An Empirical Study on Cultural and Educational Identity of Migrant Children in Zhoushan City from a Qualitative Perspective

Chen Diandian, Ren Wenxuan*, Ding Yi, Miao Yuting, Wang Siya, Wang Rui

Zhejiang Ocean University, Zhoushan, Zhejiang
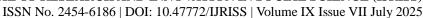
Corresponding author

ABSTRACT

With the acceleration of urbanization, Zhoushan City—a key marine economy hub in Zhejiang Province—has attracted a large influx of migrant workers, relocated families, and high-level talents, forming a diverse "new resident" population. In recent years, the government and society have paid increasing attention to the educational challenges faced by underprivileged minors within this group. Although migrant children's schools have improved in terms of infrastructure and material support, inequitable access to quality education persists. Field surveys reveal that in districts such as Huannan, Changguo, and Yancang, some migrant families experience poverty or relapse into poverty due to illness, leaving their children deprived of adequate education due to financial constraints. Their cultural-educational identity significantly impacts social integration and sustainable urban development.Guided by the theories of cultural adaptation and social identity, this mixed-methods study examines key dimensions including language acquisition, perceived educational equity, and traditional cultural acceptance. The findings aim to provide evidence-based recommendations for Zhoushan's policymakers to design inclusive education policies and promote equitable resource allocation.

Keywords: Migrant children, Education, Urban-rural Disparity

Research Background

In recent decades, rural-to-urban migration within China has fueled remarkable economic growth and rapid urbanization. Accelerated urbanization has raised China's urban population share to 63.89% of its 1.4 billion citizens (National Bureau of Statistics, 2021a), a dramatic increase from approximately 20% in the early 1980s. [1] Correspondingly, Zhoushan has witnessed sustained expansion of its newcomer population, which now constitutes 24.2% of the city's 1.1578 million permanent residents—an increase of 2.4 percentage points. Nearly one-quarter of residents are non-locals, translating to approximately one in every four permanent residents originating outside Zhoushan. [2]

This demographic shift has precipitated challenges including unequal distribution of educational resources for newcomers' children and difficulties in cultural integration, gradually emerging as critical factors affecting social harmony and stability. Against this backdrop, China's 14th Five-Year Plan explicitly advocates "people-centered new urbanization," while Zhejiang Province prioritizes "equalization of public services" as a key developmental objective. Consequently, investigating the multidimensional dynamics of newcomers' cultural and educational identity has become particularly urgent.

Current academic research predominantly focuses on economic integration or employs singular analytical metrics, failing to comprehensively reveal the complex integration processes of newcomers and leaving significant scholarly gaps. In societies where young migrants are perceived as threats to security, establishing protective resources tailored to their needs is imperative to shift collective perceptions. [3]

Taking Zhoushan as a typical case study, this research aims to conduct a systematic empirical analysis to provide an in-depth examination of the local advantages and shortcomings in facilitating the integration of new residents. As an island city characterized by unique oceanic cultural characteristics and industrial structure, Zhoushan demonstrates both innovative practices and faces specific challenges in the service management of new residents. The study will comprehensively examine multiple dimensions, including the allocation of educational resources, the construction of cultural exchange platforms, and the supply of public services. It aims to explore effective pathways to enhance the sense of belonging among new residents, thereby providing theoretical support and practical references for strengthening social stability. The relevant research findings will offer a scientific basis for the government to innovate social governance models and optimize the public service system. This will contribute to the development of Zhejiang Province's "Common Prosperity Demonstration Zone" and hold significant reference value for similar cities nationwide in addressing new resident integration issues.

LITERATURE REVIEW

In recent years, the rapid development of the island economy and the acceleration of urbanization in Zhoushan have led to a continuous annual increase in the number of children from new migrant families. Concurrently, the Party, government, and society have placed growing emphasis on the education of minors from special population groups. While the hardware facilities and material support for schools catering to migrant children have improved, significant issues persist regarding the equitable access to educational resources for these children. The influx of new migrants, while alleviating labor shortages and promoting socio-economic development, has also exposed pronounced social problems. Some new migrant families, particularly those constrained by economic conditions, social environment, and their own educational attainment, exhibit severe deficiencies in supporting their children's education. This issue is especially acute in families experiencing "poverty or relapse into poverty due to illness" (health poverty trap) residing in areas such as Huannan, Changguo, and Yancang sub-districts. Children in these families, facing extreme economic hardship, struggle to access necessary quality educational resources. This situation not only exacerbates the risk of intergenerational poverty transmission but also underscores the severe challenge to regional educational equity. [4]

Island regions are generally characterized by relative resource scarcity. Within this context of limited resources, it is crucial to investigate how to enhance the capabilities and competencies of new migrant parents and their children, facilitating their integration into the local educational, social, and cultural environment. Effectively improving the capabilities and competencies of new migrant parents and children under resource constraints to aid their integration into the local educational, social, and cultural fabric has thus become a critical issue demanding urgent resolution. However, existing research has paid insufficient attention to the unique geographical and socio-economic context of resource-limited island regions. There is a notable lack of systematic and locally contextualized investigation into the specific challenges of capability enhancement and social integration faced by new migrant families within such distinct settings.

Definition of Migrant Children

As a product of China's urban-rural dual system, the group comprising new migrants and their children has

increasingly garnered attention from various sectors of society. Ma Chuan and Wang Desheng posit that the majority of these migrant worker parents are employed in labor-intensive industries, often characterized by low incomes and long working hours. Consequently, these parents face challenges in providing adequate care and attention to their children, leading many of these children to become left-behind children in urban areas. [5] Zhuang Hete, in his work, defines new migrant children as children accompanying rural-to-urban migrant workers, referring to children who leave their household registration location to accompany their parents to their place of residence for study and living. In recent years, driven by increasing emphasis on family values and the pursuit of educational quality by the new generation of parents, the population of new migrant children has grown substantially. [6] Fu Yao, in her research, defines urban new residents as residents who have migrated from rural areas to work in the city, have purchased property within the city, or possess long-term stable housing, yet whose household registration remains outside the city. [7] Lei Hongbin, meanwhile, provides a comparative exposition of the two similar concepts of new residents and migrant workers. He clarifies that the terms are distinct. Rural-to-urban migrants are referred to by various terms, including external population, external floating population, floating population, inflow population, temporary resident population, migrant workers, temporarily migrating population, laborer, and external labor business personnel. Migrant workers specifically denotes a social group whose household registration remains rural, whose identity as peasants remains unchanged, but who work in cities for most or all of the year. [8]

Given that Zhuang Hete's definition offers a more comprehensive description of the external characteristics of the new generation of migrants, this paper adopts it as the primary reference. However, existing research remains deficient in its differential analysis of the educational needs of new migrant children under varying definitions. There is a particular lack of precise delineation and characteristic correlation studies focused specifically on the new migrant children population in island contexts.

Regional Studies Highlighting the Need for Enhanced Educational-Cultural Focus

Existing research has acknowledged the importance of education in the settlement decisions of new migrants. Zhang Yudi argues that education remains a key factor in county-level cities, but the primary reason for settlement is the greater potential for personal development. These results underscore the significance of education in migrants' settlement decisions. [9] However, accompanying this is the reality that children of new migrants entering the city encounter multiple cultural differences and dilemmas. Le Ziyu and Zhou Manyi, in their research based on Zhoushan City, point out that the lives of new migrant children currently face numerous challenges. Due to differences in culture, living habits, and social groups, these children often struggle to integrate quickly into classes or student communities upon arriving at school. This presents challenges for school management and can even create conflicts between school education and family education. Tian Huisheng, Wu Ni, and colleagues, after conducting field surveys on the educational conditions of migrant workers' children in over a dozen Chinese cities, noted that most surveyed cities exhibited problems such as inadequate teaching quality in schools for migrant children and disorganized management systems by the local inflow governments. [10] Jin Fang, in her in-depth exploration of primary education, observes that with the continuous development of cities, the number of children of migrant workers in kindergartens in these cities has also increased significantly in recent years. These children, hailing from various parts of the country, exhibit varying degrees of difference from local children in many aspects. [11]

Nevertheless, the investigation into the sources of these differences remains insufficiently deep, and there is a lack of analysis linking these differences to their specific impact on educational integration within the particular context of resource scarcity in island regions. Therefore, identifying the origins of these differences is also one of the key objectives of this paper.

Social Identity Theory

The crucial role of social identity was first proposed by Lewin, who argued that individuals require a stable sense of belonging to a group to maintain a sense of well-being. This perspective was further developed by Tajfel and Turner into a comprehensive Social Identity Theory. Tajfel defined social identity as "that part of an individual's self-concept which derives from their knowledge of their membership in a social group together with the value and emotional significance attached to that membership." [12] Thus, adhering primarily to Tajfel and Turner's classical definition, this paper focuses on the dynamic process through which new migrant children achieve social identity via educational integration.

Based on the latest research, Barbara L identified key factors influencing the return migration of new migrant families [13]. This phenomenon may stem from the high threshold for permanent urban settlement due to the household registration system, or reduced economic opportunities caused by economic recessions.Xu Limin's research on migrant children in China reveals that schools—as critical social organizations providing education—not only impart knowledge but also offer an inclusive environment fostering a sense of belonging among these children [14]. This finding contradicts the classical hypothesis that "in-group preference enhances self-esteem."Cai Hongying points out that cultural differences between new migrants and local communities lead to significant disparities in values,, and behavioral habits, sometimes resulting in conflict [15]. However, comparative studies by Yan Yueping and Liao Lianzhong indicate that institutional factors are the primary driver of the "dual marginalization" of migrant children. Biases in the formulation and implementation of institutional policies have caused widespread issues in both basic education and family support for these children [16].These studies collectively demonstrate that applying social identity theory requires contextual adaptation to specific societal conditions. The identity strategies of disadvantaged groups may transcend traditional theoretical frameworks. Addressing these gaps, this research focuses on resource-constrained island environments to explore pathways for enhancing the capabilities of new migrant parents and children, facilitating their local integration. This approach holds significant practical and theoretical value.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This study aims to understand the current implementation status and common problems in the educational and cultural lives of migrant children in new environments, obtaining first-hand data; the research method adopted in this paper is qualitative interviews within qualitative research, where the author collects sample materials through community visits and school internship interviews, gathering interviews with 9 migrant children in Zhoushan; based on the author's research theme, the selected samples are distributed across various grades in elementary school, with ages ranging from 8 to 12 years; the sample students' schools include urban schools such as Zhoushan First Primary School and township schools such as Zhoushan Baiquan Central Primary School; following specific gender ratio requirements, 5 boys and 4 girls were interviewed; subsequently, semi-structured interviews are conducted to understand their living conditions in Zhoushan, using interview questions adapted from Z. Wang and X. Zheng, "Title of Wang & Zheng's 2014 paper,"，F. Jin, "Actively promoting cultural integration education to effectively facilitate the development of new residents' children,H. Lei, "Research on strategies for achieving equal enrollment opportunities in compulsory education for migrant children in Wuxing District," Y. Fu, "Research on family education guidance strategies for new urban residents,"; with certain adaptations made according to the research objectives; preliminary investigations and relevant empirical studies have proven these questions can effectively reflect research priorities and focus; therefore, these questions were used to study the perceptions of migrant children in Zhoushan regarding local life and cultural life; subsequently, coding classification and coding were executed to draw conclusions.

Qualitative Interviews

Question 1: Are you a native of Zhoushan or from another place? When living in Zhoushan, do you feel more like a Zhoushan native or a person from your hometown?

Respondent 1: I am from another place. After living here for a while, I feel like both a Zhoushan native and a person from my hometown.

Respondent 2: I am from Henan. After living here, I feel like a Zhoushan native.

Respondent 3: I am from Anhui. My parents work here, so they brought me to Zhoushan for convenience, but I don't think I belong here.

Respondent 4: I am from another place and always consider myself a hometown person. I wasn't born in Zhoushan.

Respondent 5: I still feel like a hometown person because I live with my family, and my parents cook in hometown habits.

Respondent 6: My family is from Shandong. I still feel more like a hometown person. When living with my family, we mainly communicate in hometown dialect, and I prefer to talk to my parents in dialect, which feels more intimate.

Respondent 7: I still feel more like a hometown person because I use hometown dialect at home, so it still has a hometown flavor.

Respondent 8: I am from Anhui and feel more like a hometown person. My mother came here to work with my grandmother when she was a child, so we moved here. Since I am not a Zhoushan native, I don't play the games that Zhoushan classmates play, and sometimes I can't understand Zhoushan dialect.

Respondent 9: I am from Henan. We came here because someone owed my family money. I feel it's almost the same here and in my hometown because I can integrate into local life in Zhoushan, and my family also retains a sense of my hometown.

Table 2 Statistical Analysis Table of Identity Test

Interviewee	Registered Residence	Subjective Identity Tendency	Core Anchoring Factor	Intergenerational Migration Characteristics	Identity Conflict Intensity
1	Non-local	Dual Identity	Cumulative effect of residence duration	Voluntary migration	Low (Integrative)
2	Henan native	Zhoushan identity	Reconstruction of regional identity	Not specified	None
3	Anhui	Resistant hometown	Experience of passive	Child labor	High

	native	identity	relocation	migration	(Confrontational)
4	Non-local	Pure hometown identity	Birthplace memory	Not specified	Medium
5	Unspecified	Customary hometown identity	Family dietary culture	Family cultural transplantation	Medium
6	Shandong native	Linguistically reinforced hometown identity	Dialect-based social circle	Dialect environment maintenance	Medium
7	Unspecified	Emotional hometown identity	Linguistic emotional connection	Cultural symbol inheritance	Medium
8	Anhui native	Isolated hometown identity	Cultural practice differences	Second-generation labor migration	Extreme
9	Henan native	Instrumental dual identity	Survival needs driven	Debt-driven migration	Low

Question 2: Zhoushan has many unique customs, such as the Fish Festival and Guanyin Culture Festival. Have you participated in these activities? Did you feel uncomfortable or difficult to integrate when participating?

Respondent 1: Yes, my parents take me to watch these festivals, and my school also organizes them. I felt uncomfortable because I couldn't understand what others said.

Respondent 2: No, I haven't.

Respondent 3: No, I haven't participated.

Respondent 4: I have participated in some activities.

Respondent 5: I have participated, and the atmosphere was good.

Respondent 6: No, but I heard about them in school. Teachers talked about them in class, but few classmates participated. I learned about Zhoushan dialect games, though.

Respondent 7: No, I haven't heard of them.

Respondent 8: No, I haven't.

Respondent 9: It seems not.

Table 3 Analysis Table of New Residents' Children's Local Cultural Activities Participation

Interviewee ID	Participation Status	Participation Form	Exposure Channel	Special Notes	Emotional Attitude
1	Participated (multiple times)	Family-based + school-organized	On-site observation	Language comprehension barriers	Positive but slightly confused
2	Never participated	None	None	No exposure at all	Neutral/no expression
3	Never participated	None	None	Explicit negation	Neutral
4	Participated (partial)	Non-systematic participation	Not specified	Vague description ("some activities")	Relatively positive
5	Participated	Form unspecified	Not specified	Emphasized atmosphere experience	Positive evaluation ("good atmosphere")
6	Indirect contact	Classroom teaching + language games	School education	Low peer participation	Passive acceptance/cognitive contact
7	Never participated	None	None	No daily exposure either	Explicitly negative
8	Never participated	None	None	Simple negation	Neutral
9	Suspected non-participation	None	None	Vague memory ("seemingly" expression)	Uncertain/negative tendency

Question 3: In school or the community, have classmates or neighbors treated you differently because you are a "non-native"? Does this make you want to emphasize your original identity or strive to adapt to local culture?

Respondent 1: No, they treat me well and help me.

Respondent 2: No, they are all nice. I met many friends from other classes at school.

Respondent 3: No, people around me are friendly, and I have friends at school.

Respondent 4: I feel a little bit, but it's not malicious. I will strive to adapt to Zhoushan culture.

Respondent 5: No, I will strive to adapt to Zhoushan culture.

Respondent 6: No, they are all nice to me. I strive to adapt because they treat me well, and I feel I can integrate better.
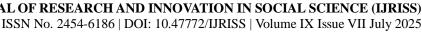
Respondent 7: No, everyone is friendly. I still prefer my original life because I love my hometown.

Respondent 8: In my grandmother's community, there was a classmate from my primary school who is a Zhoushan native. We played well, but his mother sometimes said I was from Anhui, not Zhoushan, and that people from my hometown steal, so she didn't let her daughter play with me. I try to adapt to Zhoushan culture, but I haven't succeeded yet.

Respondent 9: No, I will strive to integrate into Zhoushan culture better.

Table 4 Statistical Analysis Table of Identity Adjustment Status

Interviewee	Discrimination Perception Intensity	Identity Adjustment Strategy	Triggering Factors	Psychological Compensation Manifestation	Strategy Sustainability
1	No perception	Natural integration	Proactive assistance from others	Positive interpersonal feedback	Stable
2	No perception	Active social expansion	Successful cross-class friendships	Social capital accumulation	Enhanced
3	No perception	Status quo maintenance	Friendly environment	Security fulfillment	Maintained
4	Mild perception	Proactive cultural adaptation	Vague sense of difference	Preventive adjustment	Fluctuating
5	No perception	Programmatic adaptation	Not mentioned	Mechanical compliance	Superficial
6	No perception	Reciprocal integration	Receiving special treatment	Reciprocity-driven psychology	Deepened
7	No perception	Cultural persistence	Subjective cultural preference	Nostalgic defense mechanism	Persistent
8	Explicit discrimination	Contradictory adaptation	Parental-level regional discrimination	Cognitive dissonance (behavioral-verbal inconsistency)	Ineffective
9	No perception	Instrumental integration	Not mentioned	Utilitarian cultural capital acquisition	Goal-oriented

Question 4: Do your parents often talk to you about your hometown? Do they want you to retain hometown habits or encourage you to learn Zhoushan's lifestyle? For example, do they ask you to learn Zhoushan dialect?

Respondent 1: Yes, and we go back to our hometown for the Spring Festival every year. They want me to retain hometown habits, but they also ask me to learn Zhoushan dialect.

Respondent 2: They prefer Zhoushan's lifestyle because they want me to be happy here. They often talk about our hometown, but I don't learn Zhoushan dialect because it's difficult.

Respondent 3: Yes, they talk about hometown relatives. They want me to retain hometown living habits, such as the food I eat.

Respondent 4: Yes, sometimes they ask me to learn Zhoushan dialect and tell me news or stories about Zhoushan.

Respondent 5: Both, but they don't ask me to learn Zhoushan dialect.

Respondent 6: Yes, they tell me about hometown affairs. They probably want me to retain hometown habits, so we eat and talk in a hometown way.

Respondent 7: Yes, such as hometown relatives or outstanding people in the village. They want me to retain hometown life and learn about Zhoushan. We use dialect at home and Mandarin at school or outside.

Respondent 8: They encourage me to learn Zhoushan's lifestyle.

Respondent 9: Yes, about Henan culture. They encourage me to learn Zhoushan's lifestyle. My mother wants me to learn some dialect to understand better.

Table 5 Statistical Analysis Table of Cultural Adaptation Status

Interviewee	Intergenerational Memory Transmission Frequency	Cultural Adaptation Orientation	Dialect Education Strategy	Key Characteristic Keywords	Cultural Practice Manifestation
1	★★★★☆	Preservation-primary, adaptation-secondary	Active teaching	"Return to hometown for Spring Festival""but learn dialect"	Ritual festivals + instrumental language learning
2	★★☆☆☆	Proactive local adaptation	No requirement (abandoned)	"Want happiness""dialect difficult"	Pragmatic compromise
3	★★★★☆	Adhere to traditions	Not involved	"Relatives""hometown cuisine"	Dietary cultural fortress

4	★★★☆☆	Integrated adaptation	Contextual teaching	"Zhoushan news""occasionally teach"	Informational adaptation + fragmented language input
5	★★☆☆☆	Neutral/ambiguous	No intervention	"Both exist""not mentioned"	Cultural strategy vacuum
6	★★★★☆	Strengthen hometown identity	Family dialect environment	"Family matters""speech and food all hometown-style"	Full-family cultural closed loop
7	★★★☆☆	Dual-track parallel	Context-dependent usage	"Dialect at home/Mandarin outside"	Spatialized language management
8	★☆☆☆☆	Complete localization	Not mentioned	"More encouraged towards Zhoushan ways"	Intergenerational cultural rupture
9	★★★☆☆	Instrumental adaptation	Limited maternal-line teaching	"Learn a bit""understand is enough"	Threshold-based language mastery

Question 5: If you can choose in the future, would you prefer to stay in Zhoushan or return to your hometown? Why?

Respondent 1: I think I need to go back to my hometown sometimes and live in Zhoushan because there are many activities and delicious food here.

Respondent 2: I will stay in Zhoushan because my hometown is in Henan, and the environment here is much better.

Respondent 3: I will return to my hometown because many relatives accompany me there.

Respondent 4: Stay in Zhoushan because my hometown is a rural area, and life conditions here are better.

Respondent 5: Zhoushan, because the environment is good.

Respondent 6: Return to my hometown because relatives are there. Our extended family is in the hometown, and only our small family is here, so it feels more intimate there.

Respondent 7: My hometown, because I adapt better to hometown life. I may not adapt to local customs here. I am used to rural life in my hometown.

Respondent 8: Stay in Zhoushan because my mother said the schools here are better, and I want to study here. The conditions are also better.

Respondent 9: Either is okay. Life is similar in both places.

Table 6 Statistical Analysis Table of Belonging Tendency

Interviewee	Belonging Tendency	Core Decision Dimension	Key Influencing Factors	Emotional Expression Characteristics	Rational/Emotional Balance
1	Dual-city living	Life richness	Activity diversity, cuisine	"Feel..." (vague preference)	Emotion-dominated
2	Stay in Zhoushan	Environmental quality	Natural environment comparison	"Much better" (explicit contrast)	Rationality-dominated
3	Return to hometown	Kinship network	Relative companionship	"Will accompany" (emotional need)	Emotion-dominated
4	Stay in Zhoushan	Economic conditions	Urban-rural development gap	"Slightly better" (practical consideration)	Rationality-dominated
5	Stay in Zhoushan	Environmental quality	Natural environment	Concise statement	Purely rational
6	Return to hometown	Family bonds	Extended family belonging	"More familiar" (high emotional intensity)	Emotion-dominated
7	Return to hometown	Cultural adaptability	Rural lifestyle habits	"More comfortable" (cultural fit)	Emotion-dominated
8	Stay in Zhoushan	Educational conditions	School quality, mother's advice	"I want..." (autonomous choice)	Rational-emotional balance
9	Neutral	Life homogenization	Minimal regional differences	"Almost the same" (no distinction)	Rational neutrality

Table 7 Summary Analysis of the 9 Interviewees

Interviewee	Identity Type	Cultural Participation Pattern	Discrimination Coping Strategy	Intergenerational Transmission Strength	Future Belonging Tendency	Core Contradiction Point
1	Dual Identity	Ritual participation (language barriers)	Natural integration	★★★★☆	Dual-city living	Language ability vs. participation willingness mismatch
2	Zhoushan Identity	Non-participation	Active social expansion	★★☆☆☆	Stay in Zhoushan	Identity transformation vs. cultural practice absence
3	Resistant Hometown Identity	Cultural isolation	Status quo maintenance	★★★★☆	Return to hometown	Kinship dependency vs. local social network conflict
4	Pure Hometown Identity	Fragmented participation	Proactive cultural adaptation	★★★☆☆	Stay in Zhoushan	Economic rationality vs. emotional identity split
5	Customary Hometown Identity	Decontextualized participation	Programmatic adaptation	★★☆☆☆	Stay in Zhoushan	Cultural strategy ambiguity
6	Linguistically Reinforced Identity	Knowledge-based contact	Reciprocal integration	★★★★☆	Return to hometown	Dialect fortress vs. integration willingness conflict
7	Emotional Hometown Identity	Complete isolation	Cultural persistence	★★★☆☆	Return to hometown	Cultural nostalgia vs. reality adaptation dilemma

8	Isolated Hometown Identity	Cultural exclusion	Contradictory adaptation	★☆☆☆☆	Stay in Zhoushan	Educational rationality vs. social exclusion tension
9	Instrumental Dual Identity	Latent participation	Instrumental integration	★★★☆☆	Neutral	Survival strategy vs. cultural identity decoupling

CONCLUSION

Based on qualitative interviews with 9 children of migrant families residing in Zhoushan, this study delves into their geographical identity, cultural adaptation strategies, and future belonging tendencies, revealing the following key findings:

The identity of new residents' children tends to be pluralistic due to multiple factors

Interview results show that due to language habits, dietary customs, and intergenerational migration characteristics, the respondents exhibited highly diverse identity characteristics. New residents' children demonstrate relatively distinct awareness of their own identity positioning. Meanwhile, individual-level friendly environments (e.g., respondent 3), group-level regional discrimination (e.g., parental biases affecting respondent 8), and cultural-level custom differences (e.g., language barriers experienced by respondent 1) directly impact these children. New residents' children display pluralistic and differentiated identity characteristics. Some respondents develop "dual identity" due to length of residence and local life experiences, such as respondent 1 who preserved hometown memories while participating in Zhoushan festivals. Others form "resistant hometown identity" due to passive relocation or cultural barriers, like respondent 3 who rejected local identity because of kinship dependency. This differentiation closely correlates with intergenerational migration characteristics and cultural capital acquisition, as the intensity of identity conflict among second-generation accompanying migrant groups is significantly higher than among voluntary migrants.

Social and cultural integration and identity of new residents' children have shown certain improvement

Furthermore, the cultural integration of new residents' children faces multiple structural barriers. Language differences constitute the primary challenge: Interviewee 1 encounters participation barriers in festival activities due to incomprehension of Zhoushan dialect, while Interviewee 8 faces exclusion from local culture due to dialect barriers. Family cultural transmission patterns exacerbate this dilemma, as seen in Interviewee 6's household constructing a "cultural closed loop" through dialect and dietary habits, weakening integration motivation. Additionally, the implicit presence of regional discrimination (e.g., geographical prejudice experienced by Interviewee 8) causes some groups to fall into "cognitive dissonance"—subjectively desiring adaptation while struggling to practice it due to real-world exclusion. This precisely highlights the importance of schools as integration venues. [17] In schools, they feel equally treated and equally participate in cultural practice activities. This serves as both a protective factor and a right for cultural connection among children from diverse cultural backgrounds.

New residents' children's settlement choices are positively influenced by economic and educational-cultural factors

Simultaneously, intergenerational cultural transmission and educational expectations shape future belonging orientations. Families exhibit polarized approaches toward their children's cultural adaptation: some (e.g., respondent 1's family) encourage "preservation as primary, adaptation as supplementary," while others (e.g., respondent 8's family) lean completely toward localization. This divergence directly impacts children's future settlement choices: respondents 2 and 4 chose to settle in Zhoushan due to its environment and development opportunities, whereas respondents 3 and 6 preferred returning to their hometowns due to emotional bonds. Notably, the case of new residents' children reveals a key pattern: the quality of educational resources has become a core decision variable for the new generation's settlement choices, reflecting practical considerations regarding second-generation education among the broader new resident population.

Cultural differences lead new residents' children to still face certain prejudices

Furthermore, our study reveals that regional discrimination also exists in Zhoushan City. During interviews, a respondent from Anhui mentions being called an inappropriate nickname "Anhui person" and being suspected of having undesirable behavioral habits. This stems from socioeconomic differences, which influence the strength and presence of social memory content. [18] Halbwachs has pointed out the common perception: wealth is often associated with diligence and straightforwardness, while poverty is linked to laziness and vulgarity. Affluence implies an upwardly mobile image, whereas poverty suggests an idle and unproductive image. [19] Implicit manifestations have also been found in the values of the second generation.

Based on the research findings, we should prioritize placing children with culturally similar caregivers, as this fosters their sense of belonging in the new environment. Secondly, regarding policy, culturally appropriate measures need to prioritize regular and ongoing cultural care assessments while planning for children from diverse cultural backgrounds. [20]

LIMITATIONS

This study selected 9 children of new residents in Zhoushan as interviewees, focusing regionally on specific groups—"new-to-Zhoushan migrants," "new residents," and "adolescent children." The sample selection is based on considerations of the living environment and cultural adaptation status of new residents' children in Zhoushan, possessing certain representativeness. However, the sample size of 9 lacks sufficient scale to comprehensively cover the diversity within the new residents' children population—for example, failing to involve complex cases from different occupational families or multi-generational migrant households—limiting the applicability of research conclusions to broader populations. Future research should expand the sample size to 50-100 individuals, employing stratified sampling across dimensions such as occupation and generational status to enhance conclusion generalizability.

Secondly, regarding research methodology, introduce quantitative research designs by developing standardized instruments including identity scales and dynamic tracking questionnaires. Through longitudinal data collection, quantitatively analyze the changing trajectories of new residents' children across dimensions such as language proficiency, social network development, and value formation.

Regarding the regional discrimination observed in interviews, a social network analysis model could be constructed to map community support networks. This would analyze the influence weights of network nodes—such as neighborhood interactions, school integration, and social organization participation—on cultural adaptation. Simultaneously, comparative studies with adaptation strategies from migrants' provinces of

origin could reveal interactive mechanisms between regional cultural backgrounds and social network structures. This approach would provide multidimensional evidence for refining social integration policies for new residents' children.

REFERENCES

1. Y. Wang and P. Sercombe, "Social justice and migrant children: Exploring the design and implementation of education policies for migrant children in China," Regional Science Policy & Practice, vol. 15, no. 9, pp. 1941–1956, 2023, doi: 10.1111/rsp3.12680.

2. Census Center of Zhoushan Municipal Bureau of Statistics, "Interpretation of Zhoushan's Seventh National Census Data – Special Topic 11: Migrant Permanent Residents Account for Nearly a Quarter of Zhoushan's Population," Zhoushan Municipal Bureau of Statistics, 2021. [Online]. Available: http://zstj.zhoushan.gov.cn/art/2021/9/6/art_1229339436_3670133.html. [Accessed: Jun. 22, 2025].

3. G. Fernández-Pacheco Alises, T. Avignone, and M. Torres Jiménez, "Predicting children migrants' social exclusion risk through an innovative digital tool: Application of machine learning methods to Spanish residential centres," Children and Youth Services Review, vol. 175, p. 108345, 2025. doi: 10.1016/j.childyouth.2025.108345.

4. Z. LE and M. ZHOU, "Exploration and effectiveness of establishing 'New Resident Schools' based on island regional resources," New Countryside, no. 03, pp. 54–55, 2022.

5. C. Ma and D. Wang, "The educational inequality faced by Chinese rural migrant children in an urban public school," Int. J. Educ. Dev., vol. 114, p. 103268, 2025, doi: 10.1016/j.ijedudev.2025.103268.

6. H. ZHUANG, "Research on safeguarding the right to equal education for migrant children of urban migrant workers in Wenzhou," Master's thesis, Wenzhou University, Wenzhou, China, 2019.

7. Y. FU, "Research on family education guidance strategies for new urban residents," Master's thesis, Shenyang Normal University, Shenyang, China, 2020.

8. H. LEI, "Strategies for achieving equal access to compulsory education for migrant children of new residents in Wuxing District," Master's thesis, Ningbo University, Ningbo, China, 2019.

9. Y. D. Zhang and C. Chen, "Education-driven urbanization: How children's education shapes Chinese migrants' settlement intentions," Cities, vol. 158, p. (in press), 2025.

10. H. TIAN and N. WU, Research on Education Issues for Migrant Workers' Children, Beijing, China: Educational Science Press, 2010, pp. 51–54.

11. F. JIN, "Actively promoting cultural integration education to effectively foster the development of children of new residents," Science Fairy Tales, no. 04, pp. 102–103, 2019.

12. Y. GUI, "Research on urban identity and urban attachment of migrant workers," Master's thesis, Southwest University, Chongqing, China, 2010.

13. B. L. et al., "Accessibility and evaluation of education and training programs for child welfare workers serving immigrant and mobile children and families: A scoping review of empirical literature over 25 years," Child. Youth Serv. Rev., vol. 172, p. 108228, 2025, doi: 10.1016/j.childyouth.2025.108228.

14. L. XU, "Educational dilemmas and countermeasures in the social integration of migrant workers' children," J. Zhengzhou Univ. (Philos. Soc. Sci. Ed.), vol. 48, no. 6, pp. 42–45, 2015.

15. H. CAI, "Exploring effective approaches to restructure campus culture: A study on multicultural integration in schools with diverse student backgrounds," New Education, no. 04, pp. 68–69, 2014.

16. Y. YAN and L. LIAO, "Double marginalization of 'mobile children': Reflections based on development and integration," Consume Guide, no. 10, pp. 36–37, 40, 2008.

17. N. Pantić et al., "How do teachers exercise relational agency for supporting migrant students within social networks in schools from Scotland, Finland, and Sweden?," Teaching and Teacher Education, vol. 139, p. 104442, 2024, doi: 10.1016/j.tate.2023.104442.

18. M. CHEN, "Research on regional discrimination in social media," Master's thesis, Jiangxi Normal University, Nanchang, China, 2024, doi: 10.27178/d.cnki.gjxsu.2024.000726.

19. M. HALBWACHS, On Collective Memory, R. BI and J. GUO, Trans. Shanghai, China: Shanghai People's Publishing House, 2002.

20. Ezekwem-Obi, S. Blythe, and R. Grace, "'Your culture is in you': Cultural identity and connection for children from culturally diverse backgrounds in care: A scoping review of child perspectives," Child Protection and Practice, vol. 5, p. 100134, 2025, doi: 10.1016/j.chipro.2025.100134.