



Unexpected Guests

**Assessing the
Surprising Impact
of Fujian's
Gaokao Fiasco**

**The Affiliated High
School of Fujian
Normal University**

**Wanting Zeng
Yijia Jing
Youxin Wang
Yutong Lyu
Qimao Lin
Boyuan Li**

It was part of one tweet by a sophomore at Fuzhuo No.2 High School that began it all, *"There came our unexpected guests, moving our cheese and swallowing one mouthful after another. Then they disappeared like nothing had happened, leaving an unfillable void."*

"With the last pure land for liberal education in China vanishing into thin air, the fairness of education became an irony. It is initially expected that students can actualize their value in the so-called fairest starting point--gaokao. However, the educational level in Fujian can never pragmatically progress with this kind of window dressing (gaokao migration)," wrote Yi Chen in her tweet.

Until June 25, the tweet that blamed gaokao migrants for negatively affecting students' future has been re-tweeted 2294 times and liked 261 thousand times, triggering heated discussion, and Yi Chen even spent money to make the tweet a trending topic to spread her words. Local students and parents in Fujian wish that their dissemination of this tweet could urge the local government to expel gaokao migrants as soon as possible.



*Nervous parents waited outside the Affiliated High School of Fujian Normal University as their children took gaokao. (Source: Sina Weibo)

As an unrelenting influx of exam migrants in Fujian Province was disclosed in 2017, the National College Entrance Examination (gaokao), as the only determinant of which Chinese colleges students will enter, greatly disappointed locals in Fujian Province. The cut-off score in Fujian Province increased by 12.7% for arts students and by 11.1% for science students in 2018. Local examinees who would have entered better universities could not fulfill their goals due to the increased cutoff. Parents were infuriated, students saddened, officials alarmed, and the entire country embroiled in controversies.

Dispute on the low cut-off

According to Chinese laws, only students who registered as a provincial permanent resident have the right to take gaokao in that very province. As a consensus in China, gaokao takers in Fujian enjoy a surprisingly low cut-off score in college admission, which elicited countless complaints from out-of-provinces students. However, local students consider the cut-off score reasonable.

Yi Chen explained, "the number of local examinees in Fujian is only 200 thousand. If the number increases by 20 thousand, it will undoubtedly make a great difference."

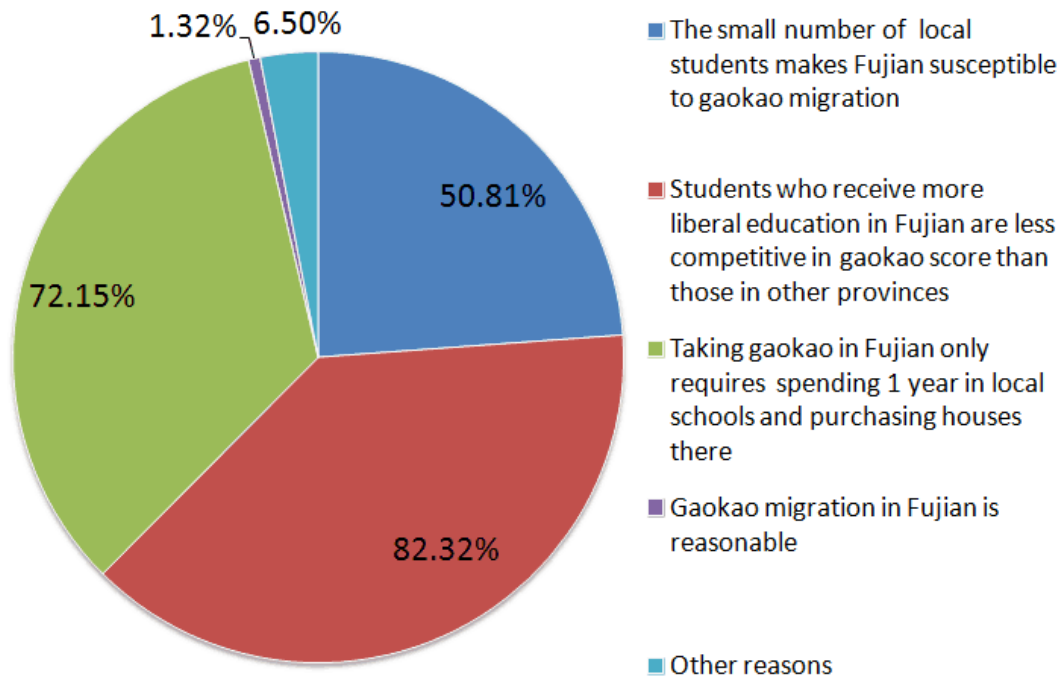
In fact, the number of gaokao takers in Fujian is one-fifth of that of gaokao takers in Henan Province, where most gaokao migrants come from. Based on this fact, it is understandable why the effects of twenty thousand gaokao migrants loomed large. In order to study the conflicts and impacts brought by gaokao migration in Fujian, we designed a questionnaire online. Until August 11th, 1108 people have answered it, with 500 interviewees believing that gaokao migration is unreasonable since the number of Fujian examinees is low, which represents susceptibility to any change.

Then, Yi Chen talked about quarrels with netizens from other provinces. "Many netizens criticized that Fujian students could not get satisfying scores because they did not work hard. But the lower scores were actually caused by the educational

difference between Fujian and other provinces in China." In our survey, more than 80% interviewees believe that Fujian students growing up under liberal education are less competitive in achieving high scores than gaokao migrants receiving a test-oriented education.

Why do you think gaokao migration is an unreasonable measure?

(You can choose more than one choice.)



* This data is collected through our online survey.

In fact, to prepare for gaokao, students in other provinces are typically forced to spend every night on extra classes organized by their schools, but this does not apply to students in Fujian. Receiving less test-oriented education, students in Fujian enjoy the freedom to control their own time after class.

"I'm proud of myself for still having the opportunity to participate in sports, clubs, and social activities in my high school time," Yi Chen has a quick smile on her face, but she is self-aware that whatever she tries to explain for liberal education in Fujian, seldom do out-of-province netizens trust her words.

Confrontations between locals and authorities

"The government is trying to put Fujian in a less embarrassed position. Unfortunately, they do so by acquiescing to Gaokao migration instead of improving our own educational ability," wrote Yi Chen.

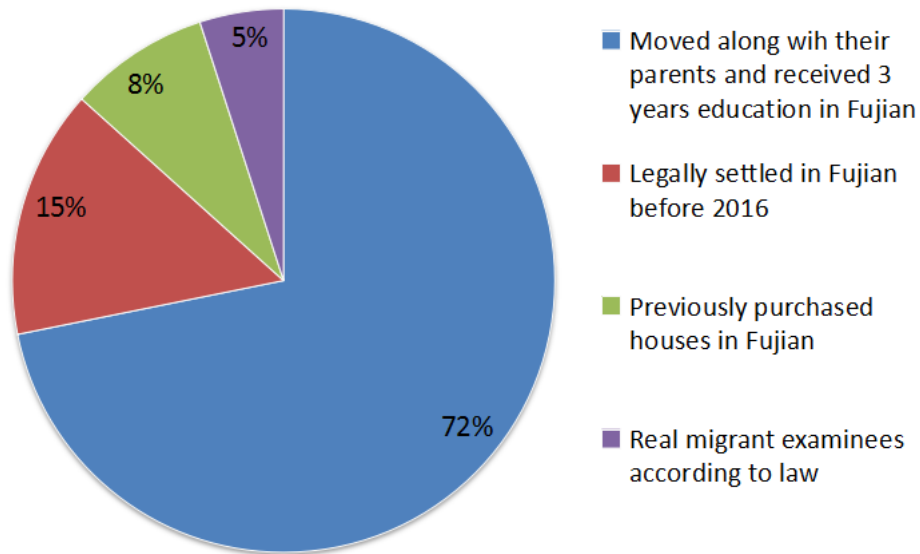
In favor of Yi Chen's opinion, half of our interviewees believe that gaokao migration was facilitated by the nonfeasance of the Fujian Education Bureau according to our questionnaire. Since the number of gaokao migrants is too large, it would be challenging to tackle, so officials chose to turn a blind eye. Furthermore, most migrants took gaokao in Fujian but received education in provinces that are equipped with higher educational ability. When it turned out that these migrants had elevated average scores in Fujian, officials could be somehow pleased because the final report of Fujian looked nicer.

Popular and influential though, Yi Chen's tweet was identified as misleading information and deleted by the platform. Furthermore, as a civil servant, her mother was prevented from participating in the demonstration of gaokao migration. "We feel both indignant and frightened about the reactions of the Education Bureau but cannot figure out any solutions." Yi Chen said with despair, like a poor soldier lost battles.

The Fujian Education Bureau has a say

Contrary to what critics' opinions, the Fujian Education Bureau defended itself in its latest announcement. According to its announcement, the cut-off line goes higher because gaokao is easier this year and students' abilities are improving. Additionally, the influx of 16 thousand migrant examinees is just a rumor and the exact number is 784. In fact, the Education Bureau has already returned illegal examinees. Thereby, gaokao migrants may not pose a serious threat to locals.

The Distribution of 15669 Examinees Who Do Not Originally Live in Fujian



According to the data in the above, only the red part, which merely constitutes approximately 5% of the so-called 15, 669 gaokao migrants, is real gaokao migrants.

*The data is released by the Fujian Education Bureau.

Despite the influence of the detailed and data provided by the Education Bureau, some locals' resentment toward gaokao migrants cannot be soothed, so the "war" continues to this day. Some parents still request for every 16,000 migrant examinees' origins from the Education Bureau.

The logic behind their resentment is simple: the online battles brought by misinformation arouse the anger of the crowd, rendering the situation uncontrollable. There are half of the interviewees in our survey believe that the number of gaokao migrants is above millions and 24.08% interviewees above thousands. What is more, until now, 36.48% interviewees still believe that the number one scholar of Fujian province is a gaokao migrant, which is fake news.

But the most crucial factor of fierce conflicts is when social psychology enters our topic. Self-serving bias, the tendency to attribute one's success to internal factors and one's failures to external factors, may describe some indignant locals. When they get

a satisfying college offer partly because of a lower requirement, they tend to believe in their own abilities. Nonetheless, when the policy no longer favors their admission, it would be natural for locals to blame the environment and policy that are disadvantageous for them. Consequently, locals gradually go to extremes and the claim that gaokao migrants take their place become truer than ever.

Where is our future?

Professor Qihui Zhong in the Fujian Normal University presented us with some possible strategies to cope with the plight.

“Firstly, I think that the Fujian government should carry out policies to ensure that only students who spend 3 years in local high school have the rights to take gaokao in Fujian, instead of just 1 year. Because it is hard for local students to compete with those students who receive more educational resources in neighboring provinces, ensuring that all students who take gaokao in Fujian have equal educational resources.”

By implementing this policy, the cost of gaokao migration would increase under the risk of losing better educational resources, a factor that will limit a lot of families from migrating.

"In addition, the government needs to combat and repatriate illegal gaokao migrants, just as what Inner-Mongolia is doing now. It is never too late to mend."

In Inner Mongolia, the local government has prevented more than 1465 ineligible migrant students from taking gaokao in Inner Mongolia for a lower requirement in college admission since 2015. Although these students' families usually have strong political backgrounds, under the policy of gaokao migration, the Inner Mongolia government strictly controlled the number of migrants to protect locals.

"Gaokao migration in Fujian has caused many consequences within a short period of time, but we believe that the system would be better and conflicts can be mitigated," said Professor Zhong.

Although gaokao migrants were introduced in 2017, it will probably happen every year. Nobody can foretell how gaokao migration will affect locals next year. During this summer vacation, Yi Chen attends extra classes with piles of books and exam papers just as other students do, preparing for rounds of revisions of gaokao subjects in the new term. No longer struggling in the unanswered questions of black and white or good and bad, she accepted the reality and no longer expects the elimination of gaokao migration in Fujian. Rather, she believes that the only thing she can do is studying harder to control her own destiny.