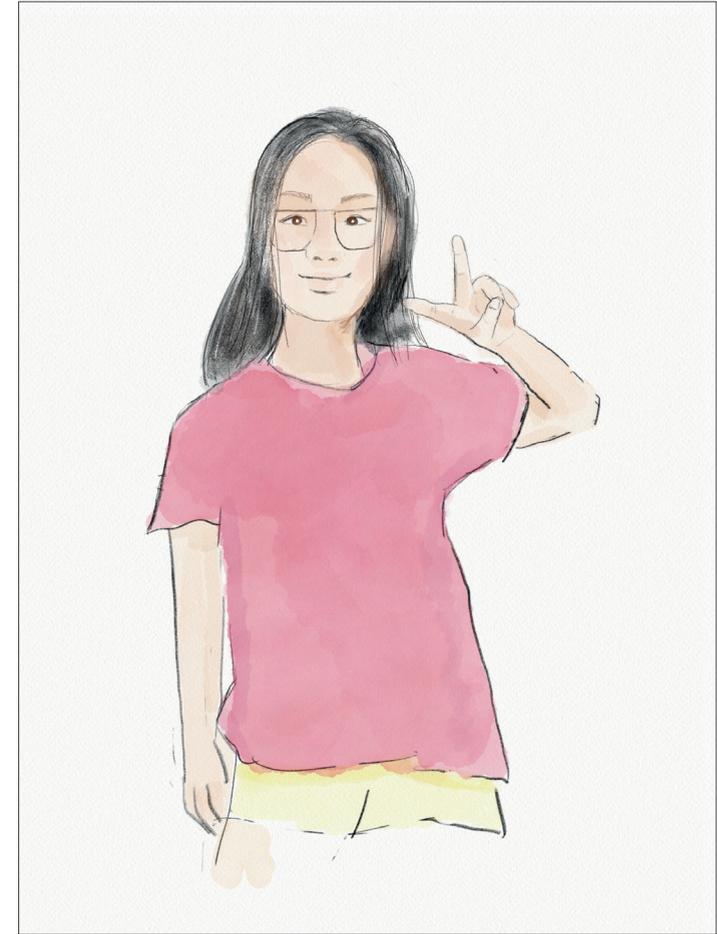
Major: car sales

Zhuanke university

Only child

Mother is a farmer

Raised by single mother



JULIA

1993

Works in education sales

Major: Fashion design

Class 2 university

One brother

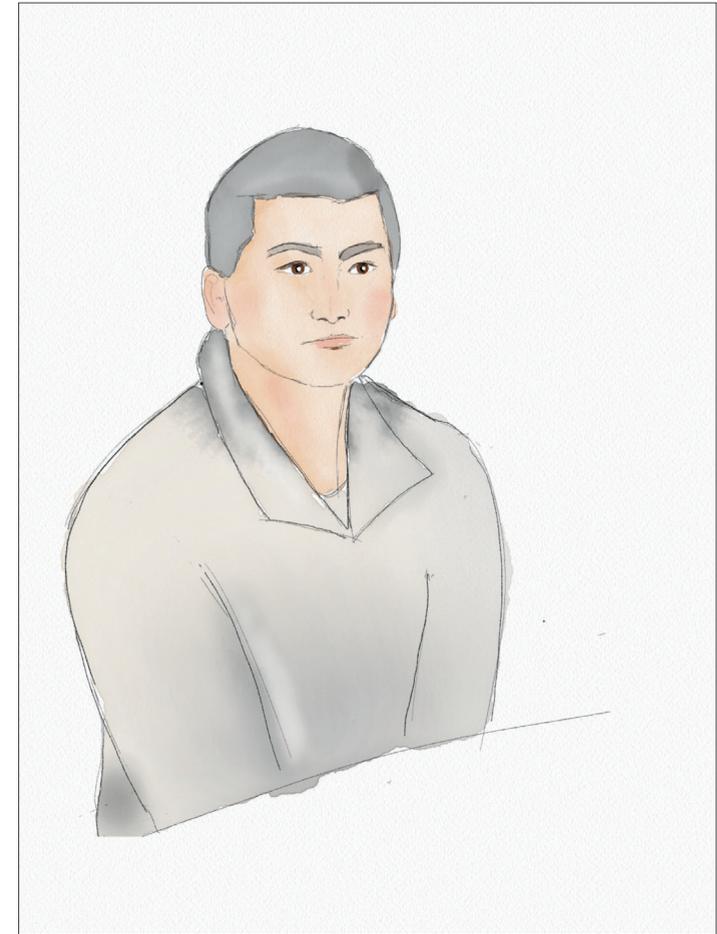
Mother practices labour migration

Very ambitious



MISTY

1993  
Works in sales  
Major: accountancy  
Zhuanke university  
One brother  
Parents are farmers  
Married and pregnant in 2019



XI

1993  
University dropout  
Works in e-commerce  
Major: machine engineering  
Class 1 university  
Single child  
Parents are farmers