

**The Development of Inequality in Public School Admission:
Public Discourses on *Ze Xiao* and Practices in Urban China**

by

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List of Abbreviations

CCTV	China Central Television
CPC	Communist Party of China
CTCs	City Technology Colleges
FESCO	Beijing Foreign Enterprise Human Resources Service Co., Ltd.
GDP	Gross Domestic Product
GPA	Grade Point Average
HSACMI	High School Affiliated Central Musical Institute
IOM	International Organization for Migration
NGO	Non Government Organization
NPM	New Public Management
ODI	Overseas Development Institute
OECD	Organization of Economic Cooperation and Development
PCO	Population Census Office
PETS	Public English Test System
Ph.D.	Doctor of Philosophy
PRC	People's Republic of China
PLA	People's Liberation Army
UK	United Kingdom
UN	United Nations
US	United States
RMB	Renminbi

Chapter 1 Introduction

Since the late 1980s, Chinese government's principle of "free, no exam and proximity based (*mianfei, mianshi, jiujinruxue* 免费, 免试, 就近入学)" school admission in compulsory education (From Grade 1 to Grade 9, see Appendix 1) has continuously been challenged by the development of "*Ze Xiao* (择校, a straightforward English translation is school choice)".¹ In general, *Ze Xiao* refers to activities in which parents compete for enrolling their children to the limited number of popular schools they prefer instead of the public schools based on the public school admission policies (Kipins, 2008; Xiaoxin Wu, 2008, 2009, 2012). In recent years, despite the government's opposition towards *Ze Xiao* through releasing a series of regulations, activities of *Ze Xiao* has not abated. Rather, diverse channels for *Ze Xiao* were innovated in response to the government's action of mitigating *Ze Xiao*. The interaction in *Ze Xiao* involved not only parents and students, but also public schools, private tutoring institutes and local education authorities.

This qualitative research aims to explore and investigate the development of inequality in admission to public junior high schools in the context of urban China through analyzing what people talk about *Ze Xiao* and how people practice in *Ze Xiao*. This study interpreted what stakeholders said about *Ze Xiao* and the meanings behind their practice in *Ze Xiao* during the past 30 years in order to explore how the statements on *Ze Xiao* transformed with the change of social stratification order in China as it transitioned from a socialist to market economy. The interpretation and exploration were conducted through analysis of discourse on *Ze Xiao*, which includes the process of coding, grouping codes and mapping the groups of codes to visualize issues involved in the public discussion on *Ze Xiao*. A case study of *Ze Xiao* in one community of Beijing was conducted to contrast to the public discussion on *Ze*

¹ In general, *Ze Xiao* includes the school admission from primary education to upper secondary education. In this research, I give focus on the admission to public junior high schools.

Xiao through discourse analysis.

This study provides a comprehensive view of the meanings behind the interactive activities of *Ze Xiao* in public school admissions and attempted to ascertain how people negotiate in the *Ze Xiao* process and how they response to *Ze Xiao* in public school admissions. Qualitative data was collected from newspapers, journals, books, government documents, and open-ended interviews with 43 participants, including 10 school principals, 25 parents, three scholars, two educational administrators at district level, two managers of private tutoring institutes and one journalist.

The findings of the study demonstrate that *Ze Xiao* does not merely reflect the participation of parents in selecting schools for their children instead of sending them to the schools assigned by local education authorities. Rather, it presents the negotiations of interests among various stakeholders in admission to public junior high schools. Moreover, *Ze Xiao* has become positional competition in public school admissions that intensified the effects of family background on children's education in urban China. This study found that the negotiations of interests for *Ze Xiao* in public school admissions were shaped by multi-dimensional forces, including, but not limited to, the ambivalence of the Chinese government towards *Ze Xiao*, the imbalanced resource distribution for public education, parents' aspiration, diverse public school admission policies at the local level, competition for quality students among public schools, and systematic conflicts and mismatch between the educational and social development in China. This study also found that people's participations in *Ze Xiao* was determined or positioned by government policies, their socioeconomic status, as well as some cultural, historical and traditional factors with local characteristics. *Ze Xiao* represents the development of educational stratification in contemporary public education in China as a socialist country in the process of transition to market economy. Moreover, in the transition to market economy, *Ze Xiao* can be considered as the negotiation between the power, the privileged, the disadvantaged and the market in

public school admission to junior high schools.

This chapter presents the background of the study, specifies the problem of the study, describes its significances and presents an overview of the research methodologies used in the study. The chapter concludes with the limitations of the study and the organization of the dissertation.

1.1 Background

A straightforward English translation of Chinese words *Ze Xiao* is “school choice”. Therefore, it is not uncommon that people tend to interpret *Ze Xiao* in the concept of school choice, regardless of the differences between the two. This study points out *Ze Xiao* in China is different from the concept of “school choice” used in the international discourse.

Internationally, school choice has been an important issue in basic education. For years, governments worldwide have been attempting to find ways to provide more options for parents, such as open enrollment, public subsidies to private schools, and education vouchers. In addition, governments in various countries have also aimed to improve accountability, efficiency and educational quality of the public school system by offering various options of “school choice”, such as Charter schools in the US, and Grant Maintained Schools in the UK. In some countries “school choice” was promoted for the purpose of desegregation, such as Magnet schools in the US and City Technology Colleges in the UK. Some countries introduced school choice policies for preventing social issues, such as bullying and school violence in Japan (Forsey, Davies, & Walford, 2008; Hirsch, 2002; OECD, 1994; Plank & Sykes, 2003). Ironically, school choice based educational reform at global level did not change the “persistent educational inequality” as stratification order in society. The effect of family background on children’s education attainment still persisted. School choice became a

tool for the privileged groups to keep advantages for their children in the competition for education. Meanwhile, it excluded the disadvantaged from such competition (Andre-Bechely, 2005a; Ball, 1993; Forsey, Davies, & Walford, 2008; Gewirtz, Ball, & Bowe, 1995; Plank & Sykes, 2003).

Conversely, in China's context, *Ze Xiao* is not supported by the government at the compulsory education level since it is felt that it violates the essential principle of admission to compulsory education in public schools. At the same time, it is not considered a tool by the government for promoting free choice for parent's decision on children's education, the improvement of schools' accountability, efficiency and educational quality or the prevention of social issues in China's education system. In general, *Ze Xiao* is considered creating competitions among students, parents, public schools, local education authorities and private tutoring institutes. In addition, *Ze Xiao* has been used as a means to make profits due to factors such as the limited access to popular schools and insufficient government funding in education. In contrast to proximity based public school admissions, there are diverse channels for *Ze Xiao*. In recent years, in addition to *hukou* (户口 residential registration) and students' academic achievements as criteria for school admission, it also involved other "unofficial" criteria, such as *Ze Xiao Fei* (择校费 fee charge for *Ze Xiao*), special talents, sponsor fees, donations from powerful work units, memos from the rich and powerful, as well as pre-admission training classes. Qualifications of students for admission depended on various factors, such as local public school admission policies, students' capacities and parents' socioeconomic status, including parents' incomes, occupations and social network (21st Century Education Research Institute, 2011; Xiaoxin Wu, 2008, 2009, 2012). In other words, whether students are admitted to their "dream" schools depends on a multitude of factors. Those factors shaped and stratified the participation of various stakeholders and caused educational inequality and social reproduction in public school admission at the compulsory education level in urban China (Xiaoxin Wu, 2008, 2009, 2012).

1.2 Statement of the Problem

With the abolishment of the entrance exam to public junior high schools in the late 1980s, admission to junior high schools in China was expected to follow the principle of “free, no exam and proximity based school admission ” as stipulated in the *Compulsory Education Law* in China (National People's Congress, 2006). Both central and local governments continually released regulations and policies to protect the right of school-aged children to have equal opportunities to enter public schools at the compulsory education level. However, the educational and social development in China, especially in urban China, was unable to fully accommodate the demands of both the government and the public. On the one hand, due to the limited governmental funding for public education and the imbalanced education development, the inequality among public schools prevented equal opportunities for children to enter public schools with the same quality education. On the other hand, the proximity-based school admission to junior high schools could not guarantee parents and students the access to schools they preferred. Therefore, there have been increasing demands for the access to the limited number of well-known public junior high schools. The mismatch between the supply and the demand stimulated a competition among parents for the limited access to popular schools. At the same time, various channels for public school admission to junior high schools were innovated by local education authorities, public schools and parents. Those approaches depended upon not only students’ special talents, students’ participation in extra-curriculum activities but also parent’s socioeconomic status and social network. The diversification of channels for *Ze Xiao* in public school admission provided parents with more options for sending their children to junior high schools they prefer. Consequently, increasing numbers of parents took actions for *Ze Xiao*. Since these channels for *Ze Xiao* were closely connected with parents’ socioeconomic status, it further deepened the inequality in public school admissions in urban China. As a result, *Ze Xiao* is provoking various concerns and debates among both from the government and the public.

Prior to this study, I found that most existing research mainly described policies and channels regarding *Ze Xiao*. The theoretical framework utilized in most research was on “school choice” at the global level, which is different from *Ze Xiao* in urban China. *Ze Xiao* is unique and different from the general concept of “school choice” because it reflects China’s social, educational, cultural and historical development. To understand *Ze Xiao*, it is necessary to conduct in-depth research on the development of *Ze Xiao* which reveals the discursive process of negotiation on *Ze Xiao* in public school admission in urban China and the interpretation of the meaning behind the practice of *Ze Xiao* in public schools. The questions to ask are, what did people think of *Ze Xiao* and how did they participate in *Ze Xiao*? How did negotiation on *Ze Xiao* occur? How were people positioned in *Ze Xiao* and what was the meaning behind that? It is worthwhile to find answers to those questions and gain a comprehensive understanding of *Ze Xiao* in public school admissions in urban China.

1.3 Purposes of the Study

There are five purposes of this study. Firstly, based on the comparison between the policy framework of “school choice” discussed internationally and its implications on *Ze Xiao* in public school admission in urban China, the study attempts to distinguish the nature of *Ze Xiao* from its wide misinterpretation as “school choice” found in previously published research. Moreover, through the analysis of *Ze Xiao* from different perspectives, this study would comprehensively redefine the meaning of *Ze Xiao* in public school admission in urban China.

Secondly, prior to this study, no research had systematically explored the development of *Ze Xiao*, people’s understanding of *Ze Xiao* and their practice in *Ze Xiao*. Through an analysis of written texts and interviews on *Ze Xiao* in the past 30 years, this study investigated the interaction and negotiation on *Ze Xiao* among stakeholders, such as parents, public

schools, and local education authorities. More importantly, the study was designed to interpret the meanings behind the interaction and negotiation on *Ze Xiao* through an investigation of the discursive process of the negotiation on *Ze Xiao* in urban China in the past 30 years. In other words, this study attempts to investigate how the statements on *Ze Xiao* in urban China changed with what stakeholders had previously said about *Ze Xiao* and how they practiced in *Ze Xiao*. In addition, the study expected to find some indications and implications due to the development of *Ze Xiao* in admissions to public junior high schools in urban China.

Thirdly, through a case study of *Ze Xiao* in public school admission in a community of Beijing, this study attempts to ascertain different forces that shaped the of negotiations on *Ze Xiao* among stakeholders arise between how *Ze Xiao* was negotiated and how *Ze Xiao* was done. The similarities and differences between negotiation and practice of *Ze Xiao* would be identified.

Fourthly, as mentioned above, there is a contradiction between the firm opposition to *Ze Xiao* by the government and *Ze Xiao* put in practice. Through exploring the interaction and negotiation on *Ze Xiao*, the study goes beyond this contradiction in order to provide policy makers an overview of the reasons for the gap between policy making and policy implementation in the aspect of public school admission in urban China.

Lastly, through analysis of the development of *Ze Xiao* in public school admission in urban China, this study attempts to further elaborate the role of government (central and local), market, interest groups (schools and families) in the emerging market that compete with and undermine state socialist redistributive economy and alter the stratification order.

1.4 Research Questions

The study attempts to answer the following research questions: 1. How was

stakeholders' negotiation on *Ze Xiao* shaped in public school admission to junior high schools in urban China? 2. How did stakeholders practice the process of *Ze Xiao*?

1.5 Significance of the Study

As mentioned above, although “*Ze Xiao*” and “school choice” shared a similar meaning literally, this study distinguishes the nature of “*Ze Xiao*” from “school choice” through review of literature on “school choice” policies and the relevant theoretical bases discussed at the global level. Meanwhile, this research diversifies the understanding of the term “school choice” through an analysis of the perspectives including how *Ze Xiao* was discussed and how *Ze Xiao* was done in public school admission with Chinese characteristics. Furthermore, with the consideration of political, social and economic factors, the case study of *Ze Xiao* in a community of Beijing further elaborates the diverse and complex negotiation and practice of *Ze Xiao* with local characteristics. It addresses the necessity of taking local characteristics into consideration when it comes to understanding *Ze Xiao* in urban China. In addition, this study contributes to the theoretical debate on the meanings and roles of choice in neo-liberal education reform at global level. *Ze Xiao* as positional competition for quality education is caused by forces from both the top-down (government oriented) and the bottom-up (the public demand initiated) directions. Although this research distinguishes *Ze Xiao* from school choice, the findings still show the contradictions and tension in the world-wide neo-liberal education reforms. This study aims to raise the discussion on what “choice” is being made with school choice. Meanwhile, it enriches the discussion on transition of stratification order in the emerging marketization of state socialist countries through analysis of development of *Ze Xiao*.

Although the government and the public had increasing concerns about *Ze Xiao*, little research has been conducted on *Ze Xiao* in admission to public junior high schools in urban

China. Moreover, most existing research mainly describes policies and approaches regarding *Ze Xiao*. In contrast, the present study interprets what stakeholders said about *Ze Xiao* and the meaning behind of their practice of *Ze Xiao* during the past 30 years in order to explore the change of the statements on *Ze Xiao* with the change of context in urban China. This study attempts to enrich studies on the development of China's education system, particularly in the aspect of inequality in public school admission.

To contribute to development studies, this research provides further understanding of social reproduction in China's education from the perspective of *Ze Xiao* in urban China. As Wu (2012) points out, parents' socioeconomic status has an important role in children's school admissions. That is, affluent families with social connections have more opportunities to send their children to popular schools, while it is difficult for low-income families to do so, particularly those without Beijing *hukou* (户口 household registration)². Meanwhile, through an analysis of government policies and public discussions on *Ze Xiao*, this study attempts to provide policy makers an in-depth overview of the gap between government's view and the public's perspectives on the issues of *Ze Xiao* related to public junior high school admissions in urban China.

1.6 Research Methodologies

This qualitative research study was conducted through analysis of discourse on *Ze Xiao* and a case study on *Ze Xiao* practice at a community level of Beijing. To answer the research questions, I collected the following data: (1) newspaper articles on *Ze Xiao* from the 1980s to 2011; (2) policy documents from national, Beijing municipal and district governments; and (3) interviews with parents, school principals, local education authorities, scholars, managers of private tutoring institutes, and journalists. Data (1), Data (2) and part of

² *Hukou* refers to household registration system in China. It was established in the 1950s. See 2.5.1.1 for details.

Data (3) are used to analyze how people discussed education, particularly about “*Ze Xiao*”, in the past three decades. Discourse analysis was applied to analyzing those data through coding, grouping codes and mapping the groups to visualize issues involved in the public discussion on *Ze Xiao*. The processes in which the discourse on how *Ze Xiao* is formed and what factors affected such processes were untangled through this analysis and presented in Chapter 4 and 5. Furthermore, interviews with school principals and parents at one primary school and one junior high school in the same community of Beijing were conducted for the purpose of learning how *Ze Xiao* was practiced, in contrast to how it was discussed. The interview data was analyzed by continual interplay between the concept mapping found from discourse analysis in Chapter 4 and Chapter 5 and the concept mapping found through coding and grouping of the transcribed interviews. Chapter 6 consists of the findings from the interviews on how people did in *Ze Xiao*. The chapters of the study are organized as response to the research questions (i.e., Chapter 4 and Chapter 5 correspond to the first research question; Chapter 6 corresponds to the second research question). In the section below, I will explain each of the research methodologies.

1.6.1 Analytical Perspective

Data analysis for this study was conducted from a social constructionism perspective. In contrast to determinism that believes the reality or the society is fixed by the nature, social constructionists look at the social construction of reality as an ongoing, dynamic process. Social constructionists aim to uncover ways in which individuals and groups participate in the construction of social reality they share. They take critical stance towards knowledge that people take for granted. And the idea invites people to challenge the objective basis of conventional knowledge (Burr, 1995; Gergen, 1985; Miller & Holstein, 2007). Social constructionists believe that there is nothing fixed or inevitable in the world since people in the society can choose to change the old conventions, theories, ideologies, practices and knowledge with new ones (Hibberd, 2005). In other words, the theories or knowledge widely

accepted by the society are not determined by things that are claimed to be about. Rather, they are assembled and constructed by the community of scientists. The community embodies social and linguistic conventions, histories, social forces, particular interests. Since these factors can all be different, there is no inevitability about them. Therefore, the theories and knowledge we have today could be different from tomorrow (Berger & Luckmann, 1966; Burr, 1995; Gergen, 1985; Hibberd, 2005; Potter, 1996).

In general, most of social constructionists have the following oriented assumptions. One, the social constructionists hold a critical stance towards taken for granted knowledge. The process of understanding of the world is not driven by the nature but depends upon where and when in the world one lives. Two, the ways of understanding the world is related to the social and economic development in specific culture and history. Three, the understanding of the world is influenced by the cultural and history of a specific period. Four, the understanding of the world is constructed through interaction between people in daily life. The interaction includes communication, negotiation, conflict, etc.. Five, the forms of understanding of the world are accompanied with other activities that people engage. In other words, the descriptions and explanations of the world can be understood as various forms of social construction of the world. Each different social construction involves different types of social actions. And the formation of the understanding of the world is constituted by the support of some patterns of social actions and exclusion of others. And the support and exclusion can be taken as the result of the interaction or negotiation between people in the daily life (Burr, 1995; Gergen, 1985).

The formulation of social problem elaborated by Spector and Kitsuse (1973) helps us further understand the negotiation or interaction in the understanding of the world. According to Spector and Kitsuse (1973), the formulation of social problem includes four stages. Firstly, some groups identify and define a specific issue that is offensive, harmful and undesirable. Secondly, the emergence of the claimed issue is recognized by some official organizations

and it leads to official investigation, proposal for reform and other response to relevant claims and demands. Thirdly, there will have re-emergence of claims and demands that are not satisfied with established procedure for tackling the recognized issues. And lastly, there may have rejections or further responses from complainant groups towards the responses from relevant governmental institutions. For instance, according to China's education policy, admission to public junior high schools should follow the principle of "free, no entrance exam and proximity based". However, the government recognized that many public schools still held entrance exams to select well-performing students in the early 2000. It violated the government's principle and received many critiques from the public. The government issued regulations to alleviate such activities. However, although public schools stopped their entrance exams by themselves, they collaborated with private tutoring institutes to select students through training classes held inside of private tutoring institutes. Such approaches intensified the burdens on both parents and students. Gradually, it was reported in the media and criticized by the public again. Therefore, the government had to take action to close such training classes held by public schools and private tutoring institutes. But this problem continues to develop today. The interaction among the government, the public, public schools, parents and private tutoring institutes keep moving forward. Such interaction can be understood as the process of formulation of social problem. This interaction keeps moving on with the social, economic change in different historical periods.

Moreover, for constructionists, the construction of language determines the construction of people's experiences and consciousness. The experiences and consciousness are constructed differently by the enormous diversity of languages. In other words, language is considered as form of action for people to exchange and construct thoughts and emotions. The concepts and categories we have are constituted by the language people use, produce and reproduce in daily life. The exchange of language between people can be considered the process of "social construction" (Berger & Luckmann, 1966; Burr, 1995). Furthermore,

language is structured, maintained and transformed in a discursive practices occurred in specific contexts (Jorgensen & Phillips, 2002).

As introduced in the beginning of this chapter, *Ze Xiao* as a parental involvement in public school admission to junior high schools was discussed through the policies and framework on “school choice” at the global level. Holding a critical stance towards the widely accepted understanding of *Ze Xiao*, I argue that the understanding and knowledge on *Ze Xiao* can be further clarified and strengthened through the analysis of the negotiation and practice of people in *Ze Xiao* by considering *Ze Xiao* as process of social interaction in the social, economic, cultural and historical development of urban China. Moreover, the language on *Ze Xiao* is the core focus of analysis in this study. With the stance of social constructionists, people’s understanding and experiences with *Ze Xiao* would be constructed through the exchange of the languages about *Ze Xiao*. The diverse languages on *Ze Xiao* determine the alternative construction of views on *Ze Xiao*.

1.6.2 Analytical Methods

1.6.2.1 Analysis of Discourse

Discourse refers to forms of language used in spoken language, written language, communication and interaction (Burr, 1995; Dijk, 1997). To be more specific, it refers to a set of meanings that particularly represent an object, event or the understanding of the world. As mentioned in the last section, there are diverse languages that construct alternative versions of the understanding of the world. Similarly, there may have a variety of different discourses that represent the same object or event in different ways. Burr (1995) illustrated that numerous discourses represent or construct the same object in a different way. Each discourse brings different aspects into focus and raises different issues for our consideration. Moreover, discourse, as a discursive practice, transforms over time. The changes in discourse represent the change of the social world (Dijk, 1985; Jorgensen & Phillips, 2002; Potter, 1996, 2004).

In other words, discourse has its meaning and is taken as the “truth” constructed in specific historical period (Foucault, 1972).

Discourse analysis as a research method examines people’s speech, writing, actions and products to identify and analyze ways of understanding the world. Since the meaning of the world is constructed by discourses, the objective of discourse analysis is to deconstruct how the discourse refers to the meaning of the world. Deconstruction is considered as the attempts to separate both spoken and written texts and identify how they are constructed in specific way which represents particular people and society. The concern of deconstruction aims to indicate how current ‘truths’ have come to be constituted, how they were maintained and what power relations are carried by them through tracing the development of present ways of understanding and the development of current discourses (Burr, 1995; Foucault, 1972). Discourse analysis is utilized in this study to show how the ‘truth’ of *Ze Xiao* became constituted, maintained and changed through exploring the ways of understanding of *Ze Xiao* and the development of discourses on *Ze Xiao* in order to understand the process of public junior school admissions in urban China.

To analyze discourse on *Ze Xiao*, I coded newspaper articles, journal articles, books and interviews that had been transcribed. Then, I categorized the coding and divided encoded items into groups that included discourse on the legalization of unauthorized school fees, the gap between schools, public school admission policies, parents’ aspiration and issues beyond the imbalanced educational development. Each group was divided into various subgroups representing opinions from various stakeholders. Next, I linked and mapped the groups to visualize issues involved in public discussions on *Ze Xiao*. Then, based on the theme of public discourse on *Ze Xiao*, I divided the development of *Ze Xiao* into two stages: the 1990s and after 2000. In order to investigate interactions of stakeholders in *Ze Xiao*, each stage was examined utilizing discourse on *Ze Xiao* from the perspectives of government documents, newspapers, journals, books and interviews. While analyzing discourses, I paid close attention

to the commonalities and differences that formed the public's opinions on *Ze Xiao*. I also took into consideration people's social status, historical context (political and institutional change), reasons as well as attitudes towards *Ze Xiao*.

1.6.2.2 Case Study

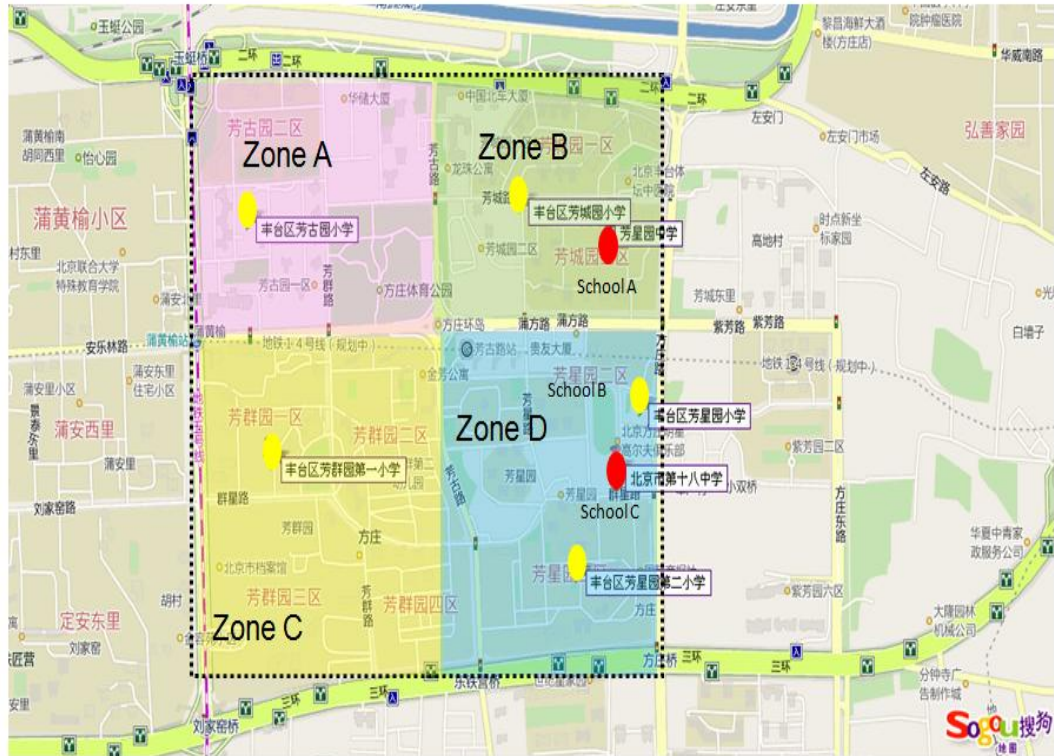
The case study of *Ze Xiao* in admissions to public junior high schools in Community A of Beijing was conducted for the purpose of exploring how *Ze Xiao* is practiced in contrast to how *Ze Xiao* was discussed. I conducted the fieldwork in Community A of Beijing from April to June 2011. With the city reconstructed in late the 1980s, Community A, the newest and largest residential area in Beijing was founded in Fengtai District in the southern part of Beijing. The community covers 5.53 square kilo meters, with population of 93,430 residents who held Beijing *hukou* in 2010 and additional 30,300 residents registered as internal migrants.³ There were more than 15 ethnic minority groups living in this community. As Figure 1.1 shows, Community A has four residential areas, Zone A, Zone B, Zone C and Zone D (see Chapter 6 for detail of the community). There were two reasons for choosing Community A. Firstly, located in the southern part of Beijing and a suburban area of Beijing, the community consisted of both affluent and low-income families. Particularly, with a rapid rural-urban migration, the population in that community had become diverse. Therefore I felt Community A would be a perfect location for my case study, because I could include people with diverse social status. Diverse social groups also indicated diverse demands for education in Community A. Secondly, since Fengtai District was a developing area in Beijing, educational resources were relatively limited, compared with districts in the central part of Beijing.⁴ When this research was conducted in 2011, there were five primary schools and two

³ Information from *Fengtai Yearbook 2010*, Retrieved from <http://dfz.bjft.gov.cn/page/ftnj/2010/view-167.html>, accessed on March 9, 2012.

⁴ According to Beijing Municipal Commission of Education, 16.2% of demonstration schools in Beijing are located in Handian District. This number in Fengtai District is only 5.9%. (see Homepage of Beijing Municipal Commission of Education, retrieved from <http://english.bjedu.gov.cn/>, accessed on September 21, 2010)

junior high schools in Community A. According to my interview with the principal of one junior high school in Community A for another research project in 2010, parents living in

Figure 1.1 Map of Community A



Source: The map was downloaded from <http://map.sogou.com/#c=12956000,4824875,10>, accessed on June 20th, 2011.

Author edited.

Note: The yellow point refers to primary schools in Community A. The red point refers to junior high school in Community A.

Community A chose schools outside of this community because they were dissatisfied with the quality of education the schools offered (Liu, 2012).

There were two sample schools in this case study. School A, a public junior high school, was established in 1989 when Community A was developed. In principle, school-aged children for lower secondary education in Community A were supposed to attend School A. However, due to several factors such as rapid urbanization and the increasing number of

migrant children, School A changed dramatically by the late 1990s (see details in Chapter 6). School B was a public primary school established in 1955. School-aged children for primary education in Zone D, in principle, go to School B for primary education. And majority of them will be assigned directly to School A for lower secondary education. School B also experienced dramatic change with the rapid social development in Community A (see details in Chapter 6).

Through an analysis of discourse on *Ze Xiao* selected from the transcribed interviews with school principals and parents from School A and School B, I investigated parents' practice in *Ze Xiao* and to explore the themes emerged from the negotiations on *Ze Xiao* through discourse analysis. This study focuses particularly on the themes that are closely related to school admission policies, parents' access to available options for *Ze Xiao*, and how parents with different socioeconomic status reacted and responded to *Ze Xiao*.

1.6.3 Data and Methods Used for Data Collection

In order to achieve the research design above, data were collected for this study in the form of written and spoken texts. For example, written texts such as newspaper articles, government documents and journal papers were collected to analyze the discursive process of negotiation on *Ze Xiao* in China's education in the past thirty years. Through interviews with school principals, parents, local educational administrators, private tutoring institute managers and journalist, spoken texts were collected regarding the negotiation about *Ze Xiao* to supplement the written texts related to the process of negotiation on *Ze Xiao* in urban China. The written texts and interviews on the negotiation about *Ze Xiao* were designed to answer the first research question. On the other hand, the interviews conducted with principals and parents in one community of Beijing as a case study were to demonstrate how *Ze Xiao* was practiced in contrast to how it was discussed. The interviews for the case study answer the second research question.

1.6.3.1 Newspaper Articles, Government Documents and Journal Papers

Various documents, including, newspapers, government documents, journals and books, were collected from the National Library of China and The Capital Library of Beijing.

The National Library is the largest library in China and has the largest collection books, newspapers and other publications in Chinese and other languages in China. Table 1.1 shows the newspapers collected for this study. In order to identify mainstream discussions on *Ze Xiao* at the central government level, I selected two major government papers, that is, *China Education Daily*, released by the Ministry of Education and *People's Daily*, the voice of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of China. Then, in order to involve diverse public discussions on *Ze Xiao* at the municipal level, I selected major newspapers in five municipal cities of China, including Beijing, Tianjin, Shanghai, Guangzhou and Chongqing. To reflect criticism of government policies, I collected data from *Wenhui Bao*, *Southern Weekly*⁵ and *Chongqing Economic Times* which were jointly owned by state and private

Table 1.1 List of Reviewed Newspaper

Title	Publisher	Period
中国教育报 (<i>China Education Daily</i>)	Ministry of Education	1983-2010
人民日报 (<i>People's Daily</i>)	Central Committee of Communist Party of China	1980-2010
北京日报 (<i>Beijing Daily</i>)	Beijing Municipal Committee	2000-2010
天津日报 (<i>Tianjin Daily</i>)	Tianjin Municipal Committee	2000-2010
解放日报 (<i>Jiefang Daily</i>)	Shanghai Municipal Committee	2000-2010
文汇报 (<i>Wenhui Bao</i>)	Wenhui-xinmin United Press Group	2000-2010
广州日报 (<i>Guangzhou Daily</i>)	Guangzhou Municipal Committee	2000-2010
南方周末 (<i>Southern Weekly</i>)	Nanfang Media Group	2000-2010
重庆日报 (<i>Chongqing Daily</i>)	Chongqing Municipal Committee	2000-2010
重庆商报 (<i>Chongqing Economic Times</i>)	Chongqing Daily Group	2000-2010

Source: Author edited.

⁵ According to Elisabeth Rosenthal (2002), *Southern Weekly* was described by *The New York Times* as China's most influential liberal newspaper.

publishers. To ensure consistency in data collection, documentation was selected and reviewed focusing on public school admission to junior high schools, including government policies, public options, admission procedures and processes, fee charge and so forth.

Government websites were used as a major source to collect data related to government policies on public school admission and compulsory education in China. For example, government documents released after 2000 were mainly downloaded from the website of Beijing Municipal Government. Government policies promulgated before 2000 were collected from the Government Documents Center at the Capital Library of Beijing.

In addition to government documents and newspapers, this study also made extensive use of journals and books on China's education. Journal articles were collected based on the Chinese Social Sciences Citation Index. One hundred thirty-seven articles (published after 2000) related to public school admissions in China's compulsory education were selected from 52 major journals on China's education. In order to reflect diverse voices on *Ze Xiao*, books on *Ze Xiao* by some distinguished scholars in China were also reviewed and utilized as references.

1.6.3.2 Interviews

Interviews were conducted with three groups of participants, namely (1) the principals of eight sample schools (two primary school principals and six junior high school principals); (2) 25 parents; and (3) multi-stakeholder group with small samples, including two city (or municipal) district educational administrators, three scholars, two managers of private tutoring institute and a journalist. Interview questions were designed to solicit participants' attitudes and opinions on government policies on public admission to public junior high schools and *Ze Xiao*, such as their reasons for participating in *Ze Xiao* in urban China and various approaches they took or experienced in *Ze Xiao*. During the interviews, I also asked some specific questions based on interviewees' status and experiences in the admission

process of public junior high schools in urban China (see Appendix 3, 4, 5, 6, 7 for interview questions). The interviews were conducted in Beijing between April and November 2011.

The first group of interviewees consisted of public school principals in major districts of Beijing. As shown in Table 1.2, principals or vice principals from three types of public schools were interviewed. They included principals from key schools, converted schools and regular schools. Their stances as principals from different types of schools provided diverse attitudes and opinions on *Ze Xiao*. The questions for principals were mainly about their experiences in public school admissions, their opinions on *Ze Xiao* and government policies as well as the development of compulsory education in key schools and converted schools (see Appendix 2 for interview questions).

Table 1.2 List of School Principals Interviewed

School	District	Category	Level	Interviewee
School A	Fengtai	Regular school	Secondary	Principal, Retired principals, Retired vice principal
School B	Fengtai	Regular school	Primary	Vice Principal
School D	Xicheng	Key school	Secondary	Vice Principal
School E	Chongwen	Converted school	Secondary	Principal/Retired principal
School F	Dongcheng	Regular school	Secondary	Vice Principal
School G	Chaoyang	Key school	Secondary	Vice Principal
School H	Haidian	Regular school	Secondary	Vice Principal
School I	Xuanwu	Regular school	Primary	Principal

The second group I talked with was parents. 25 parents were interviewed and divided into two groups for different purposes (see Table 1.3 for details of parents' socioeconomic status). The first group included parents who participated in *Ze Xiao* and successfully enrolled their children in popular schools. Due to limited access to this type of parent, I interviewed only three parents who had successfully enrolled their children to popular junior high school schools in two different districts. I also conducted sixteen interviews with parents from a

primary school and a junior high school in the same community in Beijing to find how *Ze Xiao* was practiced in contrast to how it was discussed by the public. In order to involve various voices in the negotiation on *Ze Xiao* from parents, I interviewed parents of Grade6 (G6) students in School B and parents of Grade7 (G7) in School A. Parents of G6 students shared their experiences and feelings of the on-going practices in *Ze Xiao*. And parents of G7 students shared their experiences and feelings of practices in *Ze Xiao* in 2009. Moreover, considering the growing diverse needs for education from migrant families in urban China, I selected both parents who were permanent residents of Beijing and migrant parents in Beijing. With collaboration from the school selected for this study, I randomly selected parents of Beijing permanent residents and migrant parents among parents who attended parent-teacher meeting.⁶ Interviews with those parents were arranged based on their schedules. In total, I interviewed 10 parents of Beijing permanent residents and six migrant parents in School A; and two parents of Beijing permanent residents and four migrant parents in School B. Interviews with parents were conducted after work or on weekend in café or places where parents felt comfortable with. Questions for parents focused on their options and experiences with *Ze Xiao*, their access to information on public school admission and *Ze Xiao*, their opinions on public school admissions policies in Beijing and in their district (see Appendix 6 for interview questions). I recorded interviews with parents and principals with their agreements. The recorded interviews were transcribed.

In the third interviewee groups, I visited managers of local education authorities, scholars, managers of private tutoring institutes and journalist with small samples. The purpose for these interviews was to utilize these interviewees' insights on *Ze Xiao* and attempt to involve diverse opinions on *Ze Xiao*. Firstly, due to the sensitivity of the topic I could get access to only two educational administrators at municipal district level. Despite of this, their

⁶ In China, parent-teacher meeting is one of the most important mechanisms for parents to know their children's study and performance at school. Once or twice a semester, parents are invited to attend the meeting at school. The parent-teacher meeting in School A was held on April 26, 2011. And the meeting in School B was held on April 27, 2011.

Table 1.3 Socioeconomic Status of Parents

Parent No.	<i>Hukou</i>	Education		Occupation	
		Father	Mother	Father	Mother
Parents_20110510_Shijingshan01_FW1	Beijing	Ph.D.	Ph.D.	Associate Professor	Assistant Professor
Parents_20110513_Shijingshan02_FW1	Beijing	Master	Master	Associate Professor	Civil servant
Parents_20110518_Dongcheng01_FW1	Beijing	Bachelor	Bachelor	IT Engineer	Teacher
Parents_20110503_School A01_FW1	Beijing	Lower Secondary	Upper Secondary	Policeman	Accountant
Parents_20110503_School A02_FW1	Beijing	Bachelor	Bachelor	Artist	Doctor
Parents_20110503_School A04_FW1	Beijing	College	College	Policeman	Policeman
Parents_20110504_School A05_FW1	Beijing	Vocational School	College	Designer	Bank staff
Parents_20110504_School A06_FW1	Beijing (Transfer from Henan)	PhD	College	Scientist	Post Office staff
Parents_20110504_School A07_FW1	Beijing	Lower Secondary	Vocational School	Worker	Sales
Parents_20110505_School A09_FW1	Beijing	Lower Secondary	Lower Secondary	Worker	Underemployment
Parents_20110505_School A10_FW1	Beijing	Lower Secondary	Lower Secondary	Underemployment	Catering
Parents_20110505_School A15_FW1	Beijing	Upper Secondary	Upper Secondary	Company staff	Company staff
Parents_20110510_School B02_FW1	Beijing	Bachelor	Bachelor	Company staff	Teacher
Parents_20110511_School A16_FW1	Beijing	Upper Secondary	Upper Secondary	Company staff	Company staff
Parent_20110513_School B05_FW1	Beijing	Upper Secondary	Upper Secondary	IT	Business
Parents_20110502_School A03_FW1	Henan	Lower Secondary	Lower Secondary	Worker	Worker
Parents_20110504_School A08_FW1	Hebei (Transfer in process)	Vocational School	Upper Secondary	Construction Company	Housewife
Parents_20110505_School A11_FW1	Jiangsu	Upper Secondary	Upper Secondary	Construction Company	Housewife
Parents_20110505_School A12_FW1	Henan	Upper Secondary	Upper Secondary	Private business	Company staff
Parents_20110505_School A13_FW1	Henan	Upper Secondary	Upper Secondary	Private business	Private business
Parents_20110505_School A14_FW1	Shandong	NA	Lower Secondary	NA	Private business
Parents_20110510_School B01_FW1	Hebei	Bachelor	Bachelor	Company staff	Teacher
Parents_20110512_School B03_FW1	Shandong	Lower Secondary	Lower Secondary	Private business	Private business
Parents_20110512_School B04_FW1	Shandong	Upper Secondary	Upper Secondary	Private business	Private business
Parents_20110513_School B06_FW1	Jilin	Upper Secondary	Upper Secondary	Private business	Private business

Source: Author edited.

experiences and insights towards *Ze Xiao* might be representative within local educational administrations. The questions for educational administrators were about the implementation of government policies on public school admission, their opinions on *Ze Xiao* and the school development in their districts (see Appendix 3 for interview questions). Secondly, I interviewed three scholars from National Institute of Education Science, Peking University and 21st Century Education Research Institute. They have common research interests in development of compulsory education and educational inequality in China. I asked them about their opinions on *Ze Xiao* and their understanding of the reasons for the development of *Ze Xiao* (see Appendix 4 for interview questions). Thirdly, the recent research and surveys showed private tutoring institutes have close relationship with the development of *Ze Xiao* (21st Century Education Research Institute, 2011; Fang, 2011). In order to involve the voice of private tutoring institutes that became an emerging power in *Ze Xiao* but were seldom heard in public discussions, I visited two private tutoring institutes in Beijing and interviewed their managers. They were asked to describe their experiences in *Ze Xiao*, their relationships with key schools in terms of public school admission. Their answers provided unique insights on *Ze Xiao* and description of their roles in the negotiation on *Ze Xiao* (see Appendix 5 for interview questions). In addition, I conducted interview with a journalist who kept reporting news on *Ze Xiao* for over 5 years from the Education Section of Sina.com. The purpose for interviewing a journalist was to reflect her opinions on *Ze Xiao* since she collected from the public firsthand information on the negotiation on *Ze Xiao* in urban China. Though I was not able to have a face-to-face interview with the journalist, I received her answers to my questions on *Ze Xiao* via emails. The interview questions were specifically about her opinions on *Ze Xiao* and her observations of the diverse approaches that parents chose for *Ze Xiao* (see Appendix 7 for interview questions). For the first five groups of interviews, I recorded interviews with interviewees' agreements and transcribed them.

1.7 Limitations of the Study

The analysis of discourse is a new approach for the study on *Ze Xiao* in urban China. However, the exploration and construction of the “truth” of *Ze Xiao* faced many challenges due to some restrictions in China. As Foucault (1972, p.218) points out, “true discourse was no longer considered precious and desirable, since it had ceased to be discourse linked to the exercise of power”. Since media in China is mainly forced to present the governments’ voice, the newspaper based analysis of discourse may indicate a one sided construction of knowledge of *Ze Xiao*. Nevertheless, the attempts to involve diverse stakeholders through face to face interviews may supplement and enrich the diversity of the voices regarding *Ze Xiao* and may show a relatively objective picture of *Ze Xiao*.

As mentioned above, it is necessary to take local characteristics into consideration when it comes to talking about *Ze Xiao* issues in urban China. Beijing is the Capital of China and the location of the Central government, government owned schools and higher education institutions, the headquarter of the Chinese People’s Liberation Army (PLA) as well as the headquarters of State-owned enterprises. One of the functions of Beijing is to accommodate the needs from these entities. It is reported that the demand for public school admission from these units deeply shaped the formation of *Ze Xiao* in Beijing (21st Century Education Research Institute, 2011). Therefore, the findings of the development of *Ze Xiao* in Beijing may not fully represent the whole picture of *Ze Xiao* in urban China. On the other hand, the construction of knowledge on *Ze Xiao* in Beijing may enrich the understanding of the *Ze Xiao* in urban China.

Since *Ze Xiao* is a sensitive topic for most public schools in Beijing, stakeholders, such as parents, school principals, who were deeply involved, may not be willing to talk about it in details. Therefore, the number of interviewees was limited. Although I had conducted interviews with some principals of popular schools for the discourse analysis, I was unable to interview the principal of a key school in Community A. I was shocked to learn that I was not

permitted to interview parents from key school without the school's authorization. It would be value-added if this study could include interviews with some parents of one or several key schools more convincing if experiences in *Ze Xiao* of parents from key schools could be included in the case study.

1.8 Organization of the Study

This study consists of seven chapters. Chapter one introduces the background of the study, the problem of the study, research significances, research methodologies, limitations of the study and organization of the dissertation.

Chapter two reviews literature on (1) global trends of educational reform; (2) social inequality in education; (3) social stratification, social mobility and educational attainment; (4) social closure; and (5) existing studies on social change and education development in China. In order to understand *Ze Xiao*, the literature review provides a framework which helps people to consider the development of *Ze Xiao* in China as a socialist state in the transition from redistributive economy to market economy.

Chapter three reviews the development of *Ze Xiao*. Firstly, I explore the conflicts between public school admission policies and the emerging needs for *Ze Xiao*. Secondly, I describe *Ze Xiao* from the perspectives of expansion and diversification based on existing surveys and researches. Thirdly, based on analysis of the diverse approaches innovated and used in *Ze Xiao*, I indicate the complexity of *Ze Xiao* in public junior high school admissions. Finally, based on review of the theoretical frameworks of school choice in the global trends of educational reforms, I distinguish school choice from *Ze Xiao*, which has been widely discussed as a school choice issue in China.

Through analyzing discourses on *Ze Xiao* from selected government documents,

newspapers, journals, books and interviews, in Chapter four and Chapter five, I investigate the forces that shaped people's negotiation on *Ze Xiao* in the stages of "the 1990s" and "After 2000" respectively. The two stages are divided based on the theme shift of public discussions on *Ze Xiao*.

Chapter six elaborates how *Ze Xiao* took place in Community A of Beijing in contrast to how it is discussed in Chapter 4 and Chapter 5. The analysis of practice of *Ze Xiao* is based on interviews with school principals and parents at one primary school and one junior high school in Community A.

The last chapter summarizes the main findings of how people negotiate on *Ze Xiao* through an analysis of discourses on *Ze Xiao*, the practice in *Ze Xiao* at community level in Beijing. Suggestions are proposed for the alleviation of *Ze Xiao*. And implications are identified for policy making and implementation by the government. The study also implies the findings regarding the development of *Ze Xiao* to the theoretical discussion on the newly emerging stratification order in China as a socialist country in transition to market economy.

Chapter 2 Literature Review

As introduced in Chapter 1, since “*Ze Xiao*” and “School choice” share similar meanings literally, people tend to discuss “*Ze Xiao*” as a matter of “School choice” which has been taken as one of the pillars in the global education reforms. To further clarify the similarity and difference between “*Ze Xiao*” and “School choice”, this chapter, firstly, gives a review of neo-liberalism oriented global education reform. Then, it provides a theoretical framework on education, social inequality, social stratification and social mobility to elaborate the nature of “School choice” focused educational reform. Finally, by using the framework, this chapter documents social change and education development in China. Particularly, it provides a review on educational stratification in the change of educational ideology, economic reform and the imbalanced education development in China as background for the development of *Ze Xiao* in urban China.

2.1 Global Trends of Educational Reform

2.1.1 Parental Choice

Parental choice has become a vital set of reforms in education sector of countries around the world. The choice reforms in education sector mainly aims at improving schooling efficiency through matching students to schools that reflect their family preferences as well as to increase competition among public schools (Carl, 1994; H. M. Levin, 1992). The term ‘parental choice’ in children’s education can be understood from two perspectives, including parental choice as choice for basic human needs and parental choice as choice for educational consumers.

2.1.1.1 Equity and the Right to Choose

In the late 1940s, Parents' choosing the type of education for their children became seen as a universal right. In Article 26 of The Universal Declaration of Human Rights, it is stipulated that parents have a prior right to choose the kind of education that shall be given to their children (UN, 1948). According to Levin and Belfield (2006, p.627), a common educational experience is the precondition for citizen to fairly participate in a free and democratic society. The common education experience should not be differentiated according to a family's political, religious, and philosophical preferences. Choice for parents can be considered as the means for accommodating the diverse needs for common education in a pluralistic society (Dewey, 1916; Reich, 2007). Comparing with school choice policies in the USA and UK which intended to improve students' overall academic attainments, Japanese reforms focused on the diversification of the education system (Dierkes, 2008).

Recently, due to the unequal distribution of educational resources and the opportunities in the public education system, there has been an emerging argument that parents must be allowed to have freedom to choose schools they prefer. The argument emphasizes that both the prosperous families and the poor families should have the same range of opportunities for children's education (Forsey, et al., 2008). With the Civil Rights movement the US in the 1960s, proposals for expanding choices for the disadvantaged to go to private schools were implemented in some poor communities. At the same time, choices are provided to marginalized groups to pursue desegregation, for instance, the magnet schools in the US, school voucher for the poor in Milwaukee of the US, the socially balanced intakes to the City Technology Colleges (CTCs) in the UK (Carl, 1994; Christopher Lubienski, Charisse Gulosino, & Peter Weitzel, 2009; OECD, 1994; Plank & Sykes, 2003; Geoff Whitty, 1997).

2.1.1.2 Neo-liberal Market Approach

Another type of parental choice is considered as the choice for educational consumers.

It was promoted by the neo-liberals who believed that the market based education sector could stimulate competition between public schools in order to improve their efficiency, quality and accountability. At the same time, the parental choice which was given by the market can protect freedom of parents to choose schools for their children.

From the late 1970s and the early 1980s, an educational reform movement based on the adoption of neo-liberalism and free-market ideology in education sector swept across the western world. Such reforms were seen in the Thatcher and Reagan administrations for example. According to Harvey (2005, p.2), neo-liberalism proposes that human well-being can best be advanced by liberating individual entrepreneurial freedoms and skills within an institutional framework characterized by strong private property rights, free markets, and free trade. Competition among stakeholders is considered as the virtue of neo-liberalism. The advocates of this doctrine believe that the competition can improve efficiency and productivity.

According to Friedman (1962), competitive enterprises are likely to be far more efficient in meeting consumer demand than nationalized enterprises. Similarly, the denationalizing schooling would widen the range of choice available to parents. At the same time, the competition among schools could stimulate development of schools, introduce flexibility into school system and improve quality of schools. In 1980, Friedman furthered the idea of giving more freedom and choice to parents for children's schooling in public or private education through promoting the use of voucher plan. The introduction of a voucher system for elementary and secondary education that would give parents at all income levels freedom to choose the schools their children attended (Friedman & Friedman, 1980). Educational choice involves expanding the freedom of families to send their children to schools other than the public schools in their assigned attendance zones. Thus, educational choice will force schools to compete among themselves for students, and the resulting market pressures will stimulate innovation, responsiveness, and improvements in school performance

(Henig, 1994).

Regarding the efficiency and quality of public schools in the US, Chubb and Moe (1990, 1997) found that private schools outperform public schools and are more effective than public ones. According to Chubb and Moe (*ibid.*), this gap was caused by the limitation in autonomy, weak leadership, unclear goals, conflict between teachers and local education authorities in public education sector. Thus, they argued the limitations of public education system made public education inefficient. It is necessary to decentralize power of local education authorities to public schools and consumers of educational services through alternative approaches, such as voucher system and school choice system under democratic control.

2.1.2 New Public Management

With the reform for ‘the minimal state’ initiated in the mid 1980s by the Thatcher and Reagan administrations in the UK and the US respectively, the privatization of public sector, individual interests and self-disciplines were promoted by scholars and politicians under the umbrella of neo-liberalism. The ‘big government’ of the welfare state became the enemy of the efficient and free market. And the citizens were considered as consumers of government products. The expansion of consumers’ choice became a goal for the developed world (Forsey, et al., 2008). The public-choice theory further argues government can do nothing right. The stakeholders in the society, individually or in groups, act mainly for self-interests. It caused the misallocation of resources and reduced individual freedoms. This new political economy approach argued that ‘small government’ is the best (Todaro & Smith, 2006).

The promotion of ‘small government’ can be seen in the emergence of the New Public Management (NPM) advocated by the emergence of the plural state in the UK from the late 1970s. The aim of NPM is to determine how best to organize for the provision of goods and

services from government (O'Toole & Meier, 2004). Since the welfare state always focused on the provision of a minimum standard of service to all citizens, users of the public services increasingly demanded a better public services with greater choice. Meanwhile, Thatcherism demonstrated to implement the privatization and marketization of public services to improve its efficiency and effectiveness (Hood, 1991; Minogue, 1998; Osborne & McLaughlin, 2002). Moreover, the new managerialism which stresses constant attention to quality of public service, being close to the customer and the value of innovation also deeply influenced the marketization of public education sector (Ball, 1998).

In some countries, such as the UK and the US, the governments took actions to respond to the critiques by reducing taxes, deregulating, decentralizing administrative authorizes and accelerating the privatization of public sectors. In terms of public education sector, in order to reduce the cost, increase efficiency and competitiveness and improve educational quality, choice and competition were encouraged in public education system (Brown, Halsey, Lauder, & Wells, 1997; Chubb & Moe, 1990, 1997; Plank & Sykes, 2003). The charter schools in the US are a widely recognized and accepted approach representing a public-private hybrid approach for educational provision (Lubienski, 2008).

2.1.3 Global Culture and Policy Borrowing

With the rapid globalization, the world has never been connected as closely as today. At the same time, countries have never been as interdependent on each other as today. The dissemination of universal understanding and policies, such as universal human rights, neo-liberalism, marketization and privatization of public services, self-management of public sectors and efficiency, quality, pluralism, choice of public services, flew through social, political and academic networks, the rise of inter-national student mobility and the sponsorship and enforcement of particular policy by the multilateral agencies (Ball, 1998; Brown & Lauder, 1997; Forsey, et al., 2008; Halpin & Troyna, 1995; Plank & Sykes, 2003; Taylor, Rizvi, Lingard, & Henry, 1997).

With the boundary-eroding imperatives of the new technologies as well as the imperatives of economic globalization, globalization is deeply affecting the educational culture around the world. Education system became a market product in the micro-economic reform driven by the promotion of national efficiency (Taylor, et al., 1997). The globalization and the emergence of marketization of education sector in some developed countries deeply influenced the education reform through marketization internationally (Plank & Sykes, 2003; Geoff Whitty & Edwards, 1998). With the trend of neo-liberalism, the global education policy reached a consensus on advocating decentralization, greater focus on excellence rather than equity and the shift of the emphasis on national governance from citizenship and service to clientship and consumerism (Adnett & Davies, 1999; Forsey, et al., 2008). For instance, in the developed world, with policy borrowing from Britain, market based education reform, such as privatization of public education sector, school based management, became dominant thinking by scholars and politicians in the US (Chubb & Moe, 1990). For example, the school choice reform in the UK provided references for the relevant reforms in the public education sector of the US. The charter schools in the US shared similar characteristic with Grant maintained school in the UK (Ball, 1993; Geoff Whitty & Edwards, 1998). While in the developing world, with the reduction of public investment in education through the structural adjustment, the cost sharing with private sector for public education was given concern (Carnoy, 1995). Furthermore, although equity and quality of education for the low performing students and disadvantaged groups were continuously given concerns, the neo-liberal thinking shaped such policies to embed within the choice and accountability frameworks (Forsey, et al., 2008). In other words, global education policy became more market-oriented and competition driven.

To be more specific, school choice as a global policy has been widely introduced and implemented around the world. Although school choice policies are influenced by the market based educational reform, cases in different countries showed differences and similarities in

the reform. On the one hand, these cases shared the general characteristics of the neo-liberal thinking in public education reform. On the other hand, beyond the general market based thinking, the term of “choice” with diverse focuses, such as desegregation, accommodation to the demand for pluralism in education, was also adapted into local cultural-political landscapes (See Appendix 8). Meanwhile, a review of school choice based global education reform showed a general concern about inequality in the era of educational reform at global level is increasing (Andre-Bechely, 2005a; Forsey, et al., 2008; Gewirtz, et al., 1995; Plank & Sykes, 2003).

This study will focus on two perspectives on the implication of global trends in educational reform. Firstly, the economic development of China has been closely linked with the rapid globalization. According to the literature review, the neo-liberal thinking has been fully adopted in the educational reform around the world. The review of global education reform can provide me a framework for investigating how much the educational reform at global level influence the education reform in China, particularly in terms of parental choice in children’s education and public education. Secondly, by looking through China’s adoption of policies that follow the global trends of educational reform, this study might provide additional understanding of the globalization of educational policies with national and local characteristics.

2.2 Social Inequality in Education-from Social Reproduction Perspective

Since the 1960s, there has been an increasing amount of research which shows that schools were not institutions of equal opportunity but mechanisms which perpetuated social inequalities (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1977; Bowles & Gintis, 1976; J. Collins, 2009; Lareau, 1989; Willis, 1977). Social inequality has become one of the hottest issues in sociological research. It refers to the inequality in the distribution of social rewards, resources, and

benefits, honor and esteem, rights and privileges, and power and influence which is associated with differences in social position. In other words, this concept conveys an idea of unequal distribution of benefit and privileges related to various social positions (Matras, 1975; Neelsen, 1975). People who occupy the same relative resources in the stratified society form a social class. It means that within a stratification system there are numbers of social class categorized by resources hold by people in each class. Carnoy and Levin (1985) emphasized education is a site of class conflict and social contradiction. And they argued that schooling can be considered as an instrument of class domination but that it is also a site of struggles for equality. Scholars have given analysis of social reproduction in education from various perspectives, including but not limited to economic, cultural, linguistic, social networks. The review in this section mainly discusses the social reproduction in education from the neo-liberalism perspective.

With the rapid globalization and education reform, the Neo-liberals who promoted education reform emphasizing competition-driven and freedom of consumers' choice around the world did not fully fulfill their objectives. The neo-liberalism holds that competition will enhance the efficiency and responsiveness of schools as well as give disadvantaged children opportunities that they currently do not have. For instance, Coleman and his colleagues (1992; 1993) argued that the result of school choice would be to replace the stratification by income and race by a stratification based on students' performance and behavior. Furthermore, the performance based stratification by school choice would introduce appropriate incentives to improve education outcomes of students and school side.

Nevertheless, the neo-liberals' belief above did not always hold true when put into practice. The market approach may actually serve to reproduce the traditional hierarchies of class and race (Apple, 2001, 2004, 2006). The main effect of neo-liberalism has been redistributive rather than generative through the ways which transfer assets and channel wealth and income either from the mass of population towards the upper classes or from

vulnerable to the richer countries (Harvey, 2007). In terms of education, as Bourdieu and Passeron (1977) articulated, modern societies provide the educational system with increased opportunities to exercise its power of changing the social advantages into academic advantages. In other words, different social groups can utilize capitals they hold to convert them into their academic advantages in the society. The more social advantages they have, the more academic advantages they receive. Meanwhile, critical scholars argued that the role of school was to serve to exacerbate or intensify social inequalities. Schooling was considered as the mechanism to reproduce rather than transform existing structural inequalities (Bourdieu, 1984; Bourdieu & Passeron, 1977; Bowles, 1972; Bowles & Gintis, 1976; Johnson & Howard, 2008; Levinson & Holland, 1996; Nash, 1990). As Collins (1979) demonstrated, not all social groups come to an educational market as equals since the various types of capitals were not equally distributed among classes and groups. According to Bourdieu (1986), “capital” represents “resources” and “power” can be represented by three forms, including economic capital, which is immediately and directly convertible into money and may be institutionalized in the form of property rights; cultural capital, which is convertible, on certain conditions, into economic capital and may be institutionalized in the form of educational qualifications; and social capital, which is made up of social obligations (connection), is also convertible, in certain condition, into economic capital and may be institutionalized in the form of a title of nobility. Students from affluent families attend schools with higher qualified teachers, smaller class sizes, and additional curriculum. At the same time, they gain the access from these schools to professional works and gain access to human and cultural capitals which contribute to their educational and professional success. Moreover, such educational, social and economic advantages will be converted and reproduced for the following generations (Bourdieu, 1973).

Parental choice actions is not only a matter of individual choice, but are indicative of long-standing cultural and institutional practices that give some people access to school

resources while leaving others outside (Andre-Bechely, 2005b; Graue, Kroeger, & Prager, 2001 p.471). The rise of parentocracy indicates that children's education is increasingly dependent upon the wealth and wishes of parents rather than the ability and efforts of pupils (Brown, 1990, p.65). Comparatively, the middle class have more cultural capitals to make educational choices which best advantage their children (Ball, 1993, 2003; Brown, 1990; Gewirtz, et al., 1995). Brown and Lauder (1997, p.177) argued that the introduction of choice and competition provides a mechanism by which the middle classes can more securely gain advantage in the competition for credentials. The emergence of parental choice and school autonomy has further disadvantaged those least able to compete in the market. For most disadvantaged groups the choice seems to reproduce distinctions between schools and people (G. Whitty, Power, & Halpin, 1998). Gewirtz, Ball and Bowe (1995, pp.40-41) identified that the practice of school choice is strongly class related. They categorized parents as "privileged chooser", "semi-skilled chooser" and the "disconnected chooser" based on three different social classes the choosers belong to. The skilled and privileged choosers can keep and reproduce their existing cultural, social and economic advantages in the complex and hierarchical education system (Ball, Bowe, & Gewirtz, 1996).

The social inequality in education, particularly in terms of school choice within the current global education reform, can cause two types of "cream skimming" at both family level and school level. On the one hand, "cream skimming" may occur to students from families with high socio-economic status. Their parents have adequate social, economic and cultural resources to send them to better performing schools. On the other hand, the "cream skimming" effect could happen at school level. Schools incline to select students with higher social status or with better academic achievement. The popular schools would attract and select more students with better academic achievement while the rest of schools would be left for the other students. Consequently, segregation between public schools would intensify (B. Levin, 1998; West, Ingram, & Hind, 2006; G. Whitty, et al., 1998). Kozol's observation of

America's public schools showed that the segregation of public schools through the disproportionate funding distribution deeply influenced school quality and overall effectiveness. More seriously, it intensified the inequalities between public schools and families (Kozol, 1992).

On the one hand, the social reproduction theories and practices reviewed above provide a hint to investigate the inequality reproduction in public school admission through analyzing how various capitals of families influence the public school admission and how people in different social status take part in public school admission. On the other hand, through the analysis of the process of public school admission to junior high schools in urban China, this study has the potential to contribute to the understanding of social inequality in education with Chinese characteristics.

2.3 Social Stratification, Social Mobility and Education Attainment

Accordingly, social inequality in education is mainly influenced by different resources and status held by parents in a hierarchy society. In other words, the inequality is shaped by a stratified structure of society. Social stratification is defined in terms of a hierarchy of power, privilege and prestige; it is indexed in terms of occupational status, education and income. While, social class is defined and indexed primarily in terms of ownership and control over the means of production and control over the labor power of others and secondarily in terms of the employment situation (Kohn, Naoi, Schoenbach, Schooler, & Slomczynski, 1990).

However, the stratification system is not closed.⁷ The shift of an individual or a group from one social position to another within a structured society refers to social mobility. According to Eitzen and Zinn (2007), social mobility occurs in two ways, including intergenerational mobility and intragenerational mobility. The former refers to the status

⁷ Probably, the caste system of India is considered as one of the most rigid stratification systems.

transmission from one generation to another. The latter refers to movement of individual through his or her adult life. Within intergenerational mobility studies, ascription and achievement are two key conceptions which influence social status attainment. In terms of ascription-based attainment, sometimes persons are born with attributes which themselves suffice to determine the individual's future social position, such as sex, ethnics and so forth. And sometimes persons are born in families or groups in which membership promises favorable access to certain attributes to get opportunities for earning money, for getting good education, or even for attaining influence or power. Such attributes constitute particularistic bases of position and status attainment. They also conveys to ascription-based attainment. Comparing with ascription-based attainment, persons also obtain attributes by their own efforts, such as saving money, entering famous university through exams, engaging political position through election and so forth. Such attributes constitute achievement-based of position and status attainment (Ishida, 1993; Matras, 1975).⁸ Generally, the main focus in intergenerational mobility study is to clarify how ascription-based factors and achievement-based factors affect the attainment of social positions and status. The distinction between ascription and achievement criteria usually refers to the extent to which children inherit their parents' social status (Jacobson & Kendrick, 1973).

Studies have shown a high correlation between educational attainment and stratification (Alexander, Eckland, & Griffin, 1975; Blossfeld & Shavit, 1993; Bond, 1981; Buchmann & Hannum, 2001; Chi & Rao, 2003; Deng & Treiman, 1997; Gerber, 2000; Hanley & McKeever, 1997; Henderson & Mapp, 2002; Ishida, 1993; Karen, 1991; Lareau, 1989; C. Li, 2006; Y. Li, 2006; N. Lin, 1999; Mare, 1981; Raftery & Hout, 1993; Smith & Cheung, 1986; Thomas, 1979; Treiman & Terrell, 1975; R. S.-K. Wong, 2004; Jian Zhang, 2005; Zhou, Moen, & Tuma, 1998). Research on different countries under various social

⁸ Regarding the understanding of ascription, achievement and social attainment, there are many discussions among sociologists. In this proposal, only the general understanding will be mentioned. The detailed discussion will be given in the dissertation.

systems and development stages found the similar conclusion that the expansion of education does not consistently weaken the association between social origins of students and their educational attainment. Within the studies mentioned above, studies regarding the effect of family background on education attainment in state-socialist countries show that the forces of social reproduction (inheritance of parental privileges) remained highly effective in structuring educational inequalities (Deng & Treiman, 1997; Gerber, 2000; Hanley & McKeever, 1997; Hannum, 1998; Hauser, 2003; Heyns & Bialecki, 1993; C. Li, 2006; Y. Li, 2006; J. Lin, 2006; Mateju, 1993; Raftery & Hout, 1993; S. Szelenyi & Aschaffenburg, 1993; R. S.-K. Wong, 2004). Raftery and Hout (1993) argue that inequality in educational opportunity is “maximally maintained”. In other words, the effect of social origin on education does not disappear until the enrollment of advantaged groups is already so high at a given level that further expansion is only to increase the opportunity of disadvantaged groups in education transition. It further indicates that expansion of education may not necessarily lead to a better chance for disadvantaged groups to make education transition and may not change the association between family origins and educational transitions.

The social inequalities in state socialist societies are basically created and structured by redistributive mechanisms (I. Szelenyi, 1978). The mechanism maintained and increased the advantages of the already privileged and powerful (Nee, 1989). In contrast to social stratification studies of industrialized market societies, the importance of political-processes and state policies in state socialism states should be considered as stratification dynamics⁹ (Zhou, 2004). In contrast to market based social stratification in capitalist societies, redistribution under state socialism is governed by a political logic that the central authority, the Communist Party in power, plays an vital role in resource allocation (ibid.). Therefore, the reward system favors those with political status and loyalty, such as Communist Party

⁹ According to Zhou (2004, p.16), stratification dynamics refer to a distinctive pattern of changes in stratification structures and process. In China’s case, it often imposes from the top down and that often have noncumulative and disruptive impacts on individuals’ life chances.

membership or those who are closer to the distributive power. With the establishment of socialist country, a privileged group including communist party members and carders gradually emerged. They gradually changed policies which were beneficial to themselves (Mateju, 1993). Studies on the effect of social origin on educational attainment in socialist countries, such as Czechoslovakia, Hungary, Poland remained despite the educational expansion in such socialist countries through government policy intervention (Heyns & Bialecki, 1993; Mateju, 1993; S. Szelenyi & Aschaffenburg, 1993). Contrasting to these Eastern European countries, education stratification in China showed a special history which was influenced by the periodic shifts in state policies (Bian, 2002; Bian & Logan, 1996; Deng & Treiman, 1997; C. Li, 2006; Y. Li, 2006; R. S.-K. Wong, 2004; Zhou, 2004; Zhou, et al., 1998; Zhou, Tuma, & Moen, 1996) (see details in 2.5.3).

Moreover, from the late 1980s, a theoretical discussion on inequality in state socialist countries in transition to market economy emerged. Theory of market transition claims that, in reforming socialist economies, the transition from redistributive to market coordination shifts sources of power and privilege to favor direct producers, stimulates the growth of private markets, and provides to entrepreneurs an alternative path for socioeconomic mobility (Nee, 1989, 1991, 1996; Nee & Cao, 2002). Research identified the “declining significance of redistributive power” (Nee & Cao, 1999; Q. Wu, Goetz, Hartmann, & Wang, 2012). In contrast, studies also showed that there was persistence of power of the political elites (bureaucrats) in the transition to market economy of socialist states (Bian & Logan, 1996; Nee, 1991; Nee & Cao, 2002; Parish & Michelson, 1996; Walder, 1996; Zhou, 2004). Moreover, the marketization and dismantling central planning may even exacerbate the social inequalities. With the expansion of market, bureaucrats in socialist state could monetize their political capital. And by utilizing the dismantling central planning on public resources redistribution, they also can wrest the resources into private hands through network ties with the political elite (Nee & Cao, 2002). Through the analysis of development of inequality in

public school admission to junior high schools in urban China, this study could be implied to visualize the persistence of power of the political elites in distribution of public resources.

2.4 Social Closure

Accordingly, education which is considered as media for social mobility becomes mechanism that leads to social reproduction and social inequality in our daily life. The privileged groups keep the scarce resources within the groups in order to keep advantages of their siblings and themselves in the society and exclude the disadvantaged groups from the limited resources. In this section, to further understand inequality in education and the effects of social origin and family background on education, I review the discussion on how people maximize their own profits by monopolizing the limited resources and opportunities while excluding other groups.

Inequality also can be understood through interpreting the concept of social closure. Weber explained the concept of “closure” as follows,

“...When the number of competitors increases in relation to the profit span, the participants become interested in curbing competition. Usually one group of competitors takes some externally identifiable characteristic of another group of competitors-race, language, religion, local or social origin, descent, residence, etc.-as a pretext for attempting their exclusion. It does not matter which characteristic is chosen in the individual case: whatever suggests itself most easily is seized upon. Such group action may provoke a corresponding reaction on the part of those against whom it is directed....The jointly acting competitors now form an “interest group” towards outsiders; there is a growing tendency to set up some kind of association with rational regulations; if the monopolistic interests persist, the time comes when the competitors establish a legal order that limits competition through formal monopolies... Such closure, as we want to call it, is an ever-recurring process; it is the source of property in land as well as all guild and other group monopolies” (Weber, 1968b, pp.341-342).

In other words, social closure refers to the process that collective groups seek to maximize profits by monopolizing specific resources and opportunities while excluding competitors from the access to the resources and opportunities (Murphy, 1984; Parkin, 1979). Meanwhile,

being different from Weber's exclusionary closure, Parkin (1979) and Murphy (1984) further expended the notion of "closure" by including both exclusion and usurpation. According to Parkin (1979, p.45), exclusionary closure represents the use of power in a 'downward' direction because it necessarily entails the creation of a group, class, or stratum of legally defined inferiors. In contrast, the usurpation refers to the use of power in an upward direction in the sense of the collective attempts by the excluded to win a greater share of resources always threaten to bite into the privileges of legally defined superiors. As two main types of social closure, the latter always being a consequence of, and collective response to the former. Similarly, Murphy (1984, p.548) distinguished that the main difference between these two modes is that exclusionary closure involves the exercise of power in a downward direction through a process of subordination in which one group secures its advantages by closing off the opportunities of another group beneath it that it defines as inferior and ineligible, whereas usurpationary closure involves the exercise of power in an upward direction in order to bite into advantages of higher groups.

2.4.1 Educational Credentials as a Social Closure

Examination was a universal instrument for people to socially and economically monopoly advantageous positions. It showed the desire of people to limit the supply of candidates for the positions and to monopolize them for the holders of educational patents (Weber, 1968a). Emile Durkheim (1956) believed that the education system had two key roles, the socialization of the young for their future adult roles, and their selection into employment based on individual achievement. The rise of the credential over the last century owes a lot to the fact that it captures elements of both. On the other hand, the credential represents a measure of the quality of educational experience. It signifies the acquisition of knowledge and 'expertise'. On the other hand, by extending the opportunity for all to take common examinations, the credential also offers a way of assessing the relative performance of individual students in academic examinations, and therefore their relative 'position' within the

hierarchy of talent. The human capital approach identified that investment in people's education can stimulate both individual's income and the productivity of the entire society (Schultz, 1961). With the rise of level of qualification required for a particular job, there is more and more reluctant schooling for the acquisition of qualifications necessary to get jobs (Dore, 1980, 1997). As Dore (1997, p.5) noted, the mechanism of 'qualification escalation' ensures that once one is in the modern-sector-qualification range, the higher the educational qualification one gets the better one's chances of getting some job. Meanwhile, in order to cope with the demand for education credentials, there is an emerging mechanism of credential inflation and screening. The credential inflation intensifies the competition for the position in educational hierarchy system. At the same time, it demands people to invest more time in climbing the hierarchy to the scarcest and most valued credential. Screening represents the process of increasing the resources for attaining the highest credentials in order to win in the job selection (Brown, et al., 1997). The resources for winning the highest credentials are dependent on both intellectuals and personalities, such as family's socioeconomic status (Bowles & Gintis, 1976; Brown, et al., 1997; R. Collins, 1979).

In other words, academic or professional qualifications and credentials can be considered as exclusionary devices for the privileged groups to dominate the society (Brown, et al., 1997; R. Collins, 1979). As Parkin (1979, pp.48-54) pointed out, credentialism is a form of closure designed to control and monitor entry to key positions in the division of labor through the inflated use of educational certificates. Credential inflation is seen to reinforce the opportunity gap because it will favor those with the personal and family resources that are able to meet the costs associated with an extended competition (F. Hirsch, 1976). Max Webber (1945) claimed that the creation of educational certificates aimed to make the advantage for people to monopolize social and economically advantageous positions in the society. The reasons for the introduction of regular curriculum and special examinations is not for "thirst for education" but the desire for restricting the supply of these positions and their

monopolization by the owners of educational certificates. Collins (1979) further elaborated that the promotion of academic credentials in the society could be understood by the group conflict over scarce resources. The middle classes took access to professional occupations as a means of reproducing social status and privileged life styles between generations. For Collins, credential requirement became the tool for separating people into distinct positions and careers. Meanwhile, it also became the barrier for people to achieve the social mobility. In terms of school choice, affluent families with economic, social and cultural capital find it relatively easier to send children to go to good educational environment and get highest credentials.

2.4.2 Positional Conflict Theory

As introduced above, credentials became the tools for powerful social group, such as the middle class, to keep their privileges in the competition for scarce resources and to reproduce the educational and occupational inequalities. In the positional competition, groups of competitors mobilize resources to seek to monopolize entry requirement into specific position. At the same time, powerful groups will attempt to control the competition in order to favor their siblings (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1977; Brown, 2000; R. Collins, 1979).

Positional conflict theory aims to identify how positional competition is experienced by individuals and social groups (Brown, 2006). Hirsch (1976) distinguishes the forms of positional power derived from mobilizing resources to keep the advantage in competition and the forms of positional power derive from the change of rules in the competition. Similarly, positional conflict theory considers both the competition ‘ranking’ which involves the use of individual resources in the marketplace and the competition ‘rigging’ which focuses on influences over markets (Brown, 2000, 2006). The former can be represented by activities such as parents use their financial resources to move into school district with popular public schools in order to boost the chance of children to enter these schools. And the later can be understood by the promotion of marketization of public education supported by middle-class

families.

Positional conflict theory represents an attempt to extend the focus on the monopolistic ‘rigging’ powers of social elites to include an understanding of how individuals and social groups mobilize their cultural, economic, political or social assets in positional power struggles, whatever form they take (Brown, 2000). The organization of positional competition will inevitably reflect a power struggle between competing interest groups. The shift from ‘meritocratic’ to ‘market’ rules of selection can be understood as a consequence of middle class attempts to lift competitive barriers that previously limited the use of ‘capital’ assets in credential competitions. Those who have the power to define the rules of the game are the ones most likely to win it. But they still need to take part in order to develop their intellectual capital and to proclaim the legitimacy of their success (Brown, 2006; Brown, Hesketh, & Williams, 2003). Formal examinations as a source of social exclusion was to acknowledge that social elites were no longer able to rely on social ascription and ‘proof of ancestry’ as a way of directly transmitting social advantage to their children. Increasingly, social reproduction had to be based on a declaration of formal equality before the law, where entry into elite groups is ostensibly open to all through a competition for credentials, jobs and property. In practice this formal equality obscured the ability of elites to rig the competition for jobs by restricting access to the supply of credentials (Brown, et al., 2003).

The concepts in positional conflict theory are applicable to the practice of public school admission in urban China and thus to this study. It can help people to understand how families mobilize the resources they have for the “admitability” of students to popular junior high schools (Xiaoxin Wu, 2012). Moreover, the concept of exclusion and usurpation in social closure can be employed in this study for understanding the interaction among parents and public schools in public school admission to junior high schools in urban China.

2.5 Education and Social Changes in China

The review of literature on education and social changes in China has two purposes. Firstly, through an overview of China's education development in her social changes from 1949, it indicates the influence of economic, political, cultural, social, and educational ideological changes on educational development and education reforms of China. Secondly, taking the framework on the global education reform, relevant trends and problems caused by the reform, and the theoretical basis introduced above as references, the review aims to ascertain the unique fundamental nature of *Ze Xiao* in urban China to distinguish it with the notion of "school choice" discussed in general.

2.5.1 China's Social Change: From Revolution to Revolution...

Since the establishment of the New-China in 1949, China has achieved series of social change based on the political, cultural and economic "revolutions". These revolutions led to various changes including social turmoil, economic growth, social stratification, the change of the social value and the change of the social-economic equality. These changes can be divided into at least four stages, which are the Pre-Cultural Revolution, the During Cultural Revolution, the Post-Cultural Revolution and the Post Economic Revolution. In the following part, I describe these periods respectively.

2.5.1.1 Pre-Cultural Revolution---1949-1965

The Pre-Cultural revolution period (1949-1965) is considered as the period of national building and economic development for China (Zhou, et al., 1996). The primary goal of the state was to promote economic development, culminating in the rushed-growth policy of the Great Leap Forward (*dayuejin* 大跃进) (1958-1959). The Communist government centralized resources and its power through collectivization and nationalization, especially in urban China (Whyte & Parish, 1984). Workers as the ruling class were united with peasants and soldiers. The capitalists in the urban areas and the landowners and rich farmers were taken as the "bad label", even the intellectuals were kept at a distance. During this period, educational

opportunities were expanded dramatically because of the increasing demand for an educated workforce (Zhou, et al., 1998). Furthermore, as one of the procedures for solidifying administrative control, the household registration system (*hukou*) was established by the Chinese government in 1955. By this system, most Chinese people were assigned a registration status as either ‘agricultural’ or ‘non-agricultural’ population (T. Cheng & Selden, 1994; X. Wu & Treiman, 2004; M. Zhang, 2003). Any transfer of *hukou* registration status from agricultural to non-agricultural had to go through official channels, as either a regular or a special transfer. This system separated China into two worlds, including rural and urban China. In addition, in the early 1960s, due to the natural and economic disaster, government carried out political intervention increased with the initiation of state de-stratification policies, which aimed at reducing or eliminating social inequalities among social groups (Zhou, et al., 1998).

2.5.1.2 Cultural Revolution--- 1966-1976

The Cultural Revolution was one of the major political movements in China since 1949. It was considered as a mass political struggle for the seizure of power (Bridgham, 1968; Goldman, 2006; Pepper, 1996; Wan, 1998). According to Pepper (1991, p.26), the Cultural Revolution can be divided into two stages. At the beginning was the destructive Red Guard phase. Young people throughout the country were mobilized to attack old ideas and customs. Then “people in authority” who were considered as the ones going the capitalist road became the target. Accusing the party had capitalist tendencies, bureaucratism, elitism, inefficiency and the loss of revolutionary favor, Mao Ze-dong launched the Cultural Revolution by encouraging youth in China to regain the revolutionary spirit (Wan, 1998). Another significant historical issue is the “Send-down Policy (*shangshanxiang* 上山下乡)” and the dispatch of 17 million¹⁰ urban youth to live and work in rural areas (Giles, Park, & Wang, 2008; Goldman, 2006; Walder, 1989b; Zhou & Hou, 1999). Urban youth from either working

¹⁰ According to Goldman (2006, p.405), the number of urban youth in “Sending down” movement was 14 million.

class or educated bourgeois families were sent to rural areas. In “the lost decade” for China, the Cultural Revolution and its immediate aftermath were not only large-scale political purges and repression, but also labor force participation and other opportunities that were highly politicized and severely affected by sharp shifts in state policies (Zhou, et al., 1996). During the Cultural Revolution, following Mao Ze-dong’s faith that the countryside must be the chief beneficiary of China’s revolution, a radical egalitarian agenda dominated the society. As a result, those well-educated and upper-class individuals lost the priority. In contrast, the working class (worker and farmers) became the dominated class. It is said that the Chinese society reached the most equal level in her history during the Cultural Revolution. As Deng and Treiman (1997) argued, the Cultural Revolution was probably the most drastic attempt the world has yet seen to reduce the intergenerational transmission of advantage. In order to change the tough situation for students from working class to compete with students from educated bourgeois families in school admission examinations, school admission examinations to each level of education were abolished in the Cultural Revolution (Wan, 1998). As Goldman (2006) concluded on the result of the Cultural Revolution, although China made achievement in public health construction, the Green Revolution in agriculture, and spread of literacy, the Cultural Revolution tarnished Mao’s image for his people. And the nation as a whole was still kept isolated and poor.

2.5.1.3 Post-Cultural Revolution: Economic Revolution---1978-2001

After the Cultural Revolution, especially with the implementation of the economic reform and the Open-door policy in China since 1978, the series of positive change have mushroomed within China. With the introduction of the market economy and the capitalism, the focus of the entire society has shifted to the rapid modernization¹¹ of the country through

¹¹ According to Henze (1992, pp.103-104) has always been used as a verbal weapon among competing political factions and intellectual circles in China. This term has been used in conjunction with calls for advancement or with programs of immediate action, which would subsequently receive support from particular groups in the leadership for some level of implementation. The term has been used to refer to the PRC’s backwardness in comparison with developed nations, that is to say, with “modern” societies- predominately those in the West. Not surprisingly, the indigenous term “four modernizations” stood first

the achievement of a conflict-free social order. The “class struggle” was replaced by series of reforms to speed up the nation’s development (S. Chen, 2002). Furthermore, Hawkins (1983) pointed out that a particular kind of person, such as the new socialist man, is not especially important. The Chinese leaders believed that the color of the cat does not matter- what matters is whether or not he catches mice (*buguanheimaobaimao, zhuodaolaoshujiushihaomao* 不管黑猫白猫，捉到老鼠就是好猫). It means that the social status and political status have not been the standard for judging the success of people in the Chinese society. By adapting the strategy known as “crossing the river by feeling stones (*mozheshitouguohe* 摸着石头过河)”, the leadership launched series of reform to promote the economic development, market economies, consumer goods industries and establishment of Special Economic Zones along the coast by taking dynamic economies as neighboring counties in East Asia as references (Goldman, 2006; Whyte, 2010b; L. Wong & Mok, 1995). Meanwhile, the de-collectivization of agriculture and the loosening of migrant restrictions also stimulated rural economy. The new opportunities for rural people engaged them into diverse activities to generate incomes. Simultaneously, it also unleashed waves of rural-urban migration in China (Logan & Fainstein, 2008; Solinger, 1999; Whyte, 2010b). However, due to the limitation of household registration and other relevant social system, rural migrants were excluded from the mainstream urban society in China. And it was difficult for them to enjoy the same social welfare as their urban counterparts did. Meanwhile, the increasing “floating population” from rural area to urban area generated great pressure on urban facilities, such as schools and hospitals (Goldman, 2006; B. Li, 2005). Moreover, with the reform of state owned enterprises

and foremost for a conception of economic reform that was to increase production and improve distribution and was guided by more rational modes of planning than and previously been relied on. Whether it was later called “socialist modernization” (*shehui zhuyi de xiandaihua* 社会主义的现代化) or “modernization with Chinese characteristics” (*Zhongguo tese de xiandaihua* 中国特色的现代化), to quote Deng Xiaoping, “the four modernizations mean economic construction.” Henze pointed out that modernization with development was equalized by Deng Xiaoping and other political elite in China even though it is not the case in the established view in Western sociology. From the very beginning the assumption has been accepted that “modernization” will lead to material wealth, to a happier life for most of the population, and thus to a “strong socialist China.”

from mid-1990s, there were a large number of laid-off workers caused by the bankrupt of state-owned enterprises in urban areas. Consequently, it caused emerging urban poverty and urban unemployment (Appleton & Song, 2008; Goldman, 2006; Whyte, 2010b).

2.5.1.4 Post Economic Revolution---2002-Present

China's economy achieved unprecedented development in this period. According to the World Bank (2012), China overtook Japan to become the second largest economy in the world in 2010. And the Bank predicted that the rapid economic growth in emerging markets will give rise to unprecedented expansion of the middle class.

Until the end of Cultural Revolution in 1976, the middle class was nonexistent in Chinese society (J. Lin, 2006). With the formulation of the construction of a “well-off society (*xiaokangshehui* 小康社会)” and the strategy of allowing some to “get rich first” (*rang yibufenren xianfuqilai* 让一部分人先富起来), people in the private sector, collective enterprises, urban professionals and skilled employees in both public and private sector benefited from these strategies in the 1980s and the 1990s (Tomba, 2004). According to Chinese Scholar Qiang Li (2008), from the 1980s, there have 5 conditions which accelerated the emergence of middle class in contemporary Chinese society. They include the adjustment of industry, the adjustment of employment, the adjustment of urbanization, the mass of higher education and the adjustment of income. The rapid growth of employment in the third industry accelerated the emergence of middle class in urban China. Meanwhile, the enlargement of higher education and the middle class focused income adjustment strategy made by the central government also contributed to the rise of middle class in urban China. A current definition of middle class in China general refers to people who possess property, have major savings in banks, live a life of relative comfort, and have received tertiary or higher education. More importantly, the middle class has increasingly higher quality education demands for their children. It generated the fierce competition for the limited education resource in urban China (J. Lin, 2006). Meanwhile, the economic reform in the late

1990s also caused increasing urban unemployment. For example, numerous workers were laid-off from state-owned enterprises during this period (Appleton & Song, 2008; Goldman, 2006; B. Li, 2005; J. Lin, 2006).

Accordingly, the economic evolution created a widening gap between the rich and the poor, as well as resulting social and economic instability (S. Chen, 2002; Farrell, Gersch, & Stephenson, 2006; Sonoda, 2008). From the 1980s, there is a growing *Gini* coefficient in China. In this period, the new leadership under Hu Jintao and Wen Jiabao showed serious concerns on the increasing inequality caused by the imbalanced development. The central government announced a number of policies aimed at alleviating poverty and inequality for constructing “harmonious society (*hexieshehui* 和谐社会)” (National Congress of Communist Party of China, 2006; Whyte & Guo, 2009). In order to cut off burdens of peoples in rural areas and close the disparities between rural and urban areas, the fourth generation of leaders reduced agriculture taxes for farmer and provided educational subsidy for rural education (Goldman, 2006). Furthermore, the real “Free Compulsory Education” was officially implemented with the launch of New Compulsory Education Law in 2006 (National People's Congress, 2006).

Obviously, from one revolution to another revolution, China experienced social turmoil and rapid economic development. As Fairbank and Goldman (2006) points out, in contrast to the rapid economic development, the increasing potential instability caused by growing regional disparities and social inequalities will challenge the government in the twenty-first century.

2.5.2 Social Stratification in China

With almost 60 year's social transformation through political, cultural and economic revolutions in China, the social change led to the social stratification in the different historical periods of the country. Chinese class stratification has transformed from a rigid status

hierarchy under Mao to an open, evolving class system in the post-Mao period (Bian, 2002). Under Mao, a rigid status hierarchy grew out of a state socialist economy in which private ownership of productive assets was gradually eliminated between 1952 and 1958 by collectivization of farming and state consolidation of urban economy, diminishing pre-revolution social classes in a Communist regime (Whyte, 1975). Bian and his colleagues summarized that there were four structural and behavioral dimensions classified the Chinese into qualitatively different status groups under Mao which are a rural-urban divide in residential status, a state-collective dualism in economic structure, a cadre-worker dichotomy in occupational classification and a “revolution-antirevolution” split in political characterization (Bian, 2002). With the establishment of the household registration (*hukou*) system in 1955, people in the rural areas could not get the privileges which the urban residence could enjoy. And their move was controlled strictly by *hukou* system. Meanwhile, the social-welfare which the state-workers could enjoy could not be shared with the collective workers due to the state and collective dualism which is based on the household registration system. Moreover, in the Mao era, the urban working class was officially and politically recognized as a “Leading Class” and industrial state workers were also seen as “quasi-middle class” (Bian, 2002; Bian, Breiger, Davis, & Galskiewicz, 2005). In addition, the intellectuals were called as “stinky old ninths” (*chou lao jiu* 臭老九), ranking last among all nine “black” categories (Bian, 2002).

With the slogan of “Never forget the class struggle” by Mao, the Cultural Revolution led China into the “lost decade”. One important aim of the revolution was to transform Chinese society into an even more egalitarian society by eliminating many remaining material rewards and differentials (Whyte, 2010a). During the Cultural Revolution, people were divided into two groups, the “Red class labels” and the “Black class labels”. The former includes workers, poor peasants, revolutionary, cadres and military officers. The latter includes landlords, rich peasants, capitalists, anti-revolutionaries and “revisionist”

intellectuals (Bian, et al., 2005). As a result, those well-educated and upper-class individuals lost mobility, but regained advantages in the post-Mao era, especially after the economic revolution which started in 1978 (Bian, 2002; Walder, 1995).

With the promotion of the Open-door policy, the great social transformation has been brought to Chinese society since 1978. Lu (1997), a Chinese scholar, pointed out that , “proceeding with social transformation from a traditional society to a modern society, together with system reform from a planned to a market economy, results in structural conflicts: system friction, conflicts of interest groups, conflicts of roles, and a clash of senses of value occur in the transformation and interact with each other, so that the resulting complicated situation greatly increases the difficulties of social transformation”. The post-1978 reform also has eroded the high status recognition of the working class, especially for those rural residences. It also exposed the manual workers to fierce economic competition in the newly commercialized urban labor markets. Industrialization and urbanization stimulated the surplus labor force in rural areas to migrate to urban areas to engage in the manufacturing and commercial activities in urban areas. However, this rapid change cannot be fully responded by the existing socioeconomic system which caused the social inequality, especially the gap between urban and rural areas and the gap between the rich and the poor.

The social change also accelerated the complication of social structure. According to Gao (2005), the market economy reforms launched in 1978 brought fundamental changes in the economic structures in both urban and rural areas and incurred some pressing social problems. The shift of rural production unit from collectives to decentralized households undermined the collective financial base of the existing rural social benefits such as cooperative health care and collective welfare fund assistance. Moreover, in urban areas, according to the restructuring of state-owned and collective enterprises, welfare provision has been reduced. And an increasing number of laid-offs from the closed enterprises have become the new urban poor requiring public supports. Simultaneously, with the rapid industrialization

and urbanization, increasing number of people is moving into urban areas for working and living. Because of the *hukou* system and other related social policies, those migrants are being excluded from urban social welfare, such as health insurance, housing, education and so forth. Those emerging social class, such as laid-offs and internal migrant workers leads China into a more complicated stratified society.

Moreover, the hierarchy of work organizations (work units, *danwei* 单位) based on state socialist property rights deeply influenced Chinese social stratification system (Bian, 1994; Bian & Logan, 1996; Walder, 1989a; Zhou, 2004). Resources of work unit depended on its ability to negotiate with central authorities rather than its performance or profitability in a market sense (Walder, 1989a). Firms closer to the state in their property rights relationships enjoy preferential political treatment, better economic benefits, and higher prestige than other firms. Inequalities among individuals also depended on the work unit that individual belonged to.

In addition, with the transformation from redistributive economy to market economy, there was increasing emphasis on the importance of incumbents and vested interests in the transformation (Bian, 1997; Bian & Logan, 1996; Parish & Michelson, 1996; Walder, 1995). The incumbents have power and privilege on access to decision-making processes to influence government policies in favor of their interest. Therefore, they may be able to keep their power and advantages in social stratification process within the market transition (Zhou, 2004).

2.5.3 Education Stratification in China

There is significant effect of government policies on educational stratification in China (Deng & Treiman, 1997; Hao, 2010; C. Li, 2006; Zhou, 2004; Zhou, et al., 1998). With the egalitarian education policies instituted during the Cultural Revolution, well-educated and upper-class individuals were penalized in educational attainment (R. S.-K. Wong, 2004).

Education policy which favored children from peasant and working class origins usually had negative effects for children from bourgeois and land-owning backgrounds. These policies continued to be dominant until 1977 (Yuan Cheng & Dai, 1995).

According to Zhou and his colleagues (Zhou, et al., 1998), there is increasing educational inequality in urban China from the late 1970s. Family social origin, gender, and residential location are significant for the expansion of opportunities for secondary and college education. The economic growth and transformation appears to have favored the most advantaged groups in the population, such as the children of high-rank cadres and professionals, residents of large cities, and men more than women.

The effect of Family background on children's educational achievement varied in China's historical flow. Research indicated that the process of equal educational opportunity distribution has not been so steady and can be separated into two phases of development. From the 1950s and the 1970s, education opportunities became equal rapidly. The influence of family's social, economic and cultural capital on children's educational opportunities declined rapidly. And from the 1980s to the 1990s, the supply of educational opportunities increased along with increasing inequality in educational opportunity. The effects of a family's social and cultural capital have significantly increased (C. Li, 2006, 2012). According to Li (2006), the post-1992 period placed more emphasis on meritocratic selection in job recruitment, and coupled with the expansion of higher education and other social policies (such as one child policy¹²). The shift of emphasis reduced the effect of family backgrounds on children's educational achievement and occupational attainment, allowing for greater degree of status mobility, rather than status inheritance, in an increasingly open class system. On the other hand, in terms of educational attainment, social class of family kept

¹² In the past, the fertility of low income families was higher than advantaged families. Therefore, the limited resources of low income families could not accommodate educational needs from each child compared with high income families. With the effect of One-child policy, the investment of family focused on the only one child of each family. It narrowed down the gap of resources for children's education between different social classes (Y. Li, 2006).

influencing on children's educational attainment. A recent study showed education has function of "one stone two birds". On the one hand, education reproduces the current social production order. On the other hand, it stimulates intergenerational mobility. Furthermore, it has more functions which promote the upward social mobility of children from low income families in China (C. Guo, 2009).

Studies identify various types of inequalities in China's education, such as educational inequalities caused by the widened regional disparities, unequal educational resources distribution, languages, ethnicity, gender and so forth (Hannum, 1998, 1999; Hawkins, 1983; Hawkins, Jacob, & Li, 2008; J. Lin, 2006; Mok, Wong, & Zhang, 2009; Gerard A. Postiglione, 2006; Xiaogang Wu & Zhang, 2010; Zhou, et al., 1998). Simultaneously, recent studies also give serious concerns on education inequality caused by rural-urban migration (K. W. Chan, Liu, & Yang, 1999; R. C. K. Chan, 1995; Han, 2001, 2004, 2005; Kwong, 2006; B. Li, 2004, 2006; Liang, Guo, & Duan, 2008; Jing Liu, 2009, 2012; K. Wu, 2005; W. Wu, 2006; M. Zhang, 2003). Table 2.1 shows the answers to the question of "the unequal issue which is the most needed to be solved?" given by respondents from seven countries and regions in Asia. 68.2% of respondent in China think education is the inequality which is most needed to be solved. It indicates that inequality in education is the issue which is secondly most needed to be solved (Sonoda, 2008, p.49).

Generally, with the education expansion, we cannot deny that more opportunities of education have been distributed to the excluded children. However, I argue that the current inequality issue in China's education sector is not the matter that whether students have the opportunities for the access to school or not. Rather, it is the matter that the distribution of these opportunities is over dependent on family backgrounds or the related government policies, especially at compulsory education level. As Hannum (1998, p.6) argued, the differential distribution across groups is assessed in cross-group differences in educational supply and educational participation during the 9-year cycle of compulsory education. Given

Table 2.1 The Equal Issue which is the most needed to be solved?

	Gender	Age	Education	Employment	Income	Religion	Social Originality	Ethnicity
China	34.6	24.6	68.2	56.7	79.2	7.0	4.0	10.7
Hong Kong	35.2	61.6	45.6	48.7	69.8	4.6	2.7	12.2
Japan	44.2	25.3	43.7	42.6	34.9	6.8	9.3	15.0
South Korea	42.6	25.6	74.5	55.7	55	5.3	15.4	8.1
Singapore	31.7	38.7	62.0	57.8	57.9	15.4	3.3	17.0
Taiwan	33.1	20.8	50.8	52.1	77.4	12.7	5.8	14.1
Vietnam	62.5	30.2	75.1	67.9	48.1	0	15.9	0.0

Source: Sonoda, 2008, p.49

that a stated policy goal of the government is to provide nine years of education to all children, a standard of meritocratic conditions translates to access for all children in the appropriate age groups. Evidence of differential allocation across groups thus indicates a lack of the preconditions of meritocracy.¹³ Studies show that family origins have strong effect of educational attainment and occupational attainment. The increasing educational inequality is caused by the rapid economic growth and transformation which favored the most advantaged groups in the population: the children of high-rank cadres and professionals, residents of large cities, and men more than women (C. Li, 2006, 2012; Whyte & Parish, 1984; Zhou, et al., 1998).

By analyzing nation-wide survey on the changes in China's social structure, Li (C. Li, 2006, 2012) demonstrated that equalization of education opportunities falls in two diametrically opposite stages of development. The first stage from 1950 to 1970 featured a sharp increase in educational opportunities and a rapid advance in the equalization of educational opportunities. The influence of a family's social, economic, and cultural capital on children's educational opportunities declined rapidly. The second stage from the 1980s and the 1990s had an increase either in the provision of education opportunities or the inequality of

¹³ In Hannum's research, the preconditions of meritocracy refer to an equitable distribution of basic education across social groups (Hannum, 1998).

educational opportunities. The effects of a family's social and cultural capital have significantly increased on children's education opportunities. As Table 2.2 shows, the inequality index between father's education and children's educational attainment in upper secondary education increased from 4.935 in the Culture Revolution to 6.686 in the Economic Revolution in the late 1970s. And in the 1990s, the inequality index decreased to 4.097. The same trend can be found in education attainment in higher education. In the Culture Revolution, the inequality index was 3.543. It became more unequal dramatically during the Economic Revolution. From the 1990s, it decreased to 6.010. The similar trend can be found in the

Table 2.2 Effects of Family Background on Children's Educational Attainment

	Junior high school -->Senior high School				Senior high school--> University			
	-1965	1966-1976	1977-1991	1992-	-1965	1966-1976	1977-1991	1992-
Primary Education or Below	0.323	0.360	0.240	0.555	0.063	0.004	0.030	0.0181
Lower Secondary Education	0.360	0.399	0.365	0.595	0.073	0.005	0.054	0.206
Upper Secondary Education	0.456	0.496	0.475	0.686	0.111	0.002	0.040	0.292
Higher Education	0.489	0.530	0.388	0.593	0.118	0.009	0.138	0.396
Fathers' Education Background Inequality Index	4.935	4.935	6.686	4.097	5.051	3.543	8.250	6.010
General Labor Class	0.323	0.360	0.240	0.555	0.063	0.004	0.030	0.181
General Non-labor Class	0.403	0.443	0.309	0.638	0.086	0.006	0.043	0.238
Professional Class	0.439	0.336	0.376	0.719	0.098	0.004	0.057	0.311
Administrative Class	0.439	0.479	0.429	0.711	0.033	0.002	0.019	0.282
Social class of family Inequality Index	4.686	3.949	5.707	5.436	3.557	2.820	3.935	5.238

Source: Li, 2006, p.106

Note: The bigger the index is, the more unequal the educational attainment becomes.

effect of social class of family on children's educational attainment. Moreover, there are effects of institutional factors on the distribution of educational opportunities in China. Until the 1970s, the household registration system (*hukou* system), as institutional factor for restricting people's mobility, did not have significant effect on the inequality of educational opportunity (C. Li, 2006, 2012; Y. Li, 2006; X. Wu & Treiman, 2004).

In contrast, from the 1980s to the 1990s, there is an increasing effects of the household registration system on the individual's acquisition of education with the expansion of disparities between urban and rural areas and the imbalance in the urban-rural distribution of educational resources (ibid.). The work unit system as an instrument for the government to apportion resources in the planned economy period has significant effects on their working personnel's opportunities for adult education. Relatively, such work units which are publicly owned, government organized, and state-owned public institutions provide more adult education opportunities to their staffs (C. Li, 2006, 2012).

The literature review above shows the trends of effects of family background on education attainment in Chinese society that was influenced by various social changes in China. To be more specific, the following sections provide details of the perspectives that influenced the change mentioned above. They include the change of educational ideology of China's leadership, the influence of economic reform on education development, and the development of education without balance.

2.5.4 The Change of Educational Ideology

The role of education in Chinese society changed dramatically with the rapid social change. And the change is deeply influenced by the educational ideologies of the leaderships in China. With the change of leadership, the role of education in China shifted from a tool for class struggle to means for economic development. And recently, it became an approach for fulfill the construction of harmonious society. In this part, I briefly review Mao's ideology and Deng's ideology in education and their effects on Chinese society respectively. Then, I

introduce the current education ideology under the construction of harmonious society.

2.5.4.1 Mao's Ideology in Education

As the leader of the radicals, Mao believed that the achievement of political consciousness, ideological devotion to communism, and human liberation as the primary goals for China's development. Education has a key role to play in political and ideological development of China. As a Marxists, Mao's ideology in education was deeply influenced by Marx and Engels. He strongly supported the idea to combine work and instruction in the society. Mao's writings give focus on the role of education in the building of socialism. Like Lenin, he also wanted schooling free from religions control, factory runs schools, and priority for vocational and science work at senior level (C.Tsang, 2000; Cleverley, 1985, pp.85-87; Lofstedt, 1980, pp.39-47). Mao's famous statement on education called as "*May Seventh Statement*" indicates that,

“While the students’ main task is to study, they should also learn other things, that is to say, they should not only learn knowledge from books, they should also learn industrial production, agricultural production, and military affairs. They should also criticize and repudiate the bourgeoisie. The length of schooling should be shortened, education should be revolutionalized, and the domination of our schools and colleges by bourgeois intellectuals should not be tolerated any longer.” (Mao, 1969, pp.56-57).

The work-study program was established in this historical context to have students participate in productive labor in school farmland and factories. In order to protect the core status of working class and peasants in China to achieve equality in education, Mao also criticized education system which excluded peasants and people from working class. There were needs to change the exam based enrollment and the cramming method of teaching.¹⁴ With the start of the Cultural Revolution in 1966, Mao's ideology in education was fully presented in the series of movements regarding education. The universal primary schooling and even

¹⁴ Enrollment by examination had the effect of excluding children from worker, peasant and revolutionary ranks. The exam system was argued that it had been justified and supported by leading cadres in the ministry, those ‘handfuls of renegades, secret agents and capitalist roaders scraped together by Liu Shaoqi (Cleverley, 1985, p.168).

secondary schooling were given great efforts to expand for peasant and worker class. By shortening schooling years, practical learning was emphasized. The hierarchical key school system was abolished. Schools for elite education and for cadres' children were also abolished. Even the unified entrance examinations at the junior high and senior high levels were abolished. Moreover, educated youth in urban areas were sent to be reeducated by the poor and lower-middle peasants (Lofstedt, 1980; Pepper, 1980).

2.5.4.2 Deng's Ideology in Education

In contrast to Mao's ideology in education and its influence on China's development, Deng strongly hold the standpoint that national development is mainly economic and technical, and less political and ideological. In his speech at the 1978 National Conference on Education, Deng showed his different point of view towards ideology in education during the Cultural Revolution. He emphasized the main task of students is to study and to learn book knowledge, but not devoting big proportion of schooling time in political education. Education has the key role in improving productivity of human being and supporting the development of science and technology. Comparing with the emphasis on education equality by Mao, Deng gave more focus on quality education and efficiency (Encyclopedia of China Publishing House, 1984).¹⁵ His famous statement "Education should be oriented to

¹⁵ Historical policy review of policies shows that the concept of quality education is not totally new in China's education development. The similar concept has already existed in Mao's era. In 1957, Mao Zedong pointed out that: "Our education doctrine should let students to develop through moral education, intellectual education and physical education. They should become labors with socialist consciousness and knowledge" (Mao, 1969). In the following years, Mao repeatedly expressed his opinion to cut off in half to let students take part in productive labor and necessary social activities instead of studying all days. Besides advocating that the exam system should be reformed, Mao also pointed out that student should do something else while studying. They should study not only knowledge but also learn from workers, farmers and soldiers. Also they should criticize Capitalism. The school hours should be cut off (Mao, 1969). Mao's statements had already showed his focus on all round development of individual student, balance between study and productive labor and reform of examinations. In fact, these opinions on education of Mao were put into action in the Cultural Revolution. The exam system was terminated. And the young people in urban areas were sent to rural areas to work and study from farmers. Similar to Mao's education policy, in National Education Conference in 1978, Deng Xiaoping reemphasized the all round development of individuals. He pointed out that the school admission should also give focus on this perspective. Nevertheless, in terms of the attitude towards exam, Deng has different opinion from Mao. In the same

modernization, the world and the future (*jiaoyu yao mianxiang xiandaihua, mianxiang shijie, mianxiang weilai* 教育要面向现代化，面向世界，面向未来)” showed his attitude towards the important role of education in modernization. In order to achieve education with high quality and efficient education for economic development in China, Deng stressed the strict exam-based school admission and stratified school system would prepare a diversified workforce for China’s development. Furthermore, the support for selection of students through the key school system presents Deng’s ideology for the elites in education (C.Tsang, 2000; Hannum, 1999; Lewin & Hui, 1989; Rosen, 1985; Sautman, 1991). As Rosen (1985) pointed out, with the shift of leadership from Mao to Deng after the Cultural Revolution, the Chinese education system was restructured into “bifurcated educational system” on the eve of Deng’s economic revolution. The system includes a small pro-“elite” sector which trains and accumulates human resources for modernization and a large pro-“mass” sector which provides basic educational skills and training for the majority.

Furthermore, the education reform in 1985 shows the purpose of the education reform is to improve quality of people and to cultivate more human resources and human resources with good quality. And the government document indicates the basic standard for evaluating school’s achievement. That is not how much profits the school generates, but the quantity and quality of human resources the school cultivates (Chinese Communist Party Central Committee, 1985). According to Liu (2007), “Efficiency first, give attention to equity (*xiaolv youxian, jiangou gongping* 效率优先，兼顾公平)” can be considered as Deng’s principle of education reform in the 1980s and the 1990s. On the one hand, the reform aims at pursuing educational efficiency. They hope to educate as many human resources as possible within

conference, Deng explained that, “Exam is an important method to check study and teaching effect. It just looks like the quality control which is a necessary system for keeping productive level in the factory. Of course, we cannot over depend on exam as taking it as the only one approach to check study. Rather, we need to do serious research and experiment to improve contents, forms of exam to improve it. Regarding those who did not well in the exam, we should encourage and help them instead of giving them unnecessary mental pressure” (Encyclopedia of China Publishing House, 1984).

short period for the country's construction. On the other hand, the reform gives concern on equity of schooling. They emphasize the equal opportunities for individuals. With the introduction of "Efficiency first, give attention to equity" to the economic reform from the 1980s, this concept also became the core ideology for educational reform in China.¹⁶ Schools, areas and stages of education selected by the government got priorities for development. In other words, in order to generate economic profits for the nation, the government treated members in the society differently. Some members fulfilled their educational interests while others could not.

Simultaneously, since education was widely recognized as a ladder for upward social mobility in Chinese society especially after the start of economic development in the late 1970s, the formula "university degree=good jobs=better income=social prestige" appears to provide common understanding for why people need to invest in education. As Bai (2010, p.120) concluded, monetary reward as the main aspiration for education fuels the Chinese enthusiasm for education, and so every year millions of students cram for the university entrance examinations. The idea of education for monetary reward can be found in a survey on people's perception in terms of role of education in Asian societies conducted by a group of Japanese scholars in 2006. It shows that the income generation was the most (68.7%) selected role of education in Chinese society (Sonoda, 2008, p.58).¹⁷ In recent years, the close link between education degree and individual socioeconomic status pushed most schools at primary and secondary education level to teach students for exams and tests for helping students to advance to upper level education. The "diploma disease" in Chinese education

¹⁶ Originally, "Efficiency first, give attention to equity" is economic principle in terms of income and distribution. However, this slogan was directly simplified and used as reform criteria in various fields. In fact, such phenomenon is very representative in China's society. The focus on economic reform made the discourse on economy as a hegemonic power. Due to the left behind reform in education and other fields, these fields had to borrow many concepts and ideologies from economic reform. Consequently, people started to use economic concept and understanding to deal with issues in education (D. Yang, 2006, p. 103).

¹⁷ In this survey, the choices for respondents also include 1.enriching humanity; 2.getting preferred jobs; 3.living overseas; 4. Getting higher social status; 5. Contributing to national development; 6. For the society; 7. Becoming internationally active (Sonoda, 2008. p.58)

became serious and made education as means for self-fulfillment. Consequently, the pressures on schools, parents and students for examination were intensified at all education level, even expanding to the preschool education level. On the other hand, there is a rise of “inflation of credential” presented by the increasing number of unemployed graduates in recent years (ibid).

2.5.4.3 Education and Construction of Harmonious Society

From the 1980s, the unprecedented socioeconomic development generated increasing need for qualified labors and skillful technicians. As continue, quality education was reemphasized in the 1990s, especially after the establishment of socialist market economic system in 1993. It is said that the notion “quality education (*sushi jiaoyu* 素质教育)” was firstly mentioned in government documents in 1994 (Dello-Iacovo, 2009).¹⁸ In *Opinions on Further Strengthening and Promoting Moral Education in Schools*, the quality education was required to respond to the new demand from construction of socialist market economic system (Chinese Communist Party Central Committee, 1994). Education of constitution, cultivation of pioneering spirit, independent spirit, moral education, and the implementation of music, arts and PE education in compulsory education were given emphasis. In 1998, *the Action Plan for Invigorating Education in the 21st Century* introduced the implementation of the “*Cross Century Quality Education Project*” which promoted the quality education (Ministry of Education, 1998a). As a further step, *the 2003-2007 Action Plan for Invigorating Education* raised a similar project titled as “*Project for Quality-Oriented Education in the New Century*”. It aims to strengthen and improve moral education in schools, intensify reform of the curriculum and assessment system, promote reform and development of secondary education, pre-school education and special education, strengthen and improve physical and art education in schools and strengthen standardization of language and characters (Ministry of Education, 2004). In *the Outline of Eleventh Five Year Plan for National Education*

¹⁸ This information also took reference from <http://www.edu.cn/20051018/3156152.shtml>, accessed on August 19, 2011.

Development released in 2007, implementation of quality education was given the priority in education sector (State Council, 2007). As the similar policies mentioned above, moral education, further education and teaching reform and the collaboration among schools, families and society were emphasized. Dello-lacovo (2009) explained the emergence of quality education in China was the reflection of the criticism on the rigorous exam oriented education. Wu and Shen (2006) also pointed out that quality education was a newly developed education ideals in the era of exam oriented education. In other words, quality education is used to tackle problems caused by the exam oriented education, such as one sidedly pursuing enrollment rate and increasing study workload of students.

Since China is trying to establish a socialist market economic system which has many challenges for the social ideology in a socialist country. Rapid economic development with the under-developed social welfare system caused social inequality in China. The Gini coefficient which presents the inequality of a society increased from 0.29 in 1981 to 0.44 in 2005 (J. Chen, Hou, & Jin, 2008, p.16). A larger Gini coefficient implies greater income inequality. With release of the *Decisions on Construction of Harmonious Society* by the Sixth Plenary Session of 16th National Congress of the CPC in 2006, China's government paid more attention to the emerging social inequality (National Congress of Communist Party of China, 2006).¹⁹ Under such circumstance, China's government made a decision to construct harmonious society. Education development and education equality were given priority by the government. The balanced allocation of education resources in different regions has been

¹⁹ According to the policy above, the government pointed out that Chinese society as a whole was in harmony. However, there were many problems which were conflicting with the harmony in the society. Mainly, the conflicts include: imbalanced socioeconomic development between urban and rural areas, regions with the increasing pressure of demography and environment. The serious problems also include employment, social security, income redistribution, education, medical care, housing, security in production, social safety and so forth. Related system and mechanism were not satisfactory, democratic legal system has not been accomplished. The social trust and social morality are losing among some members in the society. Some leaders' quality and capability are not suitable for the new trend in China's development. The corruption was relative serious in some fields. And there were some anti-government activities which are threats to national security and social stability (National Congress of Communist Party of China, 2006).

emphasized to gradually narrow down gaps between rural and urban areas and between regions. The government's investment in education was set up to achieve 4 % of GDP gradually (Yongxin Zhu, 2011). The donation to education from society was continuously encouraged. The charge of unauthorized school fees was firmly opposed. And reduction course workload of students was also given reemphasis. In current China, the imbalanced education development (*jiaoyu junheng fazhan* 教育均衡发展) has been considered as one of the challenges for the construction of harmonious society. In other words, the construction of the balanced education is seen as a part of the construction of harmonious society.

2.5.5 Education in Economic Reform

Obviously, the Cultural Revolution ended with a result of “a decade in chaos”. During this period, with emphasis on ideological reform and class struggle, China's economy and social development were badly damaged and left behind. The 1978 Third Plenum can be considered as a milestone in China's history. It launched an unprecedented economic reform to end the economic stagnation after the Cultural Revolution. It triggered a continuous economic growth which has already taken this country to become the secondary largest economy in the world (Goldman, 2006). Starting from the decollectivization of land ownership in rural areas, a package of economic reforms swept through the whole country to change the highly centralized economy to the market economy. As Mok (2005) pointed out, the economic reform has launched two major social and structural changes, including institutional transition and structural transformation in China. In terms of institutional transition, a highly centralized economic and social planning system has been changed to the market economy. And an agricultural, rural and closed society has been transformed into an industrial, market driven and open society. More importantly, the central government realized the role of government as a facilitator in socioeconomic development. They have taken historical steps to decentralize and marketize social policy and social welfare. According to *Decision on problems of establishment of Socialist Market Economic System* promulgated in

1993, with the economic reform, relevant education system reform was given emphasis. By emphasizing education investment, improvement of education quality and efficiency, government monopoly education system was required to change to new system with collaboration between government and social forces. In terms of compulsory education, it regulated that compulsory education should be mainly invested by government together with encouragement of schooling operated by social fund (Central Committee of the Chinese Communist Party, 1993). As a result, the actual financing, delivery and provision of social welfare have been distributed to the market and other non-state sectors with an establishment of decentralization of public financing system. Emphasizing the better use of the limited public education financial resource, reform on education financing at basic education level started with the decentralization of financial responsibility from central government to local governments. Simultaneously, education resources from both state and non-state sectors became the main revenue of education financing.

2.5.5.1 Decentralization of Education Financing

Even though Chinese government showed its emphasis on education development and education investment, due to the limited financial resources, as Table 2.3 shows, the public education expenditure as a percentage of GDP is constantly lower than 4% in the past decades (W. Li, Park, & Wang, 2007 ; Tsang & Ding, 2005; Tsui, 1997).²⁰ Therefore, in order to generate more resources for education, the structure of education financing has undergone a fundamental change from a centralized system to a decentralized system with much more diversified revenue (Hawkins, 2000). According to Tsang (1996, 2000), financial decentralization is based on the principle of “local responsibility and administration by levels”. A common arrangement is that provincial, county, township, and village governments are responsible for higher education, upper-secondary education, lower-secondary education, and

²⁰ In 1993, China’s government declared that the public expenditure on education should reach 4% of GDP by 2000 (Bray & Borevskaya, 2001; Mok, et al., 2009).

primary education respectively. The central government is in charge of some institutions at tertiary level. As to basic education, although this responsibility has been distributed to governments at county or district level, due to the disparity of economic development between different areas, the central government also takes responsibility to subsidize basic

Table 2.3 Public Education Expenditure as a Percentage of GDP (1992-2008)

Year	Government Appropriation for Education (10,000 yuan)	Gross Domestic Production(100 million yuan)	Public education expenditure as a Percentage of GDP (%)
1992	7287506	26923.5	2.71
1993	8677618	35333.9	2.46
1994	11747396	48197.9	2.44
1995	14115233	60793.7	2.32
1996	16717046	71176.6	2.35
1997	18625416	78973.0	2.36
1998	20324526	84402.3	2.41
1999	22871756	89677.1	2.55
2000	25626056	99214.6	2.58
2001	30570100	109655.2	2.79
2002	34914048	120332.7	2.90
2003	38506237	135822.8	2.84
2004	44658575	159878.3	2.79
2005	51610759	184937.4	2.79
2006	63483648	216314.4	2.93
2007	82802142	265810.3	3.12
2008	104496296	314045.4	3.33

Source: National Bureau of Statistics of China (2010), author edited. Retrieved from <http://www.stats.gov.cn/tjsj/ndsj/2010/indexch.htm>, accessed on March 28, 2012.

education in the less developed regions (L. Wang, 2009). Furthermore, although central government recommends local governments to invest more in basic education, education financing still suffers from inadequate investment from government²¹ and the widening

²¹ There are difficulties in finding funds to repair dangerously dilapidated school buildings and to buy much needed furniture and other equipment. Officially released statistics for 1988 reveal a need to build 75 million square meters of new buildings and to repair 40 million square meters. This is equal to a cost of approximately 25 billion yuan. In central China there are counties and villages where up to 80% of all elementary schools have had to be closed because of the dangerous stage of the buildings. In terms of the material/technical supply, only 10% of the 900,000 elementary and secondary schools in the country have

financial disparities at different levels of education and different areas (Bray & Borevskaya, 2001; Hannum, 1999; Mok, 2005; Rosen, 1985; Tsang, 1996, 2000; Chengzhi Wang & Bergquist, 2003; You, 2007).

2.5.5.2 Diversification of Education Finance and Schools

In order to collect enough fund for education development, two categories of diversification of education financing can be identified, including revenue generated by local government and fund collected from social contribution (Tsang, 1996, 2003). According to Tsang (1996), *jiaoyufujiafei* (教育附加费 education surcharges and levies) are collected by a town/township government and are used primarily for supporting basic education in that area. They are used on non-personnel items, the repair or replacement of schools facilities. In rural areas, these surcharges and levies are collected from household and communities in order to match the small amount of fund granted by government. With the encouragement for all types of social forces and individuals to provide donations to education, increasing number of non state education organizations were established.

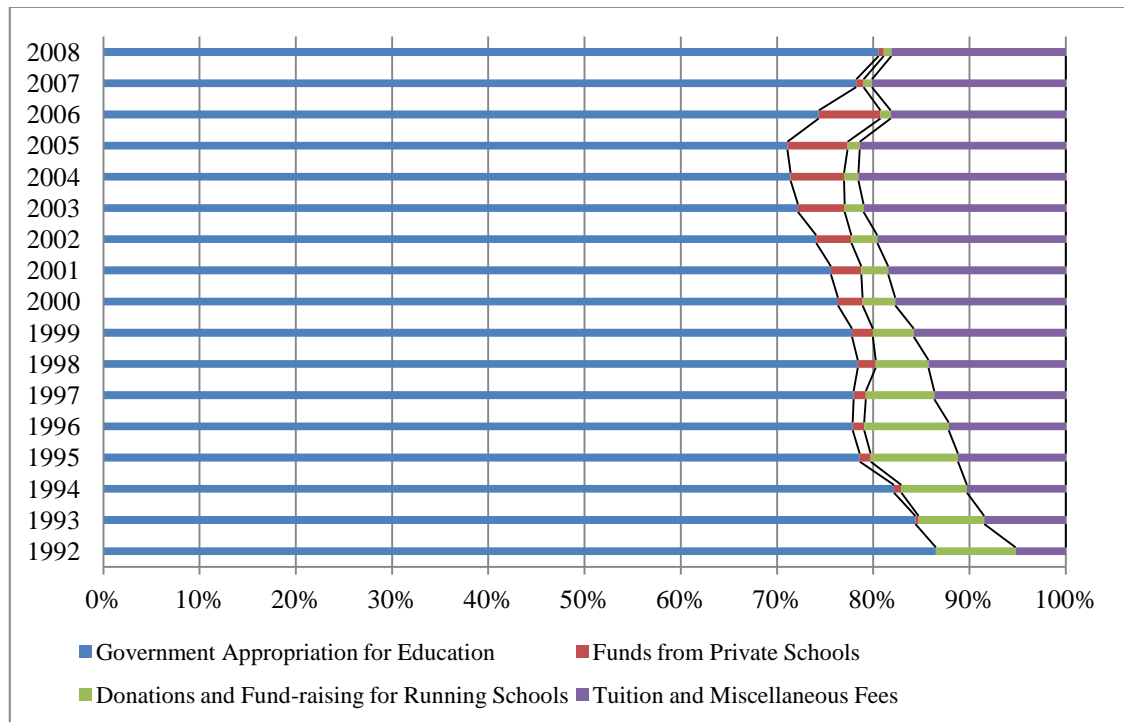
As supplement for public education and limited education financing, from the early 1980s, private schools reemerged in China. More importantly, since these private schools can charge tuition fee, the collected money could become an important supplement for the inadequate education budget. However, due to the socialist system, normally, these schools were titled as “schools run by social forces (*shehui lilian banxue* 社会力量办学)” or “people run schools (*minban* schools) (*minban xuexiao* 民办学校)” rather than private schools. Within these schools, the so called converted schools (*zhuanzhi xuexiao* 转制学校) co-founded with public schools became popular since they provided high quality education. Wu (2008) explained a converted school is one that used to be a public school run at government expense but has now been converted to a quasi-private/quasi-public institution that charges fees for its

the necessary equipment for instruction in science. And there is a shortage of some 13 million desks and 26 million chairs (Henze, 1992, p.131).

services. There are three types of converted schools: formerly key schools; formerly poor performing public schools, and newly established public schools. Because of the favorable government policy which encourages this type of schools mushroomed from the middle 1990s, in 2005, there were 1789 converted schools in China, which was about 2.5% of the total number of primary and junior high schools of the country. Comparatively, percentage of converted schools in urban China is higher than the number in rural areas (Xiaoxin Wu, 2008). According to Yang (2006), in 1999, Tianjin has 117 converted schools which is the largest number of public converted schools in China. In Beijing, there were 35 converted schools, shares 51 % of the total *minban* schools. By the end of 2001, Shanghai has 76 converted schools, which was one third of the total number of *minban* schools.

Besides these approaches for education financing collection, school generated funds was also encouraged by governments (Tsang, 1996). According to Bray and Borevskaya (2001), because many public schools were unable to make adequate funds from governments, they had to generate their own revenue to cover the education, including operation of their own enterprises, and demand for contribution from parents. It is common for public schools to rent their buildings, operate their own farms, and made items for sale. Moreover, although tuition fees are not allowed to be charged, different types of fees related to school expenditures were paid by parents. Figure 2.1 shows the diversification of education fund from 1992 to 2008. With the promotion of education donation and commercialization of education by government, from 1992, governmental investment in education gradually decreased. In contrast, there is an increasing growth of education fund from private sector. With the promulgation of the New Compulsory Education Law in 2006 which showed the government's ambitious to achieve Free Compulsory Education in China, there is gradual growth of governmental investment in education (National People's Congress, 2006).

Figure 2.1 Diversification of Educational Fund (1992-2008)

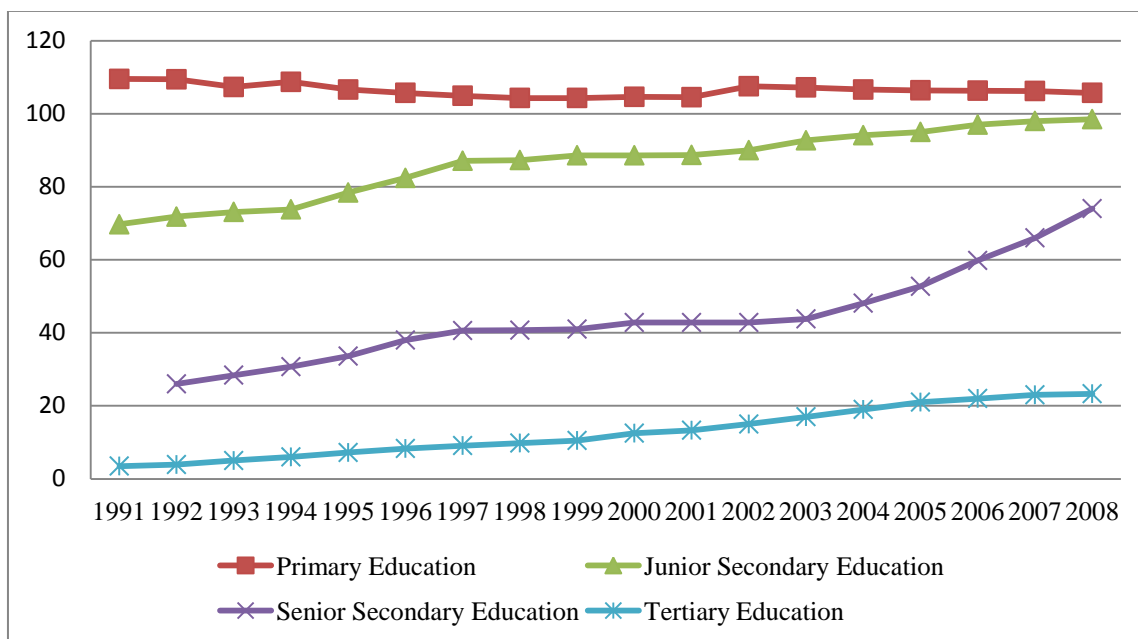


Source: China Education Year Book 1992-2009, author edited.

2.5.6 Rapid Education Development and Increasing Disparities

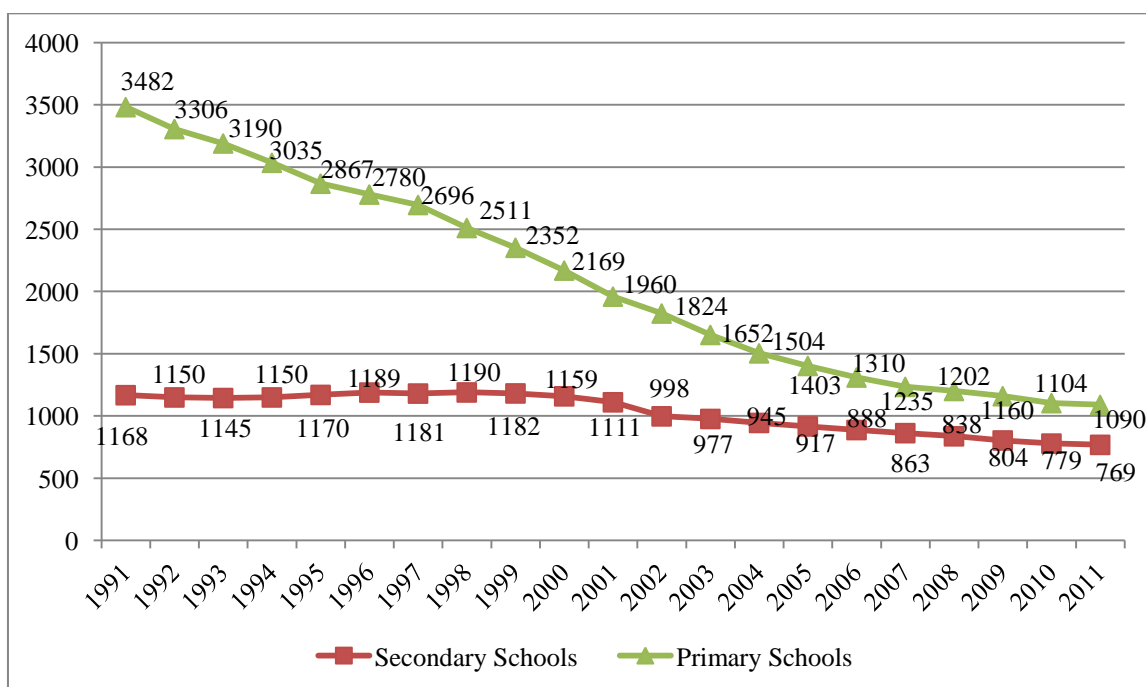
With the start of decentralization and diversification of education finance in China after the Cultural Revolution, as Figure 2.2 shows, there is a gradual achievement of net enrollment ratio in education sector at national level. Table 2.4 indicates the change of the number of students enrollment by level and type of school from 1978 to 2010. With the enlargement of enrollment in higher education, the enrollment in high education rapidly increased. The similar trend can be seen in senior secondary education and junior secondary education. However, due to the depopulation of the school aged children for primary education which is caused by the One Child Policy, there is a shrink of enrollment in primary education particularly after the late 1990s. Figure 2.3 indicates the decrease of numbers of public schools at compulsory education level in Beijing which can be considered the One Child Policy as one of the reasons. Figure 2.4 shows the similar trend of education enrollment in Beijing. There is a gradual growth of enrollment in higher education. The student enrollment

Figure 2.2 Net Enrollment Rate of Education at all Levels (1991-2008) (%)



Source: China Education Year Book 1992-2009, author edited.

Figure 2.3 Numbers of Public Schools by Level of Education in Beijing

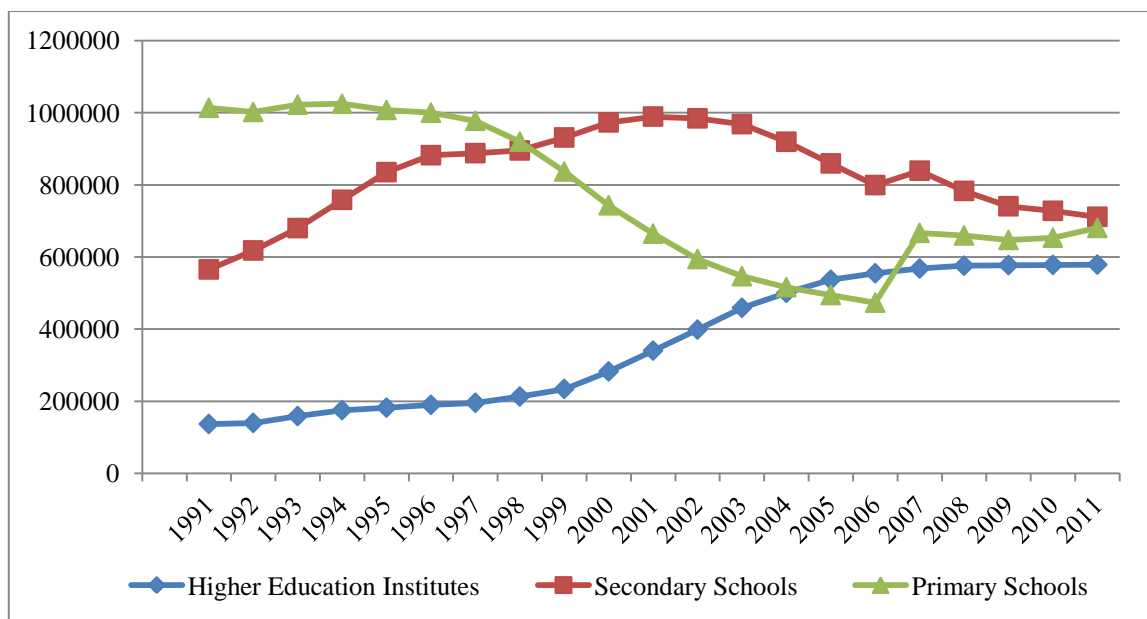


Source: Beijing Municipal Bureau of Statistics. Retrieved from www.bjstats.gov.cn/nj/main/2012-tjnj/index.htm, accessed on June 2, 2012.

in primary education decreased gradually from the 1990s to 2006. Then, it rose again from 2006. It can be considered as the effect of the Millennium baby boom in 2000.

Despite the rapid education expansion in China enlarged the scale of China's education sector and provided people more access to education, studies also identify various types of disparities and inequalities in China's education (Hannum, 1998, 1999; Hawkins, 1983; Hawkins, et al., 2008; J. Lin, 2006; Mok, et al., 2009; Gerard A. Postiglione, 2006; Xiaogang Wu & Zhang, 2010; Zhou, et al., 1998).

Figure 2.4 Numbers of Student Enrollment by Level of Education in Beijing



Source: Beijing Municipal Bureau of Statistics, Retrieved from www.bjstats.gov.cn/nj/main/2012-tjnj/index.htm, accessed on May 10, 2011.

2.5.6.1 Disparity between Regions

With the limited educational investment and the implementation of the fiscal decentralization in education sector, education development becomes highly dependent on capability of fund generating at local levels. It is not surprising to see the greater disparities among local governments (W. Li, et al., 2007). Due to the gap of capacity of financial

Table 2.4 Number of Students Enrollment by Level and Type of School

(10 000 persons)

Year	Higher Education Insitutes	Senior Secondary Schools	Junior Secondary Schools	Vocational Secondary Schools	Primary Schools
1978	85.6	1553.1	4995.2		14624.0
1980	114.4	969.8	4538.3	45.4	14627.0
1985	170.3	741.1	3964.8	229.5	13370.2
1986	188.0	773.4	4116.6	256.0	13182.5
1987	195.9	773.7	4174.4	267.6	12835.9
1988	206.6	746.0	4015.5	279.4	12535.8
1989	208.2	716.1	3837.9	282.3	12373.1
1990	206.3	717.3	3868.7	295.0	12241.4
1991	204.4	722.9	3960.6	315.6	12164.2
1992	218.4	704.9	4065.9	342.8	12201.3
1993	253.6	656.9	4082.2	362.6	12421.2
1994	279.9	664.9	4316.7	405.6	12822.6
1995	290.6	713.2	4657.8	448.3	13195.2
1996	302.1	769.3	4970.4	473.3	13615.0
1997	317.4	850.1	5167.8	511.9	13995.4
1998	340.9	938.0	5363.0	541.6	13953.8
1999	413.4	1049.7	5721.6	533.9	13548.0
2000	556.1	1201.3	6167.6	503.2	13013.3
2001	719.1	1405.0	6431.1	466.4	12543.5
2002	903.4	1683.8	6604.1	511.5	12156.7
2003	1108.6	1964.8	6618.4	528.2	11689.7
2004	1333.5	2220.4	6475.0	569.4	11246.2
2005	1561.8	2409.1	6171.8	625.6	10864.1
2006	1738.8	2514.5	5937.4	676.2	10711.5
2007	1884.9	2522.4	5720.9	740.5	10564.0
2008	2021.0	2476.3	5574.2	761.1	10331.5
2009	2144.7	2434.3	5433.6	785.7	10071.5
2010	2231.8	2427.3	5275.9	729.8	9940.7

Source: National Bureau of Statistics of China, Retrieved from
<http://www.stats.gov.cn/english/statisticaldata/yearlydata/>, accessed on
April 19, 2011.

resource generation between different regions, richer regions generally have more alternative financing options than poorer regions. As a result, the diversification of financial resources in education sector may exacerbate greater regional disparities in terms of education (Bray & Borevskaya, 2001; Hannum, 1999; Kusuyama, 2010; W. Li, et al., 2007 ; Mok, et al., 2009; Tsang, 2002). As shown in Table 2.5, comparatively speaking, the coastal regions and eastern part of China have more public education expenditure in 2008. According to Mok and his associates (2009), the marketization and privatization of education has undoubtedly intensified educational inequalities and widened regional disparities between economically developed areas and the less developed regions. As analyzed in the same study, one of reasons for the rural-urban and regional inequalities is due to the highly uneven government expenditure on education. There is more education resources allocated in the coastal regions compared with the poor regions. Moreover, the result of the research also shows that the type of higher education and the promotion to the level of education depends on income level of individual family.

Table 2.5 Disparity of Public Education Expenditure in Regions in 2008

Region	Public education expenditure (10,000 yuan)
East China	29235652
Central South China	22568787
North China	14251771
Southwest China	12310231
Northeast China	8436071
Northwest China	7877715

Source: China Education Year Book 2009

2.5.6.2 Disparity between Schools: The Re-emergence of the Key School System

(zhongdianxuexiao zhidu 重点学校制度)

The disparity of distribution of educational resources is not limited to the different regions. Even in the same region, there is serious gap among different schools, especially among the ones in public sector. As Qin (2008) demonstrated, while the interregional disparity and the disparity between rural areas and urban areas objectively occur, the disparity among schools within a city, or a school catchment area has been created deliberately. One of the main reasons for this disparity is the re-emergence of the key school system. There is obvious disparity between key schools and ordinary schools. The initial reason for establishing key schools was to concentrate limited resources on building a few limited high quality schools, so as to train human resources effectively for socialist construction. Compared with ordinary schools, key schools have better equipment, more highly qualified teachers, more funding, and more able pupils selected by examination. The direct result of the key school system is the disparity between key schools and ordinary schools. Disparities among schools occur not only between key schools and ordinary schools, but also among ordinary schools and among key schools. Schools are divided into different divisions by education administration and by communities, intentionally or unintentionally. Key schools vary at provincial (Metropolitan area, or autonomous region) level, or city level, or district level, or county level; ordinary schools can also be divided into the adequate, or the weak, or the very weak. Disparities are seen in the promotion rate, teacher quality, student resources, financial resources, reputation, school buildings, teaching facilities, libraries, staff welfare and bonuses, etc. (Qin, 2008, p.335). According to Wu (2008), a dual track system, including regular schools and key schools, has been in existence in China for more than half a century.

The history of the key school system should be tracked back to the early 1950s. In 1953, Mao Zedong raised the discussion about the establishment of Key Junior High Schools in the meeting of CPC Central Political Bureau. Based on the decision made in this meeting,

in May 26, 1953, Ministry of Education announced the *Notification of promoting the establishment of Senior High schools and Complete High Schools to improve education quality*. The notification asked local education administrations to select one or two from junior high schools as the key schools at secondary education level. Experiences got from these schools should be used to promote other schools. In the 2nd National Education Conference held in 1953, 194 junior high schools within the country were selected as the key high schools, which was 4.4% of the total number of high schools. This number increased to 487 in 1963 (Encyclopedia of China Publishing House, 1984). In terms of key primary schools, by the notification on construction of key primary and secondary schools announced by Ministry of Education in 1962, the selected key primary schools were expected to perform as a good example for other schools in order to improve the overall education quality. By 1981, except Shanghai, there were 5271 key primary schools in China (Encyclopedia of China Publishing House, 1984). Less than 5% of public schools are key schools (J. Lin, 2006, p.186). According to Henze (1992, p.116), in 1988, about 2.6% of all entrants in lower secondary schools attended key schools; this was also the case for 2.8% of the total enrollment and 3.4% of the graduates.

Although it was abolished during the Cultural Revolution,²² the key school system was reintroduced in the era of post Cultural Revolution (Lewin & Hui, 1989; Rosen, 1983). Compared with regular schools, key schools have more highly qualified teachers, better equipments and much greater funding, as well as the number of better-performing students

²² During the Cultural Revolution, the key schools were called “little treasure house pagoda schools” by the red guards. The key schools were declared to cultivate the sons and grandsons of dragons: “They put intellectual cultivation in the first place and results of examinations in command. They fanatically pursue a high rate of promotion into higher schools’. Students of the 1 August Boarding School for the children of leading cadres appealed to Red Guard units to release them from the prison which was turning them into ‘revisionist saplings’. Once their school had served the revolutionary cause by housing the children of cadres working in the white areas; now it was a privileged institution, a Shangri-la for the children of powerful party personnel. School authorities had followed the road of British and Soviet aristocratic boarding establishments and never admitted the children of workers or peasants (Cleverley, 1985, p169).

with better education transition (J. Lin, 2006; Pepper, 1990; Tsang, 2001 ; Xiaoxin Wu, 2009; You, 2007). At the same time, due to the constant governmental investment in both infrastructure and human resources, it has been almost impossible for the regular schools to follow the key schools as model. In the National Educational Work Conference in April, 1978, Deng Xiaoping gave an important speech on the quality, order and discipline, education and economic development, and teacher status. He pointed out that the construction of key lower secondary schools is one of the crucial strategies for cultivating people for modernization.” (Encyclopedia of China Publishing House, 1984, p.169).

Regarding the key school system, many scholars showed their concerns. For example, Lewin and Hui (1989) argued that the key schools are not equitable since they confer advantages on the already educationally advantaged. They are justified by the need to concentrate scarce resources. Their current status reflects the balance of ideological debate on the relative importance of nurturing the next generation of intellectuals and experts at the expense of marginal improvements in school quality for the majority. As You (2007) argued, key schools aim to distinguish between top students and ordinary students on the basis of scores so that those who manage to compete for admission to top schools at the next levels can get access to better education and become elites of the country. Hawkins (1983, pp.35-38) explained the key school system as a elitist concept which is justified in terms of the need to identify and train China’s most talented youth in order to speed the process of modernization, thus eventually benefiting the entire society. Furthermore, Fei Xiaotong, a prominent educator in the Chinese People’s Political Consultative Conference, with his colleagues gave concerns on the negative side effects associated with the key primary and secondary schools. They argued that the key schools could never train enough personnel to meet the needs of a modernized nation; on the other hand, the concentration of resources in these schools demoralized the majority of students attending the ordinary schools, who found themselves generally ignored. This contributed to relatively high (for China) dropout rates and a low

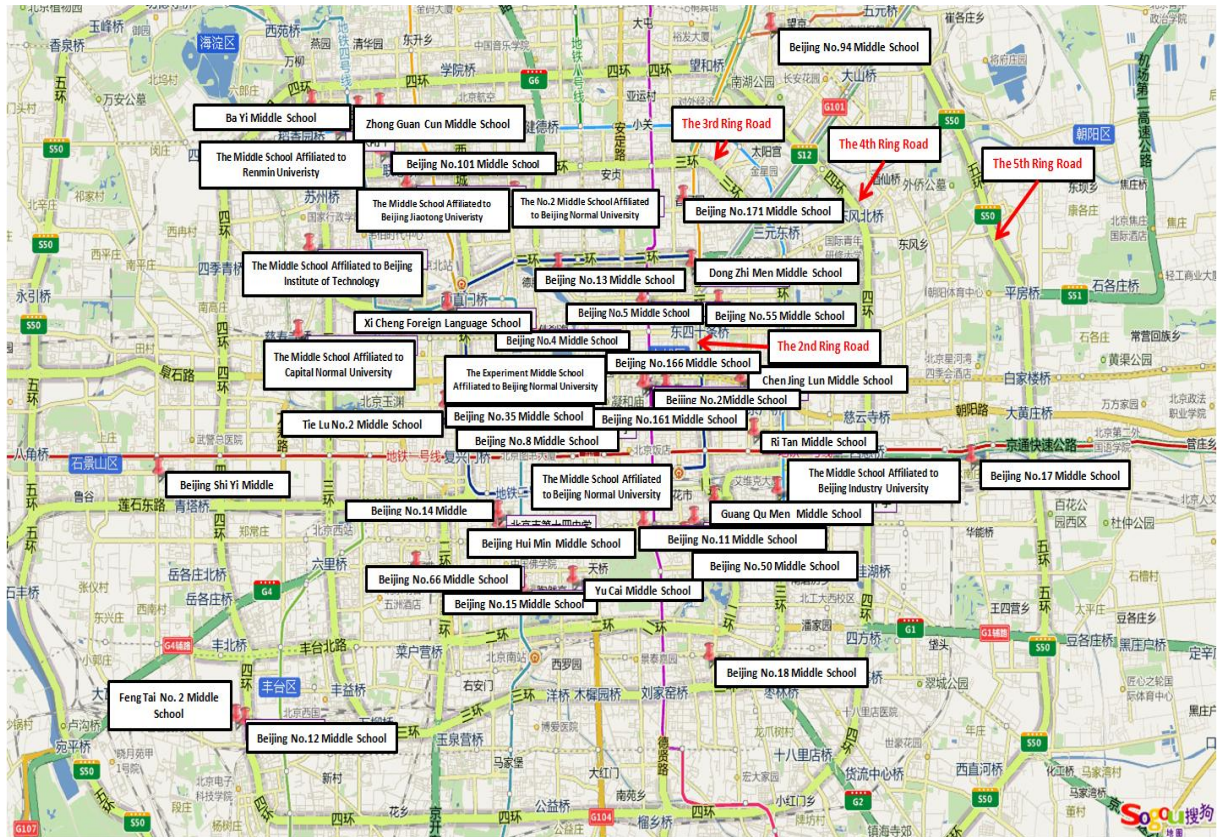
educational standard for those who graduate. They argued that the key school system contributed to the “new illiteracy.” (Rosen, 1983, p.329). Pepper’s studies on key school after the Cultural Revolution showed that key school system caused student segregation and polarization of public schools (Pepper, 1990, 1996).

With the increasing criticism on the key school system which led to a polarization between schools and students, the system was officially abolished in 1997 (State Education Commission, 1997c). However, with development of decades, those former key schools have already got strong attraction and deep influence on good performing students and parents who have education aspiration (J. Lin, 2006; Nanbu, 2012). In urban China, most of the oversubscribed schools are the former key schools. In 1995, government made decision to select and construct 1000 “Demonstration senior high schools (*shifanxinggaozhong* 示范性高中)” (It will be abbreviated as “demonstration schools” from now on.) in the late 1990s. These schools comprised only about 4% of China’s public schools (J. Lin, 2006, p.190). It can be considered as the continuation of the key school policy (Xiaoxin Wu, 2008; D. Yang, 2006; You, 2007). Since the criteria for evaluating the demonstration schools are quite high, the most qualified schools would not surprisingly be those former key schools.²³ On the other hand, in order to accommodate the increasing demand for the good quality schools from parents, Ministry of Education encouraged those former key schools, especially those at compulsory education level to change into “converted schools”²⁴ by using their reputation (Xiaoxin Wu, 2008). Because of the limited education funding, the main purpose of

²³ For example, in 2001, Beijing planned to establish 60 demonstration senior high schools. From 2002 to 2010, 74 senior high schools have been evaluated as the demonstration senior high schools. Interestingly, the former key schools awarded in 1980s by Beijing Municipal Government became the demonstration senior high schools.

²⁴ According to Wu (2008), “converted school” refers to school-operating-system reformed piloting school. A converted school is one that used to be a public school run at government expense but has now been converted to a quasi-private/quasi-public institution that charges fees for its services. Tsang (2003) introduced that in a survey conducted in Beijing, people-run government-assisted schools consists of the following types: schools affiliated with existing key government schools, people-run schools converted from dysfunctional government schools, schools formerly run by enterprises, new pilot schools in small residential districts, and people-run schools converted from traditional private schools.

Figure 2.5 Demonstration Schools within the 5th Ring Road of Beijing, 2011



Source: Author edited, information collected from Beijing Municipal Education Committee

establishing those “converted schools” is to raise more fund through charging school fees from parents. The collected fund will be redistributed by education authority to the left behind schools for their construction. Moreover, by utilizing the established reputations, some key schools set up “offspring” schools which are affiliated with the former key schools. These schools could use facilities, teachers from parent former key schools. And because of the merits they get from parent former key schools, generally, these schools can charge high school fees to generate financial resources for bonuses and school improvement projects (J. Lin, 2007; Tsang, 2000, 2003; Xiaoxin Wu, 2008). Although these schools were required to turn to real *minban* schools or truly public schools in 2006, in the transition, together with the former key schools, the present demonstration schools, they have already become the main target schools for parents and students who want to take part in *Ze Xiao*.

Table 2.6 Distribution of Demonstration Schools and Distribution of Registered Population in Beijing (2008)

District	Demonstration School	Registered Population (10000)	Severed Population/Per Demonstration School (10000/Per school)
Beijing	74	1229.9	16.6
Dong Cheng	7	61.9	8.8
Xi Cheng	9	78.3	8.7
Chong Wen	5	33.5	6.7
Xuan Wu	6	53.7	9.0
Chao Yang	7	181.8	26.0
Feng Tai	4	103.6	25.9
Shi Jing Shan	3	35.7	11.9
Hai Dian	11	209.9	19.1
Fang Shan	4	76.5	19.1
Tong Zhou	3	64.9	21.6
Shun Yi	3	57.4	19.1
Chang Ping	2	51.2	25.6
Da Xing	2	58.7	29.4
Men Tou Gou	1	24.1	24.1
Huan Rou	1	27.7	27.7
Ping Gu	2	39.7	19.9
Mi Yun County	3	43.1	14.4
Yan Qing County	1	28.0	28.0

Source: Beijing Municipal Education Committee

The key school system and the establishment of demonstration schools broke the balance of distribution of education resources in urban China. Figure 2.5 shows the location

of demonstration schools within the 5th Ring Road of Beijing.²⁵ These schools are mainly located in the center of Beijing and areas which have many higher education institutions. Comparatively, northern part of Beijing has more demonstration schools than southern part of Beijing. The inter-district imbalanced distribution of education resources may indentify students' mobility and *Ze Xiao*. As Table 2.6 indicated, the distribution of demonstration schools in Beijing did not correspond to the distribution of population in Beijing. Districts, such as Chao Yang District and Fengtai District, with bigger population have less number of demonstration schools than Districts which have small population.

2.5.7 The Rise of Demand for Migrant Children Education

The rapid urbanization brought unprecedented rural-urban migration in China. Flowing into urban areas with parents, the increasing number of migrant children in urban China contributed to the rising demand for migrant children education in urban public schools. How to effectively response towards the various demands for migrant children education and best accommodate these needs became a challenge for public education system in urban China.

With the rapid industrialization and urbanization in China, from late 1970s China has been experiencing a significant demographic phenomena-rural-urban migration (P. Huang & Zhan, 2005; International Organization for Migration (IOM), 2005; S. Li, 2008; Overseas Development Institute (ODI), 2006; Y. Zhu, 2003). The latest data of migrant population in China shown by 6th National Population Census is 261.4 million in 2010 (National Bureau of Statistics of China, 2010). In Beijing this number increased from 1.54 million in 1997 to 7.05 million in 2010 according to the municipal government (Beijing Bureau of Statistics, 2010). With millions of rural-urban migration, in recent years, a dramatic increase of family migration has been recognized (Y. P. Chen & Liang, 2007; J. Guo, 2007; Zhai, Duan, & Bi,

²⁵ According to Beijing Municipal Education Committee, there are 74 demonstration schools in Beijing by 2011. Retrieved from <http://www.bjedu.gov.cn/publish/portal0/tab40/>, accessed on October 15, 2012.

2007). According to Duan and Yang (2008), in 2005, 18.34 million out of 147 million migrants were in their 0-14 years old. The number of children who were in their 6-14 years old was 11.26 million in total. Chen and Liang (2007) point out that over 36 % of migrants who lived with a spouse in Beijing had children studying locally. In Beijing, the number of migrant children ages 0-14 years old increased rapidly from 155,000 in 1997 to 500,400 in 2006 (Beijing Bureau of Statistics, 2009). According to the 6th National Population Census, the population of migrant children ages 6-14 years old in Beijing reached 249,000 in 2010 (Beijing Office of the 6th National Population Census, 2010).

Under the household registration (*hukou*) system²⁶ based public education system, without local household registration, migrant children were excluded from the access to public education system (Ako, 2006; Han, 2001; Keung Wong, Li, & Song, 2007; G.A. Postiglione, 2006; Sa, 2004; Solomon, Yuan, Fei, & Maher, 2004; M. Zhang, 2003; Y. Zhu, 2003). With government effort, from late 1990s, education opportunities for migrant children in public schools changed from an exclusionary environment to a more integrated one and from high cost to free. Recently, there are a big number of migrant children studying in public schools in urban China. As Table 2.7 shows, in some major cities in China, such as Beijing, Shanghai and Chongqing, more than 50 % of migrant children have been studying in public schools (at compulsory education). Figure 2.6 presents the rapid increase of number of migrant children in urban public schools of Beijing. The number of migrant children in public schools increased dramatically from 98,555 in 2001 to 285,919 in 2009 (Beijing Bureau of Statistics, 2010). Comparatively, there have more migrant children in primary education than migrant children in lower secondary education.

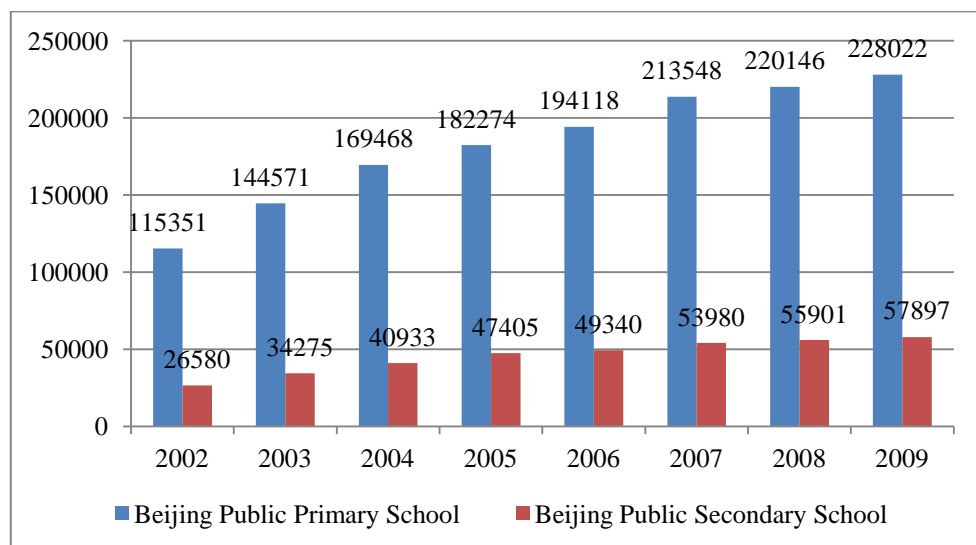
Due to the *hukou*-based public education system and the limited education financial resources, it is difficult for migrant children to get access to public compulsory education

²⁶ The Chinese household registration system (*hukou*), which divides the population into “agricultural” and “nonagricultural” sectors, may be the most important determinant of differential privileges in state socialist China, determining access to good jobs, education for one’s children, housing, health care, and even the right to move to a city (Treiman, 2012; X. Wu & Treiman, 2004; Y. Zhu, 2003).

Table 2.7 Percentage of Number of Migrant Children in Public Schools

City	Year	Migrant Children Population	Percentage in Total Number of Student in Public Schools
Beijing	2006	400372	62.00%
Shanghai	2006	295063	53.88%
Guangzhou	2006	328950	37.00%
Shenzhen	2007	389385	40.00%
Chongqing	2007	225000	75.60%

Source: Yuan & Tian (2010, p.201), author edited.

Figure 2.6 Number of Migrant Children in Public Schools of Beijing (2002-2009)

Source: Beijing Statistic Yearbook (2003-2010).

without paying various types of additional fees. According to Ako (2006), parents of migrant children have to pay several thousands to several tens of thousands of yuan in order to enroll their children in public schools. In contrast, due to the low salary of migrant families, this amount of money has already gone beyond the affordability of migrant families (Ako, 2006; Y. P. Chen & Liang, 2007; J. Dong, 2010; Han, 2001, 2005; Mok & Lo, 2007; L. Wang, 2008). In Beijing, based on the different quality of schools the sponsor fees would be charged

from 1000 yuan to 30,000 yuan in 2002. Generally, it is difficult for migrant families to afford the expensive sponsor fees and tuitions for migrant children in public schools (Y. P. Chen & Liang, 2007; Zhenguo Yuan & Tian, 2010).

Moreover, migrant families also face to dilemma regarding the continuity of education for migrant children. Due to the *hukou*-based exam system for higher education, migrant children still have to go back to hometown to take university entrance exams (Jing Liu & Jacob, 2012). Moreover, since schools in urban areas are using different textbooks from schools in rural areas, it takes time for migrant children to get used to the textbooks used in schools of their hometowns. In addition, since parents are working in urban areas, once migrant children are sent back to hometowns, parents always worry about their children's life and study. They need help for taking care of their children in hometown. Even parents decide to let their children to study in Beijing after graduation from compulsory education, there are still barriers for migrant children to continue their study in urban areas, such as lack of information, high tuition fee for senior high school and so forth (Ako, 2006; Y. P. Chen & Liang, 2007; Kwong, 2004, 2006; Jing Liu, 2009, 2012; Sa, 2004).

The review of education development and social change in China showed the roles of education shifted with the rapid social changes through political, cultural, economic and social evolutions. The role of public education in China transited from the tool for class struggle to the means for modernization. Recently, it became the approach for constructing harmonious society in China. Corresponding to the marketization and decentralization of education sector, there is increasing private investment in education. And the demand for education became diverse with the rapid rural-urban migration and the rise of middle class in urban China. At the same time, due to the imbalanced distribution of educational resources and the access to the resources, there is disparity in educational development between regions and schools. Moreover, with the rapid development and marketization of higher education, the so called "certificate disease" and "credential inflation" became visible in Chinese society

(Dore, 1997). There is increasing number of young people graduated from both domestic and overseas universities became underemployment after graduation (Sonoda, 2008). Meanwhile, with the rapid development of higher education and the marketization of higher education in China, the value of education in Chinese society became utilitarian. Education is considered as tool for the individual prosperity in the society. A survey conducted in 2006 by a group of Japanese scholars indicated that 68.7% of the social function of education is to generate more income (Sonoda, 2008, p.58).

More seriously, educational inequality emerged with the rapid economic development in China. There is increasing effect of family background on children's education in Chinese society. A survey on parents' satisfaction with equality in public school admission in 2010 indicated that the equality in public school admission to junior high school deteriorated in 30 major cities compared with the data from 2008 to 2010. In terms of *Ze Xiao* as the focus in this study, a survey shows 36.0 % of respondents from 35 major cities in China believed it was very serious in the city they lived. And 38.8 % of the respondent felt it was relatively serious. *Ze Xiao* became a common concern in public compulsory education in urban China (Yang & Chai, 2011, pp.261-262). As Wu clarified (2009), the current *Ze Xiao* in urban China caused educational inequality. Parents' choices shifted from meritocratic competition to a largely private competition between families based on their wealth and social network. There are more middle class families who take part in *Ze Xiao* works compared with families from working class. According to Lin (2006), with the commercialization of public school admission, 80 % of students from key public secondary schools come from families of intellectuals and government officials. The middle class families get wide access to good quality education resources. Obviously, *Ze Xiao* represents a tip of iceberg of current educational inequality in China's education sector. Parents' socioeconomic status and wishes for children's education become important factors which position children and parents with different socioeconomic status in public school admission to junior high schools.

To conclude the chapter of literature review, it provides a framework to consider school choice policy as part of global education reform with the discussion on social stratification, social mobility and education attainment at global level. School choice is considered as an approach in the market oriented and competition driven education reform for efficiency, quality and accountability of public education system. By utilizing school choice approach, the neo-liberals in government aim to give free choice to parents considered as consumer of educational service. At the same time, they believe that choice can inspire public schools to competition and improvement of efficiency and quality of educational service. And it was considered as the approach for providing equal opportunities for marginalized groups to high quality education. However, the magic of market does not work in terms of education equality. And the neo-liberalized education could not weaken the effect of family background on education attainment. Rather, it intensified inequality in education and social reproduction. In general, families with affluent economic, cultural and social capitals are relatively dominated the competition in school choice. On the other hand, this chapter also provides a comprehensive review of education development in the context of rapid social change of Chinese society. With the trend of neo-liberalism and globalization occurred in other parts of the world, China also adopted neo-liberal ideology for economic development and modernization from the late 1970s. And apparently, this trend deeply influenced the education reform to accommodate the needs from the modernization of the country. Nevertheless, different from “school choice” as approach for the education reform at global level, in principle, choice policy, particularly in public sector, was not taken as approach in China’s case. Due to the social stratification, the change of education ideology, the marketization of education sector and the imbalanced distribution of educational resources and opportunities, the process of public admission to junior high schools is becoming more dependent on family background and socioeconomic status. This trend intensified as educational inequality in public school education in urban China.

Chapter 3 Review of the Development of *Ze Xiao* in Urban China

This study mainly focuses on *Ze Xiao* in compulsory education, particularly from primary education to lower secondary education. In this chapter, I review the development of *Ze Xiao* based on the published information and the existing literatures, mainly including newspaper articles, government documents, journal papers, published survey results and the published books on *Ze Xiao*. Firstly, I introduce the residence based public school admission policy. Secondly, I describe the development of *Ze Xiao* from its expansion and its diversification by reviewing the results existing based on existing surveys and researches on *Ze Xiao*. Thirdly, I show the complexity of *Ze Xiao* through introducing the diverse channels for stakeholders to take part in the positional competition for children's admission to junior secondary schools in urban China. I conclude this chapter by distinguishing *Ze Xiao* and School choice in general.

The reviews indicated that the mismatch between residence based public school admission to junior high schools and people's demand for sending children to better schools was the original reason for people to take part in *Ze Xiao*. Review of the development of *Ze Xiao* indicated that *Ze Xiao* was widely practiced in urban China from the late 1980s. With the rapid development of *Ze Xiao*, the diversification of channels for *Ze Xiao* intensified complexity of the admission process to public junior high schools. *Ze Xiao* was linked with parents' power, economic status and children's achievement in study.

3.1 A Non-Choice Public School Admission in China

According to *Compulsory Education Law of People's Republic of China* (National People's Congress, 2006), the school-aged children should be admitted to nearby schools without any kind of selective examinations and streaming; and local authorities should

provide enough school places for school-aged children in their areas. According to the law, the admission to primary education and lower secondary education should be made without exam, free, and following the principle of proximity. Based on the principle of proximity, normally, parents send their children to the public schools which belong to the catchment area assigned by local education authority (Xiaoxin Wu, 2012). School catchment area refers to a geographic area in a county or district in which a public school can normally enroll children of the residents in that area.²⁷ Every public school has its own catchment area when it comes to public school admission.

The admission to public primary schools is normally based on the school catchment areas assigned by the local education authorities. In general, parents have to show household registration certificate (*hukou*) and the actual living address certificate which can prove the child's registration belongs to the school catchment area.²⁸ As to the admission to public junior high schools, mainly, it also follows the principle of proximity without any selective examination. The local education authority designates individual junior high school to several primary schools based on the school catchment areas (If there is only one junior high school within one school catchment area, then all students from primary schools in this area are enrolled automatically by the junior high school). Recently, some local governments innovated diverse approaches for achieving equal education transition without breaking the proximity based junior high school admission. Within these approaches, the school lottery system (*diannaopaiwei* 电脑派位) is the most widely practiced one. Students in primary schools are randomly assigned to junior high schools by computer system within the designated school district. However, since this system cannot guarantee to send children to

²⁷ As a resident, student has to show the household registration (*hukou*) which belongs to the school catchment area. The *hukou* system is established in late 1950s. It separates China into rural and urban areas. And it is closely related to different privileges to various social welfares, such as access to health care, public education, housing and so forth (X. Wu & Treiman, 2004).

²⁸ According to Wang (2009 p.19) and Wu (2012), in urban areas, if the residence certificates of the applying child is not registered in the same area as their parents or guardians, or as their actual living address, it is up to local education authorities to decide their school attendances.

better school in one school district, it is not welcomed by parents and students (21st Century Education Research Institute, 2011; Lai, 2007; Jun Li, 2009).

3.2 The Development of *Ze Xiao*

Traditionally, with the consensus of *'He who excels in study can follow an official career (xueeryouzeshi 学而优则仕)'*,²⁹ education is considered as one of the most important tools for climbing up the social ladder in Chinese society. Hundreds years ago, individuals spent years to become government official through government's civil examination. And in order to change children's lives and fortune of the family, parents were willing to sacrifice everything they had to create any opportunity for children's education. A well known story of *'Mencious' mother, three moves (mengmusanqian 孟母三迁)'* tells parent's aspiration for children's education by selecting good education environment.

As a culture, selecting good education environment for children does not change even though there are shifts of political atmosphere and administrations in China. Even in the early stage after the establishment of People's Republic of China, under the exam-based school admission system, there were a small number of people who utilized their power and *guanxi*³⁰ to send children to well-known schools (Fang, 2011; Jun Li, 2009; D. Yang, 2006). After the Cultural Revolution, with the rapid economic development, living standard in China, especially in urban areas improved dramatically. The increasing family income stimulated parents' aspiration for enrolling children in popular schools in order to send them to universities. The sponsor fee-based school admission became widely accepted approach for people to send children to well-known schools which did not belong to the school catchment

²⁹ This is widely known Confucian slogan for education. It means a good scholar can become an official.

³⁰ The term "*guanxi*" is understood as "connections" between people in order to exchange of favors (Bian, 1994; Hwang, 1987). "*guanxi*" represents a relational Chinese culture or interpersonal connections of sentiments and obligations that dictate social interaction and facilitate favor exchanges in Chinese society, past and present (Bian, 2002)

area they registered.

With the implementation of *Compulsory Education Law 1986*, the government abolished the standard entrance exam to junior high school in 1993. Without standard evaluation of students for admission to public junior high schools, parents started to spend money and use power to have access to send children to better school. As a result, *Ze Xiao* started sweeping over urban China. The government repeatedly emphasized the importance of equity in school admission at compulsory education level based on the principle of proximity. Nevertheless, due to the big gap between public schools, the “School lottery system”³¹ adopted from Hong Kong did not receive warm welcome from parents and public schools. On the one hand, parents worried that their children would be randomly assigned to “bad schools”. On the other hand, key schools were authorized the privilege to skip the “School lottery system” and organize their own student selection (21st Century Education Research Institute, 2011). Therefore, majority of schools involved in the system are regular schools. As a result, *Ze Xiao*, which presents a positional competition for popular schools among parents and students, expanded and became popular in urban China. According to Yang (2006, p.126), there are diverse features of *Ze Xiao*. Firstly, the areas have expanded from big and middle sized cities to counties and rural areas. Secondly, participants in *Ze Xiao* have shifted into young age groups. And it has shifted from senior high school to junior high school, and continuously shifted to primary schools and kindergartens. Thirdly, “*Olympic math fever* (*aoshure* 奥数热)” and “*Certificate fever* (*kaozhengre* 考证热)” became more closely connected with *Ze Xiao* in the public school admission to junior high schools. Fourthly, the cost of *Ze Xiao* is becoming more expensive. Yang (ibid.) demonstrated that, “*Ze Xiao* Fever

³¹ According to Fang (2011), originally, this system aims to distribute G6 students within a region equally and randomly to junior high schools by computer. However, due to the different school facilities and human resources between schools within one region, there is a gap between public schools in the same region. Since the established school lottery system was not reliable to guarantee the access to better schools for children, parents were not interested in this system. Comparing with school lottery system, *Ze Xiao* provided possibility for parents to send their children to better public school through paying additional school fees. Consequently, *Ze Xiao* became more and more popular in urban China.

is badly against the rule of free and residence based public school admission. It terribly caused study burden of students at compulsory education level, badly influenced children's health and significantly intensified gaps between schools and classes.”

According to my review of literatures on *Ze Xiao*, in the past years, there are two features of the development of *Ze Xiao* in urban China. Firstly, *Ze Xiao* becomes popular by involving more participants, such as parents, students, schools and other new stakeholders. Secondly, *Ze Xiao* becomes complex by involving diverse issues inside and outside of education sector including but not limited to the cost of *Ze Xiao*, Olympic math training in private tutoring institute, special talent training, memo student, co-founding student. In the following two sections, I elaborate the two features of development of *Ze Xiao* by reviewing the collected surveys and reports on education published in China since the 1980s to the present.

3.2.1 The Expansion of *Ze Xiao*

In general, these surveys show that *Ze Xiao* is rapidly expanding in recent years. Since there is no officially published survey at national level regarding *Ze Xiao* so far, most of data shown in this research is based on surveys conducted by media and academic institutes. In 2003, a questionnaire survey on *Ze Xiao*, which involved 94 leaders from different local education authorities by *China Education Daily*, showed that *Ze Xiao* became a common practice in public school admission in many places of China. The result of the survey showed that 59.57 % of participants admitted that they had *Ze Xiao* issue in their places. *Ze Xiao* at senior high school level was widely practiced in 85.11 % of places involved. There were 69.15 % of places where *Ze Xiao* at junior high school level was popular. This number at primary school level was 41.49 % (Jie Zhang et al., 2003, October 26). According to a survey conducted in 2005 by National Survey Research Center, 46 % of parents would choose better quality schools without following the principle of proximity (He, Xu, & Wang, 2005, May

24). A survey conducted by Beijing Normal University in 2009 showed that around 40.5 % of students in ten cities of China were *Ze Xiao* students (J. Zheng, 2011). The same survey also showed that *Ze Xiao* in capital city at province level was more widely practiced than other areas. Moreover, survey conducted by *Guangming ribao* indicated socioeconomic status of family strongly influenced participation in *Ze Xiao*. Fathers working in private sector, fathers who were cadres and fathers who owned individual business were the main players in *Ze Xiao* (X. Zeng & Ma, 2009, December 28). In 2011, according to survey conducted by 21st Century Education Research Institute, about 46 % of parents prepared for children's *Ze Xiao* from G6 to G7. In the same year, survey showed that *Ze Xiao* ratio at compulsory education level (including primary education to lower secondary education) was 40.5 % (Che, 2011, November 24). In a survey conducted by *China Youth Daily* in 2009, 98.5 % of the participants believed that *Ze Xiao* phenomenon became a common issue in the entire education sector from pre-school education to upper secondary education (Congcong Wang, 2009, November 12).³² According to Li (2011, pp.145-160), in a survey involved 400 parents, 96.5 % of parents had the plans to take part in *Ze Xiao* in order to select better quality junior high schools for their children.

There are also surveys on *Ze Xiao* conducted in big municipals, such as Beijing and Shanghai. An investigation report published by Beijing government in 1996 showed that within seven urban areas 3.99 % of newly enrolled G7 students were students who entered junior secondary schools by means of *Ze Xiao* (Hereafter, they are called *Ze Xiao* students) (Qiao, Zhou, & Zheng, 1996, p.46). Among all *Ze Xiao* students involved in visited districts totaling 7042, Dongcheng District³³ had the largest number of *Ze Xiao* students which shared 10.75 % of the total new G7 students. Haidian District³⁴ had the second largest number of *Ze*

³² This survey involved 14081 participants from 31 provinces of China.

³³ Dongcheng district is one of the core areas of Beijing. Traditionally, there are many old and popular primary schools and junior high schools in this district.

³⁴ Haidian district is located in IT industry area of Beijing. There are many nation-class universities in this district. And it has rich public education resource, including country wide known primary schools and junior high schools.

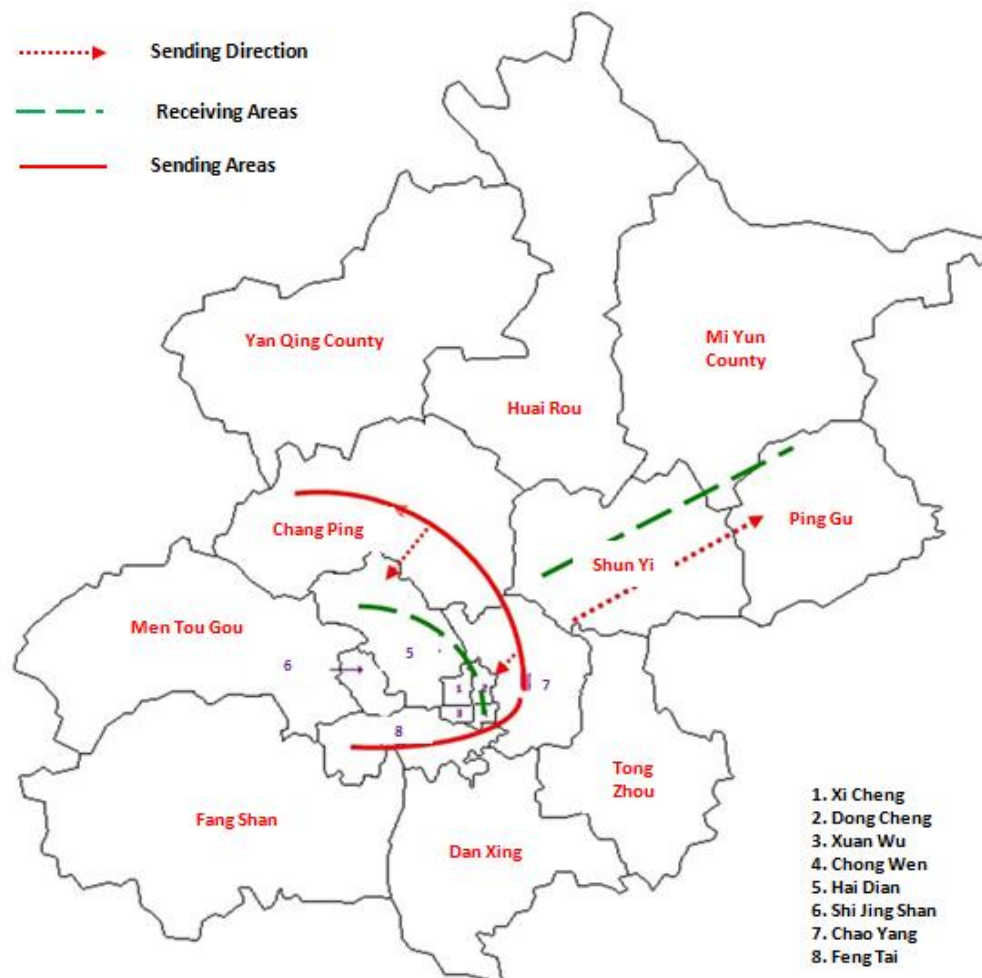
Xiao students which shared 3.75 % of the total new G7 students (Qiao, et al., 1996, p.46). In contrast, a survey conducted one decade later (2006) showed that about 45 % of parents involved in the survey admitted that they took part in one or another form of *Ze Xiao* in the process of their children's promotion from primary school to junior high school (Hu, Lu, & Xue, 2008, p.75). The same survey showed that *Ze Xiao* mainly occurred at compulsory education level in Beijing, especially in the transition from G6 to G7. Mainly, it happened in the urban areas (ibid.). It also indicated that most popular schools for parents who commit *Ze Xiao* practices were so-called "key schools". 70 % of students who had experience in committing *Ze Xiao* were promoted to key junior high schools. It also showed that only about 30 % of parents did not commit *Ze Xiao* (ibid.). According to *Remin Ribao*, an internet based survey on *Ze Xiao* held by Shanghai Municipal Education Committee showed that about 36 % of parents took part in *Ze Xiao* (He, et al., 2005, May 24) (see more information regarding *Ze Xiao* in other urban areas of China in Appendix 9).

In recent years, various surveys showed there was increasing number of families involved in *Ze Xiao*. According to Wu (2008, p.599), in a survey conducted in Beijing, 66 % of the respondents selected schools for their children. Moreover, a research conducted in Beijing indicated that not only parents in key schools but also parents in regular schools had the experience in committing *Ze Xiao* for children's education transition to junior high schools (F. Li, 2008). A TV program made by Chinese Central Television (CCTV) also predicted that over 50 % of G6 student at primary schools of Beijing in 2011 would take part in *Ze Xiao* instead of following the school assignment by local education authority (CCTV, 2011, June 3). The result of computer lottery based school assignment in northern part of Dongcheng District in Beijing in 2011 showed that only 51 % of G6 student in this area participated in this type of admission.³⁵ It means that almost 50 % of G6 student in this area

³⁵ This information comes from homepage of Educational Examinations Center of Dongcheng District of Beijing, Retrieved from <http://www.dcks.org.cn/news/show.php?id=505>, accessed on August 7, 2011.

found their places in junior high schools through other channels than computer lottery, namely *Ze Xiao*. Data above showed that *Ze Xiao* became a wide-spread practice in education transition from G6 to G7 recently in Beijing. In most major cities of China, *Ze Xiao* was widely practiced. According to 21st Century Education Research Institute (2011a, p.261), over 74% of respondents from 35 major cities in China agreed that *Ze Xiao* was serious education

Figure 3.1 Inter-districts *Ze Xiao* in Beijing (2008)



Source: Unpublished paper, Collected by Author from 21st Century Educational Research Institute

issue in their cities. As Figure 3.1 shows, Hai Dian District, Dong Cheng District and Chong Wen District became the major receiving areas which enroll inter-district students in public

school admission to junior high schools. Considering the imbalanced distribution of good quality public schools within Beijing, it is clear to identify that the major receiving areas have more good education resources which are attractive for parents and students (see Figure 2.5 and Table 2.6).

3.2.2 The Diversity and Complexity of *Ze Xiao*

With the rapid expansion of *Ze Xiao*, there are increasing numbers of issues reflecting public attitudes and practice towards the rise of the social phenomenon. *Ze Xiao* starts to involve wider varieties of practices and became more complicated. Although students are supposed to follow the principle of “no exam, no cost, and proximity” in their transition from G6 to G7, a survey report³⁶ in 2011 showed besides the lottery based school assignment system there were diverse channels used by parents to enroll children to junior high schools. As Table 3.1 shows, regarding school admission channels in eight major districts of Beijing in 2010, besides the lottery system and the counterparts school based school admission which follow the principle of proximity, there were 13 recognized channels for parents and students to choose in order to enter junior high schools depending on the districts in Beijing (21st Century Education Research Institute, 2011).

An internet based survey³⁷ showed the principle of proximity based school admission repeatedly emphasized by government was not much supported by the public. According to the result of the survey, the most popular approach parents selected for children’s education transition from G6 to G7 at nation level was school recommendation approach. In contrast, only 9.8 % of parents took part in the school lottery system. In Beijing, the most popular school admission approach was the pre-admission training class based approach. And only

³⁶ The survey was conducted by 21st Century Education Research Institute from April, 2011 to August, 2011. The author was one of members of the project.

³⁷ This survey was conducted from July 11 to August 12, 2011 by 21st Century Education Research Institute with cooperation with Education Channel of Sina.com. There were 525 participants from 35 cities involved in this survey.

9.1 % of parents followed the lottery based school assignment system (see Figure 3.2).³⁸

Interestingly, 28.9 % of parents chose other school admission channels at national level. And

Table 3.1 School Admission Options in Beijing in 2010

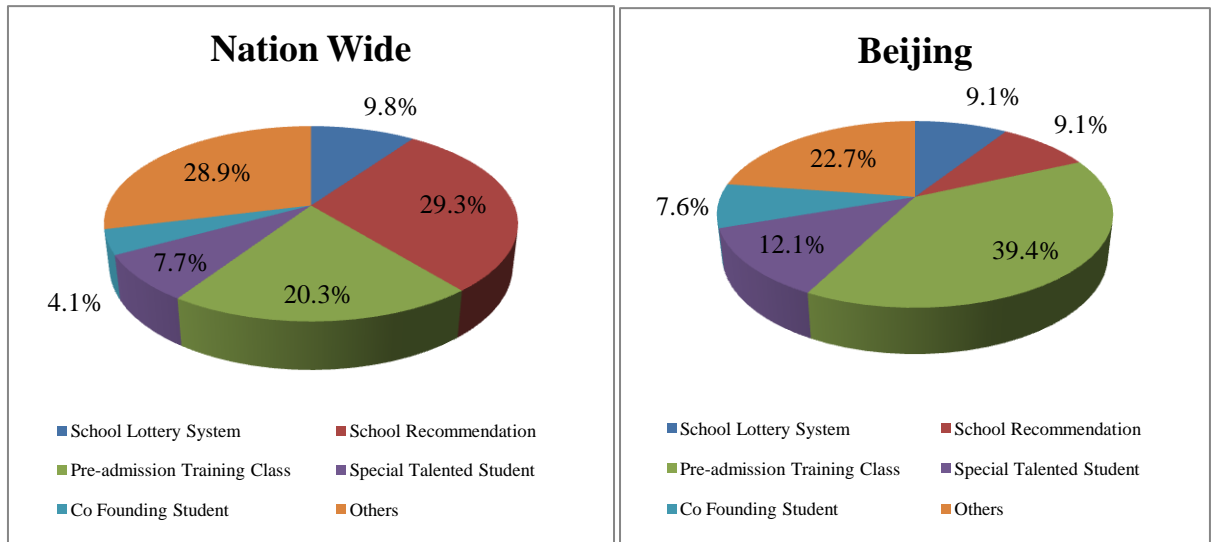
Admission Options	Dong-cheng District	Xi-cheng District	Hai-ding District	Chong-wen District	Xuan-wu District	Chao-yang District	Fengtai District (2011)	Shijing-shan District
1. Lottery based School Assignment System	•	•	•			•	•	
2. Counterparts school				•	•		•	•
3. Special talents	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•
4. Recommendation	•	•	•	•		•	•	•
5. Boarding School	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•
6. <i>Minban</i> School	•	•	•			•	•	•
7. Characteristic School	•	•		•	•			•
8. Mutual selection		•			•		•	
9. Co-founding	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•
10. Enterprises/University owned School		•	•					•
11. Nine Year School	•	•	•		•		•	
12. Relocation	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•
13. Non <i>Hukou</i>	•	•		•	•	•	•	•
14. Special education	•	•				•		•
15. Local education authority Dispensation					•			

Source: 21st Century Education Research Institute (2011). Beijingshi "Xiao Sheng Chu" *Ze Xiao* Re De Zhili: Lu Zai He Fang? Beijing: 21st Century Education Research Institute.

this number in Beijing was 22.7 %. These numbers also showed the diverse school admission options in the transition from G6 to G7.

³⁸ The diverse of *Ze Xiao* was also identified by Li (F. Li, 2008).

Figure 3.2 School Admission Options (Nation Wide & Beijing)



Source: 21st Century Education Research Institute (2011). Beijingshi "Xiao Sheng Chu" *Ze Xiao* Re De Zhili: Lu Zai He Fang? Beijing: 21st Century Education Research Institute.

3.3 Channels for *Ze Xiao*

Literature review showed that the diverse channels for parents to commit *Ze Xiao* could be categorized into three types, including, money based *Ze Xiao*, power based *Ze Xiao* and achievement based *Ze Xiao* (*China Education Daily*, 2003, September 15; Fang, 2011; Jun Li, 2009).³⁹ According to *China Education Daily*, money based *Ze Xiao* badly destroyed the equity in education. Power based *Ze Xiao* negatively influenced social value and morality. And achievement based *Ze Xiao* intensified students' burden in study (*China Education Daily*, 2003, September 15). In this part, I introduce the three types of *Ze Xiao* in details respectively. Then, I explain the complexity of *Ze Xiao* by elaborating the channels for *Ze Xiao* introduced in the beginning of this section. Information involved in this section was collected from

³⁹ Mainly, existing discourses on *Ze Xiao* was categorized as money based *Ze Xiao*, power based *Ze Xiao* and score based *Ze Xiao*. With the abolishment of entrance exam to junior high schools, comparing with exam scores, awards received from various contests, certificated issued for special talents and other relevant certificates are becoming important in the process of *Ze Xiao*. Therefore, in this research, I would like to use the term "Achievement based *Ze Xiao*" to involve both exam based *Ze Xiao* and certificate based *Ze Xiao*.

various sources, such as newspapers, journal papers and books.

3.3.1 Money based *Ze Xiao* (*yiqianzexiao* 以钱择校)

The first type of *Ze Xiao* is called as Money based *Ze Xiao*. According to Fang (2011, p.131), money based *Ze Xiao* refers to the practice of sending children to well known schools by paying money. There are two main channels for conducting Money based *Ze Xiao*, including *Ze Xiao Fei* (择校费 fees charged for choosing school) and Tuition for Converted Schools (*zhuanzhixiaoxuefei* 转制校学费). Money based *Ze Xiao* has its history with the change of school admission policy in China. In the early stage, although the school admission to junior high school was still based on the exam scores in the late 1980s and the early 1990s, parents were “willing” to pay money for enrolling children in well-known public schools if children’s score were lower than enrollment standard of these schools

Although the charges for this type of school admission was considered as unauthorized school fees by education authority and was strictly banned, money based *Ze Xiao* became a common practice from the late 1980s. In 1984, the problem of charging *Yi Jia* student⁴⁰ has already been reported in news related to the charge of unauthorized school fees in Jiangxi Province and Sichuan Province (Yongning Cheng, 1984, December 8; Q. Huang, 1984, April 24). In 1993, according to the Shanghai Education Bureau, a survey showed that within 21 schools, 11 schools had ‘*Yi Jia* Student’. In one key school, they enrolled 20 *Yi Jia* Student and charged 230000 yuan. More importantly, this amount of money was not recorded (Jin, 1993, July 29). Conversely, in Xiamen, although local education authority declaimed that the school admission and fee charge should not be linked and the payment should be paid voluntarily. The enrollment of ‘*Xuan Xiao* Student’ and the charge of these students were

⁴⁰ In Chinese, “*Yi Jia* 议价” means negotiable price. “*Yi Jia* Student 议价生 *yijiasheng*” refers to student whose school admission can be negotiated by paying school fee. And the school fee is negotiable. “*Xuan Xiao* Student” refers to students who choose their preferred schools without going to school assignment by local education authority. “*Jie Du*” means borrowing space for schooling. “*Xuan Xiao*” means choosing school. “*Jie Du* Student” refers to student who does not have local *hukou* in specific school district enter school through paying money.

allowed by local education authority. More interestingly, the fee called as 'education donation' was collected and managed by local government. 50 % of the donation is designated by the local government to be spent on teaching facilities to improve teaching condition; 20 % of donation is to be submitted to upper education authority to assist construction of schools in difficulties. And 30 % of the donation could be put into fund generation by schools to supplement teachers' salary (Tan, 1993, September 14). According to a letter to *China Education Daily* from a junior high school manager in Beijing, *Ze Xiao* based fund generation was 140 million yuan in 1994 and 126 million yuan in 1995. In 1995, within 126 million yuan, 40 % was used for improvement of school facilities. 15 % is used for teachers' salaries. 15 % was used for teachers' welfare and there was 40 million surplus. However, 70 % of 126 million yuan was used for only less than 100 schools among 3000 primary schools and 700 junior high schools. It is clear to see there was a big imbalance in the distribution of education resource (Junjie Liu, 1996, July 11).

Ze Xiao Fei, as one channel for money based *Ze Xiao*, has already been widely practiced by the public. And it was considered as the reason for the enlargement of the gap between public schools (C. Huang, 1996, August 4). News in *China Education Daily* in 1995 reported that it was popular for parents to pay the charge of fee for entering into key schools in Beijing. Parents pointed out that the price charged by the key schools in Beijing was surprising and over their affordability. The minimum was about 20000 or 30000 yuan, and the maximum was about 70000 or 80000 yuan. It seemed that it did not matter whether the students were qualified or not. The enrollment in key schools was based on how much parents could pay (Pu & Jian, 1995, August 19). In 1996, a survey report conducted in Beijing showed that the part of private educational donation in total education donation increased dramatically from 32 % in 1993 to 82 % in 1995 (Qiao, et al., 1996, p.46). According to a survey conducted by Beijing Normal University in 2005, within urban areas of Beijing, the average *Ze Xiao Fei* was 19600 yuan at primary school level and 13700 yuan at junior high

school level. *Ze Xiao Fei* at primary school level was 36.11 % of family income. And *Ze Xiao Fei* at junior high school level was 35.13 % of family income (M. Li, 2011, p.146). In 2008, a nationwide survey on family cost in compulsory education showed that, at national level, *Ze Xiao Fei* shared the largest part of family cost in terms of school education (*China Education Daily*, 2008, March 6). In other words, it is difficult for low income families to take part in *Ze Xiao* through paying education donation fee. According to another nationwide survey conducted by *China Youth Daily* in 2009, 75.8 % of participants considered *Ze Xiao Fei* as the most unequal education phenomenon in China (Xiao, 2009, December 15).

The charge of tuition for converted schools, as another channel for money based *Ze Xiao*, started with the privatization of public education system. As introduced in Chapter 2, from mid 1990s, the government positively promoted the development of *minban* (民办 people-run) schools⁴¹ at compulsory education level in order to supplement the limited government investment in education and to accommodate growing demand for parental choice for children's schooling (Tsang, 2000, 2003; B. Wang, 2009; Xiaoxin Wu, 2008; D. Yang, 2006). No doubt, the conversion from public schools into *minban* schools generated school revenue through charging high tuition from parents. It mobilized additional private resources for education development. Simultaneously, to some extent, this reform provided more choices for parents to send children to schools they prefer. However, with the growing interests of schools regarding the conversion reform, this policy was distorted at the implementation level. Some key schools recognized the benefits from school conversion and started to convert from public schools to *minban* schools or establish branch schools affiliated to key schools. As a result, the conversion of these schools stimulated parents' aspiration for paying tuition fees for children's *Ze Xiao* (Xiaoxin Wu, 2008, p.601). In 2005, CCTV reported the fee charge for entering into a converted school invested by two key schools in

⁴¹ According to Tsang (2003, p.165), people-run schools are schools sponsored and managed by a community of people or a collective organization and funded by resources from the community or financial assistance from the state, etc.

Nantong city. By charging each student 18000 yuan, this converted school generated 20 million yuan through enrolling 1200 G7 students (D. Yang, 2006, pp.130-131).

3.3.2 Power (*guanxi*) based *Ze Xiao* (*yiquan(guanxi) zexiao* 以权 (关系) 择校)

The second type of *Ze Xiao* is Power-based one. In Chinese culture, power refers to the sociomoral suasion, or peer-group pressure, that one may use to change the attitude, motivation, or behavior of another to conform to one's will during the process of social interaction (Hwang, 1987, p.947). And *guanxi* is understood as “connections” between people in order to exchange of favors (Bian, 1994; Hwang, 1987). As Bian (1994) clarified, for two individuals to develop *guanxi*, they must know a good deal about each other and share a good deal with each other. Therefore, in terms of education, people use power to satisfy people's demand for education. As Fang (2011) defined, power (*guanxi*) based *Ze Xiao* refers to the practice that some leaders utilize their power to give pressure on school side in order to help their children or children of related people to take part in *Ze Xiao*. Mainly, there are two channels for power based *Ze Xiao*. One is Memo student (*tiaozisheng* 条子生). The other is Co founding student (*gongjiansheng* 共建生).

In terms of Memo student, generally, memos come from powerful departments in one district administration, such as industrial and commercial department, tax bureau, planning department and discipline inspection department and so forth (W. Fan, 2005, May 9). A popular school principal pointed out that every year he could meet many *Ze Xiao* students and receive various memos from province level to district level. It was almost 600 pieces averagely. These memos could be divided into different categories, including memos from government institutes, memos from education authority or education related institutes, memos from other administrative departments, such as police, fire fighting, finance, sanitation, tax, and memos from other related work units (Xiaowei Li, 2007, June 19). According to a survey conducted in Beijing, *guanxi* students come from work units which control school daily management, such as water, gas, heat, sanitation, community authority and police station and

so forth; Children of teaching staffs; Students through personal donation based enrollment; Students through Co-founding based enrollment (Qiao, et al., 1996, pp.46-47). According to a report published in *China Education Daily*, an official, who is in charge of education authority in one district of Beijing, clarified that in this district there were 2000 memo students based on pre-contact from leaders at upper level and various *guanxi*. Power based *Ze Xiao* includes both leader based *Ze Xiao* and powerful institutes based *Ze Xiao*. Either of both is difficult for education administration or school leaders to refuse (Xiaowei Li, 2007, June 19). According to Qiao and her colleagues (1996, p.46), there were 10 key primary schools and 14 key junior high schools in Dongcheng district of Beijing. Enrollment ratio of memo students was 20.56 % of total enrollment. And the enrollment ratio of *guanxi* student was 26.54 % of total enrollment in 1996. A recent survey report on *Ze Xiao* in Beijing explains that memo student refers to “the back door student (*houmensheng* 后门生)”. Some parents use special *guanxi* to send children to key schools. It shows that most of memo students are directly managed by leaders at city or district level. In every district, annually, some key schools have to leave position for memo students. Some memo students come from commerce and industry administrative departments, tax bureau, city planning sections and so on. And some of them are from high ranking government officials in central government. It introduces that averagely, quota of memo student in annual enrollment is from 8 % to 10 % of total enrollment in key schools of Beijing (21st Century Education Research Institute, 2011).

As to Co founding student, in recent years, it became a sensitive term in the process of *Ze Xiao*. Some government institutes and work units signed agreements with some well known schools at compulsory education level in order to get enrollment quota for their staffs’ children through paying specific amount of money (Fang, 2011). Students enrolled through this way are called “Co founding students”. As Wu (2008) introduced, it is common in China for schools (especially the key schools) to cooperate with some work units through exchange education donation (co founding fee) with enrollment quota for children from the work units

as cooperation. For instance, according to *China Education Daily* one ministry annually paid 600000 yuan as sponsor fees to one university affiliated school in order to enroll staffs' children to one class in department of junior high school and one class in department of senior high school. Students enrolled in these two classes had lower scores than students enrolled through official ways. The exchange between education donation and school admission was widely criticized by the public. Moreover, there was a “shadow donation” to education through exchange of money and power. It is reported that one Hong Kong businessman came to a key school in Beijing to show his willingness to donate 100000 yuan to the school. As an exchange, the school needed to enroll 3 relatives of the businessman. The school accepted the deal. However, in the beginning of the semester, school found that three children's parents all worked in Ministry of Commerce (Pu & Jian, 1995, August 19).

Sometimes, the co founding fees are collected from parents by co founding work units and are paid to school side. Some units are even granted privileges without paying any penny to schools with cooperation. In Beijing, there are 400 pairs of schools and work units established “co founding” relationship. Table 3.2 shows that FESCO⁴² as State owned company in Beijing established co founding agreements with 13 key schools or popular schools in Beijing for their employees' children. Basically, schools with co founding work units are key schools and relatively popular schools. And the work units are mainly government institutes or “affluent” administration departments (J. Wang, 2008). Currently, Co founding based school admission becomes more complicated since popular schools want to have their own quality control of students they enrolled. They provide children from co founding work units opportunities to take entrance “test” for going to popular schools. The

⁴² FESCO refers to Beijing Foreign Enterprise Human Resources Service Co., Ltd., founded in 1979 and being the first state owned company in China to provide professional service of human resources to foreign enterprises' representative offices in China foreign financial institutions and economic organizations, has a long history of providing professional HR service and is highly experienced in the market and fully qualified to provide such service.

Table 3.2 List of Co Founding School with FESCO of Beijing (2011)

School	District	Characteristics
Beijing Dongzhimen Junior High School	Dongcheng	Key School (District level)
Beijing No. 2 Junior High School Branch School	Dongcheng	Key School (City level)
Beijing No.5 Junior High School Branch School	Dongcheng	Key School (City level)
Beijing No.171 Junior High School	Dongcheng	Key School (District level)
Beijing No.166 Junior High School	Dongcheng	Demonstration School (City level)
Beijing No.13 Junior High School Branch School	Xicheng	Key School (District level)
Beijing Sanfan Junior High School	Xicheng	Converted School
Beijing No.8 Junior High School	Xicheng	Key School (City level)
Beijing No.80 Junior High School	Chaoyang	Key School (District level)
Chenjinglun Junior High School	Chaoyang	Demonstration School (City level)
Chenjinglun Junior High School Branch School	Chaoyang	Converted School
Handian Experiment Junior High School	Haidian	Popular public school in Haidian district
Beijing Bayi Junior High school	Haidian	Key School (District level)

Source: 21st Century Education Research Institute, 2011, p. 17

final result of the enrollment depends on children's capacity. In practice, this type of school admission has "One stone two birds" effect on school side. On the one hand, schools can receive co founding fees for school development. On the other hand, the quota for co founding student enriches the flexibility of enrollment in popular schools. These schools can fully utilize the quota to select students they want. Consequently, Co founding based school admission has been criticized by the public since it favored the privileged groups while excluding other groups. It is considered as a collective power based *Ze Xiao* and it is caused education inequality (Fang, 2011; D. Yang, 2006). A recent survey in Beijing showed that in one key school of Beijing, there were 70 seats for co founding student within 400 seats as total enrollment in 2011. Interestingly, more than 400 children took part in test for the 70 seats (21st Century Education Research Institute, 2011).

3.3.3 'Achievement' based *Ze Xiao* (yifenzexiao 以分择校)

The third type of *Ze Xiao* is Achievement based *Ze Xiao*. Achievement based school

admission, mainly depending on students' learning achievement, was traditional approach for students to transit from G6 to G7. However, with the abolishment of entrance exams to junior high schools, the meaning of the term "achievement" was diversified. According to Fang (2011, p.132), it refers to the practice of *Ze Xiao* by achievement in exams. In general, there are two channels for achievement based *Ze Xiao*, including school recommendation student (*tuiyousheng* 推优生) and special talent student (*techangsheng* 特长生). With the abolishment of entrance exams to junior high schools, besides achievement made inside of schools, such as awards or high scores on comprehensive exams, various types of academic certificates, special talent certificates and even exam scores received from private tutoring institutes have been recognized as "achievement" which can be utilized as important requirements for school admission.

One of the channels for achievement based *Ze Xiao* is to become a school recommendation student. School recommendation (also called School recommendation lottery based admission) is considered as one of the most important school admission options at compulsory education level. The objective of the option is to provide access for students to popular schools. It is also considered as approach for key schools and popular schools to select students. According to number of G6 students and the enrollment plan in popular schools, the quota of school recommendation student is decided by district education authority annually (Y. Du & Zhang, 2011, May 10). In Beijing, this approach started from 2008. And the quota increased gradually in different districts. In 2011, this quota was 13 % of total G6 students in Haidian District, 20 % in Dongcheng District, 10 % in Shijingshan District and 30 % in Xicheng District (21st Century Education Research Institute, 2011, p.8). The selection standard of school recommendation student is complicated and diverse in different districts. It includes various criteria, such as good health, all round development (*quanmianfazhan* 全面

发展),⁴³ Three excellence student (*sanhaosheng* 三好生),⁴⁴ Excellent student leader and good academic achievement, etc. For example, in 2010, Xicheng District in Beijing took recipient of reward of “Three excellence student” at municipal or district level as the first criterion for school recommendation student selection. And the second criterion is the achievement in the comprehensive exams held in 2nd semester in G5 and the 1st semester in G6.⁴⁵ In 2011, in Haidian District of Beijing, criteria of school recommendation student included not only the exam scores in G5 but also included various awards and recognized special talents (21st Century Education Research Institute, 2011). Since school recommendation student should be all round developed, it forces students to take after-school classes or private tutoring in order to get as many certificates as possible to meet the criteria for the selection. This approach intensified competition in education transition (Y. Du & Zhang, 2011, May 10).

The other channel is special talent student. It is one of the options for parents to enroll children in good quality schools. As Wang (2008, pp.140-142) illustrated, there is no explanation on “Special talent student” in Chinese dictionaries since this term is created by educators in recent years. This innovation can be considered as a magical “Open sesame” spell for students to skip “School lottery system” and go to “key schools” through education transition from G6 to G7. According to Wu (2008), special talents refers to any skills normally learnt outside the school curriculum, such as being good at certain kind of sports,

⁴³ All round development, originally defined by Mao Zedong, refers to all round development of moral, intellectual, physical development of individual student. Deng Xiaoping reemphasized this idea in 1977 (Encyclopedia of China Publishing House, 1984).

⁴⁴ Regarding Three Excellence Student, Mingyuan Gu, President of Chinese Education Society, showed his opinion to abolish the evaluation activity on “Three Excellence Student” since 1998. He elaborated the positive role of this evaluation in stipulating students’ motivation to study hard. On the other hand, he pointed out that since some places linked it with education transition it has been involved into the track of exam oriented education. Being “Three Excellence Student” becomes the competition for education transition (Gu & Li, 2007).

⁴⁵ From 2003, Beijing Municipal Education Commission established Compulsory education monitoring system through a standard test for students in G5 in some districts. This system was gradually introduced at city level in recent years. According to this standard, the result of the standard test in G5 shares 60 % of the total student quality evaluation. It is considered as the only standard evaluation of students from G1 to G5. Retrieved from <http://www.jiajiaxue.com/Course-987.html>, <http://www.aoshu.com/e/20100712/4c3a888f4d492.shtml>, accessed on July 6, 2011.

having a musical talent and special extra-curricular activities in academic subjects like English or math. Mainly, there are three widely used channels for becoming special talent students, including Olympic math (*aoshu* 奥数), Public English Test (PETS, *gonggongyingyukaoshi* 公共英语考试)⁴⁶ and Pre admission training class (*zhankengban* 占坑班)⁴⁷.

In Beijing, special talent based school admission is officially permitted at municipal and district level. Annually, municipal government sets up the schedule for special talent student tests. Each student is allowed to apply for two or three schools within district they

Figure 3.3 Special Talent based Entrance Exam (Dongcheng District, Beijing, 2011)



Source: Taken by Author on May 21, 2011, Beijing

registered. Mainly, special talents student is divided into three categories, including sports

⁴⁶ According to National Education Examination Authority, PETS is a 5-level framework of proficiency English examination in China. It is being established to satisfy the requirements of social reform and opening up policies, to assist in meeting the needs of expansion in communications with foreign countries, and to reform the current public English examination in China. The 5-level framework ranges from the level of English equivalent to that of junior high school level to the level required by graduates studying/working overseas. It is available to all learners of the language, with no restriction on age, profession or academic background. Starting from 1999, there is increasing number of participants in PETS. In 2007, the number of participants reaches over one million for the first time. Retrieved from http://sk.neea.edu.cn/yydjks/xmjs.jsp?class_id=26_12_01_03, accessed on March 2, 2012.

⁴⁷ According to Wu (2012), *Zhankeng* refers to “place-holding”.

talent students, arts talent students and science talent students (Beijing Municipal Education Committee, 2006, 2007, 2008, 2009, 2010, 2011). In 2011, in Haidian District of Beijing, the quota of special talent students was 11% of the total enrollment of G7 students. The quota was 12% in Xicheng District of Beijing and 10% in Dongcheng District (21st Century Education Research Institute, 2011, p.8). Figure 3.3 shows parents were waiting for their children outside two junior high schools in Beijing which held the entrance exams for selecting special talent students in Beijing.

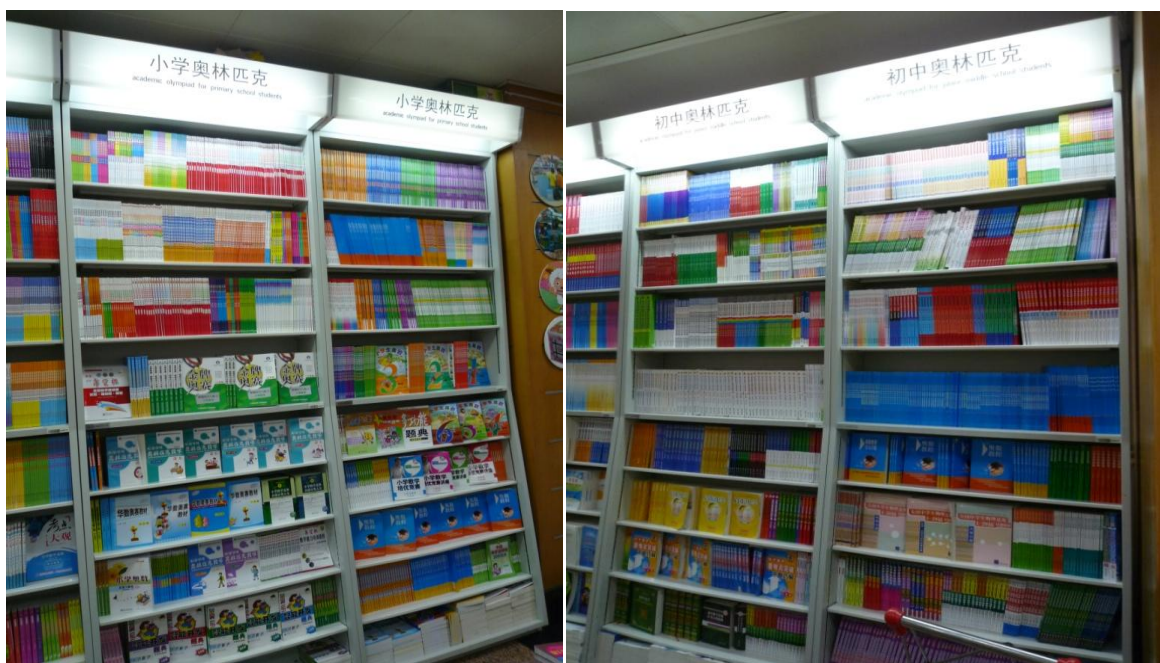
Olympic math⁴⁸ is the one of the channels for becoming special talent student. As introduced above, in order to become special talent students, students have to take various contests and competitions for getting certificates and awards to prove their talents. Olympic math contests provide opportunities for students to get such “Open sesame” to fulfill their objectives. Surveys showed Olympic math was the most popular option for children to get access to popular schools. In big cities of China, 80% of students over G3 studied Olympic math and 90% of student in G5 went to Olympic math class in a survey conducted in 2004 at national level (Yongmei Yang, 2004, February 18). A survey conducted at national level in 2005 showed that 95% of parents took Olympic math as an approach for children’s school admission (Chai, 2005, March 2). A recent survey conducted in Beijing in 2011 showed 62.2% of parents involved sent children to Olympic math class (21st Century Education Research Institute, 2011). Some key junior high schools started taking Olympic math as criterion for student selection in school admission. As a result, Olympic math training became popular. Figure 3.4 shows the Olympic math textbook corner in one of the biggest bookstore of Beijing. Parents and students can easily buy diverse types of Olympic math textbooks from such corner.

Similar as the role of Olympic math in *Ze Xiao*, in recent years, Public English Test

⁴⁸ According to Fang (2011), the international Olympic Math Contest started from 1959 aiming at searching for genius in math among junior high school students. From 1985, China officially sent players to take part in the international contest. In recent years, winners in this contest were enrolled by top ranking universities.

System is also closely linked with *Ze Xiao*, especially after the promulgation of the prohibition of linking Olympic math with education transition and school admission by Ministry of Education in 2000 (Ministry of Education, 2000). More importantly, certificates of PETS became one “Open sesame” for children to go to popular schools.

Figure 3.4 Olympic Math Textbook Corner



Source: Taken by Author in Beijing Wangfujing Bookstore on May 18, 2011, Beijing

According to Fang (2011), since many schools take PETS as criterion for school admission, there are many primary school students who take such exam every year. According to *Beijing Wanbao*, annually there were 100,000 students at basic education level take PETS. And majority of them were primary school students. Some students started their preparation for the exam since G3 in order to get “Open sesame” for education transition to junior high schools. In a class based survey held by *Beijing Wanbao*, 27 out of 40 G6 students have experience in taking PETS. Among 27 students, 19 students took PETS for education transition to junior high schools (*Beijing Wanbao*, 2007, May 16). Responding to the growing participation of students at primary education level in PETS, in 2007, Ministry of Education released regulations to prohibit the participation of students at compulsory education level to take

PETS (Ministry of Education, 2007a). In the same survey mentioned above, unexpectedly, regarding the order made by Ministry of Education which originally aimed at reducing study burden of students, 36 students believed that if the junior high school admission policy did not change, there would have other new exams to replace PETS even though PETS was terminated (*Beijing Wanbao*, 2007, May 16). News showed the importance of PETS to parents and children. Responding to the decision made by Ministry of Education to prohibit students at compulsory education level to take PETS, 28 parents from Haerbin wrote Ministry of Education a letter to request them to amend the released order to free students at compulsory education level to take part in PETS (*Tianfu Zaobao*, 2007, July 2).

Pre admission training class is a new innovation for *Ze Xiao*. It has become one widely accepted channel for parents to send children to popular schools. Survey conducted in Beijing showed that 37 % of parents sent children to such class for education transition (21st Century Education Research Institute, 2011). In general, it has several titles, such as “*Zhankeng Ban* (占坑班)” or “*Keng Ban* (坑班)”. “*Keng Ban*” refers to classes held by public schools or classes collaborated between public schools and private tutoring institutes for selecting primary school students from G6 to G7. Students cannot enter into “*Keng Ban*” without passing entrance exams for this class. After entering into “*Keng Ban*”, students have to take weekly or monthly tests in order to get advantage for the final student selection (Xiaoxin Wu, 2012). Based on past record in sending students to popular schools, parents categorized such “*Keng Ban*” into several levels, such as “*Golden Keng* (*jinkeng* 金坑)”, “*Silver Keng* (*yinkeng* 银坑)”, “*Earth Keng* (*tukeng* 土坑)” and “*Trash Keng* (*fenkeng* 粪坑)”. In order to increase the likelihood of their child being admitted to their top choice, some parents even send children to several such classes at the same time (Fang, 2011).⁴⁹ According to 21st

⁴⁹ Survey conducted by 21st Century Education Research Institute gives detailed explanation on these terms. “Golden Class” refers to classes which have close connection with the top ranking junior high schools. Without taking such class, it is impossible to be enrolled by the top ranking schools. “Silver Class” refers to the classes which are closely connected with the popular schools among parents. And the possibility of enrollment through taking these classes is relatively lower than “Golden Class”. “Earth Class” refers to

Century Education Research Institute (2011b), “*Zhankeng Ban*” originally started from 1998. With the full implementation of lottery based school assignment system from G6 to G7, on the one hand, parents refused to enroll children to regular schools. On the other hand, key schools had concern on student quality and were unwilling to accept assigned students through lottery system or even school recommendation students. As a result, Olympic math training based student selection for key schools started over. Therefore, “*Zhankeng Ban*” becomes a magical “Open sesame” spell for going to key schools. Meanwhile, these classes became a platform for key schools to select students they prefer.

3.4 Summary: *Ze Xiao* ≠ School Choice

The literature review illustrates the essential difference between “school choice” and “*Ze Xiao*”. The essential difference reminds us to distinguish “*Ze Xiao*” from “school choice” when it comes to talking about channels for public school admission in China. Table 3.3 further demonstrates the different nature between *Ze Xiao* and school choice. The most different parts between *Ze Xiao* and School choice are the government’s attitudes, the basic ideology, purpose and approaches. Firstly, in contrast to school choice policies that are promoted by the government, the government in China generally held negative attitude towards the adoption of *Ze Xiao* in compulsory education. Meanwhile, due to the limited educational investment by the government, they also depended on the tuition charge generated through *Ze Xiao* to supplement the education finance despite the opinion that it is against the principle of free compulsory education. Secondly, the basic concepts of education reform are different even though both are influenced by neo-liberalism. The basic concept of education reform in China is for the modernization of China which takes education as a tool for cultivating human resources needed by the country’s construction. In contrast, school choice as a policy in education reform in most of the developed world is based on the efficiency of

classes related to ordinary key schools. “Trash Class” represents classes which have no relations with key school enrollment (21st Century Education Research Institute, 2011).

Table 3.3 Comparison of Nature between *Ze Xiao* and School Choice

	<i>Ze Xiao</i>	School Choice
Government's Policy	Official opposition/ Dilemma	Official support and promotion
Basic Concept of Education Reform	Efficiency as priority (Profit driven)	Neo-liberalism/ Freedom/ Needs driven
Purpose	Fund generation for supplement of the limited government's investment in education	Competition among public schools/ Efficiency, quality and accountability of public education / Diverse educational needs
Approach / Channel	Money based/ Power based/ Achievement based	School autonomy/ Diverse choices for parents and students
Effects	Increasing inequality in education/ Polarization of public schools/ Exam-driven education	Increasing inequality in education/ Diverse education

Source: Author edited.

public education, freedom for consumers in education market and accommodation of needs from consumers in education market. Thirdly, the different basic concepts of education reforms have different purposes for *Ze Xiao* and School choice. In China, mainly, *Ze Xiao* can be considered as the approach for generating fund to supplement the limited educational investment by the government, while school choice policy aims at improving efficiency, quality and accountability of public education through competition among public schools and choice of consumers in education market. Fourthly, in contrast to the government subsidy based school choice (education voucher) in the developed world, the tuition based *Ze Xiao* in China is covered entirely by parents. Besides the achievement based *Ze Xiao* that is similar as the one in the developed world, power based *Ze Xiao* through parents' social capital (*guanxi*) and money became a common practice in public school admission. Finally, the effect of school choice promoted diverse education in the developed world. Meanwhile, it caused the inequality in education because of the effect of family background on parents' choices for

children's education. As to China's case, *Ze Xiao* intensified inequality in public education. And it also fostered the exam-driven education in China.

To conclude this chapter, the review of development of *Ze Xiao* showed that the positional competition in public school admission to junior high schools has been widely practiced in urban China, particularly in major cities of China. The review further distinguished *Ze Xiao* and School choice even though they are lexical equivalents. Choice in public school admission to junior high schools in urban China does not have the meaning of freedom or shared focus on the quality improvement of public education system. As Kipins (2008) pointed out, *Ze Xiao* in urban China does not present the neo-liberalism discussion in the context of school choice in other part of the world. Besides the rapid expansion in its scale, the review indicated the diversification and the increasing complexity of *Ze Xiao*. *Ze Xiao* has been committed by money, power and children's achievement. Furthermore, the review asserts that there are various channels for parents to take part in *Ze Xiao*. Meanwhile, it also showed that the stakeholders involved in *Ze Xiao* are not limited to parents. The diverse channels for *Ze Xiao* have closely connected public schools, local education authorities, private tutoring institutes, parents' work units in the process of public school admission to junior high schools. To further explain the multi-stakeholders involved public school admission to junior high schools in urban China, I will analyze peoples' negotiation on *Ze Xiao* in Chapter four and Chapter five to answer the 1st research question. Then, in Chapter 6, I interpret the meaning behind the practice in *Ze Xiao* in order to answer the 2nd research question in the following three chapters.

Chapter 4 Negotiation on *Ze Xiao*: Public Discourses in the 1990s

To answer the 1st research question on how was stakeholders' negotiation on *Ze Xiao* shaped within the admission process to public junior high schools in urban China, in the following two chapters, I investigated the forces which shaped the negotiation among stakeholders for interests in *Ze Xiao* for education transition to junior high schools. According to the data I collected from both written texts and interviews on *Ze Xiao*, I identified two themes regarding discussion on *Ze Xiao* separated into two stages from the 1990s to the present. In the 1990s, discussion on *Ze Xiao* was mainly discussed in the theme of the unauthorized charge of school fees (*jiaoyuluanshoufei* 教育乱收费). And the theme after 2000 was on the imbalanced education development (*jiaoyubujunhenfazhan* 教育不均衡发展). The shift of the themes is almost consistent with the third (Economic revolution) and fourth period (Construction of harmonious society) of social change in China introduced in Chapter 2. Therefore, in Chapter 4, the analysis is about the negotiation on *Ze Xiao* in the 1990s. The data I used for the analysis in Chapter 4 involved the written texts, mainly including government documents and newspaper articles. And in Chapter 5, the analysis is about the negotiation on *Ze Xiao* after 2000. The data I used for the analysis involved the written texts and interviews. The written texts include government documents, newspaper articles, journal papers, and books. In order to supplement the analysis of the discussed issues about *Ze Xiao* in the written texts, particularly the issues newly emerged after 2000, I also involved interviews with various stakeholders in *Ze Xiao* to provide more evidences for the deeper analysis of the newly emerged issues regarding *Ze Xiao* after 2000 (see Chapter 5). The diverse opinions on *Ze Xiao* were categorized and analyzed based on the themes and issues identified. In terms of the presentation of the analysis, I borrowed the concept of formulation of social problem by Spector and Kitsuse (1973) in order to present the

interaction between stakeholders in the discussion on *Ze Xiao* (see 1.6.1). Therefore, in the following two chapters, the order for presenting the data analysis always followed the order as “opinions and discussions on one specific topic from the voice of government followed by the public responses”.

Chapter 4 mainly focuses on the negotiation on *Ze Xiao* among stakeholders in the 1990s. The negotiation under the theme on the unauthorized charge of school fees included four most discussed topics, including the limited education investment, the gap between public schools, school admission policy and parents’ aspiration for children’s education. Firstly, most discussions repeatedly addressed the lack of education investment as reason for causing *Ze Xiao*. On the one hand, the phenomenon of unauthorized charges of presented the limited national investment in education sector since most of government budget was invested into the economic development.⁵⁰ On the other hand, with the promotion of the market economy, government started to consider education as a fund generating engine which could collect additional fund from consumers to supplement the limited education budget. *Ze Xiao* was considered by the government as tool for schools to generate educational fund collected from parents. Secondly, the gap between public schools and the privilege of key schools in charging school admission fees intensified the charge of *Ze Xiao Fei* and *Ze Xiao*. Thirdly, the automatic promotion policy of the government, which abolished standard entrance exams from primary to junior high schools, left loophole for public school and parents to exchange money with the limited access to popular schools. Fourthly, parents’ aspiration stimulated by traditional conception of the value of education investment for children’s future, fierce competition in education also intensified *Ze Xiao* in the 1990s. Analysis of the public discussion on *Ze Xiao* in the 1990s showed a government dominated discussion on *Ze Xiao*. Compared with the voice from the central and local governments, there were few responses heard from stakeholders at school level or parent level in regard to *Ze Xiao*. In other words,

⁵⁰ According to *Outline of the Reform and Development of China’s Education*, State Council set up the goal of share of education investment in GDP as 4% in 1993 (State Council, 1993).

the voice of stakeholders in *Ze Xiao* was not fully presented in the public discussion in the 1990s.

The following part of this chapter will illustrate the government led negotiation on *Ze Xiao* based on the review of the discussion on four topics between the government documents and the public in the 1990s, including 1. The limited education investment; 2. The gap between schools; 3. School admission policy; and 4. Parents' aspiration.

4.1 The Limited Education Investment

Limited education investment is considered one of the forces which aggravated the development of *Ze Xiao* in urban China. Analysis of government documents showed paradoxical attitudes of the government towards unauthorized charge of *Ze Xiao Fei* by schools when parents choose public school admissions. The government authorized popular schools to charge *Ze Xiao Fei* in order to supplement the limited government education investment (see 2.5.5.1). On the other hand, the government repeatedly warned public schools not to charge *Ze Xiao Fei*. On the other hand, the public discussion showed many public schools “legally” charged *Ze Xiao Fei* to “supplement” the limited educational investment from the government. All of that took place under the government's look.

4.1.1 Government Documents

Government documents in the 1990s showed that the government's paradoxical attitudes towards schools charging students *Ze Xiao Fei* in urban public schools. On the one hand, some government documents informed public schools of not charging *Ze Xiao Fei* for public school admission (State Education Commission, 1993b, 1993c, 1994a, 1994b, 1995c, 1996b, 1997b, 1997c). On the other hand, the government gave some schools (particularly the key schools) privileges to charge *Ze Xiao Fei*. Moreover, due to the limited governmental education investment in compulsory education, education donation from private sector was encouraged and promoted by government. It consequently intensified *Ze Xiao*.

In 1993, State Education Commission⁵¹ issued *The notice on rectification of the charge of unauthorized fees in primary schools and middle schools*, which stated that, “it is not allowed to charge unauthorized fees on new student admission. And it is not allowed to link the education donation with new student enrollment” (State Education Commission, 1993b). In the same year, the State Education Commission released another document, i.e. *The notice on strengthening management of the charge of school fees in primary schools and middle schools*. The document emphasized on the same issue, asserting that, “Students in compulsory education are only charged fees for school facility maintenance. It is not allowed to enroll “high price student”. The sponsor fee to schools education should not be linked with school admission. Practices such as using money to buy score⁵² or school place⁵³, using money to select public schools or key schools must be banned without hesitation. The sponsor fees should be managed by local education authorities [to ensure equity]” (State Education Commission, 1993c). On the other hand, with the establishment of socialist market economy, diverse channels and types of fund generation and school management are positively encouraged (Central Committee of the Chinese Communist Party, 1993). In 1994, the government repeatedly encouraged enterprises and other social forces (*shehuililiang* 社会力量) to participate in providing education funding and management through diverse methods (State Council, 1994b). According to the same document, “sponsor fees for education” from the private sector were warmly welcome (see the increase of sponsor fees for education in Figure 2.1). Consequently, public school admission was linked with the sponsor fees, which provided a legal ground for unauthorized charges by schools.

With the increasing concerns on the unauthorized charges for school admission, government policies firstly showed firm opposition to the charge of “Ze Xiao student” in 1995. In *Opinions regarding implementation of rectification of the charge of unauthorized fees*

⁵¹ Until the Institutional Reform of the State Council in 1998, Ministry of Education was called as State Education Commission in China’s context.

⁵² Scores refers to the achievement in tests or exams related to education transition.

⁵³ School place refers to the student status or identification at school.

released by State Education Commission, it formulated that:

The issue of *Ze Xiao* student has expanded from the post compulsory education stage to the compulsory education stage, including junior high schools and primary schools. It stressed that nine years compulsory education should follow the principle of proximity and should not enroll “*Ze Xiao* student”. The sponsor fees for education should not be linked to enrollment; junior high schools and primary schools should strictly follow new curriculum, and are not allowed to hold any fee paid to remedial class, interest class, improvement class and extraordinary class (State Education Commission, 1995c).

The government strongly opposed the charge of *Ze Xiao Fei* for public school admission in 1996. According to *Opinions on the implementation of the rectification of the charge of unauthorized fees in primary schools and middle schools*, the State Education Commission emphasized that the focus should be placed on further solving the issue regarding *Ze Xiao* students in public schools at the compulsory education level in Beijing, Tianjin, Shanghai and capital cities of other provinces. The highly charged fees for *Ze Xiao* student should be inhibited without hesitation, especially in the cases in big and mid-scale cities. At the same time, various types of power-based *Ze Xiao* options, such as “memo student” and “*guanxi* student” should be inhibited without hesitation. In principle, sponsor fees should be voluntarily paid but they were not allowed to link with enrollment (State Education Commission, 1996b).

The government’s attitude towards the charge of *Ze Xiao Fei* and enrollment of *Ze Xiao* students did not change until 1997. On the one hand, the government kept emphasizing the prohibition of *Ze Xiao* at the compulsory education level; on the other hand, they made compromise and agreed to give privileges to some schools to enroll *Ze Xiao* students while charging *Ze Xiao Fei*. Since the government clarified that the funds generated from *Ze Xiao* students belong to the government, the “unauthorized” fees collected from *Ze Xiao* students suddenly became “legalized”. As a result, parents were willing to pay *Ze Xiao Fei* regardless of how high the fees were. According to *Some principle opinions on standardizing the school*

operation at present compulsory education stage, released by the State Education Commission in 1997, the government emphasized the no tuition, the principle of proximity, and equal opportunities in compulsory education. The policy also stressed that the gap between public schools in terms of school condition and student pool should not be deteriorated artificially; and public schools at the compulsory education level are not allowed to enroll “*Ze Xiao* student” and the alike. *Ze Xiao* should be committed in schools outside public sector, such as *minban* schools⁵⁴. Local governments and education authorities should devote to taking action to solve *Ze Xiao* and to fully adopt policies such as no entrance exam and proximity based compulsory education in about three years (State Education Commission, 1997c). On the other hand, the same document left loophole for some public schools in some big and medium-sized cities in terms of *Ze Xiao*. It illustrated that for such cities which encountered great difficulty in implementing the school placement by principle of proximity, *Ze Xiao* student can be accepted for the time being by a few public schools. The funds generated from taking *Ze Xiao* students belong to the state for reconstructing disadvantaged schools (State Education Commission, 1997c). As Wu (2009, 2012) pointed out, this was the first time that the government officially allowed the enrollment of *Ze Xiao* students in public schools. With the ambiguous phrases “a few public schools” and “for the time being”, the privilege of enrolling *Ze Xiao* students was officially given to the key schools in 1997. The government’s paradoxical policies on *Ze Xiao* can be considered one of the forces that shaped the development of *Ze Xiao* in urban China.

4.1.2 Public Discussion⁵⁵

The focus of public discussion on *Ze Xiao* in the 1990s was about the issue of *Ze Xiao*

⁵⁴ The *minban* schools have been promoted by China’s government since 1986 with the promulgation of *Compulsory Education Law*. In 1994 the *Opinions on implementation of the outline of the reform and development of China’s education* promoted *minban* schools and converted schools to supplement the limited government investment in education through charging school fees. In 1996 with the promulgation of the *Ninth Five Year plan for National education development and development plan for 2010*, public schools were allowed to convert into *minban* schools, such as public school assisted by *minban* or *minban* school assisted by public.

⁵⁵ The Public discussion in Chapter 4 refers to the public discourses collected from newspapers.

Fei for entering into popular schools. As mentioned in Chapter 2, education investment by the government in China was kept at a low level in the 1990s (see 2.5.5.1). Although the governmental investment in education gradually increased by the rapid economic growth, it did not reach the goal of 4 % of GDP set up by the central government in 1993.⁵⁶ According to the review of reports in *China Education Daily*, the limited government investment in education was considered as one of the reasons for *Ze Xiao* (*China Education Daily*, 1996, July 26; Pu & Jian, 1995, August 19).⁵⁷ Furthermore, because of the delegation of the compulsory education administration to local government, the local government became responsible for the investment in education. However, the limited capacity of local education investment intensified the charge of *Ze Xiao Fei* (C. Dong, 1997, July 31).

The limited governmental investment in education led to the charge of *Ze Xiao* at the school level. Public discussion showed that the limited education investment forced schools and education authorities to charge school fees for generating education fund and compensating for the lack of government education investment (Pu & Jian, 1995, August 19; Z. Wang, 1997, July 30). Meanwhile, as *China Education Daily* pointed out, school principals offered their reasons to defend their actions for charging *Ze Xiao Fei*. They argued that schools were entitled to charge student fees since schools lack money. Some principals even believed that it was reasonable to overly charge students fees since they were used in school facilities and not for their own benefits (H. Du, 1986, August 23). Lanqing Li, the Vice Premier Minister of 1996, identified the critical relationship between the charge of *Ze Xiao Fei* and school income. He pointed out that there would be a barrier to terminate the charge of *Ze Xiao Fei* since it might reduce the income of some schools (K. Zeng & Yin, 1996, July 30). Bin Liu, former Deputy Director of National Education Committee, demonstrated that the

⁵⁶ According to *Outline of the Reform and Development of China's Education*, State Council set up the goal of share of education investment in GDP as 4% in 1993 (State Council, 1993).

⁵⁷ According to *China Education Daily*, Statement of Guoquan Wang, Representative of National People's Congress, showed the low priority of education investment in China in late 1980s. He said that it was better to invest more in our education instead of buying cars or ice-cream machine (S. Li & He, 1986, January 21).

fees collected from *Ze Xiao* students could supplement for the limited education fund. However, the government should increase investment in compulsory education rather than charging from *Ze Xiao* student to supplement the government investment (Ji, 1997, August 16). Moreover, Jie Wen, former Member of Beijing Education Committee, asserted that a common misunderstanding was that educational resources could be distributed by the market or exchanged by money, which was one of the reasons for the rise of the charge of *Ze Xiao Fei* (C. Dong, 1997, July 31). With the introduction of market economy and the promotion of industrialization of education in the 1990s, education, especially quality education resources, was widely considered as goods for consumers to exchange. However, it is against the *Compulsory Education Law* and challenging the education equality at the compulsory education level. In addition, one interesting phenomenon called as “legalization of educational donation” stimulated parents’ aspiration for sending their children to popular schools by paying *Ze Xiao Fei*. Due to limited government investment in education, donation for education from the private sector was warmly welcomed by the government (State Council, 1994b). Figure 2.1 shows the increasing proportion of donations and fund-raising for running schools in diverse educational fund in the 1990s. A legalized fee charge as “education donation” was considered as another type of *Ze Xiao Fei* with an agreement between schools and parents’ employers. Since *Ze Xiao Fei* was over parents’ affordability, they had to get help from their work units. According to an interview with parents in Beijing, in the early 1990s, the majority of parents could not afford *Ze Xiao Fei*. Therefore, they had to get help from their employers. Consequently, there was a cost sharing for children’s education between parents and their employers (Xin, 1993, October 7).

Accordingly, the government had the paradoxical attitudes towards the charge of *Ze Xiao Fei* in school admission. On the one hand, the government kept showing opposition to the charge of *Ze Xiao Fei*. On the other hand, the government policies left rooms for stakeholders to legalize the charge of *Ze Xiao Fei* in order to supplement the limited

governmental investment in public education. Moreover, parents' employers took part in the cost sharing of the charge of *Ze Xiao Fei* for their employees' children. Considering the focus of "efficiency as priority" in China's development in the 1990s, the charge of *Ze Xiao Fei* generated additional funds to supplement the limited investment in education from the government. The analysis of the public discussion showed the public had already taken the charge of *Ze Xiao Fei* as an approach for achieving efficiency in public education (see 2.5.4.2).

4.2 The Gap between Public Schools

The gap between public schools was discussed from the perspective of key school system and the perspective of school conversion reform. The government recognized the risk of the school conversion reform fostered *Ze Xiao* and the key school systems intensified the unauthorized charge of school fees. However, they did not directly clarify the relationship between the gap between public schools (particularly the key school system) and *Ze Xiao*. In contrast, the gap between public schools was discussed as one of the forces which formed *Ze Xiao* in urban China by the newspaper reports.

4.2.1 Government Documents

The analysis of government documents on the gap between public schools showed the government's paradoxical attitudes towards the abolishment of key schools and the establishment of demonstration schools which led to gaps among public schools. More gaps were created while some public school converted to *minban* schools⁵⁸ to diversify the school system for the purpose of generating funds to supplement limited government education

⁵⁸ According to Tsang (2003, p.165), people-run schools are schools sponsored and managed by a community of people or a collective organization and funded by resources from the community or financial assistance from the state, etc.

investment.⁵⁹ Consequently, those issues further enlarged the gaps among public schools.

As mentioned in Chapter 2, the key school system was re-introduced with the implementation of the *Open-door Policy* in the late 1970s. With an important role in cultivating necessary human resources to boost China's economy and modernization, the key school system was taken as one of the most important strategies in China's educational reform. By giving focus on governmental investment in limited number of public schools, it would be relatively efficient to cultivate needed human resources for China's modernization. Meanwhile, government documents in the 1990s showed increasing concerns on how the key school system deteriorates the balanced development between key schools and regular schools.

Review of government documents also showed the government's concerns on the key school system which challenged the balanced development of public schools on the other hand. As indicated in *Instruction of reducing course burden of student in compulsory education and fully improving education quality*, the existence of the key school system was considered as one of the reasons for causing course students' excessive workload in compulsory education. According to the same document, in compulsory education, key schools (class) and non-key schools (class) were not allowed to be separated (State Education Commission, 1993a). In 1994, in the *Opinions on fully implementing education plan, reducing course burden of students in primary and junior high schools*, the State Education Commission reemphasized that there should have no separation between key schools (class) or non key schools (class) in compulsory education. Furthermore, the government also emphasized that the gaps between key and regular schools in the aspects of government investment, school condition, teacher quality, leadership and school administration (State Education Commission, 1994c, 1995a). In addition, the government urged to reduce the gap

⁵⁹ According to Wu (2008, p.597), 'converted school' is short for 'school-operating-system reformed piloting school'. A converted school refers to one that used to be a public school run by government but has been converted to a quasi-private/public institution that charges fees for its services.

between key schools and non-key schools. In *Opinions on standardizing the school operation at the present compulsory education stage* issued in 1997, the government expressed firm opposition to the key school system, including key classes, advanced and regular classes in compulsory education (State Education Commission, 1997a).

On the other hand, the government attempted to strengthen the position of key schools in urban society. For instance, the government document *Opinions on implementation of outline of education reform and development in China* issued in 1994 showed that the government planned to establish 1000 demonstration senior high schools nationwide (State Council, 1994b). The State Education Commission announced the details of development and evaluation of the 1000 demonstration senior high schools in 1995 (State Education Commission, 1995b). According to the criteria, without long term all round development,⁶⁰ it seems difficult for regular schools to meet the requirements not alone to participate in the evaluation. As Wu (2008) argued, there would be no doubt that the former key schools would meet the criteria and be designated as demonstration schools. Yang (2006) pointed out that the government's policy stimulated a new round development of former key schools. Consequently, the policy further intensified the gaps among public schools.

Moreover, review of government documents identified that conversion of public school to *minban* (people run) school was one of the forces that further enlarged the gaps among public schools and fostered *Ze Xiao*. In 1992, the 14th Communist Party of China (CPC) Congress announced that the objective of economic reform in China was to establish the socialist market economic system. In order to support for the economic reform, there was a need for the education system to shift into a new model which could accommodate the economic development. Therefore, the education system reform was given the green light in 1993. According to the *Outline for the reform and development of China's education* released

⁶⁰ Here, the all round development refers to both development of school infrastructure and development of human resources.

in 1993, with the on-going reforms of the economic system, the political system and the science and technology system, the education system reform should take comprehensive measures to change the government monopolized system (State Council, 1993). As to the school running system reform, the government monopolized structure should be changed with gradually establishing a system that involves government as the main body with collaboration from other social parties (State Council, 1993). Figure 2.1 indicates the rise of collaboration between government and other social parties in terms of educational investment. In the *Opinions on Implementation of Outline for the reform and development of China's education* released in 1994, the government clearly defined the new type of the school running system as follows:

Basic education is mainly run by the government. Meanwhile, based on the related laws and policies, the diverse types of school system by enterprises and other social forces are encouraged. In places where the condition is good enough, it is possible to implement government-run people-assisted and people-run government assisted schools. School owned enterprises owned schools can also be run by social forces under the supervision of local government (State Council, 1994a).

Government policies in 1996 and 1997 emphasizes on the reform of school running system. The conversion of public schools to government-run people-assisted schools (*gongbanminzhuxuexiao* 公办民助学校), people-run government assisted schools (*minbangongzhuxuexiao* 民办公助学校), community participated schools (*shequxuexiao* 社区学校) and other private schools were recommended (State Education Commission, 1996a, 1997b). On the one hand, the reform of school-running system supplemented the lack of education investment in public education and supported the education development. On the other hand, the conversion of public schools to *minban schools* was taken as a tool by some well-known public schools to generate additional school revenue charging students and parents unauthorized school fees. Ironically, it resulted in furthering the practices of *Ze Xiao*.

Towards the problems caused by the school conversion reform, in 1998, State Council

released *Opinions on experiment of reform of school system in compulsory education stage*. In this document, the government addressed the problems caused by the reform of school running system as follows,

Although the reform of school-running system has a positive effect on rectification of the charge of unauthorized school fees and eases the pressure from *Ze Xiao*, there are some problems in this reform... mainly they are presented like, some good quality schools converted into people-run government assisted schools to charge high fees in compulsory education; some good quality public schools open “school within a school”, “people-run class inside of school” or “two systems in one school”; some demonstration schools still select students by examination; some schools charge unauthorized school fees, which is very serious in some cases; There are still many low-performing schools at the local level. As a result, the public is unsatisfied with public education. And it fosters *Ze Xiao* as a result (State Council, 1998).

Apparently, as the quote above indicated, the government recognized the school conversion intensified the unauthorized charge of school fees, further enlarged the gap between public schools and fostered *Ze Xiao*. However, they did not directly elaborate the relationship between the reform and the development of *Ze Xiao* in urban China. Rather, they believed that the school conversion reform in general alleviated the pressure for *Ze Xiao*. It is the conversion of some well known schools which intensified *Ze Xiao*.

The analysis of government’s opinions on the gap between public schools indicated that the gap between public schools was caused and intensified by the government’s policies on the key school system, the demonstration school system and the reform of conversion of public schools. Facing the situation of limited educational investment from the government, generating more funds through public school conversion system looks much more important than the pressure for *Ze Xiao* caused by the gap between public schools. Moreover, the failure in alleviating the conversion of well known public schools to *minban* schools also intensified the gap between public schools and further intensified *Ze Xiao*.

4.2.2 Public Discussion

Public discussion, mainly represented in the newspaper articles, indicated that the gaps

within public schools in urban China stimulated the charge of unauthorized *Ze Xiao Fei*. And it further intensified *Ze Xiao*. Due to some historical reasons and limited state investment, key school system, representing an elite education ideology, divided public schools based on factors such as school facilities, teacher quality, and education quality. Parents were motivated to participate in *Ze Xiao* (Luo & Lai, 1992, December 3; Z. Wang, 1997, July 30; B. Zhang, 1997, July 24). In 1996, *Remin Ribao*, representing the voice of the central government, pointed out that *Ze Xiao* was caused by the key school system. It further clarified as follows:

In the late 1970s and the early 1980s, in order to recover from the Culture Revolution and cultivate human resources for country's construction quickly, a number of key schools in primary and lower secondary education were established. Those schools were given priorities in the aspects of school finance, human resources and student selection. By training quality students, those key schools made great achievements and contributions to China's construction. However, in the past decade, some local governments overemphasized on the role of those key schools and ignored other schools, which enlarged the gap between public schools in terms of school condition, education quality, and student quality. As a result, *Ze Xiao* developed gradually (Translation by the author). (Bi, 1996, March 11).

The statement above confirmed that the central government believed that local education authorities were responsible for creating an imbalance among public schools, which led to the intensification of *Ze Xiao* and pro-key schools funding strategies.

Newspaper reports showed that the abolishment of key schools unexpectedly pushed local governments to establish demonstration schools or “experiment schools” to keep the advantaged position for the former key schools. Consequently, the gaps among schools in the same region were enlarged artificially, which, continuously stimulated parents' interests in choosing schools for their children (Bi, 1996, March 11; C. Dong, 1997, July 31).⁶¹ In addition, authorized by local education authorities, key schools were given privileges to

⁶¹ The similar analysis of reasons for *Ze Xiao* can also be found from a letter written by a retired teacher in Beijing to *China Education Daily*. The teacher believed the reasons for *Ze Xiao* included the imbalanced school development and the high expectation for children's education (C. Huang, 1996, August 4).

charge *Ze Xiao Fei*, which deteriorated the alleviation of charging unauthorized school fees and intensified *Ze Xiao* (Jianping Li, 1997, July 18).

Similar to the government documents, the public discussion on *Ze Xiao* in the 1990s gave focus on the gap between public schools caused and intensified by the key school system and the demonstration system. Interestingly, although the conversion of public schools to *minban* schools was taken by the government as a reason for *Ze Xiao*, based on my review, there was not much relevant discussion on this topic by the public in the 1990s.

4.3 School Admission Policy

Public discussions showed that school admission policies were one of the forces that shaped *Ze Xiao* in urban China. On the one hand, the government kept emphasizing on “free, no screening and proximity based compulsory education”, which prohibited certificate⁶² based student selection in public school admission. On the other hand, the government gave privileges to select students based on certificates and students’ achievements made both inside and outside of schools. As a result, it intensified *Ze Xiao*.

4.3.1 Government Documents

Review of government documents showed emphasis on the implementation of the public school admission policy in the 1990s. That is, no entrance exam was required and enrollment was proximity based. At the same time, a series of documents were promulgated to ban on public school admission based on talent contests for students at the compulsory education level.

With the implementation of *Compulsory Education Law* in 1986, the entrance exams to junior high schools were gradually abolished in urban China (National People's Congress, 1986). At the same time, the proximity based public school admission was repeatedly

⁶² Certificate refers to child’s talents and achievements made in after-school curriculum.

addressed in government documents. In 1993, the no entrance exam based admission to junior high schools was addressed by the government (State Education Commission, 1993a). The reform of junior high school admission delegated the operation of graduation exam of primary school from district level to school level in 1994. Furthermore, education authority firmly promoted the policy of no entrance exam and the principle of proximity based junior high school admission. According to *The notice of further promotion and improvement of junior high school admission reform* announced, in 1995, although most provinces in China had already implemented the policies of no entrance exam and proximity based junior high school admission, *Ze Xiao* based school admission rapidly emerged in some urban schools (State Education Commission, 1995a).

A new trend was emerged when public schools performed their admissions. For example, with the gradual abolishment of entrance exam to junior high schools, there was limited room for public schools to select students they preferred. In order to select the best performed students, some public schools linked certificates of contests or competitions with public school admissions. However, the government showed firm opposition to the new trend. In 1991, the State Education Commission pointed out that the certificates students at compulsory education level received from contests or competitions intensified heavy burdens for students and teachers. The State Education Commission also emphasized that results of competitions should not be linked to school admissions (State Education Commission, 1991). In 1994, the government addressed the issues on Olympic schools and classes that increased workload for students and the charge of unauthorized fees. These schools and classes were required to close as soon as possible (State Education Commission, 1994b). Furthermore, contests or awarding activities were not allowed to link with public school admission (State Education Commission, 1994a).

4.3.2 Public Discussion

Public discussion review showed that key schools were given privileges to charge *Ze*

Xiao Fei and select students in their admissions. Discourse analysis showed that, due to limited education funding, there was a link between *Ze Xiao Fei* and public school admission. As addressed in government documents, there was also a clear link between certificates received from contests and public school admissions. Particularly, students who had certificates from the Olympic math contest would receive direct or indirect enrollment by key schools. *China Education Daily* reported the incidents as follow, in 1994,

...In many documents of local education authorities, it regulates students got awards in Olympic contests at different levels can be directly enrolled by key schools or get additional scores for education transition. In some places, it regulates students got awards in Olympic contexts at various levels can be directly enrolled by junior high schools. With the abolishment of entrance exam to junior high schools, school admission to junior high school is based on the principle of proximity. In order to go to key schools, it is important to have necessary "special talents"...With the high expectation on Olympic schools for education transition, various types of Olympic schools came into being... (Ba, 1994, October 29)⁶³

Accordingly, the fever of Olympic math training and other special talents trainings were stimulated by student selection criteria of key schools.

Public discussion also illustrated that competition results became a key criteria in key schools' admissions and student selection. For example, many key schools used Olympic math scores as the main criteria for selecting students. *China Education Daily* described the situation in 1994,

There is a student selection competition among key junior high schools in Beijing. In order to select good students, those schools hold Olympic schools or classes to select students. This competition even changed into different strange shapes. In order to enroll good students, some key schools signed agreement with students. In Olympic schools owned by some key schools, students can be enrolled directly into the key school. Also, key primary school and key junior high school collaborated with each other on the school transition. The linkage became closer compared with the policy regulated. (Ba, 1994, December 19).

⁶³ Similar arguments are also found in *China Education Daily*, February 28, 1995 (Dongming Bao, 1995, February 28).

The analysis of interaction between government documents and public discussions on the school admission policy indicated a mismatch between the public school admission policy and the actual practice of public schools, particularly key schools. The disparity in school admission among public schools was caused by the pro-key school admission policy. Certificates or results in competition of students became the key criteria for key schools to select students they prefer. The student selection by key schools intensified *Ze Xiao*.

4.4 Parents' Aspiration

Although government documents in the 1990s did not give relevant discussion on parents' aspiration as the force to push *Ze Xiao*, public discussion indicated that parents' aspiration of sending their children to popular schools was one of the forces that intensified the charge of unauthorized school fees and *Ze Xiao*. Nevertheless, public discussions showed more voices of government officials with their interpretation of parents' aspiration for *Ze Xiao* from the aspects of culture, traditional thinking and the One Child Policy. There were few voices from parents regarding their aspiration for *Ze Xiao*.

Newspaper reports showed that parents' aspiration was stimulated by three perspectives. Firstly, traditional thinking in education and historical issues shaped parents' aspiration for sending children to popular schools. According to *Renmin Ribao*, Qingchen Yu, General Director of Education Bureau of Zi Bo City, pointed out that common understanding on the value of education was reflected by some old Chinese sayings, such as "*Man struggles upwards; Water flows downwards (renwanggaochuzou, shuiwangdichuliu 人往高处走, 水往低处流)*." and "*He who excels in study can follow an official career.*" The traditional thinking explained parents' active participation in *Ze Xiao* by paying *Ze Xiao Fei* (Yu, 1996, February 1). According to Songhua Tan, Deputy Director of National Education Committee Research and Development Center, due to the traditional culture, blue collar workers had low

social status in Chinese society. Therefore, to prevent children from becoming blue collar workers, parents were willing to exhaust their financial resources on *Ze Xiao* by sending their children to popular schools (Z. Wang, 1997, July 30). Secondly, the implementation of One Child Policy allowed parents to be able to invest everything in children's education. In an interview about *Ze Xiao* in 1997, Jie Wen, Member of Beijing Education Committee, offered a comprehensive analysis on parents' aspiration for *Ze Xiao*. She pointed out that,

..., it [*Ze Xiao*] is caused by the One Child issue. Parents of the One Child generation are almost those who spent their student period in the Culture Revolution. Therefore, they have high expectations and expect their children to fulfill their own dreams. Under old fashioned education value, value of human resource and employment standard, there is a high demand for education. To some extent, this is a blind pursuing for "high quality" education... (Translation by the author) (C. Dong, 1997, July 31).

Thirdly, the fierce competition in higher education and the labor market pushed parents to "voluntarily" send children to good quality schools by paying *Ze Xiao Fei* (Dongming Bao, 1996, March 11; Dongming Bao & Wang, 1995, December 16; Yu, 1996, February 1). In 1997, according to Songhua Tan, Deputy Director of National Education Committee Research and Development Center, the current employment system in the labor market focused more on educational credentials while ignoring student's capacity. Therefore, to make sure their children enter universities, parents had to send children into good primary schools and junior high schools (Z. Wang, 1997, July 30).

China Education Daily reported an interview with parent in 1993, which showed parents' "willingness" and understanding of *Ze Xiao Fei* for children's education. One parent said,

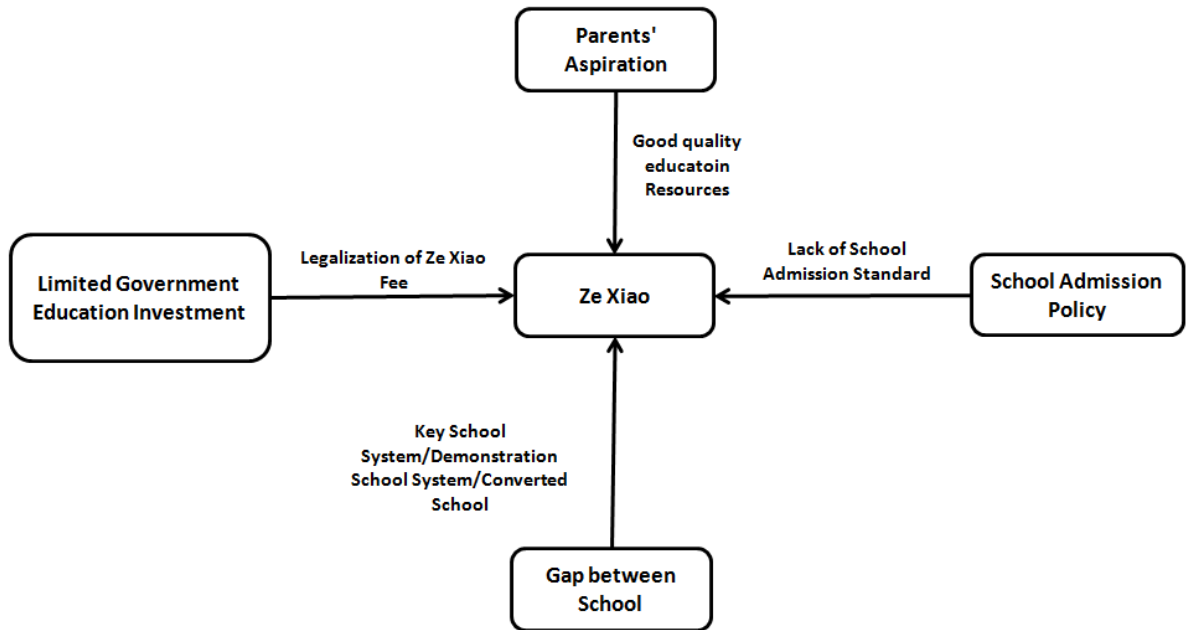
...In fact, schools charge fees, and parents pay the fees. Every parent would like to enroll [his or her] child in a good school. Therefore, parents are willing to pay. However, the price of the fees just went up because of the competition among parents. Schools are not rich. In order to keep good teachers through improving teachers' welfare, they (schools) have no choice instead of but charging fees...

(Translation by the author) (Xin, 1993, October 7).

On the one hand, the quote above shows parents' understanding of the charge of *Ze Xiao Fei* by public schools. On the other hand, it indicates that competition among parents for sending children to schools they prefer generated the environment for schools to raise the price of *Ze Xiao Fei*.

To conclude this chapter, analysis of government documents and newspaper reports on *Ze Xiao* in the theme of the unauthorized charge of school fees in the 1990s illustrated in Figure 4.1. As Figure 4.1 shows, in the government dominated public discussion on social issues, negotiation on *Ze Xiao* among stakeholders in the 1990s was mainly influenced by four forces, including the limited government education investment, the gap between public schools, school admission policy and parents' aspiration for children's education. First, due to limited government education investment in the 1990s, the government legalized the charge of *Ze Xiao Fei* as educational donation from the private sector to public education. It can be considered as the result of government's policy that encouraged the schooling invested by social fund (see 2.5.5). It stimulated parents' aspiration to pay *Ze Xiao Fei* in order to enroll their children to schools parents preferred. Second, Deng's ideology on the cultivation of human resources for modernization of China in short term deeply influenced development of elite education in public education in China (see 2.5.4.2). The key school system together with the demonstration school system and the policy on conversion of public schools to *minban* schools created gaps among public schools. Those gaps might have forced parents to take any action to send their children to popular schools. Third, since there were no clear government's guidelines for public school admissions after the abolishment of entrance exams to secondary education, the charge of *Ze Xiao Fei* became acceptable to parents if they wished to enroll children in good schools. Meanwhile, analysis of the public discussion on *Ze Xiao* also indicated that *Ze Xiao Fei* as supplement for limited governmental investment in public education is attractive for both local education authorities and public schools. The economic

Figure 4.1 Public Discussions on *Ze Xiao* in the 1990s



Source: Created by the author.

profits generated from the charge of *Ze Xiao Fei* stimulated local authorities and public schools to charge the fees although it is against the policies made by the central government. Moreover, the link between contests and key school admissions also pushed parents to send children to after-school curriculum for student selection in public school admission. Fourth, traditional consensus of education for people's fortune, high expectation for the only one child of the family and the fierce competition in higher education and labor market forced parents to believe that the only way for their children to climb up the social ladder and have prosperous life was to send them to universities. Therefore, in order to achieve this objective, parents were willing to devote anything they have for children's education through *Ze Xiao*.

Chapter 5 Negotiation on *Ze Xiao*: Public Discourses after 2000

Chapter 5 continues investigating the negotiation on *Ze Xiao* among stakeholders in admission to junior high schools after 2000. In this chapter, the data I used for the analysis involved both written texts and interviews that I conducted with various stakeholders in Beijing. According to the experience in collecting information on *Ze Xiao* after 2000, I recognized that *Ze Xiao* became a common practice in most urban areas after 2000. And there was an increasing public discussion on *Ze Xiao* from various types of medium, including but not limited to the government documents, newspapers, journal papers, and books. Therefore, I assume that it would be necessary to involve more opinions and discussion on *Ze Xiao* if I could collect diverse information from stakeholders at different levels. Accordingly, in terms of the written texts, besides newspapers articles at central government level, I collected newspapers at city level and from private sector. Also, I collected journal papers and books on *Ze Xiao* and public education published after 2000. Moreover, I recognized there were some newly emerged issues related to *Ze Xiao* which were receiving people's eyeballs on the newspapers without concrete explanations and deep discussion. In order to further elaborate these issues in the negotiation on *Ze Xiao* and show the development of public discourse on *Ze Xiao* as dynamic and on-going process, I also conducted interviews with stakeholders, such as school principals, administrators in district education authorities, managers of private tutoring institutes, scholars and journalist in Beijing. The presentation of analysis in Chapter 5 will follow the order as "governmental action followed by the public responses".

In Chapter 5, the negotiation under the theme on the imbalanced education development included five most discussed topics which have similarities and differences from the issues discussed in the 1990s. On the one hand, public discussions continuously highlighted that the negotiation on *Ze Xiao* among stakeholders was closely linked with the

limited education investment, the gap between public schools, parents' aspiration and school admission policy. On the other hand, discussions provided more specific discussion on *Ze Xiao*. Meanwhile, they raised the newly emerged issues which were not touched upon in the 1990s. These issues were mainly about the systematic conflicts and mismatch between public education and social development in China.

In the following sections of this chapter, I explain issues which influenced stakeholder's negotiation on *Ze Xiao* after 2000. In order to avoid redundancy, I mainly highlight the updated discussion on the issues discussed "The 1990s" and "After 2000". Then, I give focus on three newly emerged issues after 2000 mentioned above.

5.1 The Distribution of Limited Education Investment

After 2000, the limited education investment was, continuously, considered as one of the forces which shaped *Ze Xiao* in urban China. Moreover, the government shifted their understanding that *Ze Xiao* was considered as the result of imbalanced education development. Meanwhile, the public discussion indicated that people shifted their focus on *Ze Xiao* from the amount of education investment to the balance in distribution of the limited investment in education.

5.1.1 Government Documents

Ze Xiao Fei as unauthorized charge of school fee was continuously addressed and firmly prohibited by the government after 2000 (Ministry of Education, 2002; Ministry of Education et al., 2003; Ministry of Education & State Council for Rectifying, 2002; State Council, 2001; State Council Office for Rectifying & Ministry of Education, 2001). After 2000, the government actively promoted the alleviation of poverty and social inequality, with special focus on the construction of harmonious society by the central government in 2006. The government gave growing concerns on the perspective of balanced development in various fields of China (see 2.5.4.3). Gradually, focus of relevant discussions on *Ze Xiao* also

shifted from understanding of *Ze Xiao* as result of unauthorized charge of school fees in the 1990s to the one as the result of the imbalanced development of public education after 2000. The imbalanced development of compulsory education was taken as the main reason for *Ze Xiao*. In other words, the balanced development of compulsory education was considered an important approach for solving *Ze Xiao* at the compulsory education level (State Education Commission, 2004).

From 2007, the government kept emphasizing the balanced development of compulsory education to prevent public schools from charging unauthorized fees in school admission (Ministry of Education, 2007b, 2010b; Ministry of Education et al., 2008, 2009, 2010, 2011). As solutions, the balance of opportunity to popular public schools, the improvement of weak schools and so forth were suggested in these documents. The change was accelerated by the government who gradually realized that the main reason for *Ze Xiao* in urban China was the imbalanced development of compulsory education and the imbalanced distribution of opportunities to access to good quality education.

5.1.2 Public Discussion⁶⁴

Similar to the public discussions on *Ze Xiao* in the 1990s, the public discussion after 2000 continuously showed concerns on the limited education investment and relevant issues which caused *Ze Xiao* and the charge of *Ze Xiao Fei* (Xiao, 2009, December 15; C. Zhao, 2009).⁶⁵ Moreover, in contrast to the firm opposition to *Ze Xiao Fei* shown in the government documents in the 1990s, the public discussions after 2000 showed critiques on government's attitudes towards the charge of *Ze Xiao Fei*. They indicated that the charge of *Ze Xiao Fei* could be considered as government's compromise towards the dilemma between the limited educational investment and the increasing demand for quality education in China (Y. Wang,

⁶⁴ The public discussion in Chapter 5 refers to newspaper articles, journal papers, books, and interviews that I conducted with various stakeholders related to *Ze Xiao* in Beijing in 2011.

⁶⁵ According to *China Youth Daily* (Xiao, 2009, December 15), result of a survey conducted by *China Youth Daily* among 30 cities showed that 75.8 percent of participants involved in this survey chose school gap caused charge of high *Ze Xiao* fee was considered as the more serious educational inequality phenomenon in China.

2005, November 7; X. Zhao & Zhai, 2006, March 8). As Principal of Nanjing No.1 Middle School argued in an interview by *China Education Daily* in 2005,

Schools are taking responsibility for the charge of *Ze Xiao Fei*. On the other hand, we [the society] should deeply consider why the government allows schools to charge fees and where the money goes to? ... Due to the slogan "Poor country manages big education", the government cannot provide enough investment in education. They can provide policy only. The policy is to allow schools to make it possible to increase the size of classes. It means to increase teacher's workload through enrolling fee charged students. Some local governments released the restriction on *Ze Xiao Fei*. In fact, this action aims to legalize the fee charge for *Ze Xiao*. In Nanjing, parents pay *Ze Xiao Fei* to government's account directly. 30% of the total amount will be used for improving poor quality schools. The rest 70% will be paid back and used for improving schools' facilities, teacher salaries, and other expenses (Translation by the author). (Y. Wang, 2005, November 7).

The statement above clearly showed that both the local government and public schools could get benefits through the legalization of *Ze Xiao Fei* and the ownership shift of the fees. The profits can be presented by the education fund generation through charging school fees for sending children to public key schools or the converted key schools (Dongming Bao & Chu, 2001, May 11; *China Education Daily*, 2002, March 7; Weili Hua, 2000, September 19; Weilie Hua, 2001, November 24; Wei, 2007; T. Zheng & Liu, 2010, January 14).⁶⁶ The charge of *Ze Xiao Fei* was the result of lack of education investment. And the failure in eliminating the charge of *Ze Xiao Fei* could be interpreted as the attempt of local government to protect their own profits.

On the other hand, public discussion on *Ze Xiao* after 2000 gave more focuses on the balanced distribution of the limited educational investment. They considered that the

⁶⁶ Besides *Ze Xiao Fei* that is directly paid to schools, there are various types of payment that are related to *Ze Xiao*. *Ze Xiao* has also stimulated the rise of price and renting fees for housing near popular schools. Following the principle of proximity based school admission at the compulsory education level, parents are willing to buy condominiums that are located near key schools. An internet based survey conducted by *China Youth Daily* showed that 57.3 percent of participants in the survey were willing to buy properties their children because of *Ze Xiao*. According to Fang (2011), 'School district apartment' that is popular among parents has become a model for the development of the real estate market. Property developers invited popular schools to establish branches in their new housing projects in order to attract potential buyers so they could make huge profits through the *Ze Xiao* Fever. Moreover, with the boom of participation in cram schools or relevant classes for *Ze Xiao*, parents have to pay expensive tuition fees for their children to attend those classes. Such an investment has become a big financial burden for many families.

inappropriate distribution of the limited education investment among public schools was the reason for *Ze Xiao* and unauthorized charge of *Ze Xiao Fei* (X. Fan, 2004, March 15; Jiao, 2003, May 22; Y. Wang, 2005, November 7; H. Wen, 2003, July 21; Xia, 2004, February 24; Xinxiaoxibao, 2009, August 16).⁶⁷ For example, in 2005, as *Ze Xiao* became more serious, Dongping Yang, Professor of Institute of Technology of Beijing, raised a couple of questions that critically touched upon the imbalanced distribution of educational resources presented by *Ze Xiao* issue. As Professor Yang⁶⁸ described in *Nanfang Zhoumo*⁶⁹,

The *Ze Xiao* Fever is becoming popular. One of the popular explanations for causing this phenomenon is “the lack of good quality educational resources”. However, comparing with 5 years ago, one decade ago or even two decades ago, whether our good quality education resource increased or not? With the increasing of good quality education resources, why has *Ze Xiao* Fever not cooled down? And why is it becoming more popular? With the economic development, why is education becoming more expensive and is over people’s affordability? ...I will say that the imbalanced distribution of educational resource enlarged the gap between schools even though the total educational investment [by the government] is increasing (Translation by the author). (D. Yang, 2005, December 1).

The statement above indicated that *Ze Xiao* is not merely caused by the limited educational resources invested by the government. Rather, it is due to the imbalanced distribution of educational resources. The imbalance in distribution of educational resource between different regions and among public schools intensified the gap of education resource at regional level

⁶⁷ The left behind construction of poor quality public schools is also considered as one of reasons for *Ze Xiao* (Weng, 2003; Xia, 2004, February 24; Jie Zhang, et al., 2003, October 26).

⁶⁸ Dongping Yang, is a professor from Beijing Institute of Technology, famous education specialist and Cultural scholar. He is the deputy secretary of China’s first environment NGO “Friends of Nature”, president of 21st Education Research Institute. His research interests include China’s education reform, environment protection, history and culture protection, education inequality and relevant practice. In 2009, Yang wrote an article to criticize Olympic math education in China. It raised a fierce public discussion on this issue in Chinese society. In 2011, Yang edited a report which is about *Ze Xiao* issue in Beijing. In this report, Yang and his team showed firm attitude to alleviate *Ze Xiao* and relevant problem in compulsory education in urban China. Yang is awarded as “50 Influential Intellectual in China” by *Nanfang People Weekly* in 2004.

⁶⁹ According to *The New York Times*, *Nanfang Zhoumo* is considered as the largest and most influential Chinese paper that consistently produces top-flight investigation journalism. Based in the freewheeling southern city of Guangzhou, the paper deals with topics that most of the government press will not touch... Retrieved from <http://www.nytimes.com/2002/03/24/world/under-pressure-chinese-newspaper-pulls-expose-on-a-charity.html>, accessed on March 1, 2010.

and school level. The gaps separated public schools and forced parents to select schools for their children.

Analysis on the distribution of the limited educational resources indicated that there was growing critiques on government's policy regarding alleviation of *Ze Xiao* despite the government's continuous firm opposition to *Ze Xiao* in public school admission. Furthermore, the profits by *Ze Xiao* for both local governments and public schools pushed local education authorities to legalize *Ze Xiao Fei* through the ownership shift from public schools to local education authorities. The principle of "efficiency as priority" promoted from the 1990s in economic reform deeply influenced education development. With the decentralization in education sector, the "Legalization of *Ze Xiao Fei*" can be considered as approach for local education authority and public schools to improve efficiency. In contrast to the equality driven policy at central government level, policies at local and school level are more efficiency driven. More importantly, the consensus on the reason for *Ze Xiao* after 2000 gave emphasis on the imbalanced distribution of the limited educational investment. This shift can be considered as the result of the promotion of the construction of harmonious society through balancing educational development in China.

5.2 The Gap between Public Schools

Analysis of government document and the public discussion on *Ze Xiao* after 2000 indicated the key school system and its conversion intensified the gap between public schools in urban China. And the gap caused *Ze Xiao*. Moreover, the privileges authorized to key schools and popular schools by the government also intensified *Ze Xiao* in urban China. In addition, profits in school admission generated by the effect of key school and its conversion stimulated peoples' aspiration to take part in *Ze Xiao*. Comparing with the public discussion on *Ze Xiao* in the 1990s, the discussion after 2000 gave comprehensive analysis on issues

regarding the gap between public schools. These issues include privileges of key schools given by the government in terms of school's development and public school admission, transformation of the key school system to demonstration school system and the gap between the converted public schools and the regular public schools.

5.2.1 Government Documents

Review of government documents showed that there were three perspectives which intensified the gap between public schools and *Ze Xiao*. They included the key school system, the converted schools and improvement of weak schools.⁷⁰ Firstly, although the government abolished the key school system officially in 1997, the government recognized that there was continuous influence of key schools on public compulsory education and repeatedly showed their firm opposition towards the existence of key school system and key classes (National People's Congress, 2006; State Council, 2010).

Secondly, conversion of public schools into *minban* schools was considered as the reason for *Ze Xiao*. The government continuously promoted policies on conversion of public schools into *minban* schools (National People's Congress, 2001; State Council, 2001). Nevertheless, parents' zeal for *Ze Xiao* was stimulated by the emergence of conversion of popular key schools to *minban* schools. The government document issued in 2002 showed concerns about the reason that public key schools or popular schools desired to change their status to *minban* schools, stating that:

Public primary schools and junior high schools with high quality of education, teaching level and good social reputation are public education resources through a long-term accumulation. They should not be converted into *minban* schools or converted for the reason of charging high school fees (Translation by the author) (Ministry of Education & State Council for Rectifying, 2002).

⁷⁰ According to Ministry of Education (1998b), the weak schools refer to public schools in big and medium size cities which are not well managed, with low teaching quality, not sound social reputation, and not receiving trust from parents and students. These are caused by relatively bad teaching condition, weak school leadership, weak teaching teams and problems in terms of student admission.

In order to terminate the conversion of public key schools to *minban* schools, the government issued a couple of policies between 2004 and 2005 (National development and reform commission & Ministry of Education, 2005; State Council, 2004). According to Wu (2008), two options were suggested to deal with conversion of public schools. That is, schools could choose to turn into real *minban* schools or to change their status back into public schools. Schools were required to complete the transactions by 2009 (Ministry of Education, et al., 2009).

Thirdly, the existence of weak public schools in public school system is another reason which intensified *Ze Xiao*. The government desired to improve weak schools and achieve balanced education in order to deal with *Ze Xiao* (Ministry of Education, 2002, 2009, 2010a; State Council, 2007).

Apparently, the government gradually recognized that the gaps between public schools fostered *Ze Xiao* in public school system. The analysis of government documents also showed their firm opposition and attitude to reduce the gaps. However, the analysis of public discussion below showed the different stories contrasting to what the government said.

5.2.2 Public Discussion

Public discussion identified that the gap between public schools as the result of the imbalanced education development intensified *Ze Xiao* in urban China (Fei, 2000, July 10; Weili Hua, 2000, September 19; Zhihong Yuan, 2007, November 12; Z. Zhao, 2006, April 13).⁷¹ The interviews I conducted with school principals, scholars and other stakeholders in Beijing also showed the gap between the public schools, particularly the gap caused by the key school system, severely affected the balanced education development. As a result, it

⁷¹ According to *China Youth Daily* December 15, 2009, result of a survey conducted by *China Youth Daily* among 30 cities showed 63.9 % of the participants in the survey believed the big gap between schools was the main reason for *Ze Xiao*. It also indicated that 75.8 percent of participants involved in this survey chose school gap caused charge of high *Ze Xiao* fee was considered as the more serious educational inequality phenomenon in China (Xiao, 2009, December 15).

fostered *Ze Xiao* in Beijing.

The interview I conducted with Dr. Ni Wu, Education Specialist from the National Institute of Education Sciences indicated that the key school policy (see 2.5.6.2) was the reason for *Ze Xiao*. In contrast to the original purpose for selecting key school as model schools for improving underperforming schools, Dr. Wu pointed out this policy was not implemented appropriately and lost the balance at local level. It stratified public schools. Meanwhile, it did not give serious concerns on the improvement of non-key schools. Although the key school system has been terminated by the government since the late 1990s, the transformation of key schools to demonstration schools kept the advantage and popularity of key schools in the public. Dr. Wu argued that the establishment of demonstration schools from the mid-1990s negatively influenced the alleviation of *Ze Xiao* in Beijing. Moreover, key schools became the fund and profit generator for the local governments. As Wu explained,

... those [key]schools at the compulsory education level still have big influence. Those schools are given special focus by a local authority. And, definitely, they are also the focus for parents. Although the term “key school” has been eliminated, local governments still treat those schools differently. Some policies and evaluations still give favor to those schools.... Some local government officials even use key schools as resources to boost their power. Key schools became a card for a local government to exchange profits with stakeholders. And these [what I mentioned above] stimulated the public’s aspiration for *Ze Xiao*... (Translation by the author)

-Interview with Dr. Ni Wu, April 28, 2011

Interview above indicated that the local governments took actions to protect such schools and considered such schools as card for exchanging profits between stakeholders in contrast to the policy on abolishment of key schools by the central government.

Besides these, my interviews with school principals and staffs of local education authorities in Beijing provided diverse explanation on reasons for *Ze Xiao* caused by the key school system.

My interviews with school principals in Beijing showed the key schools were given

more privileges in terms of students' selection, teachers' hiring and teachers' welfare. These caused the imbalanced development among public schools. In other words, the imbalanced development between public schools in Beijing mainly referred to the gap of "soft power (students' qualities, teachers' qualities and teachers' welfare)" between schools. The vice principal of School F⁷² in Dongcheng District analyzed that there was no big difference in terms of infrastructure between key schools and non-key schools since all schools followed the same standard by the government. The big gap between the two types of schools mainly referred to students' quality and teachers' quality. According to the former principal of School E⁷³, although the computer lottery system in school admissions was to balance the educational development, the imbalance of student distribution still existed among junior high schools due to the fact that some key schools could choose not to participate in the system. In reality, key schools were allowed to pick qualified student first. Mrs. Feng, teaching and research staff from the Education Training and Research Center in the Dongcheng District of Beijing clarified that student distribution reflected the pro-key school process, a practice that negatively influenced the balance of student quality between key schools and regular schools. She said that,

When I was a teacher in School F, the student distribution was equal. At that time, key schools around us averagely enrolled four or five classes. Since they had the privileges to select quality students in this district, School F could only enroll the so called "second-class students". How about now? You know, the enrollment in key schools was enlarged. In recent years, they had enrolled an averagely 8 or 10 classes... On the one hand, the enrollment of key schools has been doubled. On the other hand, comparing with previous years, School F enrolls less good quality students ... the imbalance of student quality between schools is getting worse...
(Translation by the author)

-Interview with Mrs. Feng, November 7, 2011

⁷² School F is public school in Dongcheng district. Although this school is not a key school, it is popular as a popular school among parents in Dongcheng district. The interview was conducted on November 7, 2011.

⁷³ School E is a converted school which means that school changed its status from a public junior high school to a converted school in 1996. The school is located in the Chongwen District of Beijing. The interview was conducted on May 9, 2011.

The case above showed that the non-key schools were discriminated by the pro-key school admission policy. The practice of students' selection enlarged the gap between key schools and regular schools, which further fostered *Ze Xiao* in the urban public school system.

Furthermore, the imbalance of teachers' distribution and teachers' welfare between key schools and regular schools in the same or different school districts also contributed to the imbalanced education development in Beijing, which led to more serious issues such as more parents wanted their children to go to key schools. And more teachers changed jobs and worked for key schools.

The former head of the Educational Supervision Office in the Chaoyang District of Beijing pointed out that there was a big gap of teachers' welfare between key schools and regular schools. Key schools regularly offered teachers incentives such as rice, eggs and other life necessities (such as shampoo, tissue paper).⁷⁴ In contrast, non-key schools had very little to reward their teachers. Consequently, key schools or schools located in affluent areas became the "haves" and underperforming schools became the "have not". The turnover of teachers affected parents' decisions for their children since they would like their children to enroll in schools that had more quality teachers. Dr. Ni Wu explained that the imbalanced teachers' distribution among public schools and between districts deeply affected the balanced educational development and intensified *Ze Xiao*. Although the government attempted to make some adjustments to prevent teachers from turning over, Dr. Wu argued that the non-civil servant status of teachers was the main reason for the rotation of teachers. He further clarified the difficulties,

...being different from Japan that makes public school teachers civil servants at

⁷⁴ Regarding gap of welfare between schools, former vice principal of School A told a real story. One teacher of School A moved to a key school at city level. The salary was several times compared with the one in School A. Every academic year, teachers in this key school were required to go abroad for self study tour. The cost of domestic tour could not be covered by school side. Teachers in this key school were asked to buy laptop. School side only covered the laptop which was over 10000 yuan. This story shows a big gap of teachers' welfare between key school and regular school. (The interview was conducted with former vice principal of School A on April 18, 2011).

the national level, teachers in China are just employees of their schools... in order to make a teacher rotation within a district, we need to make teachers civil servants at the district level. In order to narrow down the gap of teachers between districts, we need to make teachers civil servants at the city level... However, here is a problem! According to district based compulsory education administration, it is not appropriate to upgrade teachers' management at the city level... therefore, it is difficult to balance the teacher quality between districts... the only solution is to make teachers as civil servants at national level... however, due to the gap between urban and rural areas, it is still not easy to fulfill this goal... (Translation by the author)

-Interview with Ni Wu, April 28, 2011

Dr. Wu's analysis on teacher rotation system indicated that it would be difficult to fulfill the balance in quality of teachers in public schools without a systematic reform of employment system in public education of China.

Interviews I conducted with school principals also showed that the demonstration school system further broke the balance among public schools in terms of distribution of financial resources, teachers' distribution and student selection. Head teacher from School D⁷⁵ agreed that the transformation of a key school to demonstration school⁷⁶ excluded many children from entering popular schools through the process of public school admissions. The demonstration school system broke the balance of educational resource distribution in each district, as well as balance in the distribution of human resources and students between public schools.

Moreover, the complicated relationship between key schools and the newly designated demonstration schools was taken as a reason for *Ze Xiao*. With the transformation of key schools to demonstration schools in urban China, key schools were required to separate junior high school department from the senior high school section. The latter became the newly established demonstration schools. Some junior high school departments of key schools

⁷⁵ School D is a demonstration school in Xicheng District.

⁷⁶ According to Ni Wu, the demonstration school refers to senior high school. This type of school used to have both junior high school department and senior high school department. In order to become demonstration schools, they are required to separate the junior high school part from the newly designated demonstration schools. The interview with Ni Wu was conducted on April 28, 2011.

became the branches of the demonstration schools. Those schools were allowed to become *minban* schools. However, according to Dr. Wu, at least in Beijing, the link or collaboration between newly established branch schools and the demonstration schools still existed. And the collaboration continuously influenced parents' decision on *Ze Xiao*. The open enrollment⁷⁷ at the newly established branch schools or the newly converted *minban* schools could be considered as a way of quality control in student selection for demonstration schools. In other words, demonstration schools were able to select well-performed students from affiliated junior high schools. This policy attracted many parents to be willing to send their children to those affiliated junior high schools in order to get access to the demonstration schools. Such student selection process was considered as cause of the imbalanced student distribution among public schools. As a result, it also intensified the competition for *Ze Xiao*. This process represented not only competition between parents but also competition among public schools, particularly the demonstration schools.

In addition, the imbalance of education development was caused by the gap between converted schools and regular schools. According to the former principal of School E, the conversion⁷⁸ allowed those schools to charge school fees and open special education programs. School E established a special English education program and became popular among parents. According to principal of School E, the school planned to enroll around 240

⁷⁷ Open enrollment in this study means enrollment of students from the whole city of Beijing. According to Dr. Wu, only demonstration schools and some converted schools have such privilege.

⁷⁸ The conversion of public schools to *minban* schools started from 1996 in Beijing. According to current principal of School E, the purpose of establishing these converted schools was originally to collect more funds for schools by charging tuition fees. By 2003, there were about 50 converted schools in Beijing. With the rapid economic development and increase of education investment, in 2008, Beijing education authority required these schools to make decision to return to public school system or become fully *minban* schools. In Beijing, 90 percent of the converted schools chose to return to public school system. Currently, these schools are still given authority to select students by themselves. The full implementation of the proximity based school admission will start in the coming several years. (Interview with principal of School E was conducted on May 16, 2011). As to the reform of converted schools in Beijing, vice principal of School G in Chaoyang District considered it as the unification of education resource within Beijing by Beijing education authority. In order to balanced teacher's salary, it will be easier to make reform in the same system (Interview with vice principal of School G was conducted on October 27, 2011).

students at most in 2011.⁷⁹ In contrast, they received more than 1000 applications.⁸⁰ With the privilege to hold entrance exam to select student, the schools could enroll better students than other regular public schools. This enlarged the gap of student quality between schools. Moreover, the gap further stimulated parents' participation in *Ze Xiao* process. Independent scholar Feng Wen viewed the converted school reform as a mistake made by the government. In his opinion, it just aimed to supplement the lack of government investment in education through collecting fees from parents. It also aimed to generate more social welfare for teachers and education sector as a whole.⁸¹

Towards discussion on the gap between public schools caused by the key school system, the office director of a private tutoring institute in Beijing showed positive view when she was interviewed. She firmly believed that key schools could become examples for regular schools to improve school management and educational quality. Moreover, she pointed out that key schools provided high achievers with opportunities to key universities. And those students could become the elites for China's future.⁸² Obviously, the director held the view that the elite education ideology was the right choice for urban China. Moreover, she believed that the key school system was useful for elite student selection in public schools, especially those popular schools.

The analysis of public discussion, particularly through the interviews I conducted in

⁷⁹ Since the school had to accept 80 school recommendation students based on the admission policy for local schools, the number of students for open enrollment was 160 only.

⁸⁰ The popularity of School E was represented by interview with Parent 6 from School B whose son went to take the entrance exam to School E in 2011. According the parent, there were at least 700 or 800 students who took part in the entrance exam held by School E. In contrast, the enrollment plan in School E was 200 in 2011. The interview with this parent was conducted on May 13, 2011.

⁸¹ Interview with Feng Wen was conducted on October 30, 2011. Feng Wen is one of staffs in a private tutoring institute in Beijing. He started independent research on China's education from 1992. His research interests include entrance exams to university, education transition to secondary education, pre-school education, equality in education, and sustainable education development. Mr. Wen's blog often shows some firsthand data regarding basic education in China. It has become popular blog for parents and education research institutions to understand various perspectives of China's education.

⁸² The interview with office director of private tutoring institute was conducted on April 20, 2011. This institute was established in 1994. Until May 2012, this institute has established branch schools in 12 cities in China. In Beijing, until May 2012, it has 93 branches. It has been selected as one of the most influential private tutoring institute by mass media for years. For more information, please refer to the link, <http://www.juren.com/>

Beijing, indicated that the conflict between government's policies on the abolishment of key schools and the establishment of demonstration schools and the conversion of public schools to *minban* schools caused the imbalanced development of public schools. Consequently, it forced stakeholders to take part in *Ze Xiao*. The analysis showed that key schools, demonstration schools, converted schools, local education authorities and individual families became the stakeholders in *Ze Xiao*. *Ze Xiao* presents collective profits among these stakeholders in public school admission.

5.3 School Admission Policy

Similar to the discussion in the 1990s, the discussion after 2000 continuously considered the delegation of the administrative responsibility of compulsory education to the local government as the force that broke proximity based public school admission and ironically stimulated the aspiration of local education authority to best accommodate needs for public school admission to junior high schools. Meanwhile, public discussion showed that the innovated channels in public school admission by the local government collaborated with other relevant stakeholders intensified *Ze Xiao* in urban China. These channels include admission by school recommendation and admission by special talents.

5.3.1 Government Documents

After 2000, the government continuously addressed proximity based public school admission (Ministry of Education, 2002, 2004; National People's Congress, 2006; State Council, 2010). Public schools at compulsory education level were not allowed to admit students through exams or special selection (Ministry of Education, et al., 2010, 2011).

Moreover, with the delegation of responsibility in compulsory education from the central government to the local (district) government and education authority (National People's Congress, 2006), the principle of proximity in public school admission was challenged by diverse school admission options, which were innovated by local governments

and public schools (see Table 3.1 and Figure 3.2).⁸³ A review of government documents on public compulsory education transition in Beijing showed the delegation of authority on education transition to the local level left space and possibility for the rise of diverse channels in this process. It may accommodate the various demands for education transition. Conversely, it may also intensify *Ze Xiao* and cause inequality in public compulsory education (Beijing Municipal Education Committee, 2008, 2009, 2010, 2011). As showed in Table 3.1, there were diverse options for public school admissions at local level in 2010. It is against proximity based school admission at compulsory education which was repeatedly addressed by Beijing Municipal Education Committee. The diverse channels in school admission fostered *Ze Xiao* in Beijing.

5.3.2 Public Discussion

Public discussion after 2000 illustrated that the public school admission policy broke the balance of student distribution among public schools, which led to the imbalanced school development and intensified *Ze Xiao* (Dongming Bao & Chu, 2001, May 11). In contrast to the proximity based public school admission promulgated by the *Compulsory Education Law* of 2006, various channels were innovated by the local education authority and public schools to meet the increasing demands for quality education. Besides the *Ze Xiao Fei* based school admission which existed from the 1990s, the channels for *Ze Xiao* became diverse after 2000. These channels for *Ze Xiao* presented as the interaction among stakeholders regarding mismatch between demand and supply for school admissions. Besides *Ze Xiao Fei* based option, public discussion indicated that student's achievement based *Ze Xiao* became the mainstream channel for school admission after 2000. Mainly, this option included admission by school recommendation and admission by special talents. In this section, I analyze public discourse on the relationship between these channels for school admission and their impact on

⁸³ According to Ding (2001), the Compulsory Education Law in 1986 stated provinces, autonomous regions and municipalities have autonomy to decide the education system by considering their locality.

Ze Xiao.

5.3.2.1 Admission by School Recommendation

Public discussion showed that the admission by school recommendation approach was an authorized (by the education authorities at city or district level) channel for accommodating the needs from students in public school admission. However, since this channel was exam-based and depended on the subjective evaluation of students' academic performance, it stratified students and excluded low academic achievers but with good ethics from popular schools. More seriously, since this channel was linked with education transition and student selection, it distorted the equality in compulsory education and made education more utilitarian.

The interviews I conducted with some scholars and relevant stakeholders showed diverse attitudes towards the admission by school recommendation approach. According to Dr. Wu, Education Specialist, the purpose of admission by school recommendation was to accommodate the needs for diverse options at school level in Beijing. It was the result of negotiation between local education authority, public schools and parents. He further explained,

Both admission by school recommendation and admission by special talents are authorized approaches in the current school admission process at the district level in Beijing. *Ze Xiao* does exist in those approaches. But there is no rule to follow. ... In the past, the full computer lottery system based school admission was not widely accepted. So, what shall we do? The solution should be widely accepted. And at the same time, it should be functional for student selection. Therefore, education authorities just provided various choices for parents and students to choose. You know, I do not think these stimulated *Ze Xiao*. In fact, they are just solutions for education authorities to alleviate the conflicts in the process of *Ze Xiao*. Or we can say it is a compromise indeed (Translation be the author).

-Interview with Ni Wu, April 28, 2011

In contrast to Dr. Wu's neutral attitude towards the admission by school recommendation, Mr. Zhu, the former director of Education Supervision Office in one district

of Beijing offered some negative comments about the channel. He believed this channel stratified students into different groups, which was against the *Compulsory Education Law*. In his opinion, students who were not recommended by schools invisibly labeled as “not excellent students”. Such channel would not only raise the burden of both parents and students, but also affect students’ attitudes towards their future life. Mr. Xu, Office Manager of School H, shared Mr. Zhu’s view. He argued admission by school recommendation made compulsory education into selective education and it was against the *Compulsory Education Law*.⁸⁴ Furthermore, Mr. Xu pointed out that the criterion utilized in the admission by school recommendation should be more objective and scientific. In most of the interviews I conducted in Beijing, stakeholders opposed the approach of taking “Three excellence student”⁸⁵ as one of the most important criteria in the evaluation of the recommended students. They raised various weaknesses of the “three excellence student” evaluation. For example, Principal of School G in Beijing pointed out that the “three excellence student” evaluation was not comprehensive enough since it over emphasized students’ academic achievements without giving comprehensive evaluation on students’ ethics and physical development. Feng Wen, as independent scholar, thought “three excellence students” was easily affected by subjective factors, such as teachers’ biases and teacher-parents relationship.⁸⁶ Principal of School I in Beijing shared a similar opinion that people’s biases influenced the evaluation of “three excellence students”. She specified that,

⁸⁴ Interview with Mr. Xu from School H was conducted on May 10, 2011.

⁸⁵ In 1953, Mao Zedong, firstly, gave the definition of “Three excellence student” in a statement for the Communist Youth League. He asked young people to achieve “good health, good study, and good work.” (Mao, 1969). According to Chinanews.com, this evaluation of students was abolished during the Culture Revolution. Then, it re-emerged after the “lost ten years” (Retrieved from <http://tv.sohu.com/20080916/n259584866.shtml>, accessed on April 12, 2011). In 1982, Ministry of Education and the Central Committee of Youth League promulgated the approach for selecting three excellence students in secondary education. The criterion should follow: the students who are selected due to excellence in terms of morals (*de* 德), study (*zhi* 智) and health (*ti* 体) (Ministry of Education, 1982). According to CPC Beijing Municipal Committee, Beijing started evaluation of three excellence student from 1979. Three excellence students selected in primary schools could be directly enrolled by key junior high schools (CPC Beijing Municipal Committee, 1979).

⁸⁶ This interview was conducted on October 30, 2011.

In fact, this evaluation causes various issues. We need to take care of teachers' feelings, pay attention to the corruption... you know, in order to let children become "three excellence students", parents give gifts to head teachers... and also we need to take care of children's feelings and parents' feelings. The evaluation will affect children. Some of them really care about the result... (Translation by the author)⁸⁷

-Interview with Principal of School I, October 25, 2011

The quote above showed that the evaluation of "three excellence student" in the public schools was linked with teacher-parents relationship and parents' socioeconomic status. To some extent, "three excellence student" or "school recommended student" became one type of "education resource rent seeking" for public schools, teachers and parents. It can be considered as a platform for "profits exchange" between public schools, teachers and parents. And the participation in this exchange depends on socioeconomic status of parents.

Parent 1 from a primary school in Dongcheng District of Beijing took admission by recommendation to key schools as predetermined process. In Dongcheng District, "three excellence students" was the prerequisite for students to gain school recommendation. As Parent 1 explained, "Although the recommendation process looked fair, there were loophole for schools and parents to reach the result they preferred." She further explained the necessity for parents to take initiative in this process,

As parents, if we do not fight for the opportunity, then our children may not be selected. You know, for head teacher, "small gift" [gift at cheap price] from parents generally does not work at all. You know, we [parents without high socioeconomic status] have very few chances! This year the school recommendation ratio is about

⁸⁷ According to Principal of School I, problems caused by evaluation of "three excellence student" are quite complicated. In fact, the various evaluations have their reasons to exist. Now, if a child can be selected as "three excellence student", then he or she can save 50000 yuan or 100000 yuan for parents! This title can change his life. To some extent, it is a reliable option for children to find out an access to popular schools. This evaluation also increases many works for school side. For these evaluations, we need to have four meetings among teachers. And finally, once the result is announced, school side has to accept parents' questions and arguments. Furthermore, sometimes the evaluation process is difficult to manage. The number given by education authority sometimes is difficult to averagely distribute to each class. For instance, if we have to select seven or eight students from 3 classes, it is difficult to balance. It may even deteriorate relationship between teachers and school leaders.

20 % of the total enrollment. However, you know, there is no guarantee for accepting all recommend students in the admission (Translation by the author).⁸⁸

-Interview with Parent 1, Primary school in Dongcheng District, May 18, 2011

According to *Guangming Ribao*, the quota of school recommendation student is determined by the education authority in each district. Since school recommendation students should be all round developed, the admission by school recommendation approach intensified the competition in school transition (Jinghua Zhang, 2011, May 10).

Principal of School G showed negative attitude towards the link between “three excellence student” and school admission to junior high schools. In his opinion, the “three excellence student” was just an honor for students. The link with school admission made the title very utilitarian. In other words, students might pretend to be good for becoming “three excellence student” in order to be recommended to key schools.⁸⁹ In addition, according to the office director of one private tutoring institute, the “three excellence student” evaluation often excluded students with good capacity but did not seriously obey the school disciplines. Thus, such evaluation became a barrier for those students to access to key schools.⁹⁰

5.3.2.2 Admission by Special Talents

With the school admission reform in the 1990s, admission by special talents at the compulsory education level was innovated by local education authorities to meet the increasing demand for sending children to popular schools. Public discussion illustrated that this option became a channel for parents to choose schools for their children. With the abolishment of the entrance exam to junior high schools, students had to take more extra curriculums to get certificates of talents to meet the requirement of popular schools for school admission (Xiaoxin Wu, 2008). The interviews with parents conducted by the media showed

⁸⁸ Similar problem was also mentioned by principal of School I. According to this principal, in Xuanwu District, the enrollment ratio of school recommendation student was about 87 percent in 2010. It means that not 100 percent of school recommendation students can be successfully enrolled by key schools (Interview with principal of School I was conducted on October 25, 2011).

⁸⁹ The interview with Principal of School G was conducted on October 27, 2011.

⁹⁰ The interview with office director of private tutoring institute was conducted on April 20, 2011.

that many of them had to spend lots of money and sent their children to various after school curriculum classes so that their children could become more competitive in the admission by special talents. The interviews with parents showed that the main reason for doing so was to send their children to popular schools. One parent said,

“The reason for [my child] taking the Music Level Exam is because of the current school admission. Some schools showed they enroll special talent students based on their certificates.” (Shi, 2004, February 17).

Another parent said,

...if my child can get awards in music instrument contests, then it will be helpful for my child to be recommended to a key senior high school or taking special talent student tests given by key senior high schools. (*Jinri Zaobao*, 2007, September 23).

The interviews above indicated that the after school curriculum or special training for cultivating children's interests became utilitarian for sending children to popular schools.

Moreover, admission by special talents was also widely considered as a convenient approach for public schools to select students in accordance with their interests. Schools which were authorized to enroll special talent students could enroll any student they needed.⁹¹ They could select students by tests authorized and scheduled by local education authority. One principal said that these schools could do anything for the students they preferred (Ye, Chai, & Bao, 2006, June 13). In other words, the government authorized approach could be considered as a platform for popular schools to select students. Obviously, it is against the *Compulsory Education Law* in China. Meanwhile, it intensified the competition in school admission among schools, students and parents.

In addition, public discussion showed that the lack of criteria for student evaluation was also one reason for schools to emphasize the importance of certificates presenting various

⁹¹ According to interview with principal of School E, public school which can enroll special talented students should be authorized by local education authority. Mainly, the former key schools are those which are qualified to be selected as such type of school. The interview was conducted on May 16, 2011.

special talents of students. In contrast to the *hukou* based school admission to junior high schools, popular schools took initiatives to take various certificates as a kind of criteria for student selection (L. Su, 2005, November 8). Accordingly, the student selection by popular schools generated the certificate fever for school admission and intensified *Ze Xiao* as a result. Meanwhile, it seems that school admission by special talents became key school initiated student selection. Both parents and students were forced to follow the rules.

5.3.2.2.1 Admission by Olympic Math & PETS

One of the rules is to select students based on achievement in Olympic math study. In contrast to the prohibition on school admission by Olympic math, public discussion showed that Olympic math was closely linked with school admission at practice level. According to public discussion, achievement in Olympic math as special talent was widely accepted as channel for enrollment of special talent students. The link between Olympic math and public school admission stimulated parents' aspiration for sending children to Olympic math training classes. On the other hand, this link connected various stakeholders for their own interests through *Ze Xiao*, such as key schools and private tutoring institutes.

For parents, the Olympic math was "Open sesame" for children's education transition to popular schools. One parent showed the close link between Olympic math and school admission. And the achievement in Olympic math of pupil can save *Ze Xiao Fei* for their parents in school admission to junior high schools (S. Wang, 2005, April 17). Another parent from Beijing explained that the purpose for sending children to Olympic math was to enroll child into experiment class in key schools (Chai, 2005, March 2). Furthermore, the enlargement of enrollment in higher education was also considered as external reason for the Olympic math fever in *Ze Xiao* at compulsory education level (Y. Li & Liang, 2009). As introduced in Chapter 2, in order to send children to the key universities in China, parents believe *Ze Xiao* is one step in the preparation for the entrance exams to universities. Director from one private tutoring institute involved in my fieldwork took Olympic math class as a

platform for students and parents to get access to key schools. Standing behind the private tutoring institute, she argued that it was unfair to close Olympic math class by the government. She further clarified that Olympic math class just accommodates the needs from parents and students.⁹² Meanwhile, Independent scholar Feng Wen argued that the Olympic math based *Ze Xiao* is unfair if it needs parents to invest both time and money in the relevant training. Relatively, it excluded disadvantaged groups from this channel for *Ze Xiao*.

For schools, Olympic math was considered as one criterion for key schools to select student. News about Olympic math study in Beijing showed the link between Olympic math and school admission to junior high school caused the boom of Olympic math study (*China Education Daily*, 2003, September 28). Furthermore, student selection for key schools is closely dependent on the collaboration between private tutoring institutes and key schools. It intensified school admission by Olympic math. Interview with a parent in my fieldwork illustrated the close link between Olympic math, private tutoring institutes and key schools in school admission. She told that,

My son took part in two Olympic math classes in two private tutoring institutes.⁹³ Since both of these schools are so called “Golden class”, we sent our son to study there. I heard that one of the schools recommended 91 students who studied in this private tutoring school to key schools as special talent students in Dongcheng District last year (2010).⁹⁴ You know, this private tutoring school is becoming popular in recent years in Beijing. Key schools in this (Dongcheng) District all invited their director to interview students who applied these key schools. And

⁹² Interview with Director of the private tutoring institute was conducted on April 30, 2011.

⁹³ One of the private tutoring institutes in this conversation has been listed on the Exchange market in China. According to independent scholar Feng Wen, nowadays, there are four private tutoring institutes which have been listed on the Exchange market in China. The main reason for the rise of these institutes’ success is closely linked with the exam oriented education. Since there are needs for Olympic math for education transition to public junior high schools, these private tutoring institutes identified the needs and responded efficiently. Mainly, private tutoring institutes in China are just supplement for school education at basic education level. Their role is to strengthen what schools teach in the class. Without changing the education structure on the policy and systematic level, it is impossible for private tutoring institutes change. The student selection based collaboration between key schools and some private tutoring institutes is understandable. Since there is profit, there is collaboration (Interview with Feng Wen was conducted on October 20, 2011).

⁹⁴ Parent 1 heard this information from others parents whose children studied Olympic math in the same institute as Parent 1’s son did. According to Parent 1, parents always shared rumors about school admission policies, enrollment number in specific key schools, strategies for going to key schools.

some key schools even invited this school to organize entrance exams for them to select students. So ... (laughing)... you can see the relationship and the link with education transition...

-Interview with Parent 1 from primary school in Dongcheng District, May 18, 2011

In my fieldwork, although Director of Private Tutoring Institute in Beijing denied their collaboration with key junior high schools, she clarified that private tutoring institute provided a platform for parents and junior high schools to make mutual selection. Exams held by private tutoring institutes were taken as criterion for selecting students by some key schools. It became approach for key schools to select students they expected. Meanwhile, the Olympic math focused exam for student selection by key schools further intensified Olympic math for *Ze Xiao*. According to this director, some public junior high schools, especially the key schools, took knowledge of Olympic math as the main part in their entrance tests. These tests were much more difficult than what students learn from school curriculum. In order to meet the needs for making children well prepared for these tests, it was necessary for parents to send their children to after school programs held by private tutoring institutes. In other words, the mismatch between school curriculum and the tests for student selection at key schools intensified the development of *Ze Xiao* by achievement in Olympic math.

In addition, public media also reported that the direct reason for Olympic math in China was the economic profits generated through the link between Olympic math and education transition (*China Education Daily*, 2009, May 31). Considering the cost spent on Olympic math training classes, relevant text books and contests, there would have a big amount of benefits generated by Olympic math (see 5.5.3).

Meanwhile, interviews I conducted with Independent scholar Feng Wen showed that the lack of appropriate evaluation criteria for student is the core reason for school admission by Olympic math. He confessed that Olympic math provided a relatively objective evaluation criterion for students. And to some extent, it solved the problem of equality in education. Relatively, exam based education transition was a fair approach for students to compete for

the access to popular schools.⁹⁵

Besides Olympic math, public discussion indicated that PETS became a channel for parents and students to take part in *Ze Xiao* and a standard for key schools to select students (*Beijing Wanbao*, 2007, May 16).⁹⁶ Scholars also stressed that the boom for *Ze Xiao* by PETS was caused by the popular school which took it as criteria to select student (Yang & Chai, 2010; Fang, 2011; J. Wang, 2008; D. Yang, 2006). Apparently, admission by special talents can be considered as the result of the mismatch between public school admission and the demand for going to popular schools from parents and students. Meanwhile, it is also intensified by the motivation of popular schools for student selection. In other words, admission by Olympic math can be considered as the platform for mutual selection between parents and public schools.

5.3.2.2.2 Admission by Pre Admission Training Class

Public discussion showed that pre admission training class as a channel for *Ze Xiao* was stimulated by the lack of reliable student evaluation criteria in current public school admission. The pre admission training class is considered as the result of public school admission reform. Principal of School F specified that,

... the abolishment of unified entrance exam to junior high school led to a school admission without standard for student selection. It stimulated the market of pre admission training class. As a result, key schools are always oversubscribed since many students apply such schools. Therefore, these schools have to select good

⁹⁵ In the interview, Mr. Wen explained the paradox of Olympic math in terms of education transition. According to him, the Olympic math based school admission is shaped by the lack of standardized student evaluation system. For parents, Olympic math is an approach to send children to popular schools, especially for parents who do not have *guanxi* and money. Therefore, when Professor Dongping Yang publicly showed his firm opposition to Olympic math and its link with education transition, many parents stood up to against him and protect their “Open sesame” for children’s good quality education (Interview with Feng Wen was conducted on October 20, 2011). Similar argument can also be found on *China Education Daily*, March 1. 2005. According to *China Education Daily*, Siming Zhang, Math teacher, Peking University Affiliated Middle School, pointed out that the narrow student selection standard made Olympic math as a standard for student selection (Daosu Bao, Zhang, & Chai, 2005, March 1).

⁹⁶ *China Youth Daily*, November 24, 2005. Retrieved from http://33te.com/education/edu_news/051214224518389638530.shtml , accessed on March 13, 2012.

students through exams. Since some private tutoring institutes just provide such training and guarantee the access to key schools with collaboration with key schools, the pre admission training class becomes popular...(Translation by the author)

-Interview with Principal of School F, November 7, 2011

This approach became a platform for key schools to select students they preferred through the collaboration with private tutoring institutes. It intensified the imbalance in student distribution between public schools and *Ze Xiao* in urban China. Government official from Ministry of Education pointed out that it was necessary to alleviate phenomenon of “*Zhankeng Ban*” since some schools (key schools) have already taken it as tool for selecting students (Chun, 2011, February 24). According to *China Education Daily*, an interview with a parent showed “*Zhankeng Ban*” became a tool for key schools’ student selection. The parent analyzed,

...For popular junior high school, school recommendation students should be best from primary schools. However, due to the different level of primary schools, the best students recommended from different primary schools are different (in terms of quality). Since the good quality student is the main objective for popular junior high schools, principals from such schools says that they have their own ways to select good students. Their own way is to hold selection exam by training institutes. Then based on the result, schools will select students. The most popular training institutes have close relationship with those key schools. Therefore, only those who attend their classes can have opportunity to take such exams (Translation by the author). (J. Wang, 2008, July 6).

According to *Beijing Ribao*, in order to send children to go to popular schools, parents have to enroll children to “*Zhankeng Ban*” through entrance exam. Then, students will be screened and selected by key schools through several rounds of exam. Interviews I conducted with Principal of School E⁹⁷ and Principal of School G⁹⁸ in Beijing indicated the nature of the pre admission training class as tool for student selection by key schools. Sometimes, in order to avoid the influence by sudden change of policy at city or district level, the student selection

⁹⁷ Interview with principal of School E was conducted on May 16, 2011.

⁹⁸ Interview with principal of School G was conducted on October 27, 2011.

through “*Zhankeng Ban*” is often held before the announcement of public school admission policy. In Beijing, before the announcement of the school admission policy by municipal education authority, some popular schools have already finished their student selection through pre admission training classes (H. Liu, 2009, March 25).

Series of reports showed the collaboration between parents, private tutoring institutes and key schools in terms of pre admission training class. *Guangming Daily* also analyzed that,

“Pre admission training class in fact is *Ze Xiao*. It is totally against the principle of proximity and the equity in compulsory education and the balanced compulsory education development. Pre admission training class is created by parents. It includes “Gold Class” which is held by popular school affiliated training institutes; Multifunctional Class which is held by popular private training institutes... (Translation by the author)” (*Guangming Ribao*, 2010, July 25).

As the main participants in the “*Zhankeng Ban*”, parents shared their experiences which showed collaboration between private tutoring institute and key schools. One parent introduced,

...Now, training schools have direct relationship with some key schools. They held selection exam for key schools in training schools and won possibility for children who wanted to go to key schools. Exam results in these schools become important reference for key schools to select children. (Translation by the author) (*Beijing Youth Daily*, 2009, February 15).

The analysis of pre admission class showed the close collaboration between key schools and private tutoring institutes in terms of public school admission. On the other hand, it illustrated key schools took initiatives in student selection which was against *Compulsory Education Law*. Private tutoring institutes became the media for parents and public schools to achieve mutual selection. At the same time, they could generate profits through holding the pre-admission training classes and hosting exams for student selection by key schools. In other words, school admission to junior high schools was closely involved in education market through student selection by key schools. The marketization of public school admission

generated profits for key schools, private tutoring institutes and individual families.

Meanwhile, it also became exclusion for families without relevant resources to enroll their children in key schools.

5.4 Parents' Aspiration

Public discussion indicated that parents' aspiration in children's education was one of the reasons for *Ze Xiao* (He, et al., 2005, May 24; B. Wen, 2005, May 31; Z. Zhang, Shi, & Shen, 2005, May 25). According to *Renmin Ribao* in 2005, a survey on *Ze Xiao* showed that the most selected reason for *Ze Xiao* is parents' aspiration for selecting good studying environment for children (He, et al., 2005, May 24).⁹⁹ In 2005, *Wen Hui Bao* also analyzed that the emerging *Ze Xiao* phenomenon was caused by expectation of parents for children's education (Niu, 2005, November 29). Regarding parents' aspiration on *Ze Xiao*, Bingqi Xiong, professor from Shanghai Jiaotong University, analyzed,

...the order from government showed their attempts to reduce students' study burden. However, it caused parents' disagreement...since exam driven education has forced students and parents to believe it is not allowed to lose one score...everything is based on score. And sometime, one score can completely change one's life. Since parents are afraid of losing "any single score" for children's future competition, parents don't want children to miss any step in daily education. And they do not want to lose any single score for *Ze Xiao*. Therefore, *Ze Xiao* War comes out fiercely every year... parents worry that their children will be left behind and lose their future if they give up participating in *Ze Xiao* and give up sending children to remedial classes. (Translation by the author) (Xiong, 2007, July 5).

There were reasons which stimulated parents' aspiration for taking part in *Ze Xiao*. Firstly, parents' aspiration rose with the fierce social competition in both education transition and labor market (F. Li, 2007; Qu & Yang, 2007). In 2003, in an interview reported by *Wen Hui*

⁹⁹ The survey was conducted among 600 parents from Beijing, Shanghai, Guangzhou, Wuhai, Xian, Nanjing and other major cities in China. The second reason for *Ze Xiao* is the "sheep mentality". 56 percent of parents think they should participate in *Ze Xiao* since majority of parents are doing it. And 33 percent of parents think the reason for *Ze Xiao* is due to the low education quality of school in their school districts.

Bao, a parent, said,

...Due to the fierce competition for human resource, we must take part in *Ze Xiao*. It is the fact that without going to good primary school it is difficult to go to good junior high school. Then it will be difficult to go to good senior high school and good university. As a result, it will be difficult to find a good job! (Translation by the author) (J. Lu, 2003, September 1).

The interview with parent above presented the formula “university degree= good jobs = better income = social prestige” on people’s understanding for investment in education (see 2.5.4.2). The monetary reward through education fuels parents’ enthusiasm to invest in children’s education.

Secondly, parents’ aspiration was stimulated by the One Child Policy (Niu, 2005, November 29; Yinfu Yang, 2005, December 5). Because of this policy, parents wish to devote anything to their children. *Beijing Ribao* showed parents had consensus that “*My child should not be left behind at the starting line!* (*bunengranghaizishuzaiqipaoxianshang* 不能让孩子输在起跑线上)”. It deeply influenced parents’ decision in choosing schools for their children (Bang, 2010, November 5). Moreover, the traditional consensus, such as, “*He who excels in study can follow an official career.*”, “*Education can change life* (*jiaoyugaibianmingyun* 教育改变命运)”, pushed parents to actively take part in *Ze Xiao* (Zhai & Chai, 2007, July 30). One interview with parent by *China Education Daily* showed similar statement regarding their willingness to pay money in order to enroll their children to popular schools. The parent said that,

...they were willing to send their child to good school even though they had to sell everything at home. Otherwise, it would be impossible to go to good high schools, good university. And as a result it would be impossible to have good job (Translation by the author). (Xinhuashe, 2008, March 9).

Thirdly, parents’ aspiration was activated by the imbalanced development between

schools. Both the gap between public schools and the limited good quality education resources pushed parents to take part in *Ze Xiao* (J. Su, 2009, February 16; Y. Wang, 2005, November 7).

In addition, parents' own experiences and their zeal for children's education pushed parents to join *Ze Xiao*. Interview with Independent scholar Feng Wen further illustrated that *Ze Xiao* presented as parents' competition for children's education was stimulated by the increasing aspiration of parents for children's education. He clarified that,

“...Another reason for *Ze Xiao* is the rapid improvement of parents' quality. In the 1950s and the 1960s, the highest education background of parents was upper secondary education or low secondary education. If their kids went to high schools, it will honor their family and clansmen. Nowadays, many parents have higher education background or even education experience abroad. Therefore, parents who have Ph.D. or Master degree will try to send children to good quality education or even expect their kids to go to higher level education than themselves. ... The high standard, expensive tuition excluded migrant children... In addition, *guanxi* is an important factor which can be utilized for children's education transition. With the rapid increase of family income, parents are willing to use their *guanxi* and money for children's education. And most parents would like to give children the best but not the most appropriate. *Ze Xiao* is not a need for good quality education resources but a need for parents to compete with other parents. ... The enlargement in higher education also caused pressures on *Ze Xiao* (Translation by the author).”

-Interview with Feng Wen, October 30, 2011

Mr. Wen's clarification indicated that the parents' high aspiration for children's education depended on parent's experiences and their education background. Moreover, the interdependent relationship between parents' social network and economic status excluded the disadvantaged groups from *Ze Xiao*. In addition, *Ze Xiao* presents a competition for accommodating parents' self-esteem through sending children to key schools. Children's willingness was not given serious concern in this process.

Interestingly, interviews I conducted with stakeholders in Beijing also showed some critiques on parents' aspiration. To be more specific, the mismatch between parents'

aspiration for children's education and children's capacity caused *Ze Xiao*. Principals from different schools argued that parents' choices in *Ze Xiao* might not best meet children's needs.

According to interview with principal of School F in Beijing, most decisions made by parents might not be appropriate for their children. Parents had aspiration to send children to good quality education resources without considering whether this decision is appropriate to their children or not. She further illustrated,

... In fact, most parents did not really understand why they chose the school for their kids. They just felt that since that school used to be key school it was a good school. And their kids must go to good schools. Regarding whether the schools were really appropriate for their kids, in fact, parents did not think too much... Obviously, most parents just wanted to try their best to send their kids to the best schools. While they did not think whether these schools were appropriate to their kids or not (Translation by the author).¹⁰⁰

-Interview with Principal of School F, November 7, 2011

Similarly, Principal of School G also concerned, "the motivation for *Ze Xiao* actually comes from parents without considering children's conditions."¹⁰¹ In other ways, parents' aspiration for *Ze Xiao* is caused by the mismatch between parents' aspiration for children's education and children's capacity/wishes for their own education.

5.5 Beyond the Imbalanced Education Development

What difference between discussion in the 1990s and after 2000 is that there were emerging critiques which demonstrated systematic issues in educational and social systems as

¹⁰⁰ Principal of School F also pointed out that the mismatch between parents' expectation and children's capacity in *Ze Xiao* was often misled by public media. According to her, "*Ze Xiao* represents a concept of consumption. It is very normal. The point is not whether people choose or not. Rather it is which choice is more appropriate for students. I think media sometimes misled parents and the public. They mainly focused on the word "*Ze*" (choose). But, they neglect to discuss to choose what ... In my opinion, media should discuss more on how to wisely and appropriately choose schools." This interview was conducted on November 7, 2011.

¹⁰¹ Interview with Principal of School G was conducted on October 27, 2011.

the main reasons for *Ze Xiao* after 2000. These issues included the mismatch between economic and education development, systematic exchange between power and education resources and the limited government's capacity. Moreover, interviews with school principals, scholars, staffs from local education authorities, parents as well as staffs from private tutoring institutes in Beijing specified these emerging issues with Beijing's characteristics. In the following part, I provide concrete analysis on these issues.

5.5.1 Mismatch between Economic Development and Education Development

The rapid economic development stimulated individuals' demand for education which was represented by *Ze Xiao* in urban China. The growth of private investment in education is increasing in recent years (see Figure 2.1). It seems that the government dominated education is being replaced or challenged by the emerging demands for self-determined education. Increasing number of parents is involved in decision-making process for their children's education. On the other hand, public education system cannot best accommodate these needs. Due to the limited capacity to accommodate demand for education from migrant children by the public schools, there were an increasing number of migrant children who were involved in *Ze Xiao*. The public discussion on *Ze Xiao* showed that it was the mismatch between economic development and education development rather than the imbalanced education development which stimulated *Ze Xiao*.

5.5.1.1 Emergence of Question on Education for What?

Regarding *Ze Xiao*, Cheng (2011) gave emphasis on the shift of demand for education from the state to individuals. Considering the monetary reward from education, parents were willing to pay money for sending children to schools which they preferred instead of following the school assignment. On the one hand, *Ze Xiao* represented the increasing demand for individuals' development through education. On the other hand, *Ze Xiao* raised the question on "*Ze Xiao* for what?" and "Education for what?"

Public discussion started to give special emphasis on the purpose of basic education to

illustrate the deeper structural reasons for *Ze Xiao*. It showed that *Ze Xiao* is caused by the unclear objective of public basic education in urban China with the rapid social change in China.

Professor Kang from Peking University clarified that the current development of *Ze Xiao* presented the overly emphasized needs for education from parents and the society while neglecting the basic needs from children. In other words, basic education in China does not give serious concern on children's needs for the basic education. He further analyzed that,

What is basis education? Basic education is the education which can satisfy the needs for people's life, need for people's growth, people's internal demand and social needs. However, the social needs are completely different from children's internal demand. And the latter is what we neglect in education sector and society. ... Our current methods in children's cultivation and *Ze Xiao* for children do not take children's basic needs as basic human needs. Originally, it should be taken into consideration in education. While currently, it has become something that is outside of education. Parents just send children to schools. They do not expect children to think of other things. ... Our education is doing something that we would like children to know, to do and to be. Consequently, there is big number of children who do not know what they really want to do (Translation by the author).

-Interview with Jian Kang, November 4, 2011

Considering Deng's modernization theory and the idea of construction of harmonious society through education, the role of education is closely connected with needs of the nation's development (see 2.5.4). In contrast, the value of education for individual's development was neglected and replaced by the value of education for national development.

Moreover, Professor Zemin Wu, from East China Normal University in Shanghai, highlighted the unclear objective of basic education (compulsory education) was distorted by the exam driven education ideology and the utilitarian doctrine in education. The exam driven basic education was overly emphasized by the public. He further explained,

After the implementation of Open Door Policy, the human resources strategy in

China pushed the pressure down from entrance exam to university to lower level of education. Recently, this situation is becoming more serious. People have reached consensus that “In order to go to good quality junior high school, it is necessary to go to good quality primary school. Then, in order to become elites, climb up to the high status on the social ladder and receive good income in this society, it is necessary to go to key senior high school and key university. The utilitarian doctrine has been vividly presented in China’s education sector. ... One of the reasons for *Ze Xiao* is that compulsory education in China does not have clear objective. Compulsory education for children in the early stage should cultivate their interests in study, cultivate their good living habits and customs. And it should be happy education. However, modernization, education development, talented person and human resources have been closely linked. And the basic education has been impressed by the exam driven education and utilitarian doctrine (Translation by the author).

-Interview with Zunmin Wu, November 24, 2011¹⁰²

The utilitarian doctrine in China’s education sector can be linked with the discussion on the monetary reward as the main aspiration for education in China in Chapter 2 (see 2.5.4).

Besides these, independent scholar Feng Wen showed negative attitude towards the monopoly of public basic education which influenced *Ze Xiao* in urban China. Although central government firmly expressed negative attitude towards *Ze Xiao* through the slogan “*Public schools do not enroll Ze Xiao student. Go to minban schools for Ze Xiao* (*gongbanbuzexiao, zexiaozaominban* 公办不择校，择校找民办).”, majority of participants conducted *Ze Xiao* in public popular schools since these schools have more good teachers and receive more privileges in terms of school development from education authority.¹⁰³ In Wen’s opinion, without a well developed private education system as competitor and supplement for public basic education, parents will continue choosing schools in public sector. Consequently, it will be difficult to alleviate *Ze Xiao* in urban public schools.

¹⁰² The statement of Professor Wu was collected from the Symposium on *Ze Xiao* Fever hosted by 21st Century Education Research Institute on November 24, 2011.

¹⁰³ According to Lin (2006), most elite private schools have been met with discriminatory measures from the government, such as exclusion from consideration for model schools and refusal to recognize their teachers’ seniority when the teachers want to return to public schools. In contrast, education authority maintain advantages of key schools by distributing highly qualified teachers and establishing much better facilities and equipment.

5.5.1.2 Migrant Children

Public discussion raised the increasing number of migrant children in urban China was one of the reasons for *Ze Xiao*. Notwithstanding, the issue was not widely reflected in mainstream discussion by the public. With the rapid urbanization, there is growing number of internal migrants flowed into urban areas. Due to the limited capacity of accepting migrant children in public schools, there was a competition among these children and their parents for public education in receiving areas (Jing Liu, 2012). Without *hukou* in receiving areas, paying *Ze Xiao Fei* became the only way for migrant families to enroll their children into public schools. As Jie Mao, Representative of National People's Congress, analyzed,

...due to the imbalanced development in regional education development, increasing number of migrants and the limited capacity of accepting migrant children in public schools in urban areas have become reasons for the rise of *Ze Xiao Fei*. (Xinhuashe, 2008, March 9).

Also, the *hukou* system is also one reason for migrant children's *Ze Xiao* (T. Chen, 2005). Due to the proximity based compulsory education in China, without local *hukou* it is difficult for migrant parents to enroll their children in urban areas. Therefore, migrant parents have to take part in *Ze Xiao* in order to enroll children to public schools. The need for the reform of *hukou* based compulsory education is still not fully responded by the government. Meanwhile, the mismatch between supply and demand for migrant children's education in urban China not only intensified *Ze Xiao* among migrant parents but also among local parents. According to Feng Wen, the increasing number of migrant children in urban public school pushed parents in Beijing to send their children to popular schools which do not have many migrant children.¹⁰⁴ It further intensified *Ze Xiao* in urban public schools.

5.5.2 Systematic Exchange between Power and Education Resources

After 2000, there was an increasing critique on the exchange between power and

¹⁰⁴ The interview was conducted on October 30, 2011.

educational resources in urban China. Public discussion indicated that the systematic exchange between power and education resources was another reason for *Ze Xiao* in urban China. According to *Nanfang Zhoumo* in 2004, interview with Professor Dongping Yang from Beijing Institute of Technology showed that *Ze Xiao* was caused by the systematic exchange between power and education resources, or money and education resources in the process of industrialization of education¹⁰⁵. On the one hand, the limited education resources became a big market. On the other hand, our education system could not accommodate the current demand for education. The combination of these two effects caused the “Education resource rent seeking (*jiaoyuziyuanxunzu* 教育资源寻租)” which seriously distorted the meaning of education and led to corruption in education (D. Yang, 2004, October 7).¹⁰⁶

Regarding the exchange between power (*guanxi*) and education resource in Beijing, Professor Kang, from Peking University, critically pointed out that,

... Who can do *Ze Xiao* in Beijing? People have money can take part in it. People have good score can participate in *Ze Xiao*. The score based *Ze Xiao* sounds relatively fair. However, it is still difficult if you only have good score. You should have money, power and *guanxi*. People without these still cannot do *Ze Xiao*... *Ze Xiao* is not a right based competition. The equality for some people directly influences equality for others in education. Therefore, the limited good quality education resource is dominated by those who have advantages. Those who do not own any advantages have to go to the schools in relatively bad condition. The stratification raises some people up while pushing large number of people down (Translation by the author).

-Interview with Jian Kang, November 4, 2011

¹⁰⁵ According to Yang (2006, p.106), the industrialization of education refers to the systematicalized activities that education system and schools at all levels generated profits and enlarged educational resources through utilizing market mechanism and approaches from the 1990s. It happened under the background of extremely lack of educational fund. To some extents, these activities supplemented the limited educational fund and enlarged educational resources. Meanwhile, however, the charge of high tuitions, charge of unauthorized fees occurred. These distorted the meaning of education, intensified corruption in education sector. The quality and reputation of education were badly influenced.

¹⁰⁶ According to *Jiancha Ribao*, in 2008, one principal of primary school in Beijing committed corruption totally in 1.4 million RMB charged from educational donation (Chunlin Bai, 2011, June 22). In 2008, corruption committed by principal of one popular school in Beijing was reported by media. The corruption included more 100 million RMB. And most of it was charged as educational donation from parents (H. Chen & Wang, 2008, August 17).

Similar argument was made by Mr. Xu from School H in Beijing. He sharply demonstrated that *Ze Xiao* was initiated by people with power and money. Moreover, his argument also showed that there was a rise of demand for *Ze Xiao* from people without absolute power and other advantages. Mr. Xu addressed that,

We need to ask: who did *Ze Xiao* first? ... You know, of course, it is not ordinary people! It is the people who have power. They can take part in *Ze Xiao* through their power. And policy making leaves spaces for people with power to achieve it. ... Hence, you can guess who will not agree with the full implementation of proximity based education transition? ... People with power and money will not agree. Because such approach will directly influence their children's education transition. ... And the whole society will not agree ... Because most parents wish to send children to go to the limited popular schools (Translation by the author).

-Interview with Mr. Xu, School H, May 10, 2011

Although parents without power (*guanxi*) were not willing to “voluntarily” accept the pre-determined exclusion regarding choice for children's education, they still had to face various barriers which were pre determined in the process of *Ze Xiao*. Experience in *Ze Xiao* of Parent 1 from primary school in Dongcheng District showed the pre-determined exclusion of parents without power or money. She specified,

The education transition to junior high schools does not depend on students' capacity nor their comprehensive evaluation. It totally depends on parents' *guanxi*... Except those geniuses, other children have to depend on parents. As ordinary people, if you just follow the official school admission procedure, then finally your children can only go to the assigned schools...you know, that is really a matter of luck! I mean children go to popular schools through school assignment...Recently, I realize that *Ze Xiao* is really not for ordinary families. You take part in each stage of *Ze Xiao* works with passion. But, finally your children still have to go to the assigned schools...without *guanxi*, it is quite difficult (Translation by the author)!

-Interview with Parent 1 from primary school in Dongcheng District, May 18, 2011

In contrast to powerless parents who are excluded from *Ze Xiao*, parents who worked for powerful work units received supports from their employers in terms of children's education. Through exchange between power and education resources among these work units and popular schools, parents working in such work units could enroll children to popular schools. In 2005, in *Nanfang Zhoumo*, one article on education transition corruption showed a vivid picture of the exchange between power and education resources for *Ze Xiao* in details. It said,

... One popular school was often monitored and reported negatively by media which badly influenced school's reputation in public. One year, one editor of a newspaper contacted the principal for requesting enrollment of two students to this school. The principal took it as an opportunity for a "DEAL". He accepted the request. And at the same time he required editor to pay for *Ze Xiao Fei* and give more positive reports about the school. The editor accepted everything without hesitation. In the following five years, there were continuously positive reports to boast this school in various aspects, such as Quality education practice, excellent academic achievement in entrance exam to senior high schools... One journalist explained since his child was accepted by this school through the "DEAL" between the editor and the principal, as exchange, he had to write and boast principal and the school (Translation by the author). (F. Wu, 2005, April 28).

The example above indicated the exchange between powerful parents' work units and access to popular schools. Such exchange brought mutual benefits to both schools and employees in the powerful work units. One principal of a popular school pointed out that it was necessary to enroll some memo students since it brought benefits for schools, such as government's investment and *guanxi* for school development (Xiaowei Li, 2007, June 19).

Work units especially those with political and economic power (see Table 3.2), could provide guarantee for the access to popular public schools for employees' kids. Public discussion showed the power of co founding work units in terms of *Ze Xiao* works, especially in Beijing. As Mr. Xu from School H added,

China Aerospace Science and Technology Corporation (Affiliation of PLA) is our co founding work unit. Also, No. 304 Hospital (an army hospital) also has co

founding sponsorship with us. Co founding fee is one type of school income. As exchange with the co founding fee, we enroll students from our co founding work units. Well, I am not sure the details of the fees or enrollment number. ... As I know, both co founding sponsor fees and *Ze Xiao Fei* will be paid to local education authority directly. Part of the money will be paid back to school side. But, I am not sure the exact number (Translation by the author).

-Interview with Mr. Xu from School H, May 10, 2011

Xu's statement above also showed the legalization of charging co founding fee and *Ze Xiao Fei* through government permission. Furthermore, interview with principal of School E in Beijing showed that a kind of non money exchange between co founding work unit and public school. This exchange benefited both individuals and interest groups. He clarified,

We have co founding work units. But it is different from those who have sponsorship. Our co founding work units do not have any sponsorship with us. We just collaborate and support each other through exchanging "convenience". We provide some school seats to children from these work units. As exchange, we get support from these work units. For instance, police station can assist our school security... (Translation by the author)

-Interview with Principal of School E, May 16, 2011

Obviously, co founding based *Ze Xiao* showed the exchange between the public education resources and public fund from powerful work units for schooling of their employees' kids. As a result, the public resources were utilized for collective (group) interests. In other words, the government's institutions and state-owned work units have the capacity to dominate the access to good public schools for offspring of their employees through establishing co founding relationship with good public schools and paying the sponsor fees. The privileged groups kept the advantage position for their children's school transition by utilizing their political, social and economic capitals.

In addition, interview with principal of School F showed the political position of Beijing as Capital city of China was one special reason for the popularity of power based *Ze Xiao* in Beijing. Professor Yang, president of 21st Century Education Research Institute, pointed out that, "Co founding collaboration between popular schools and government institutions, large

scale state owned enterprises aims at accommodating needs for their offspring' quality education. Considering the special characteristics of Beijing which has large number of state organs, how to limit their privileges in terms of public school admission is a big challenge for alleviation of *Ze Xiao* in Beijing (21st Century Education Research Institute, 2011). The political pressure from upper level forced public schools, especially the good quality public schools, to absolutely obey the orders. One principal of a popular junior high school in Beijing analyzed that,

Every year, every good school receives memos from upper administration offices for children's education transition. Also, we get pressure from co founding work units as well. You know, Beijing is a very special place. Central administration offices are all located here. So, we have the responsibility to serve them. Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Police Stations... Can we say "No" to any of them? ... (shaking her heads and bitterly smiled) (Translation by the author)

-Interview with Principal of School F, November 7, 2011

Regarding co founding students in Beijing, independent scholar Feng Wen firmly showed his argument on the link between these work units and education transition to popular schools. In his opinion, the school admission by co founding agreement presented the privilege for minority in public education which originally known as public goods for all members in the society. This approach vividly presented the good education resources were dominated by the privileged groups in Chinese society. A recently published report on *Ze Xiao* in Beijing further critically demonstrated the challenges for Beijing to solve *Ze Xiao* due to its special position in China (21st Century Education Research Institute, 2011). According to this report, there was a common understanding that education sector in Beijing should accommodate any needs from the central government. The real barrier for achieving balanced education development is the interest of the privileged groups. They prefer to keep the gap between public schools in order to dominate their privilege to enroll their children to good schools. They try to establish new rules in public school admission to lead the distribution of quality education resources for their own profits (see 7.4 for further discussion). Therefore,

how to take a stance against and restrict privileges is a challenge for the Party and the municipal government of Beijing.

5.5.3 The Limited Government's Capacity

After 2000, there were critiques on the limited capacity of government in terms of alleviation of *Ze Xiao* in the discussion at both central and local level (Zhai & Chai, 2007, July 30; D. Yang, 2004, October 7). More importantly, since *Ze Xiao* could generate various profits for the government and schools, the attitude of the government or their willingness to alleviate *Ze Xiao* also deeply influenced policy making and policy implementation for the alleviation of *Ze Xiao*.

Interviews with various stakeholders showed similar opinions on the gap between policy making and policy implementation which caused the failure in alleviation of *Ze Xiao*. According to journalist from Sohu.com, it was necessary to strength the policy implementation instead of simply making them. The “black box” in process of public school admission should be open and be kept transparent.¹⁰⁷ Dr. Wu from National Institute of Education Science considered the failure in alleviation of *Ze Xiao* as the result of the failure in policy implementation. He clarified,

...the policies were not implemented strictly by the government. The dysfunction of the government or passive role of the government can be considered as the core reason for the failure in alleviation of *Ze Xiao*. In terms of education resource distribution, in fact, they still give more to some former key schools. It intensifies the pro-key school policy and elite education ideology. More importantly, another vital question is whether the *Compulsory Education Law* is really taken as a rigid law or flexible law? If we really take *Ze Xiao* as a behavior which breaks *Compulsory Education Law*, then probably, it will be easier for us to change the current complicated situation. Have you ever heard who was put into jail because he broke *Compulsory Education Law* by taking part in *Ze Xiao*? ... (laughing)...(Translation by the author)

-Interview with Ni Wu, April 28, 2011

¹⁰⁷ The interview with journalist from Sohu.com was conducted through email exchange between the journalist and the author.

One of the examples regarding the limited government's capacity was the alleviation of school admission by Olympic math. Since Olympic math could generate profits for various groups, the Olympic math fever was not easily cooled down. In contrast, it became a widely accepted channel for *Ze Xiao*. As Mingyuan Gu, President of Chinese Education Society, pointed out, the failure in alleviation of Olympic math fever sometimes was caused by the opposition from various interest groups and parents (Gu, 2009, August 22). Some schools, in order to get better education transition ratio, forced students to learn Olympic math and generated profits. Math teacher from Shanghai also complained that Olympic math was heated by pursuing various profits in the society (Yongmei Yang, 2004, February 18). One specialist in teaching Olympic math specified that there were at least three types of profits generated by Olympic schools. Firstly, it provided platform for schools to select students with talent in math. Secondly, it boosted school reputation and school enrollment. Finally, it generated profit through collecting tuition (Ye, 2004, January 11). A professor from Shandong University also stated that Olympic math became utilitarian. Schools promoted it for their reputation. And parents sent children to the Olympic math classes for enrolling them to key schools (X. Fan, 2005, March 17). There was a "Profit chain" of Olympic math which intensified Olympic match fever for *Ze Xiao* (Y. Li & Liang, 2009). An interview conducted by *China Youth Daily* specified the meaning of the "Profit chain". A teacher who taught Olympic math for nearly ten years confessed that there was an "Olympic Math Economy" valued in 200 million yuan in China. One education specialist pointed out that Olympic math training classes collaborated with some junior high schools to pursue the common profits generated by the training (Xinling Li, 2009, April 1). Accordingly, the "Profit chain" connected Olympic math schools, Olympic math teachers, parents and key schools closely.

Regarding the alleviation of school admission by Olympic math, public discussion demonstrated that the lack of monitoring intensified *Ze Xiao*. In 2009, Dongping Yang, professor of Beijing Institute of Technology, wrote about Olympic math education on his blog

to show his doubt on government's monitoring system on the alleviation of school admission by Olympic math. In the article titled "*Down with Evil of Olympic Math Education* (*dadaowanedeao shujiaoyu* 打倒万恶的奥数教育)", he doubted dysfunctional government monitoring capacity in the prohibition of Olympic math education. And he argued the government should be responsible for the Olympic math issue and the link with public school admission.¹⁰⁸ A Deputy Director of Education Bureau of Chengdu also addressed the necessity to establish powerful monitoring mechanism to alleviate school admission by Olympic math (Xinhuashe, 2009, November 15).

Moreover, the endless charge of unauthorized school fees, such as *Ze Xiao Fei* or education donation, can be considered as the result of the limited capacity of the government. Former director of education supervision office in Chaoyang District, Beijing, called this failure as result of "the Indulgence of the Government". Independent scholar Feng Wen further analyzed the lack of monitoring system on policy implementation as the core reason for the endless charge of *Ze Xiao Fei*. He pointed out that,

...China is single power dominated society. The monitoring function almost does not work if it challenges "the absolute power"... I do not think we are lack of policies... we have enough policies, but the implementation cannot be fully and correctly made. The core reason it is the lack of monitoring. And the establishment of this system depends on the willingness of policy makers and policy implementers... (Translation by the author)

-Interview with Feng Wen, October 30, 2011

Meanwhile, the result of alleviation of the charge of unauthorized school fees also depended on the will of the government, particularly the local government. With the legalization of the fee charge by local education authority, school admission by money became the "casting couch" in public education transition in urban China. Mr. Xu from School H in Beijing gave his reasonable statement for charging *Ze Xiao Fei* in school

¹⁰⁸ Dongping Yang's Blog, "*Down with Evil of Olympic Math Education*" uploaded on April 15, 2009. Retrieved from http://blog.sina.com.cn/s/blog_492471c80100cn8h.html. Accessed on March 15, 2012.

admission. He said,

...Since the compulsory education should be free, the charge of unauthorized fee was not legal. But, you know, it is reasonable, especially when the fee charge is legalized by local education authority.¹⁰⁹ School side believes that you need to pay since your kids use our education resources... I do not think it is the unauthorized fee charge. ... If it is the fee charge between principal and individual parents personally, then it is illegal. Since it [the fee charge] is an act of the state... (smiling and looking at the voice recorder)...you know... it is just acceptable.

-Interview with Mr. Xu, School H, May 10, 2011

The statement above showed the positive attitudes of school leader towards the charge of fees for students which was stimulated by local education authority's legalization of the unauthorized fee charge for school admission. It also presented the ideology of considering public education as commercial goods emphasized in education reform influenced school principal's opinion on *Ze Xiao Fei*. The principle of efficiency as priority in economic and educational reform became the firm argument for school principals to charge *Ze Xiao Fei*.

Interviews also showed the limited capacity of government in solving the conflict between balanced education development and the exam driven education. On the one hand, government policies aimed to promote balanced education development. On the other hand, at school level, there still have competition among public schools through the exam results (education transition ratio) as the criterion for boosting their own reputation. More importantly, the good reputation in terms of education transition ratio could attract more students and parents to come. Mrs. Feng, Teaching and Research Staff in Education Training and Research Center in Dongcheng District, Beijing, doubted the current policies regarding the balanced education development and remedial class. She argued that,

Recently, I am confused on the conflict between balanced education development and the increasing remedial classes. On the one hand, policy promotes the balanced

¹⁰⁹ The legalization of the charge of *Ze Xiao* can also be found through interview with principal of School F. According to her, the rate of return of *Ze Xiao* fee from local education authority to school was 85 percent in Dongcheng District (Interview was conducted on November 7, 2011).

development among schools. On the other hand, at school level, many schools, especially the good ones, are adding more classes for students in order to compete with other schools through exams. I am not sure whether they really attempt to alleviate the gap between public schools or they still want to select good students and separate schools... you know, the later will absolutely stimulate *Ze Xiao*!...And it is just happening in our district...(Translation by the author)

-Interview with Mrs. Feng, November 7, 2011

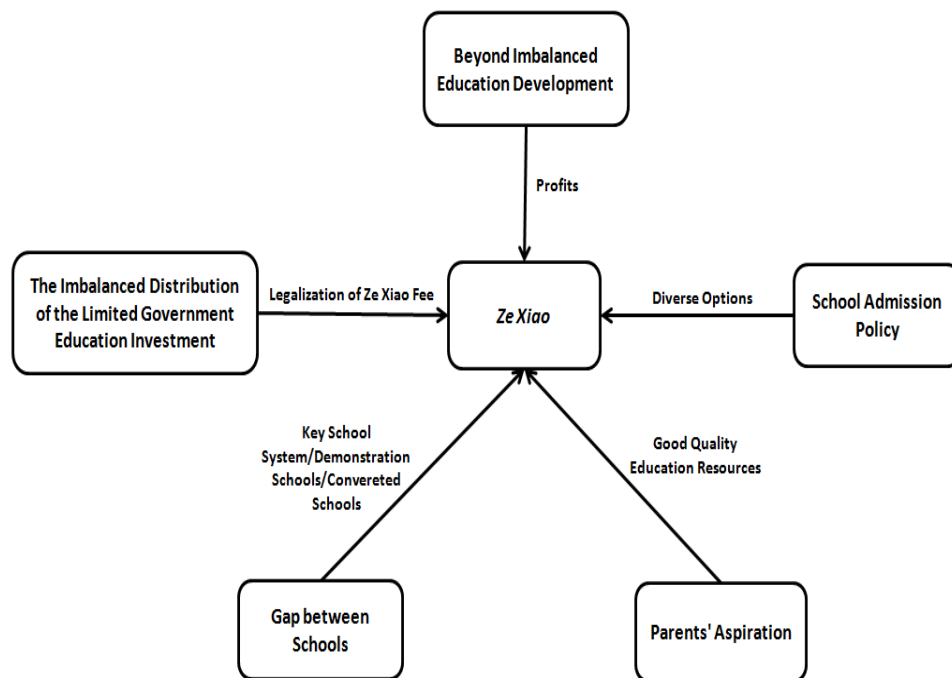
Accordingly, the limited capacity of government is considered as the force which shaped the development of *Ze Xiao* in urban China. The limited capacity of government in alleviation of Olympic math intensified the school admission by Olympic math. The limited capacity of government in abolishment of school admission by *Ze Xiao Fei* stipulated parents with money to invest for children's education. And the limited capacity of government in terminating exam driven education system pushed public schools to boost and keep school reputation through *Ze Xiao* based student selection in order to achieve high education transition ratio to upper level of education.

To conclude Chapter 5, as Figure 5.1 shows, the imbalanced distribution of the limited government investment was considered as the original reason for *Ze Xiao* after 2000. Due to the legalization of *Ze Xiao Fei*, school admission by money kept stimulating parents' aspiration to enroll children to popular schools. Due to the imbalanced distribution, key schools (or demonstration schools) are given more privileges in school construction, student selection and teachers' welfares. The pro-key school distribution of education resources intensified the gap between public schools and stimulated parent's aspiration for *Ze Xiao*. Also, the innovation of conversion of public schools to *minban* schools generated more school income through charging the legalized school fees (and *Ze Xiao Fei*). In order to meet the needs for quality education, local education authorities invented diverse channels for public school admission. Since these channels generated diverse profits, they widely received supports from various stakeholders, such as parents, public schools and private tutoring institutes. Public schools could collect more well performed students through collaboration

with private tutoring institutes. The admission by pre admission training class and admission by Olympic math class provided a platform for public schools to screen students. Furthermore, public discussion also identified that parents' aspiration, generated by the One Child Policy and fierce competition in education transition and labor market, were the forces which affected negotiation on *Ze Xiao* among stakeholders in public school admission to junior high schools.

Moreover, in the public discussion after 2000, there was increasing discussions indicating that the systematic problems in education sector and the limited capacity of government also had influence on *Ze Xiao*. Firstly, the discussion touched upon the mismatch

Figure 5.1 Public Discussions on *Ze Xiao* after 2000



Source: Created by author.

between economic development and education development. They argued that the unclear objective of education and inappropriate response to the increasing needs from migrant

children for education caused *Ze Xiao*. Secondly, public discussion criticized the exchange between power and education resources called as “Education resource rent seeking” in public school admission. The admission by memo and the one by co founding agreement provided a platform for people with privileges to enroll their children to popular schools. These approaches stimulated parents’ aspiration to utilize any possible *guanxi* (private based or work unit based) for their children’s education transition. Finally, public discussion showed the limited capacity of government in terms of alleviation of Olympic math class, the termination of *Ze Xiao Fei* and the lack of monitoring system in public school admission deteriorated *Ze Xiao*. In addition, analysis of public discussion showed the political position of Beijing stimulated power based *Ze Xiao* in this city. The privileged groups with *guanxi* and money kept their advantages in public school admission to junior high schools in Beijing. This process intensified inequality in public education in urban China.

In a word, analysis of public discourse showed that the negotiation on *Ze Xiao* among stakeholders was shaped by diverse forces, mainly including parents, public schools, private tutoring institutes, government and systematic issues and local historical, political and cultural characteristics. *Ze Xiao* was formed by the increasing demand for good quality education from parents. Meanwhile, it was also shaped by appetites for interests in *Ze Xiao* from diverse stakeholders, such as public key schools, the local education authorities, private tutoring institutes and powerful work units. Moreover, the analysis showed that there was increasing mismatch between individual demand for education and current supply of public education, mismatch between government policy making and policy implementation, mismatch between economic development and education development. In other words, *Ze Xiao* was shaped by the mismatch between education development and social change in China. In addition, through the analysis, public discussion showed that public school admission to junior high schools in urban China was significantly influenced by parents’ socio-economic status rather than children’s own capacities. In other words, children from privileged families have more

opportunities to get access to the limited good quality education resources comparing with children from the disadvantaged groups. Equality in public compulsory education is seriously challenged by *Ze Xiao*.

Chapter 6 Practice in *Ze Xiao*: A Case Study on Public School Admission in Community A of Beijing

In the last two chapters, I investigated forces that shaped stakeholders' negotiation on *Ze Xiao* related to admission to public junior high schools in urban China. In contrast, this chapter investigated how *Ze Xiao* was practiced through an analysis of stakeholders' experiences in *Ze Xiao*, particular from parents' aspects. Data were collected from qualitative field interviews with 26 participants from a public junior high school (School A) and a public primary school (School B) of Community A in southern part of Beijing. The interview respondents included the principal of School A, the principal of School B, two retired principals of School A, 16 parents from School A and 6 parents from School B (see Chapter One for details of parents' socioeconomic status).

In this chapter, firstly, I briefly introduced the community and the schools I visited. Then I analyzed respondents' experiences in *Ze Xiao* focusing on five aspects, including the legalization of *Ze Xiao Fei*, the gap between public schools, public school admission policy, parents' aspiration and the systematic issues beyond the imbalanced education development. Finally I mapped the process of *Ze Xiao* in Community A.

6.1 Introduction to Schools in Community A

Community A has four residential areas with diverse population. As Figure 1.1 shows, basically, people living in Zone A and Zone B are relatively rich and well educated, they work as employers in foreign companies and government offices. In comparison, people living in Zone C and Zone D have lower socioeconomic status than those in Zone A and B. Residents of Zones C and D are factory workers, migrant workers or self employed business

men.¹¹⁰ As Figure 1.1 shows, within Community A, there are two junior high schools and five primary schools. School A (a public junior high school), School B (a public primary school) and School C (a demonstration school) are the main focuses in this study.

In 1989, with the construction of Community A, School A, a public junior high school, with brand new facilities was established to meet the education needs of residents in Community A. School-aged children for lower secondary education in Community A mainly went to School A. According to the principal of School A, since a large number of residents were working in government offices, such as Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Ministry of Commerce, Ministry of Justice, student quality¹¹¹ in Community A was relatively high. It was until 1995 that School A was considered famous for its high quality education in Fengtai District.¹¹² However, with the aging facilities and rapid urbanization, from the late 1990s, the social class of residents in Community A changed dramatically. A large number of local residents moved out of this area. Consequently, there were many apartments for people to rent.

The number of internal migrants entering into Community A was increased. The demographic change in Community A directly influenced the student structure in School A and its reputation in Fengtai District.¹¹³ In addition, due to the limited reform and facility upgrading, School A became less attractive for residents in Community A and had difficulties

¹¹⁰ Information on residents in Community collected from interviews with principals from School A and School B involved in this study.

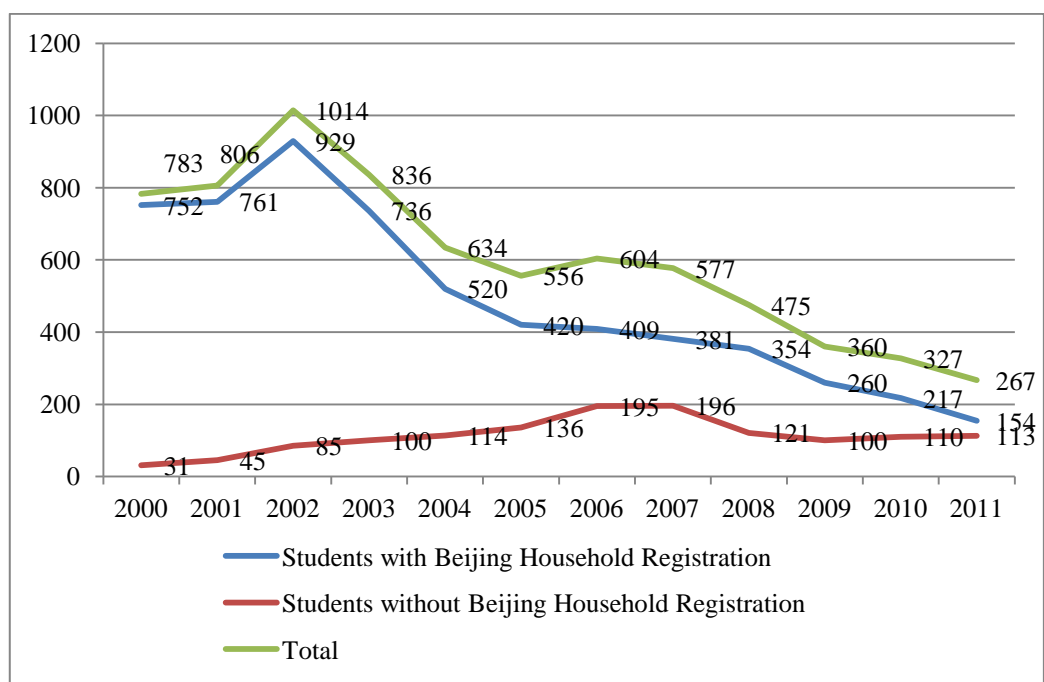
¹¹¹ According to the principal of School A, student quality refers to academic achievement and ethics. The interview with the principal of School A was conducted on April 18, 2011.

¹¹² According to the interview with the principal of School A, ‘good quality education’ mainly refers to the promotion rate from School A to demonstration schools at the upper secondary school level. Until mid-1990s, School A was ranked in one of the Top 10 Junior High Schools in Fengtai District since the school had a high promotion rate to key senior high schools. Many students of other school districts came and applied to School A at that time (based on interview was conducted on April 18, 2011).

¹¹³ According to the interview with the principal of School A, in 2005, Beijing Municipal Education Committee initiated the “Beijing Junior High Schools Construction Project”. There was a saying that described the education system in Beijing: “Browne Head; Iron Feet; Tofu Waist”. The head refers to higher education; the feet refer to primary education and the waist refers to secondary education. Secondary education in Beijing has been considered under developed. The Project aimed to reconstruct secondary education, particularly junior high schools in Beijing with collaboration with some universities in Beijing. In 2005, School A was selected as one of the 32 public junior high schools involved in this project (based on interview was conducted on April 18, 2011).

enrolling good quality students from this area. As the retired principal of School A introduced, School A used to be able to enroll from 30 % to 40 % of well-achieved primary school students¹¹⁴ in Community A. However, in recent years, good quality students went to key schools or took part in *Ze Xiao* and went to schools in neighboring districts. In order to stay in business, School A had to enroll migrant children.¹¹⁵ Figure 6.1 shows a gradual increase of migrant children enrollment in School A.

Figure 6.1 Enrolment of School A (2000-2011)



Source: School A, author edited.

Although students of the five primary schools in Community A had a direct access to School A, most students of the primary schools in Zones A and B participated in *Ze Xiao* for better schools instead of going to School A.¹¹⁶ In addition, since the High School Affiliated

¹¹⁴ According to Retired principal of School A, school recommendation students (about 5 percent of total number of G6 students) are sent to key schools directly by primary school. Besides them, based on the studying achievement, there are still about 30 to 40 percent students who have relatively good learning achievements. In most of time, these students will be enrolled by School A in the past.

¹¹⁵ The interview with Retired principal of School A was conducted on April 27, 2011.

¹¹⁶ According to interview with Retired principal of School A, annually, school leaders go to primary schools in Community A to introduce and promote their schools for school admission. In 2007, she visited primary school in Zone B and made presentation to introduce School A. However, she was interrupted by

Central Musical Institute (HSACMI)¹¹⁷ is located in Zone C, 50 % of the primary school graduates in Zone C went to HSACMI.

School B is a public primary school established in 1955. In principle, school-aged children for primary education in Zone D should go to School B and then continue their education in School A. According to the interview with the principal of School B, with the One Child Policy and the increase of migrants in Community A, the number of local students decreased in recent years (see Figure 6.1).¹¹⁸ In contrast, the number of migrant children attending School B had increased from one tenth of total student enrollment in the late 1990s to about 50% of the total student enrollment.¹¹⁹

School C, a public secondary school established in 1951, is well-known in Fengtai District. In 1978, the school was awarded the title of “Key Secondary School” by the education authority of Fengtai District. In 2005, the school was designated as a “Demonstration Senior High School” by Beijing Municipal Education Committee. From 2008, School C was reauthorized to enroll junior high school students with establishment of two new campuses as junior high school department. Since School C as a key secondary school, is located in Community A, it had the privilege to select the best all round developed students from the five primary schools since 2009.

The next section will focus on the diverse forces that shaped the public school admission in Community A, drawing from the interviews with parents and school principals.

some parents who said they had already found schools for children in other districts (Interview with Retired principal of School A was conducted on April 27, 2011).

¹¹⁷ Although the High School Affiliated with Central Musical Institute is located in Community A, the school is administered by Central Musical Institute and independent from the local education authority that oversees Community A.

¹¹⁸ The interview with Vice principal of School B was conducted on May 12, 2011.

¹¹⁹ The data was collected from the interview with Vice principal of School B, conducted on May 12, 2011.

6.2 Multidimensional Forces on *Ze Xiao* in Public School Admission in Community A

Despite public school admission in Community A has its own characteristics shaped by the socioeconomic context of the community, the interviews with respondents indicated that the following five forces shaped *Ze Xiao* in Community A, that is, 1. The legalization of *Ze Xiao Fei*; 2. The gap between public schools; 3. Public school admission policy; 4. Parents' aspiration; and 5. Systematic issues beyond imbalanced education development. In the following section, I would unravel the five perspectives respectively.

6.2.1 Legalization of *Ze Xiao Fei*

As mentioned in Chapter Four and Chapter Five, the charge of *Ze Xiao Fei* was “legalized” and widely accepted by parents if they wanted to send their children to key schools. Parents' experiences in *Ze Xiao* show the legalization of *Ze Xiao Fei* in public school admission to junior high school in Community A. Moreover, their *Ze Xiao* experiences also revealed the “legalized exclusion” of low income families from participating in *Ze Xiao* since they were unable to pay *Ze Xiao Fei*. Meanwhile, the interviews with parents in Community A also revealed the importance of *guanxi* in *Ze Xiao*.

According to Parent 1 from School B,¹²⁰ the inter districts *Ze Xiao* generally cost 30000 yuan. The money should be paid to a specific account that belonged to the district education committee, which showed a clear evidence that *Ze Xiao Fei* were legalized by the local education authority.¹²¹ Although Parent 3 from School B did not pay money for her

¹²⁰ The interview with Parent 1 from School B was conducted on May 10, 2011.

¹²¹ The “legalization” of *Ze Xiao* fee is also mentioned in the interview with the Principal of School A. Since there is no *Ze Xiao* student in School A, School A did not get any income from the charge of *Ze Xiao* fee. According to the principal of School A, before the prohibition of *Jie Du* fee for migrant children, the charge of *Jie Du* fee from migrant children was paid directly by parents to an account that belonged to the local education authority. About 70 percent of the collected money from parents in School A was paid back to school from the local education authority. The rest 30 percent was used for the reconstruction of poor quality schools in the district. This interview with Principal of School A was conducted on April 18, 2011. Interview with the ex-vice principal of School A showed that in the 1990s when School A was in the peak period of its development, the school charged 50000 yuan, which was the highest *Ze Xiao Fei* in the school's history. Based on the standard set up by the local education authority, in general they charged

daughter's school admission, she shared her friend's stories of paying *Ze Xiao Fei*. She lamented that education had been commercialized too much. In order to enroll a child to a popular junior high school in a neighbor district, her friend paid 70000 yuan as *Ze Xiao Fei*.¹²²

Furthermore, interviews showed that without any *guanxi*, money alone did not work for *Ze Xiao*. The interview with Parent 4 from School A showed that without *guanxi*, parents would not have any access to pay *Ze Xiao Fei*. She shared her sister's story as follows,

...my sister decided to pay money in order to enroll her son to a good school. Since they did not have *guanxi*, the first step was to find *guanxi* that could help them to deliver the money to the school they preferred. In order to find *guanxi*, they paid 30000 yuan to a middle man. At the same time, they paid additional money as *Ze Xiao Fei*... it really cost a lot.

-Interview with Parent 4, School A, May 4, 2011

Parent 4's story illustrated the situation of the so called "public education resource rent seeking" in Beijing. In order to buy a limited access to popular schools, parents have to pay *Ze Xiao Fei*. Meanwhile, there is a "*guanxi* rent seeking" as well. Those who had *guanxi* with popular schools were able to make money by connecting parents with the schools. In this process, parents were usually charged twice in order to get their children to be enrolled in quality schools. Similar experience was also shared by Parent 6 from School A. In order to send her daughter to a key school in neighbor district, they paid 20000 yuan to a middle man who negotiated with the school. However, since the "*guanxi*" between the middle man and the

12000 yuan from *Ze Xiao* students. And at that time, the money collected was not required to be submitted to the local education authority. According to the ex-vice principal of School A, the cost for *Ze Xiao* sometimes was more than the *Ze Xiao Fei* itself. In Beijing, primary school graduates' identification cards were usually transferred to assigned junior high schools by the local education authority. Students who chose *Ze Xiao* had to get their cards back from the assigned schools by themselves. Sometimes, the assigned schools charged the commission fee for parents to get the identification card back. In some cases, it took several thousand yuan (based on interview with the ex-Vice Principal of School A was conducted on April 18, 2011). The Vice Principal of School B also shared a similar observation regarding the charge of *Ze Xiao* fee. She said that if it was inter-districts transition then parents were normally charged 15,000 yuan. The price had been increased to 30000 yuan in recent years. She pointed out that 30000 yuan was just the amount written in an invoice; the real price of a *Ze Xiao Fei* was hard to tell. Only the principal and parents knew the exact amount (based on interview with the Vice Principal of School B on May 12, 2011).

¹²² The interview with Parent 3 from School B was conducted on May 12, 2011.

school was not “strong” enough, Parent 6 had to wait a long time for the result. Parent 6 did not get any result from the middle man until the principal of that school was arrested due to corruption.¹²³ It was evident that a middle man and his/her *guanxi* with a key school played a very important role in *Ze Xiao*, which made the process of *Ze Xiao* more complicated and costly. Apparently, the “legalized” *Ze Xiao Fei* excluded families that had little money or no *guanxi* with the schools they preferred. For affluent parents with strong *guanxi*, it is an “open sesame” for them sending their children to popular schools, while disadvantaged families were excluded from a fair public school admission. Parent 14 from School A is a migrant single mother. She was excluded from *Ze Xiao* since she could not afford *Ze Xiao Fei* charged by a key school in a neighbor district. She recalled,

We went to that key school to look for possibility...the first question we got was whether we could pay 30000 yuan as *Ze Xiao Fei* or not since my daughter did not have Beijing *hukou*... (she choked with emotion) ... you know, as a single mother, it had already been over my affordability...the only choice for me was to give up my wish to providing my kid good education and sent her to come here (School A).

-Interview with Parent 14, School A, May 5, 2011

Besides paying *Ze Xiao Fei* directly, another type of payment for *Ze Xiao* was to rent a house close to an objective school. Since many parents selected schools that were far away from home, they had to rent apartments close to the objective schools. Parent 5 from School B decided to send her daughter to a key school that was far away from home. Therefore, they had to rent an apartment close to the school so they would not have to commute a long distance. The rent was about 3000 yuan per month, which was beyond many families’ affordability in Beijing.¹²⁴ Obviously, the case of Parent 5 from School B proved that the

¹²³ *Ze Xiao Fei* based corruption became hot topic in urban China recently. In 2008, principal of one famous primary school in Haidian District was arrested by corruption. According to China News Net, The unauthorized *Ze Xiao Fee* collected by this school was more than 100 million yuan. Retrieved from http://news.xinhuanet.com/legal/2008-08/17/content_9424765.htm, accessed on April 2, 2012.

¹²⁴ According to Beijing Statistic Bureau, the average monthly salary of people is 4201 yuan in 2010. Retrieved from <http://www.bjstats.gov.cn/>, accessed on December 13, 2011. The room rent paid by Parent

socioeconomic status was the pre-condition for parents to participate in *Ze Xiao*. Regardless of what type of payment for *Ze Xiao* is, direct or in-direct, the legalization of *Ze Xiao Fei* and the utilization of *guanxi* in *Ze Xiao* became the widely accepted “casting couch” for parents to take part in *Ze Xiao*.

6.2.2 The Gap between Public Schools

The interviews with the principals of School A and School B were mainly related to the balanced education development between the junior high schools in Community A and the ones in neighbor districts, and between the two junior high schools in Community A. The interviews indicated that there was big gap of educational resources between the junior high schools in Community A and schools in neighboring districts, as well as between the two junior high schools in Community A. The gap can be categorized in terms of school facility, student distribution and teachers’ salary.

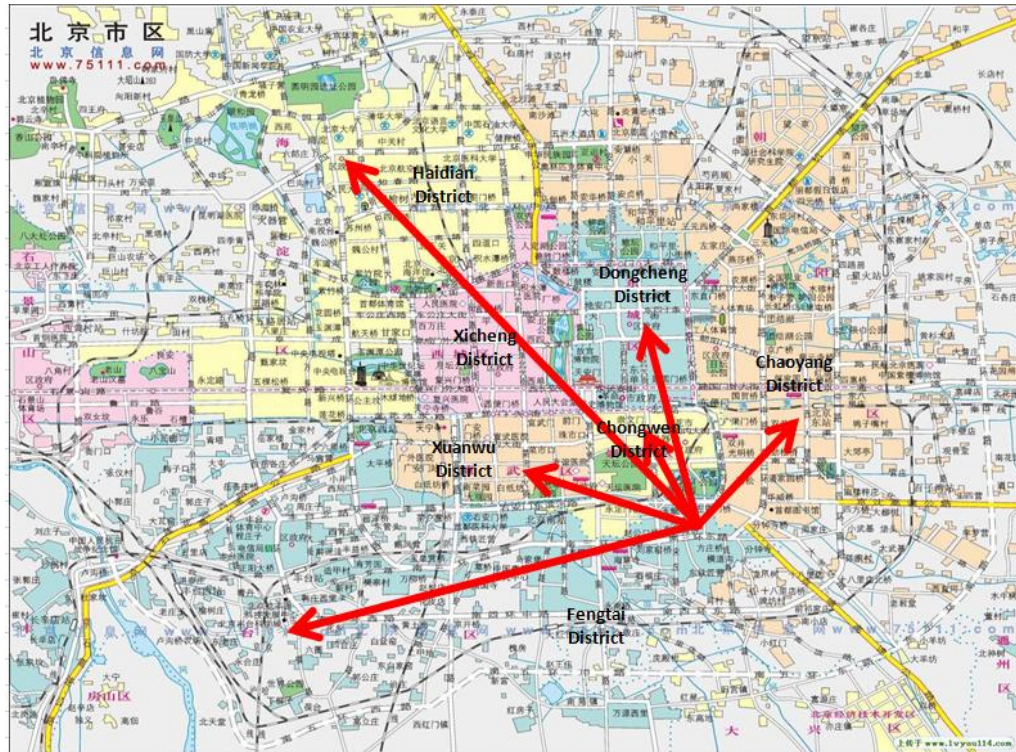
6.2.2.1 The Gap between Schools in Different Districts

Although the interviews did not specifically mention the gap between the schools in different districts, Figure 2.5 shows the imbalanced distribution of education resources among schools in Beijing. As Figure 2.5 illustrated, there was a gap between the southern and northern part of Beijing in terms of allocation of demonstration schools. The interview with the retired principal of School A showed serious student mobility in Community A due to the gap between public schools in different districts. According to the retired principal, School A used to have a full student enrollment from the five primary schools in Community A. In some years, School A now only has 50% of the students from the five primary schools. It was not uncommon that some students did not report to the schools when school began. The main reason for their absence was that they had chosen other schools in the same district or in neighbor districts that offered better education and had more quality education resources than

5 may be beyond affordability of many families in Beijing. The interview with Parent 5 from School B was conducted on May 13, 2011.

Fengtai District. Figure 6.2 shows the student mobility in Community A based on the interviews with the principals of School A and School B. The data also indicated that students

Figure 6.2 Student Mobility in Community A



Source: Author edited.

who did not report to the schools assigned to them but attended the schools in neighbor districts, such as Chongwen District, Chaoyang District and Xuanwu District. A small number of students also chose the schools in Dongcheng District and Haidian District. Relatively speaking, those districts had more popular schools compared with Fengtai District (see Figure 2.5 and Table 2.6).¹²⁵ The imbalanced distribution of education resources between districts intensified student mobility and *Ze Xiao* in Community A.

¹²⁵ The distribution of demonstration schools in Beijing is not in balance. According to Beijing Municipal Education Committee, in 2010, there were 12 demonstration schools in Dongcheng District, 11 demonstration schools in Haidian District, 7 demonstration schools in Chaoyang District. In contrast, there were only 4 demonstration schools in Fengtai District. Retrieved from <http://www.bjedu.gov.cn/publish/portal0/tab40/>, accessed on June 3, 2012.

6.2.2.2 The Gap between Schools in Community A

As noted earlier, the interviews with respondents also showed a big gap between public junior high schools within Community A. The gap can be analyzed in the aspects of school facility, student distribution and teachers' salary.

In terms of the gap between school facilities, the interviews with the principals of School A and School C illustrated the gap in school facility between two schools. Although Beijing education authority had already made the decision to separate junior high school department from "Demonstration School", it is interesting to find that School C, as a "Demonstration School", just established a new junior high school department with government support in 2010. On the one hand, this confirmed the existence of conflict policies between the district level and the city level, as described by the ex-vice principal of School B. On the other hand, it showed the attempts of the education authority in Fengtai District to attract quality students to stay in their own district. According to the Principal of School A, Fengtai District government invested about 140 million yuan building a new campus for School C.¹²⁶ Although School A was continuously receiving government investment as a "weak junior high school" between 2006 and 2011, the government investment for School A was much less than what was given to School C. Figure 6.3 and Figure 6.4 show the differences in terms of school facility. School C has teaching buildings, student dorm, laboratory buildings, library and so forth. In contrast, School A only has one building. The government investment in favor of key schools led to the imbalanced distribution of educational resources among public schools in the same district and in different districts.

The collected data confirmed the existence of a student distribution gap between schools. The interviews with respondents indicated a big difference in terms of school admission between School A and School C in Community A. The pro-key school admission

¹²⁶ This information can also be identified on homepage of School C, retrieved from <http://bj18.schoolwires.net/domain/14>, accessed on June 4, 2012.

Figure 6.3 School C



Source: Author

Figure 6.4 School A



Source: Author

policies broke the balance of student distribution within this area. According to the interview with the Principle of School A, School A as an ordinary junior high school was not authorized to enroll students by school recommendation or special talent students. In contrast, School C as a demonstration school had the privilege to select all-round developed students in the community and communities within the district. Therefore, School C had better quality students than School A. As the Principal of School A complained,

With the establishment of a junior high school department in School C, the district education authority gives them the privilege to select better performed students in eastern Fengtai District...this approach badly affected the opportunity for School A to enroll better performed students. The students we have are called ‘Three without Students’. That is, they are considered having no special talents, poor academic performance and no other choices for school admission.

-Interview with the Principal of School A, April 18, 2011

The ex-Vice Principal of School A agreed that the establishment of the junior high school department in School C might help Fengtai District keep more well performed students within the district. Nevertheless, she also believed that the policy had already negatively affected student distribution in School A. Since School C had the privilege to select well performing students, School A experienced more difficulties in attracting quality students. Also, the interviews with the current Principal of School A showed that the change of student quality in School A had deteriorated teachers’ motivation for teaching. As a result, some teachers left for other schools. Meanwhile, the aggravated student quality directly affected School A’s reputation at the district level.¹²⁷

The gap of teachers’ salary was another factor that affected School A. The interviews with the school principals from both Schools A and B showed the imbalance of government investment in human resources, especially in teachers’ salary, between public schools in different districts and within the same district. The data collected revealed that teachers left low salary schools for high salary schools. Consequently, it affected teacher retention and intensified the gap between public schools. The Vice Principal of School B confirmed that because of the salary gap, quality teachers in Fengtai District left for other districts where they received higher salaries, which seriously affected parents’ decision on school choice. The ex-Vice Principal of School A defined her school as “teacher training center for key schools”.

¹²⁷ The interview with Ex vice principal of School A was conducted on April 18, 2011.

According to her, because of the difference in teachers' salary, many quality teachers in School A left for key schools in Fengtai District after gaining enough experiences.¹²⁸ The interview with the retired Principal of School A showed that in the past ten years ten veteran teachers of School A left for key schools in the same district or in other districts.¹²⁹ In contrast, School C, a "Demonstration School" at the city level, was able to offer teachers higher salaries by charging students tuition.¹³⁰ Quality teachers were often attracted by higher salaries. The gaps between School A and School C in the aspects of school facilities, student distribution and teachers' salaries intensified *Ze Xiao* in Community A.

6.2.3 Public School Admission Policy in Community A

The interviews I conducted in Community A indicated that public school admission policy manipulated by district education authority intensified the competition in school admission to junior high schools and *Ze Xiao*. The participation in diverse approaches for public school admission was socially constructed.

As the policy decision on school admission was delegated to the local education authority at the district level, nine options for public junior high school admission were provided in Fengtai District. For example, students could be admitted based on school recommendation, special talents students, mutual selection between school and parents, *hukou*

¹²⁸ According to Ex vice principal of School A (on April 18, 2011), teachers in their 30s in are the most transferring group. A story of teacher's leave for a famous key school was given in the interview. The leave for the key school brought good salary for this teacher which was several times than her salary in School A. At the same time, the training subsidy for teachers in that key school was much better than the ones in School A. Teachers were encouraged to go abroad for studying. They were also given subsidy for buying laptops. These welfares were not provided in School A. There is a huge gap of teachers' welfare between schools and districts.

¹²⁹ Interview with Ex vice principal of School A was conducted April 18, 2011.

¹³⁰ According to *Opinions on Implementation of Rectifying the Charge of Unauthorized School Fees* (Ministry of Education, et al., 2003), *Ze Xiao* is allowed at public upper secondary education level. However, the school admission of *Ze Xiao* student should follow "Three Restrictions", including restriction of numbers of *Ze Xiao* student, restriction of *Ze Xiao* Fee (Maximum 30000 yuan in Beijing) and restriction of academic achievement (Minimum line). According to interview with Ex vice principal of School A, since there is an official standard for the charge of *Ze Xiao* Fee at senior high school level, people take for granted to charge of *Ze Xiao* Fee at junior high school level by following the standard at junior high school level (The interview was conducted on April 18, 2011).

Table 6.1 School Admission Options in Community A in 2011

School Admission Option	Definition
Admission by School Recommendation	In Beijing, the local education authority allowed each school to take a very small number of students recommended by their schools. Schools that were authorized to admit students by recommendation made their own selection criteria, such as students' unified exam scores in G5 and G6, ethics, awards of "Three Excellence Student", and so forth. Recommendation was a four-phase process, including 1. self recommendation; 2. class recommendation; 3. teachers' recommendation; and 4. school recommendation to the local education authority. Students who pursued this process were usually local and held Beijing <i>hukou</i> . Therefore, migrant children without "Green Card" were not eligible for this admission scheme.
Admission by Special Talents	Based on the guidelines provided by the local education authority, only three types of students were qualified for this admission method, that is, students with outstanding skills in sports, arts and technologies talent student. Schools that were authorized to admission special talent students administered admission exams but the examination date was determined by Beijing Education Committee. Each student was allowed to choose two or three schools to take the exams. Migrant children with special talents and approved by the local education authority have been allowed to take this approach for junior high school admission in Fengtai District since 2011.
Admission by Mutual Selection	Admission by mutual selection had been practiced in Fengtai District since 2010. It refers to the process in which both schools and students were allowed to choose each other. Fengtai District had give school districts. Community A belonged to School District 1. There were 11 junior high schools in School District 1. Local students could select three schools out of 11 junior high schools. At the same time, the schools also selected students who picked the schools checking students' academic achievements and comprehensive evaluation. The mutual selection process usually lasted three days.
Boarding School Admission	In Fengtai District, only one key school provided room and board at the junior high school level.
Admission to Assigned Schools	Local students who did not participate in the admission processes such as by school recommendation, special talents and mutual selection were assigned to schools by the local education authority.
Going back to <i>hukou</i> Registered School Admission	This option is for students who study outside their <i>hukou</i> registered school districts in primary schools. These students return to <i>hukou</i> registered school districts for low secondary education.
Minban School Admission	This option was for students who planned to study in private junior high schools.
Admission for Migrant Children with "Green Card"	Migrant children with one of the eight types of certificates issued by Beijing Municipal Government were treated as local students and eligible in public school admission to junior high schools.
Admission for Migrant Children without "Green Card"	In Fengtai District, parents of migrant children without "Green Card" had to find schools on their own. Normally, they registered in a local junior high school first. Then their children took an entrance exam. Those who passed the exam were admitted by the public junior high schools upon meeting the admission criteria by the school.

Source: Summarized from recording taken in parent meeting for guidance of school admission by Vice-Principal of School B on May 12, 2011.

registration, assigned admission, *minban* school admission, boarding school based school admission, migrant children with a “Green Card” in Beijing,¹³¹ as well as admission without a “Green Card”. Table 6.1 described the nine admission options. According to the interviews with the Vice Principal of School B, in Community A, besides the three admission approaches for attending popular schools, most local primary school graduates went to the junior high school assigned to them, i.e. School A. Since boarding school and *minban* school charged expensive tuition and fees, few students from School B attended those schools.¹³² As to the approach “Going back to *hukou* registered school admission”, local students who had *guanxi* usually transferred their *hukou* to the districts that had better education resources.¹³³

In terms of school admission for migrant children, on the one hand, they were excluded from the mainstream (local students’) school admission. Despite migrant children were included in the special talent admission approach, they were excluded from the school recommendation approach and the mutual selection approach. On the other hand, migrant children were affected by their “Green Card” status and their parents’ socioeconomic status, which was against the education stressed by the *Compulsory Education Law*. The interviews with the Principals of School A and B also showed biased attitudes of school officials towards public education for migrant children in Community A. The Vice Principal of School B showed a negative attitude towards the increasing number of migrant children in public schools. She stated,

Because of the One Child Policy, the number of school aged children in Beijing is decreasing. Conversely, the number of migrant children is increasing rapidly. In

¹³¹ Green Card refers to various certificates issued by Beijing Municipal Government for residents without Beijing *hukou*. Holders and their children can have the same treatment as Beijing residents. Migrant children whose parents hold the following certificates can be treated as Beijing residents. They include: 1. Certificates of children of the returned educated urban youth working in countryside; 2. Certificate of Children of Taiwanese; 3. Certificate of Children of Post Doctors; 4. Certificate of Children of Army Officials; 5. Certificate of Children of Overseas Chinese; 6. Certificate of Beijing Resident Card issued by Beijing government; 7. Certificate of Children of employers in CSCEC-Paully Construction Company Limited; and 8. Children of employers from big-scale state-owned Enterprises (Beijing Municipal Education Committee, 2005, 2006, 2007, 2008, 2009, 2010, 2011).

¹³² The interview with Vice Principal of School B was conducted on May 12, 2011.

¹³³ Based on interview with Principal of School A which was conducted on April 18, 2011.

fact, to some extent, public compulsory education in Beijing is serving migrant children. They are using many good quality education resources of Beijing... And in fact our teachers are really suffering in teaching them...

-Interview with Vice Principal of School B on May 12, 2011

Furthermore, the interview with the Principal of School A indicated that the school admission policy for migrant children at School A was against “Free, no selection exam and proximity based compulsory education”. It also broke equality in the process of admission to public junior high schools because migrant children were excluded from the mainstream public school admission. As the Principal of School A described,

...different from other schools in this area, our school requires entrance exam for migrant children in order to control student quality...you know, annually, we have about 260 applications but we only can enroll 60 migrant children. Therefore, we have to select through exams and interviews...

-Interview with Principal of School A, April 18, 2011

In addition, the exclusion of migrant children from public school admission was also presented by the exclusion of migrant parents from having access to obtaining public school admission information. The data collected revealed that the public school admission policies at the district level were made to protect the benefits of local schools and local students. Conversely, the policies at the city level emphasized equal public education for all.¹³⁴ Therefore, it is difficult for schools to explain policies at the district level in details for parents in guidance of public school admission policy. The parent-teacher meeting which introduced public school admission policy just became a platform for the pre-determined educational exclusion. According to Appendix 9, the school admission schedule of School B in 2011 failed to provide detailed information on the school admission approaches for migrant

¹³⁴ According to vice principal of School B, in fact, due to population explosion in Beijing, especially for the significant growth of migrant population in Beijing in recent years, policy for migrant children in 2011 became stricter compared with previous years. School admission policy was considered as a tool for preventing migrants from rapidly flowing into Beijing. However, in the parents’ meeting it is difficult for school side to explain this target clearly for migrant parent. Therefore, in most of time in the parent-teacher meeting, vice principle of School B just intentionally avoided touching upon migrant children’s school admission. I took part in the two hours parent-teacher meeting held by School B on April 27, 2011.

children. A migrant mother, also a business owner, from Shandong province expressed her dissatisfaction toward the parent-teacher meeting held by School B. She believed she and her husband were excluded from the public school admission process. She described her experience as follows,

...To be honest, it was a kind of waste of time in attending the parent-teacher meeting held by School B. I was hurt by their (school's) attitudes towards migrants... (her eyes were full of tears)... During the meeting, teachers did not mention school admission for migrant children at all! Within about two hours, they mainly talked about local students' school admission...you know, it is really a discrimination! ...

-Interview with Parent 3 from School B, May 12, 2011

The feeling of exclusion was also shared by Parent 6 from School B. The migrant parent felt angry and complained during the interview,

...I might be too direct, but, you know, parent-teacher meeting held by my son's primary school was really terrible and useless. It seemed policies were just for local students. As to our migrant children, we had to find schools by ourselves. Nobody cared us. I was so disappointed with this!

-Interview with Parent 6 from School B, May 13, 2011

In summary, public school admission policy in Community A has two features. Firstly, indeed, there are diverse options for parents and students to choose for their school admission to junior high schools. Nevertheless, the available approaches are mainly dependent on parents' socio-economic status. It may cause inequality in public school admission. Secondly, obviously, there is an educational exclusion in public school admission in Community A. It is particularly presented in the school admission approaches for migrant children and the exclusion migrant parents from access to school admission policy.

In the following section, I intensively unraveled parents' experiences in *Ze Xiao* and their opinions on school admission policies and approaches for *Ze Xiao*. Through an analysis of parents' experiences and opinions on public school admission, this section attempted to

further illustrate the “parentocracy” based *Ze Xiao* and the pre-determined exclusion of migrant children from public schools admission in Community A. Table 6.2 shows the school

Table 6.2 School Admission Schedule in School B, 2011

Date	School Admission
April-13~17	Checking student's basic information
April-19~20	Procedure for Students' whose parents have "Green Card"
April-22~May-5	School recommendation student
May-4~5	Going back to <i>hukou</i> registered school Application
May-14~15	Special talents student Registration
May-17~18	Mutual Selection Registration
May-12	Special talents student Test
May-21~22	Mutual Selection ¹³⁵
June-1~6	School Assignment and Announcement of School Admission Results

Source: School Admission Arrangement distributed by School B for G6 students' parents, collected from Parent-teacher meeting on April 27, 2011, edited by author.

admission schedule of School B in 2011 to junior high schools in Community A in 2011 officially started from the middle of April to the early June. Analysis of parents' experiences and opinions in public school admission follows the school admission in Community A. Interviews with parents in School A and School B mainly talked about School recommendation based and Special talent based school admission to junior high schools.

6.2.3.1 Admission by School Recommendation

The interviews with parents showed two major concerns about this admission approach. Firstly, parents felt this approach intensified exam-driven education and increased students' workload. Secondly, the selection criteria for recommendation by school did not reflect fairness and equality in education.

¹³⁵ According to the Principal of School A, in general, School A had 30 seats positions for the mutual selection approved by the local education authority. Within three days, students and School A mutually select each other. School A selects students who choose School A by taking student's learning achievement and comprehensive evaluation. (Interview with Principal from School A was conducted on April 18, 2011).

In terms of the first concern, to compete for the limited quota for admission by recommendation, students were forced to study for exams, which intensified students' workload. Working as a teacher in School B, Parent 1 pointed out that the purpose of the admission by recommendation approach was to dispute better performed students for key schools. Students who would like to pursue admission by recommendation were required to have a GPA over 95 points (the full score is 100 points) in two locally unified exams in Grade 5 and Grade 6. Therefore, in order to perform well on the exams, parents had to send their children to various private tutors or tutoring agencies after school and on weekends. Some parents started the exam preparation when children were in Grade 3 or Grade 4. Both parents and students felt exhausted in the process.¹³⁶ It was evident that the admission by recommendation had become exam-driven and students' workload had been increased tremendously.

According to criteria of recommendation student, the learning achievement based and *hukou* based selection standard exclude children without high scores and without *hukou* from the access to popular schools. The interviews with parents showed concerns on the limitations of student evaluation. Parent 5, a local parent from School B specified,

Well, my child has got school recommendation to No.12 Middle School.¹³⁷ You know high score and being "Three excellence student" are the two keys to become school recommendation student. ...However, I think it is necessary to look at all round development of our kids. Two exam scores are really not enough. They do not show everything, in fact. The daily achievement should also be given consideration. And it is really important. ...

-Interview with Parent 5 from School B, May 12, 2011

Parent 16 from School A said that the academic achievement based selection still could not

¹³⁶ The Interview with Parent 1 from School B was conducted on May 10, 2011.

¹³⁷ No. 12 Middle School is the "Demonstration School" in Fengtai Distirct. It is said that this schools is considered as the best school in this district.

reflect the strengths of a student.¹³⁸ Moreover, the admission by recommendation approach was considered a barrier for students to go to popular schools. Parent 3's daughter was not recommended by School B due to the dissatisfied exam result in math. Thus, Parent 3 argued,

It is really not fair. I really do not think it is a good policy. I am not sure how badly this policy will influence children who cannot be recommended. But, you know, without recommendation, it is almost impossible to get access to good schools. It is unfair to exclude children from quality schools because of a poor result of one exam. It will be a big damage for our child and her future. I think it is necessary to terminate this policy. The policy excludes children from attending good schools. And it may badly affected children's future.

-Interview with Parent 3 from School B, May 12, 2011

Migrant parents expressed their mixed feelings on the exclusion of their children from the admission by recommendation approach. Parent 6, a migrant parent, from School B felt that the recommendation approach would motivate students to work harder. However, she wished migrant children could be included in that process.¹³⁹ Parent 6's view was echoed by Parent 4, also a migrant parent from School B.¹⁴⁰

Furthermore, parents expressed their concerns on the transparency of the student selection in the admission by recommendation process. Parents 3, a migrant worker in Beijing, pointed out that the selection was subjective and clearly led to inequality in education.¹⁴¹ Parents also showed their concerns on the effect of *guanxi* on the student selection process. Parent 2 from School A criticized that the process as follows,

This policy is really a terrible one. It is just a tool for a *guanxi* network and exchange between power, money and access to key schools. I really dislike the policy which plans to increase the quota of school recommendation students. You know, maybe because my child is not good enough to be recommended. I do not have any feeling for it....

¹³⁸ The interview was conducted on May 11, 2011.

¹³⁹ The interview with Parent 6 from School B was conducted on May 13, 2011.

¹⁴⁰ The interview with Parent 4 from School B was conducted on May 12, 2011.

¹⁴¹ The interview with Parent 3 from School A was conducted on May 3, 2011.

In summary, as a tool for key schools to select students, the admission by school recommendation approach excluded students who did not have good examination scores and local *hukou*. More seriously, the criteria for student selection were clearly influenced by exam-driven education and *guanxi*. Furthermore, the approach might have also caused social exclusion and intensified inequality in public school admission and education.

6.2.3.2 Admission by Special Talents

Since School A is not authorized to enroll special talent students by the local education authority, there is no student who entered into School A as special talent students. Nevertheless, the interviews with parents from Schools A and B showed diverse purposes for cultivating children's special talents. Meanwhile, the interviews with parents indicated that mastery of Olympic math, English and pre admission training classes was very critical to those who wished to enter into popular schools as special talent students. The data collected also confirmed that parents were inspired to send their children to those training classes. Consequently, special talent based approach intensified *Ze Xiao*.

As noted earlier, parents had various attitudes towards how to develop their children's special talents. Firstly, some parents did not link developing their children's hobbies to special skills. For example, Parent 2 from School A started teaching his daughter violin when she was 4 years old. He did not expect his daughter to become a violinist but just want her to know music.¹⁴² However, some parents invested everything to cultivate their children's talent for their future. In order to send her child to Central Musical Institute, Parent 11 from School A took her daughter to Beijing from Jiangsu Province. She hired a professor from Central Musical Institute to teach her daughter and paid expensive tuition. This type of investment is

¹⁴² Interview with Parent 2 from School A was conducted on May 3, 2011.

over the affordability of regular families in Beijing.¹⁴³ Different from Parent 2 and 11, some parents decided to trade-off when there was a conflict between developing students' special talents and allowing them to have normal schooling. For example, Parent 4 from School A asked her son to give up his hobby on Chinese chess in the beginning of Grade 5, though he had been playing Chinese chess for years in primary school.¹⁴⁴ Parent 4 felt that playing Chinese chess would not help her son get a good job in the future. Another example, Parent 2 from School B used to take her daughter to play Chinese traditional musical instrument. However, to prepare for the unified exams at the district level, she asked her daughter to give up musical instrument training.¹⁴⁵

As mentioned earlier, Olympic math was one of the main criteria for student selection. Some parents showed positive attitudes towards Olympic math class since it was useful for school admission. Parents 3 from School B send her son to an Olympic math class from Grade 1. She was very positive about the Olympic math class since she believed that it could help her son with his study and it was useful for his education transition. She said that,

I think the main purpose for sending him to tutoring classes is to help him to touch upon knowledge widely in order to improve exam result. ... I think Olympic math can help children to practice their brains. And I do believe it is necessary for children to learn. Also, if children are able to get awards from the Olympic math competition, they will gain priority in education transition from G6 to G7. In my child's class, over 50% of the students take Olympic math. You know, teachers also recommended it.

-Interview with Parent 3 from School B, May 12, 2011

Similar positive feedback on Olympic math classes was also found in the interview

¹⁴³ According to Parent 11, the musical instrument class averagely takes 800-1000 yuan per hour. And the total tuition for the training is about 50000 yuan. According to Beijing Statistics Bureau, the Per capita disposable income of Beijing in 2011 is 32903 yuan. Therefore, the disposable income for a three people family (two parents and one child) is 65806 yuan. The musical instrument tuition is about 76 percent of the total disposable income for a family in Beijing.

¹⁴⁴ Interview with Parent 3 from School A was conducted on May 4, 2011.

¹⁴⁵ Interview with Parent 2 from School B was conducted on May 10, 2011.

with Parent 9 from School A. Her child started Olympic math classes from Grade 3. Parent 9 believed that there were two main benefits from taking Olympic math classes. Firstly, it was helpful for her child's study. Secondly, it is useful for her child to have a successful education transition by taking Olympic math classes.¹⁴⁶ The interview with Parent 2 from School B showed that knowledge of Olympic math was closely linked with school admission. As Parent 2 from School B explained,

.... Two years ago, I heard that the governments did not allow schools to link Olympic math with school admission. Therefore, I did not send him to that class. Well, you know.... (laughing)...if they are linked again, then I am sure I will let him take it without hesitation.

-Interview with Parent 2 from School B, May 10, 2011

Olympic math classes were usually offered by private tutoring institutes. According to Parent 5 from School B, since one tutoring institute guaranteed to recommend her (or his) child to a key school upon completion of the Olympic math class, Parent 5 enrolled her (or his) child in that private tutoring institute. However, after tuition was paid, the tutoring institute never mentioned again recommending her child to a key school.¹⁴⁷ Olympic math classes had been linked closely with admission to popular schools, which attracted parents to send their children to Olympic math classes.

Like Olympic math, mastery of English was considered another important talent for those who desired to enter popular schools to have. The interviews with respondents indicated that achievement in English classes became "Open sesame" for children to get access to popular schools. Meanwhile, certificates received from English contests became a critical criterion for popular schools to select students in the admission process to junior high schools.

English classes were closely linked with school admission in Community A.

¹⁴⁶ The interview with Parent 9 from School A was conducted on May 5, 2011.

¹⁴⁷ The interview with Parent 5 from School B was conducted on May 13, 2011.

According to Parent 15 from School A, the reason for her child to take English classes was to get certificates, which were useful for her child's transition to junior high school.¹⁴⁸ To some parents, taking English at a young age also meant preparing for entering a good university. As Parent 4 explained,

I sent my son to Cambridge English Class when he was in kindergarten. The class was held twice a week, two hours each time. It continued until G5... Before graduation from primary school, we sent him to ABC English Class.¹⁴⁹ The tuition was 5000 yuan per semester. My objective for sending him to English class is just to send him to School C. Then he can go to a better university.

-Interview with Parent 4 from School A, May 13, 2011

Furthermore, the government decision on disconnection between English study and education transition made parents disappointed (see 3.3.3). It illustrated the importance of English study for children's education transition. Parent 6 from School B complained,

We went to English class from G3 to G5. ... Yes, even taking Cambridge English.¹⁵⁰ But I was told by some parents that the Cambridge English was not useful for education transition to lower secondary education...to be honest, it really affected my son's motivation and mine to continue it!

-Interview with Parent 6 from School B, May 13, 2011

The interviews with parents showed their paradoxical feelings for sending children to take extra curriculum classes for public school admission. Parents believed that without taking any extra curriculum, their children's education transition and future would be in jeopardy. As Parent 6 from School A noted,

¹⁴⁸ Interview with Parent 15 from School A was conducted on May 5, 2011.

¹⁴⁹ ABC English program is offered by ABC Education Corporation in China. The corporation was established in Beijing in 1997. It provides English learning program from pre-school level to adult level. Retrieved from <http://www.abc.com.cn/index.php/rukou>, accessed to June 1, 2012.

¹⁵⁰ According to the homepage of University of Cambridge, they started English for speakers of other languages examination program in 1913. From 1992, this program started in China. Cambridge Young Learners English Tests is an English exam system for young learners aged from 7 to 12 years old. It has three levels from Starters to Flyers. Retrieved from <http://www.cambridgeesolchina.org/index.php>, accessed on June 2, 2012.

Regarding the remedial classes, I do think this kind of class just likes giving the seeding a hand. It is too early [for children] to learn so many things a day. I really do not believe they can remember all. But it is really a paradox. If I give her a free life, then everything will become difficult.

-Interview with Parent 6 from School A, May 4, 2011

The interviews with respondents showed that the pressure to students and parents for admission to public junior high schools through remedial class in Community A also came from the local education authority and schools. Parent 1 from School B explained that the local education authority deeply influenced parents' decisions on sending children to cram schools or private tutoring. The exam-oriented education pushed parents and schools to support private tutoring. In order to achieve expected exam results, schools recommended parents to send their children to cram schools for private tutoring. Parent 1 further explained,

As to the cram schools, some are from the private sector, while some are operated by the local education authority. Some teachers and research staffs from education authority at district level also teach there.¹⁵¹ The local education authority informs schools of any class it offers. But, you know, these are all inside information... Since those teachers are the ones who design the standard exams at the district level or even at the city level, we strongly recommend our children to go in order to have a good exam result...

-Interview with Parent 1 from School B, May 10, 2011

Moreover, the interviews with parents also indicated that parents' socioeconomic status determined their children's participation in Olympic math classes or English classes. In order to obtain certificates from Cambridge English classes, Parent 3 from School A paid tuition in the amount of 1500 yuan per semester. Tuition for an ABC English class, according to Parent 4 from School A, was about 5000 yuan per semester. Parent 6 paid 1000 yuan per semester for her daughter to attend pre-admission training class in a key school located in a

¹⁵¹ In Beijing, there are teaching and research center at both district level and city level. These institutes are in charge of design for unified exams at various levels. Therefore, the teachers' classes are considered as the important resources for students and teachers to prepare for the exams (The information was collected from interview with Parent 1 from School B on May 10, 2011).

neighboring district. Although it cost a lot for parents to do so, the interviews confirmed that parents of low income families were willing to invest in their children's education. Parent 9 from School A was a factory worker. Since his wife was laid off a couple of years ago, the husband became the only bread earner of the family. Although the cost for their child attending an Olympic math class was high, Parent 9 still sent his son to the class. The average cost for an extra curriculum class was about one third of the family's income.¹⁵²

Accordingly, similarly as Olympic math, parents in Community A sent children to English class in order to get advantages in public school admission to popular junior high schools. The participation in such classes was stimulated by the link between achievement in English contests and public school admission. Moreover, parents' participation in such approaches was also forced by local education authority and dependent on their own socioeconomic status.

Although schools never openly informed the public that taking pre-admission training classes was one of their admission criteria, the interviews with parents in Community A showed that many parents did it anyway, especially those who planned to send their children to popular schools. The close linkage between pre-admission training classes and the access to popular junior high schools led to the fever for taking such class and then further enhanced the collaboration between private tutoring institutes and popular public junior high schools in the processes of school admission and student selection.

Parent 4 from School B¹⁵³, a migrant parent, confessed that the main reason for her to send her son to a pre-admission tutoring class was there might be possibility for her son to be recommended by the private tutoring institute to the popular junior high school. She believed that there was a working relationship between the private tutoring institute and the popular school. She also believed that the pre-admission training class was part of the exam-based

¹⁵² The interview with Parent 9 from School A was conducted on May 5, 2011.

¹⁵³ The interview with Parent 4 from School B was conducted on May 12, 2011.

student selection by the popular school. Students took the pre-admission training classes once a week to study Chinese, math and English. Exams were determined to screen students every other two or three weeks. Those who achieved high scores on those exams were recommended by the private tutoring institutes to popular schools. Therefore, the exam results were critical for the final student selection and admission to popular school. The interview with Parent 6 from School A showed fierce competition in pre-admission training classes. She said,

In fact, my daughter also participated in a popular junior high school's pre-admission training class. The tuition was around 1000 yuan per semester. They followed the exam-based selection system. After one exam, some students had to "drop out" because they failed to meet the minimum standard. That was a fierce competition. Students who failed the exams would lose their opportunity for student selection by the popular school.

-Interview with Parent 6 from School A, May 4, 2011

The interviews with parents also confirmed that without taking pre-admission training classes, students could lose their admission opportunity to a popular school. Parent 4 from School A informed that her son failed the entrance exam to a popular school because he did not take pre-admission training class preparing for the entrance exam. However, participation in pre-admission training classes did not guarantee success in passing the entrance exam by the popular school, because *guanxi* was another important factor that affected admission to a popular school. According to Parent 4 from School A, in addition to entrance examination results, many people used *guanxi* to get their children admitted to the popular school. Therefore, the popular school selected students by utilizing both exam results and *guanxi* as admission criteria.¹⁵⁴

In summary, the interviews with parents confirmed that preparing their children for admission to popular junior high schools had become costly and time consuming. Moreover,

¹⁵⁴ The interview with Parent 4 from School A was conducted on May 3, 2011.

the admission process failed to be fair and it failed to provide migrant children and those of low-income families with equal education opportunities. The unfairness and failure of the admission process to popular schools was also reflected by the involvement of private tutoring institutes with public schools or vice versa, as well as the involvement of the local education authority in offering and promoting pre-admission training classes, which showed clear conflict interests. The public school admission became a luxury for children of the rich and the powerful. The process could be described as what Brown called as “parentocracy” (Brown, 1990).

6.2.4 Parents’ Aspiration

The case study of Community A showed obvious conformist mentality in the Chinese society. Parents had their own definition of good quality schools which inspired them and affected their decision on school selection for their children. The interviews with parents indicated that sending children to Olympic math classes, English classes and pre-admission training classes was stimulated by conformist mentality. For example, some parents sent children to Olympic math class and successfully enrolled their children to popular junior high schools. Therefore, other parents followed and did the same. No parents wanted their children to be left behind. There was a famous saying among parents in China: “My child should not be left behind at the starting line!” The parents in Community A shared the view. As Parent 12 from School A said,

In fact, you know, the purpose of taking Olympic Math is not to have him left behind at the starting line... (laughing)... you know, just like many parents,...we did think Olympic Math might help our son to go to a good school since we have heard many successful stories about it. We started Olympic math from G1...

-Interview with Parent 12 from School A, May 5, 2011

Parent 16 from School A also said that since everyone sent children to Olympic math classes

she believed her child should go as well.¹⁵⁵

The interviews with parents showed that parents' were inspired to send their children to popular schools and the education transition ratio of each school was the main criterion parents used to decide which school their children should attend. Parent 5 from School B stated that the title of a key school and the education transition ratio were two major criteria parents used to make a decision. She pointed out that,

...the current education resources in Community A are not in balance. School A and School C are totally different. You know, one is key school, the other is not. Then I think people will choose! People believe key school receives more supports! Therefore, even these two schools have the same education quality, I still choose School C for my daughter. Normally, parents just look at the education transition ratio!... if School A's education transition ratio is better than School C for three years, then I think parents will plan to send their children to School A!

-Interview with Parent5 from School B, May 13, 2011

To conclude, like many parents in urban China, parents in Community A had high aspiration for their children's education. On the one hand, they were pushed by conformist mentality to provide their children with quality education. On the other hand, they created their own criteria for choosing "quality schools" for their children. It seems that the key school system and exam driven education greatly affected parents' aspiration and decision on their children's school admission, which also fostered *Ze Xiao*.

6.2.5 Beyond Imbalanced Education Development

The findings in the public discourse analysis uncovered increasing critiques on *Ze Xiao* calling *Ze Xiao* as the result of systematic problems and the mismatch between the education sector and the social development in China. Those findings were echoed by the interviews with parents in Community A, who complained that power and education resources exchange were involved in *Ze Xiao* and migrant children were excluded from public

¹⁵⁵ The interview with Parent 11 from School A was conducted on May 11, 2011.

school admission. Those issues were also beyond the discussion on imbalanced education development and *Ze Xiao*.

6.2.5.1 Systematic Exchange between Power and Education Resources

The interviews with the principals of School A and B did not show any exchange between power and education resources for co-founding students or memo students introduced in Chapter Four. However, the interviews with parents in Community A showed exchange between power and education resources outside of school settings. As mentioned earlier, *guanxi* and *hukou* determined who could attend popular schools.

The interviews with parents showed *guanxi* was linked with the evaluation of school recommendation students. Since becoming a school recommendation student was the pre-condition for going to good quality schools, *guanxi* directly influenced the result of school recommendation based school admission. Parent 5 from School A believed that the evaluation of school recommendation student had been considered as exchange between *guanxi* and good quality education resources. Parents 5 from School A added that people in the *guanxi* network would benefit through the exchange.¹⁵⁶

Interviews showed that *guanxi* became “Open sesame” for getting the access to the popular schools. According to Parent 5 from School B, before getting recommended by School B to the key school in Fengtai District, Parent 5 utilized her *guanxi* to find access to key schools in other districts. She honestly confessed that,

We just wanted to send my child to a school which was as good as possible. Without *guanxi*, even you have money, it is almost impossible to enter into good quality schools. Based on *guanxi*, a key school in Xuanwu District agreed to enroll us. Since the *guanxi* we had was not that reliable, we could not get access to the

¹⁵⁶ According to Parent 5 from School A, his daughter used to study in a key school (9 year school includes both primary education and lower secondary education) in Xicheng District. There were 18 students in his daughter’s class, including 10 local students and 8 students without local *hukou*. These 8 students without local *hukou* were grandsons of leaders in neighbor provinces. And except his daughter, other local students were offspring of leaders at city level or district level in Beijing (The interview with Parent from School A was conducted on May 4, 2011).

key school we preferred in Dongcheng District... In my kid's class, majority of students just looked for schools by parents.

-Interview with Parent 5 from School B, May 13, 2011

Nevertheless, *guanxi* did not guarantee the success in *Ze Xiao* sometimes. Whether *guanxi* was reliable and powerful enough or not became more important for the result of *Ze Xiao*. Parent 6 from School A told her unsuccessful story by using *guanxi* to take part in *Ze Xiao*. She said that,

We had some friends who could help us to send my daughter to a popular junior high school in Chaoyang District. We paid 20000 yuan to the middle man to negotiate the education transition. However, it was said that the principal of that school was sued and investigated by the local government due to the charge of unauthorized fees.... As a result, the middle man could not make it and returned 20000 yuan to us.... You know, we depended on this *guanxi* too much. More seriously, we did not prepare for other options.... Otherwise, we could have more options than that...

-Interview with Parent 6 from School A, May 4, 2011

Interviews also indicated that *hukou* became another type of *guanxi* for parents to utilize for *Ze Xiao*. Since *hukou* is considered as a basic condition to go to public schools in Beijing, *hukou* in popular school district became an advantage for *Ze Xiao*. Local parents who have relatives in good school district have advantage to use this special *guanxi* to change children's *hukou* in order to enroll children in popular schools. Parent 4 from School A had relatives in Chongwen District which has relatively more popular schools than Fengtai District. Therefore, she transferred her son's *hukou* into Chongwen District. This approach provided an option for Parents 4 to send her son to schools in Chongwen. As Parent 4 pointed out, even the school assigned by local education authority in the new *hukou* area was much better than School A. This case showed *hukou* as tool for parents to look for good quality schools for children. *Hukou* became advantage for local parents to take part in *Ze Xiao*. Meanwhile, the approach excluded families without access to change children's *hukou* for *Ze*

Xiao.

6.2.5.2 School Admission for Migrant Children

The interviews with migrant parents showed that migrant children in Community A were excluded from most approaches provided in regular public school admission due to the mismatch between migrant children's condition and the admission requirement (see Table 6.1). In principle, most migrant parents had to find children's junior high schools by themselves. Meanwhile, school admission for migrant children to junior high schools depended on migrant parents' socioeconomic status. In other words, few migrant parents might have strong *guanxi* and enough money to meet the requirements of popular schools.

The data collected showed that migrant parents that did not have any or strong *guanxi* were completely excluded from *Ze Xiao*. As Parent 4 from School B described, he went to several public schools and attempted to negotiate with the schools about his son's education transition. All of those schools rejected his request. He was told that since local students had problems in entering popular schools, migrant children would not be given any consideration until local students' needs were met.¹⁵⁷ According to Parent 13 from School A, she followed the procedures set for migrant children's school admission in Beijing and spent three months preparing necessary documents to meet the admission requirements. In order to make it possible, the parent applied five schools in three districts. Only School A, a non-key school, responded. Parent 13 complained,

I really felt angry with those schools...even though we were not qualified, we still thought it was necessary for them to let us know the result... the feeling of being neglected was really sad! But you know, we have to keep being strong since nobody will help us in this city!

-Interview with Parent 13 from School A, May 5, 2011

¹⁵⁷ The interview with Parent 4 from School B was conducted on May 12, 2011.

Conversely, migrant parents with *guanxi* in Beijing could find school for their children easier. For example, Parent 11 from School A had *guanxi* in Beijing. So, she was able to enroll her daughter to School A without any difficulty. With help from her relative living in Beijing, her daughter entered into School A quickly after arriving in Beijing.¹⁵⁸ Parent 6 from School B, also a migrant mother, shared her experience in looking for schools for her son. By the time when I interviewed her, her son had been rejected by three key schools in different districts. In order to send her son into a popular public junior high school, Parent 6 said she had tried to utilize any possible *guanxi*. Since she had a small company serving some local customers, she planned to ask her clients for help, which was her last hope.¹⁵⁹

Besides *guanxi* in Beijing, *guanxi* in migrant's hometown could also help. Some migrant parents chose to send their children back to their hometown for secondary education. Those migrant parents recognized the difficulty in sending their children to key schools in Beijing and therefore, "voluntarily" accepted the reality by sending their children to popular schools in their hometown. Parent 3 from School B had been working in Beijing for more than a decade. They prepared for their daughter's education transition since she was in Grade 4. On the one hand, they tried to find the possibility to enroll the child to a key school in Beijing. On the other hand, they started searching good schools in their hometown. Through help from relatives, their daughter was accepted by one of the top ten junior high schools in their province. Since they bought an apartment next to that school, their daughter was able to enroll based on the principle of proximity without paying any additional fees. Parents who did well financially and had social network in their hometown could take this approach. By utilizing money and *guanxi* to gain access for their children to study in popular schools, migrant parents could have generated similar issues and problems in their hometown.

Findings showed that migrant children's school admission to junior high school was

¹⁵⁸ The interview with Parent 11 of School A was conducted on May 5, 2011.

¹⁵⁹ The interview with Parent 6 from School B was conducted on May 13, 2011.

determined by factors such as public school admission policy at district level, parents' social networks in both Beijing and hometown, as well as their financial capabilities. The study also showed that majority of migrant parents had to accept the exclusion of their children in public junior high school admission in Community A. While migrant parents with local social network had some advantages for sending their children to public schools in Beijing, they also had a backup system if they had *guanxi* in their hometown.

6.3 Mapping *Ze Xiao* in Community A

Despite the survey result showed 70 % of *Ze Xiao* students were in key schools in Beijing,¹⁶⁰ the interviews with parents in Community A indicated that parents from regular schools (e.g. School A) also actively took part in *Ze Xiao*. The study also showed that parents' participation in *Ze Xiao* in Community A is deeply influenced by "parentocracy" rather than meritocracy. Although parents from School A did not succeed in *Ze Xiao*, the interviews showed that parents had tried diverse approaches in order to send their children to popular schools. As shown in Figure 6.5, *Ze Xiao* in Community A were categorized into two types, including *Ze Xiao* for local parents (in blue arrows) and *Ze Xiao* for migrant parents (in red arrows). The two types of *Ze Xiao* were pre-separated by *hukou* based school admission policies made by the local education authority.

Firstly, as Figure 6.5 shows, there are six approaches for local parents and students to take part in admission to junior high schools. Besides the school assignment approach, which meant the proximity based school admission, other approaches required diverse pre-conditions for parents and students to take part in. Although academic achievement was one of the most important factors for participation in diverse options in *Ze Xiao*, the success of *Ze Xiao* was closely dependent on some "parentocracy" factors, such as parents' *guanxi*, *hukou* and financial condition. In other words, the meritocracy based competition for access to

¹⁶⁰ See Hu,Lu & Xue, 2008.

popular schools was stratified by parentocracy factors. Although majority of parents involved in the interview took part in *Ze Xiao*, most of them failed in the student selection due to the mismatch between their conditions (such as parents' socioeconomic status, *guanxi* and *hukou*) and the selection criteria made by schools. In general, admission by assignment to School A was the last choice for parents and children. The diverse channels for school admission did not reflect equality in public school admissions. Consequently, they intensified parentocracy based *Ze Xiao* in Community A. In addition, preparation for admission to popular schools had become a very costly and lengthy process. Only those parents who had time and money were able to participate in *Ze Xiao* and send their children to private tutoring, special talent studies and pre admission training classes.

Secondly, under the public admission policies by the local education authority, migrant parents and their children were excluded from the mainstream public school admission to junior high schools because they did not have *hukou* in Beijing. Thus, their participation in admission to junior high schools mainly depended on *guanxi* and affordability for *Ze Xiao Fei* in Beijing. Migrant parents sent children to School A after their attempt to gain admission to schools of their desire failed. Moreover, migrant parents who had *guanxi* in hometown also had advantages and were able to have their children admitted by popular schools there. In such a case, someone else's children might be excluded from admission to key schools.

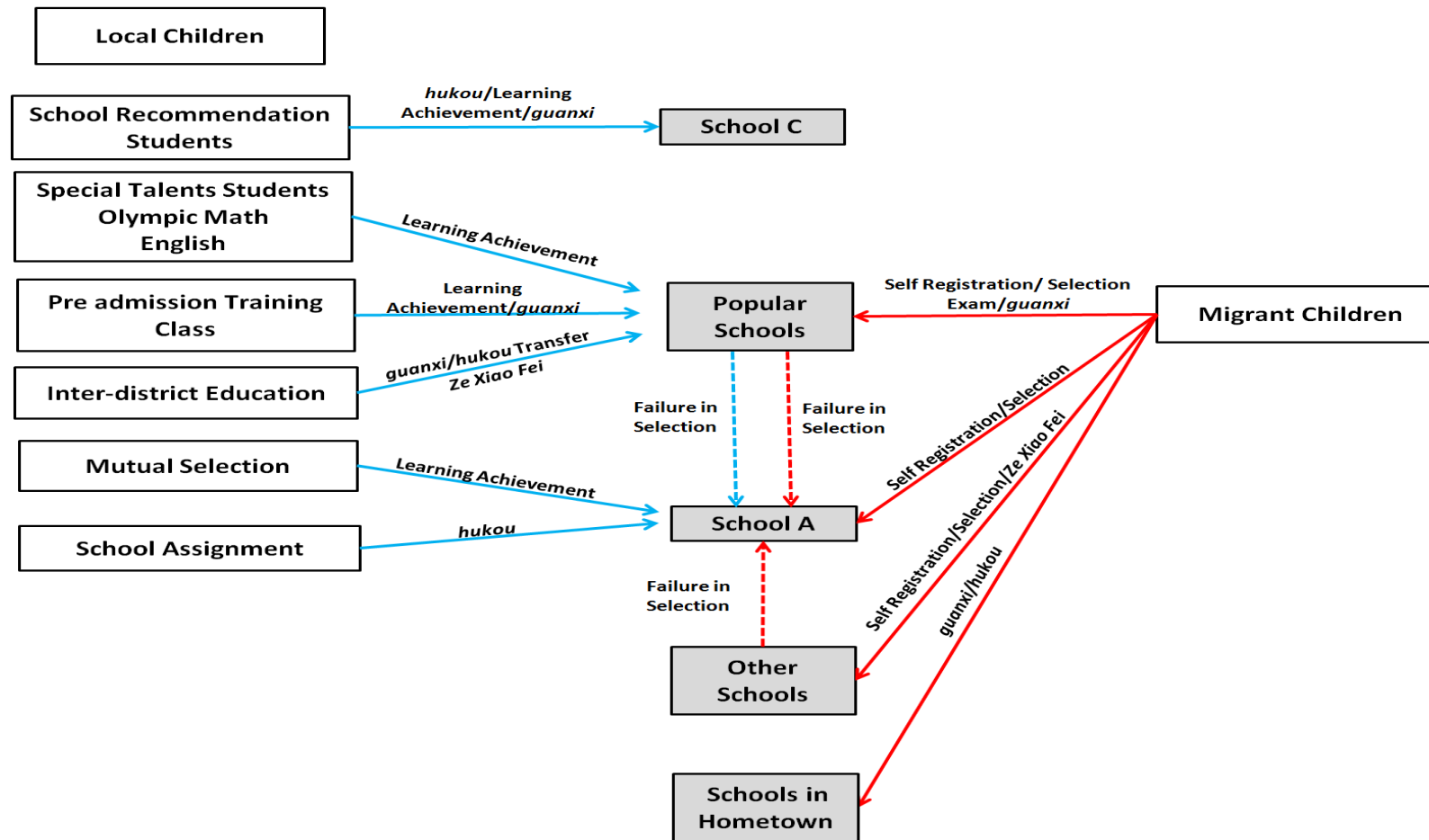
In summary, similar to the findings in the analysis of public discourse on *Ze Xiao*, *Ze Xiao* in Community A was also shaped by multidimensional forces, including the legalization of *Ze Xiao Fei*, the gap between public schools, diverse public school admission policies, parents' aspiration and the systematic issues beyond imbalanced education development. Beyond the discussion on the imbalanced education development, there have been increasing concerns about the exchange between power/*guanxi* and education resources, as well as social exclusion of migrant children from public education. This study found that those issues

intensified *Ze Xiao* in Community A.

The case study on Community A showed that the diverse public school admission policies at the district level did not reflect equality and fairness in public school admission. Moreover, the public school admission became more “parentocracy” dependent rather than “meritocracy” dependent, because the processes such as student selection and admission criteria led to the exclusion of vulnerable groups such as migrant families from public junior high school admission to quality junior high schools. More seriously, it intensified the inequality in public school admission in Community A.

The case study on Community A also showed that migrant children were excluded from the mainstream school admission in Community A due to the lack of *hukou*, *guanxi* and money, which is a clear indication that admission to public junior high schools Community A is parentocracy based and has created inequality in public education.

Figure 6.5 Mapping *Ze Xiao* in Community A



Source: Author edited.

Note: Dotted line means that parents sent children to School A after they failed in sending their children to other schools.

Chapter 7 Conclusion and Implications

This final chapter summarizes the research findings based on the examination of people's negotiation on *Ze Xiao* through analysis of *Ze Xiao* at the community level in contrast to *Ze Xiao* discourse in urban China. Suggestions for how to alleviate *Ze Xiao* were provided, as well as implications for theoretical debate, practice and future research.

As mentioned in Chapter one, this study explored *Ze Xiao* in public school admission to junior high schools as social reproduction in urban China by investigating what people said and how *Ze Xiao* is understood and practiced in the context of urban China. The study was designed to answer the following research questions: How was stakeholders' negotiation in *Ze Xiao* shaped in public school admission to junior high schools in urban China? How did people practice in the process of *Ze Xiao*?

Through qualitative field research, this study primarily attempted to discern the development of inequality in public school admission to junior high schools in urban China by analyzing public discourses on *Ze Xiao* and a case study of *Ze Xiao* in Community A of Beijing. The analysis of discourses on *Ze Xiao* relied on discussion collected in the form of both written texts and interviews, such as newspapers, journals, books and interviews with school principals, parents, scholars, education administrators, private tutoring institutes administrators and journalist. The case study was conducted through interviews with four school principals (two current principals and two retired principals) and 22 parents from a primary school and a junior high school in Community A.

7.1 Summary of the Findings

In this section, I report the findings based on the analysis of discourses on *Ze Xiao* and

the case study of practice in *Ze Xiao* in Community A of Beijing. As mentioned earlier, each finding is in response to the research questions developed for this study.

7.1.1 Negotiation on *Ze Xiao*

The findings of this study indicated that stakeholders' negotiation on *Ze Xiao* in the context of public school admission to junior high schools was driven by multidimensional forces, for example, the paradoxical attitudes of the government towards *Ze Xiao*, the imbalanced distribution of resources for public education, parents' aspiration, diverse public school admission policies and systematic issues in social and educational system. As mentioned earlier, the discursive development of negotiation on *Ze Xiao* in urban China took place in two stages: "The 1990s" and "After 2000". The theme of the first stage was the unauthorized collection of school fees. In this stage, firstly, *Ze Xiao* was mainly discussed as the result of the lack of government investment in education. It was taken as a tool for public schools to generate education fund from parents for school admission to popular schools. Secondly, the gap between public schools intensified *Ze Xiao*. With the emergence of elite education from the 1980s, the government's pro-key school education policy reinforced the advantages of key schools in public school admission. It intensified the gap between public schools and stimulated the competition for the limited access to the key schools. Thirdly, with the abolishment of the entrance exams to junior high schools, buying access to popular schools became widely accepted approach for entering into popular school. Consequently, it intensified *Ze Xiao*. Fourthly, parents' aspiration stimulated by the traditional understanding of education, pressures from competitions in school admission. And the one child policy also played an important role in *Ze Xiao*. Moreover, in contrast to the government dominated negotiation and discussion on *Ze Xiao*, little was heard from parents and schools.

In the second stage "After 2000", with the emphasis on the construction of harmonious society and the focus on alleviation of social inequality by the leadership shift to Hu Jintao, *Ze Xiao* was, mainly, negotiated in the theme of imbalanced education

development. As a continuity of the understanding of negotiation on *Ze Xiao* in the first stage, public discussions that took place in this stage highlighted that the negotiation on *Ze Xiao* developed due to the government's limited investment in education, the gap between schools, parents' aspiration and the diversification inconsistent policies on of school admissions. On the other hand, there were newly emerged focuses on each dimension compared to public discussion in the 1990s. Firstly, for example, the focus of the discussion on limited government investment in education in the 1990s shifted to calling for balance in distributions of government investment in education after 2000. Secondly, the diversification of public school admission approaches at the local level after 2000 was considered an emerging force that intensified *Ze Xiao*. Besides admission by children's academic achievement through exams at schools and by paying unauthorized school fees, admission processes became more dependent on children's participations in after school curriculum, private tutoring, and special talent contests. In addition to the forces mentioned above, the most distinguishing different force which shaped the negotiation on *Ze Xiao* uncovered by the public discussion after 2000 was the issues related to the educational and social systems in urban China. To be more specific, those issues included the mismatch between the economic development and the education development (for instance, how to accommodate diverse demands for education with the rapid social change?), the exchange between power and education resources (Memo students and Co founding students) and the limited government's capacity (lack of monitoring system for alleviation of *Ze Xiao*). In contrast to the government dominated public discussions on *Ze Xiao* in the 1990s, there were diverse voices about *Ze Xiao* from both the central and local perspectives. More importantly, the negotiation on *Ze Xiao* after 2000 was influenced by increasing arguments regarding the role of the central and local governments and their attitudes towards the alleviation of *Ze Xiao*. The study also found that the negotiation on *Ze Xiao* was significantly influenced and shaped by the following factors: 1) some social, political, economic, and institutional factors at the local level; 2) the political position of

Beijing and the rapid urbanization; 3) the privileges of parents as employees of the central and municipal governments, PLA, state owned enterprises and other prestige organizations in Beijing. Moreover, the increasing demands for quality education from families of permanent residents and migrant families outpaced the government's capacity to accommodate those demands influenced the negotiation on *Ze Xiao* in Beijing.

7.1.2 Practice in *Ze Xiao*

The case study on parents' practice in *Ze Xiao* in Community A indicated that the multidimensional forces identified by the analysis of public discourse on *Ze Xiao* in Chapter 4 and Chapter 5 might influence parents' participation in admission to public junior high schools in urban China. As mentioned above, those forces included the legalization of unauthorized charge of *Ze Xiao Fei*, the gap between public schools, the diversification of channels for public school admission, parents' aspiration and the systematic issues beyond the imbalanced education development. A "parentocracy" based public school admission to junior high schools illustrated *Ze Xiao* as reproduction of social inequality in public school admission to junior high schools.

As noted earlier, paying unauthorized *Ze Xiao* fees became a widely accepted approach for parents in Community A if they wished to send children to the schools they preferred. Meanwhile, the findings of this study also indicated that the same approach legally excluded many low income families from participation in *Ze Xiao*. Furthermore, my interviews with parents in Community A showed that, in conjunction with *Ze Xiao Fei*, *guanxi* was an extremely important pre-condition for parents to successfully have their children accepted by popular schools. The study also found that parents' practice in *Ze Xiao* heavily relied on both social capital and economic capital of parents. That is, children from the families had money, power and social network (*guanxi*) were more likely to be enrolled in key schools than others.

The findings of the study also showed that the gaps between public schools within the same community and among different districts intensified *Ze Xiao* in Community A. That is, the gaps between public schools referred to the gap of school facilities, the gap of student distributions and the gap of teachers' salary. These gaps stimulated parents' aspiration to participate in *Ze Xiao*.

The interviews with parents indicated that the admission policies for district based public schools diversified public school admission to public junior high schools. Parents of Community A participated in *Ze Xiao* utilizing diverse channels that were socially constructed by money, *hukou* and *guanxi*. Meanwhile, they have to mobilize their resources to keep their children at the top of the positional competition in public school admissions. Consequently, the privileges and advantages of these families were reproduced through the positional competition for public school admission.

The case study on *Ze Xiao* in Community A further illustrated that parents' aspiration in children's education influenced their practice in *Ze Xiao*. These aspirations were stimulated by the conformist mentality in Chinese society and the conventional standard of "good quality schools". For instance, "My child should not be left behind at the starting line!" and the "high transition ratio to popular senior high school of junior high school" were the two main factors which pushed parents to take part in *Ze Xiao*.

The findings of this study also uncovered that parents' practice in *Ze Xiao* was influenced by the systematic exchange between power and education resources as well as the mismatch between the educational and social development in Community A. *Guanxi* and *hukou* became parents' advantages in sending their children to schools they preferred. Meanwhile, with the increasing number of migrant children in Community A, the public schools within the community could not fully accommodate the needs of migrant children, which affected migrant parents' practice in *Ze Xiao*. This study suggested that migrant

families might have been excluded from participation in *Ze Xiao* because of their disadvantages in having *hukou*, *guanxi* and money.

The findings also indicated that *Ze Xiao* was very time-consuming. In order for children to be accepted by the schools parents preferred, many parents started preparing for their participation in *Ze Xiao* before their children reached G6. In many cases, parents started enrolling their children in private tutoring or special talent training classes before G3 or even earlier. Furthermore, this study also found that many parents utilized multiple approaches while participating in *Ze Xiao* (see Appendix 10). In addition, in contrast to the survey result introduced in Chapter 3 parents of key schools students were major participants in *Ze Xiao*, the case study conducted in Community A indicated that parents of regular schools students often made great efforts to participate in *Ze Xiao*, though their children ended up at regular junior high schools. They never stopped looking for opportunities for their children to be enrolled in the schools they preferred. Their failure in *Ze Xiao* presented the mismatch of parents' desire and capacities and the rule of “*Ze Xiao* Game” shaped by the power and the privileged groups.

To conclude, *Ze Xiao*, as a positional competition in public school admission to junior high schools, took place as social reproduction in urban China. Both people's negotiation and the practice in *Ze Xiao* were driven by multi-dimensional forces such as the limited governmental investment in public education, the gap between public schools, the emerging parents' aspiration for quality education, “parentocracy” based channels for public school admission, and the systematic exchange between power and public education resource, as well as the mismatch between social and educational development in urban China. This study found that *Ze Xiao* no longer merely represented a positional competition in admission to junior high schools. Rather, as the findings revealed, it was reflected through fund generation in the 1990s to as well as social reproduction in urban China after 2000. Furthermore, as hinted in Chapter 2, in order to further understand *Ze Xiao* as social reproduction phenomenon

in contemporary Chinese society, I argue it is necessary to link the phenomenon with the analysis of stratification order and institutional change of Chinese society (see 7.4).

7.2 Reconsidering *Ze Xiao*

The deconstruction of the formation of people's negotiation on *Ze Xiao* in this study elucidated that *Ze Xiao* no longer merely meant that parents enrolled their children in schools of their choices. Rather, the meanings behind the stakeholders' negotiation on *Ze Xiao* and the practice in *Ze Xiao* were shaped by multidimensional forces. An emerging discussion illuminated that *Ze Xiao* was caused by series of systematic problems and mismatches between the social and educational development in urban China. The analysis of people's negotiation and practice in *Ze Xiao* answered the research questions. Meanwhile, the findings of this study also raised several new discussions on *Ze Xiao*.

7.2.1 *Ze Xiao*: As a Result of the Imbalanced Distribution of Education Resources

The lack of governmental investment in education was considered as one of the main reasons for *Ze Xiao*. Due to limited education investment, public schools had no choice but charging additional fees. However, as Yang (2005, December 1) argued the reason that school to charge *Ze Xiao Fei* was due to the imbalanced distributions of governmental investment in public education (see Chapter 5). Although the key school system was abolished in the late 1990s, the demonstration school system continued to exist, which affect the distribution of government investment in public education. Furthermore, the case study in Community A showed the imbalanced distribution of education resources between public schools within the same community. Both the gaps of infrastructure and human resources between schools gave parents no choice but to participate in *Ze Xiao*. Although the total of governmental investment in public education did not meet the demand, the central and local governments should continuously increase their investment in public education. On the other hand, I argue that the

government might not be able to alleviate *Ze Xiao* in urban China without balancing the distribution of resources to public education. More importantly, the abolishment of privilege authorized to the popular schools in terms of distribution of public education resource is “a hot potato” for the local governments. Sometimes, due to the imbalanced distribution of education resources to such popular schools, these schools took their advantage as education resources for renting.

7.2.2 *Ze Xiao*: As a Conflict between Public School Admission Policy at Central and Local Level

As noted in Chapter 2, as *Ze Xiao* developed, the government’s policy on proximity based public school admission at the compulsory education level was being challenged due to two reasons. Firstly, due to the imbalanced distribution of public educational resources in urban China, the local education authority attempted to implement the proximity based public school admission. Since there were gaps between public schools within the same district and between districts, it is impossible to enroll children in public schools with the same quality education. Therefore, parents had no choice but to take part in *Ze Xiao* by sending children to schools they preferred. Secondly, the conflicts between public school admission policy at the national, municipal and district level intensified *Ze Xiao*. With the delegation of authority in administration at the compulsory education level to the education authority at the district (county) level, public school admission policy became more dependent on local education authority (National People's Congress, 2006; L. Wang, 2009). In fact, the delegation left a loophole for local education authorities to accommodate the local needs for more diverse options in public school admission compared with the residence based public school admission. As illustrated in Chapter 3, despite the Beijing Municipal Education Committee continuously urged the public to follow the proximity based school admission policy in admission to junior high schools, education authorities at the district level in Beijing insisted on offering diverse admission approaches for public schools and parents (see Table 3.1).

Moreover, the diversification of channels for public school admission aimed at accommodating various demands for getting profits in public school admission to junior high schools. In other words, the diversification of school admission policy at local level presented a compromise of local education authority for diverse demands in public school admission. Firstly, diverse channels were innovated for responding to increasing demand for children's good education from parents. The various approaches provided parents more choices and possibilities to send children to popular schools they preferred. Secondly, competition among public schools, particularly among popular schools, intensified the demand from public schools to select students. In order to accommodate demand for keeping advantages in competition among public schools, popular schools were officially or unofficially authorized to select students (through school recommendation) they prefer before the school assignment. Thirdly, besides school recommendation based student selection, to further satisfy the appetite of popular public schools to select students, pre admission training class, as collaboration among popular public schools and private tutoring institutes, was promoted and became popular in recent years. Since exam based selection is not allowed in public school admission at compulsory education level, popular public schools selected students they preferred through selection exams held in pre admission training classes. The selection intensified Olympic math fever, English Certificates fever for primary school students in urban China. Meanwhile, it made public school admission more complicated and utilitarian.

7.2.3 *Ze Xiao*: As Educational Inequality and Social Reproduction

Nevertheless, the diverse approaches for *Ze Xiao* did not guarantee the success in public school admission to junior high schools. As argued by Wu (2012), parents' participation in public school admission became more dependent on "parentocracy". In other words, parents' socioeconomic status and wishes of parents had important role in children's school admission. *Ze Xiao* became a competition among parents for children's positions in public junior high schools. As indicated in school choice cases of the UK and the USA,

competition between parents for schools disadvantaged those families who are inclined to enter the competition but who are not well placed to exploit the market to their advantage (Andre-Bechely, 2005a; Gewirtz, Ball, & Bowe, 1995). In other words, parents who were willing to compete for school position for their children may not be capable for the competition due to their disadvantages for such competition. Although case study in Beijing showed parents' inclination to enter the competition for children's school admission, the rules of the competition disadvantaged parents whose capacity mismatched the needed economic, cultural and social capitals. Therefore, parents in School A finally failed in *Ze Xiao* and had to accept the authorized school assignment to enroll their children to regular schools. Consequently, parents without affluent economic, cultural and social capitals can only enroll their children to the regular school. *Ze Xiao* became process of social reproduction in admission to public junior high schools. And this type of social reproduction should be seen in the stratification order of Chinese society (see 7.4).

Next, in Chinese society, which is heavily constituted by *guanxi*, the combination of economic capital and cultural capital may not guarantee the success in sending children to popular schools (Xiaoxin Wu, 2012). Therefore, *Ze Xiao* is relatively dependent on how to mobilize social capital by economic capital. Parents' social capital tends to keep consistent with parents' social class (Horvat, Weininger, & Lareau, 2006; Lareau, 1989). Relatively, it would be more difficult for parents in lower social class to find *guanxi* for children's school admission. According to the analysis of the negotiation on *Ze Xiao* and case study in Community A, without *guanxi*, even for parents have economic capital and cultural capital, it was still difficult for parents to enroll children in popular schools. However, similar as the conversion of social capital to economic capital demonstrated by Bourdieu (1986), case study in Community A also indicated that parents mobilized their economic capital into *guanxi* for achieving *Ze Xiao*. Accordingly, success in *Ze Xiao* depended on whether parents had the enough capacity or not to mobilize enough resources to social network for *Ze Xiao*.

Then, as introduced in Chapter two and Chapter three, when it comes to talking about *Ze Xiao* in urban China, it is necessary to pay attention to local social, political, institutional and economic factors which may influence negotiation on *Ze Xiao* and the practice in *Ze Xiao* among stakeholder in urban China. Beijing, as the capital of China, has responsibility to accommodate needs from central governments, headquarters of the army, other government institutions and big scale state owned enterprises (21st Century Education Research Institute, 2011). These work units have capacities and advantages to cooperate with popular public junior high schools to have the privileges to provide good education environment for children of their employees. Sometimes, the agreement of co founding relationship between these work units and popular schools or even memos from these work units to local education authority and public schools became the privilege for parents to send children to popular schools. In recent years, such approaches, considered as “legalized privilege in public school admission”, were receiving concerns in the public. The privileges of parents’ work units were converted to parents to compete for school positions for children. It represents another social reproduction in public school admission in urban China. It absolutely intensified the inequality in public compulsory education in urban China. And it should be abolished without hesitation.

Lastly, although migrant children’s participation in *Ze Xiao* was not widely given concerns by the mainstream public discussion, case study in Community A in Beijing illuminated the involvement of migrant families in *Ze Xiao*. Mainly, migrant parents paid *Ze Xiao* fee or mobilized their *guanxi* in Beijing for sending children to public junior high schools in Beijing. Besides money and *guanxi*, what mostly excluded migrant children from public school admission was *hukou*. Because of *hukou* based compulsory education, migrant children were “legally” excluded from public school admission to junior high schools by local education authority and public junior high schools. Meanwhile, parents without capacities in enrolling children in public junior high schools in Beijing had to send their children back to

hometown for secondary education. However, I show my concern on *Ze Xiao* in migrant children's hometowns which is caused by their return from urban areas. Affluent migrant families will use their money and *guanxi* to choose schools for their children in hometowns. As a result, it may intensify education inequality and social reproduction in these children's hometowns.

7.3 Implication for Practice

Despite consistent government opposition to *Ze Xiao*, it has never been alleviated so far. In contrast, with the rapid economic and social change in China, the demand for *Ze Xiao* will definitely intensify. As Tsang (2003) addressed, it is not a matter of whether or not to allow *Ze Xiao*. What really matters is how to manage *Ze Xiao*. In other words, *Ze Xiao* itself has nothing wrong, the problem is the rules that governed it. Based on the analysis of negotiation on *Ze Xiao* and the practice in *Ze Xiao* I made the following policy recommendations for the policy makers and practitioners.

7.3.1 Balanced Education Development

As government recognized, the imbalanced education development in China is one of the most important reasons for *Ze Xiao*. On the one hand, there is still ample room for raising “public finance rate”¹⁶¹ to strengthen government investment in compulsory education. On the other hand, since the gap between regions, districts or schools still exist, it is necessary for governments at different level to take action to make the government investment in compulsory education more reliable and sustainable. Furthermore, considering the differences across the country, the state policy should keep the basic principle and allow the local adaptation.

¹⁶¹ According to Tsang (2003, p.189), the “public finance rate” refers to total government revenue from tax and non tax sources as a percentage of gross domestic product.

Secondly, education resource in public education, including both the financial resources and human resources, should be distributed fairly and in balance. With rapid urbanization, it is necessary to redistribute public education resources in most urban areas of China. As Table 2.6 and Figure 2.5 show, the current public education resource distribution could not respond to the demographic change and accommodate needs for public education efficiently. At the same time, with the relocation and reconstruction of public schools, it is necessary to reestablish standardization of public school construction at city level in order to balance school facilities in public schools (see Figure 6.3 and Figure 6.4). Furthermore, in order to adjust the imbalance in human resource distribution to public schools, standardization of teacher welfare system, such as a recently implemented performance based pay system for teachers in public schools at city level should be fully promoted and implemented. The gap of income between public schools in the same city should be reduced gradually. Meanwhile, in order to further balance the teaching team in public education system, a reliable and fair Teacher-Principal Relocation System at city level should be established. In addition, standard for evaluation system on balanced education development of public education at city and district level should be established and conducted annually.

Thirdly, it is necessary to give concern on the balanced development between public education and private education. As independent scholar Feng Wen stated in the interview, it would be impossible to alleviate *Ze Xiao* in public education system without the development of private education (see Chapter 5). Since most private schools just re-emerged from the late 1990s, it is still difficult for them to compete with popular public schools (key schools or demonstration schools) in terms of financial capacity, human resources, reputation and education quality (Lin, 2006). Therefore, it is difficult to follow the principle which addressed “*Public schools do not enroll Ze Xiao student. Go to minban schools for Ze Xiao* (公办不择校，择校找民办).” by Ministry of Education. Apparently, policies which assist development of private education should be discussed, released and implemented. The renationalization of

converted schools, in fact, should be given reconsideration. The development of the converted schools in the past decade showed the possibility to make good schools in private sectors. And I support the idea which suggested keeping the converted schools independent and staying in private education sector. With the gradual empowerment of private schools at compulsory education level, affluent families could be attracted to choose schools for children from public sector to private sector. Then, *Ze Xiao* in public schools could be solved.

7.3.2 Does Balanced Education Development Work?

As analyzed in Chapter four and Chapter five, the central government took the strategy of balanced education development as the major solution for alleviating *Ze Xiao* in urban China. In contrast, there was increasing concerns which doubted that whether this solution could really cool down the positional competition in admission to junior high schools for children. I argue that it would difficult to deal with *Ze Xiao* without solving the systematic problems in social and educational system in urban China.

Firstly, it is necessary for Chinese society to reconsider the question: Compulsory education for what? As discussed in Chapter five, if compulsory education is still linked with the preparation for entrance exam to popular junior high school, popular senior high school and the key universities, then *Ze Xiao* at compulsory education level, which represents one of the steps in the preparation for the entrance into the key universities, is almost impossible to be alleviated. Compulsory education has been closely linked with the post compulsory education and children's future career. The pressure for children to climb up their social ladders has been shifted down to compulsory education or even earlier. In order to deal with *Ze Xiao*, it is necessary to simplify function of compulsory education and to unlink compulsory education with post compulsory education by establishing "Independent Exam System" for children to take in order to enter into post compulsory education. In my opinion, compulsory education should not be responsible for children's education transition to senior high schools. If the exam result for upper secondary education of children has nothing to do

with evaluation of junior high schools and teachers, then it may be possible to solve the positional competition at compulsory education level. For parents as the major participants in *Ze Xiao*, it would be better to provide additional instruction by public schools and public media to lead parents to calm down to reconsider what kind of education is more appropriate for their children instead of considering what is the best education their children should have.

Secondly, abolishment of privileges in public education can be considered as the key to solve *Ze Xiao* in urban China. Apparently, analysis in previous chapters showed there were diverse privileges for *Ze Xiao* in urban China. At public school level, privileges were authorized to the key schools, demonstration schools and the converted schools in terms of distribution of government investment, distribution of human resources and the priority in student selection. Without abolishing these privileges, it is almost impossible to reduce the gap between public schools and to solve *Ze Xiao*. At family level, the privileges parents received were socially constructed. Parents' personal socioeconomic status and the strength of their work units deeply influenced the options they chose for *Ze Xiao* and the result of *Ze Xiao*. Moreover, *hukou* as another important factor which "legally" excluded migrant children from public school admission in urban China intensified the inequality in public education of urban China. Accordingly, on the one hand, with the improvement of the balanced development in public education system, proximity based school assignment should be followed without hesitation. And the collaboration between powerful work units and popular schools should be completely abolished. Meanwhile, a third party based monitoring system for public school admission to junior high schools should be established. Although it is still difficult to change the *hukou* based school admission, it is possible to establish a more flexible school admission system at compulsory education level for migrant children. If the government could establish system to open account for every school aged child in China, then the cost of migrant children's compulsory education in urban China could be transferred through this system from their hometown to the receiving areas. And the un-covered part could be paid by the

central government.

7.4 Implications for Theoretical Debate

This study contributed in expanding theoretical debate in two perspectives. First, this study further visualized the process of development of inequality in public school admission in urban China through utilizing the concepts of exclusion and usurpation from social closure theory and the terms of “ranking” and “rigging” from positional conflict theory. It elaborated the deep and complicated structure of inequality in public school admission in urban China. Second, the analysis of inequality in public school admission through analysis of discourse on *Ze Xiao* and practice in urban China further provided evidence of the persistent power control over public resources by the privileged and the power in China, as a socialist country in market transition. It further provided analysis of the change of stratification order in the transitional socialist economy.

By explaining multiple channels for *Ze Xiao*, this study contributed to the understanding of inequality in public school admission in urban China as part of socialist state in market transition. As introduced in Chapter 2, inequality can be considered as the concept of social closure that includes both exclusion and usurpation. The exclusion in downward and upward direction fostered the development of inequality in public school admission to junior high schools. More importantly, the analysis of channels for *Ze Xiao* indicated that the inequality in public school admission to junior high schools is constructed by exclusion and usurpation at multiple-layer among stakeholders.

In terms of the downward exclusion, at policy level, the official channels for admission to key schools, such as school recommendation, is closely linked with student's performance and parents' social, cultural and economic capitals. This channel officially excluded children from disadvantaged groups without reliable social, cultural and economic

capitals. The power based *Ze Xiao*, such as admission by memo and admission by co founding agreement represented the absolute privilege in public school admission in urban China. Such channels intensified the exclusion and inequality in public school admission. Meanwhile, the downward exclusion also can be found at school level. With the privilege in terms of student selection, key schools were given the authority to select well performing students despite it breaks equality in compulsory education. In contrast, regular public schools were excluded from student selection. *Hukou*, as special capital in Chinese society, also became an approach for exclusion in school admission. It became a ticket for accessing to key schools or school districts with relatively popular schools. In contrast to local parents who have *hukou* or have privilege to change children's *hukou* to good school district, migrant children without local *hukou* were excluded from the access to good schools in urban China. More importantly, since such channels were mainly initiated by the powers and the privileged groups, I define them as "Institutional Exclusion".

In terms of the upward usurpation, towards the privileges in school admission to public junior high schools, non-privileged groups started to take action to respond the "institutional exclusion" and protect their own interests in public school admission to junior high schools. Parents whose children do not have good academic achievement started to utilize their resources to compete with those with privileges in the access to the limited number of good schools. With the transition from redistributive economy to market economy, people took education as "market" for people to exchange. It led to the rise of money based *Ze Xiao* in public school admission to junior high schools, such as *Ze Xiao Fei* based school admission. At the same time, the upward usurpation also occurs at school level. Key schools took action to resist official admission by school recommendation. Since they were not satisfied with the quality of school recommended students, they started student selection based on their own criteria. Consequently, the special talents, certificates received from contests, competition which could show children's talents became the criteria for public key

schools to select students they preferred. This is the reason for the development of admission by Olympic math and PETS. It also stimulated parents' aspiration for sending children to after-school curriculums, such as Olympic math class, English class and other relevant trainings. As a result, it generated Olympic math fever and Olympic math economy in urban China. With the prohibition on student selection through school based entrance exams, key schools started to collaborate with private tutoring institutes. It intensified the development of pre-admission training classes for *Ze Xiao*. In other words, student selection by key schools was closely linked with education market in urban China. Accordingly, I define these channels as "Market Usurpation". In a word, *Ze Xiao* can be considered as interactions between "Institutional Exclusion" and "Market Usurpation" or interaction between "the Privileged" and "the Market".

More interestingly, the interaction seems more complicated since they occur at multiple levels among stakeholders. Key schools have privileges to select students through school recommendation as "Institutional exclusion". Meanwhile, they established their own student selection criteria as "Market usurpation" to resist official approach. However, the regular schools were excluded in both downward and upward exclusion. Similarly, non-privileged parents actively participated in sending children to Olympic math class, English class or pre-admission training class to compete for the privileged dominated access to good schools. Nevertheless, the disadvantaged families were excluded from any access to good schools in both "Institutional Exclusion" and "Market Usurpation". In other words, either schools or families, once they are positioned as the disadvantaged, they are excluded from *Ze Xiao* in public school admission.

Furthermore, borrowing the concept of "ranking" and "rigging" in positional conflict theory, I further elaborated that families mobilized their resources for the "admitability" of students to good public junior high schools in urban China. Families fully mobilized their social capital (*guanxi*), economic capital (*Ze Xiao Fei*), institutional capital (*hukou*) for

getting limited access to good schools for their children. More importantly, work units, which represent collective interests of privileged groups, became another type of institutional capital for parents to mobilize for children's school admission. In terms of "rigging", the proximity based school admission was changed by the powers, the privileged groups, local education authorities, key schools, powerful work units and private tutoring institutions. The *hukou* based school admission shifted to depend on social advantage, family resources, and strength of parents' work units. The change of the rules in public school admission established more barriers for the disadvantaged groups to take part in *Ze Xiao* and send their children to good schools. In other words, the institutional structure and the market intensified *Ze Xiao* in urban China.

Meanwhile, the visualization of the development of inequality in public school admission also provides new evidence through admission to public junior high schools in urban China to indicate the persistent power-control over redistribution of public resources by the power and the privileged groups in transitional socialist economy (see the debate on inequality in socialist country in market transition in 2.3). It might be true that the political capital matters less on income inequality in current Chinese society (Q. Wu, et al., 2012). However, as mentioned above, through mobilizing political capital, the power and the privileged groups still can utilize their network and resources to continue keeping their advantages in the redistribution of public resources. In terms of admission to public junior high schools in urban China, the channels for *Ze Xiao*, such as school admission by school recommendation, represent the ideology of the redistribution of public resources by the privileged (see 3.3.3). Moreover, the admission by memo and co founding agreements between key schools, parents and parents' work units indicated the mobilization of political capitals and public resources for the power and the privileged groups to maintain their advantages in access to good public schools (see 3.3.2). Meanwhile, the power and the privileged groups also can keep privileges for their offspring in public school admission

through utilizing the competition in education market, such as the student selection based on special talent in Olympic math, English and achievement in pre admission training classes (see 3.3.3). They utilized both institutional structure and the market to dominate the access to good public schools for their offspring. Social closure theory and positional conflict theory further visualized and elaborated the power control over redistribution of public resources through interpreting the channels used for *Ze Xiao* as educational inequality in urban China.

7.5 Implication for Future Research

Although I did my best to involve diverse participants in this study, what I could not analyze in detail was the experiences of parents from popular schools in *Ze Xiao*. The discourse on their experiences in *Ze Xiao* will illuminate more details in terms of the “parentocracy” based public school admission and the formation of *Ze Xiao* in urban China. Meanwhile, although I argue the conflict of public school admission policy at city and local level intensified *Ze Xiao* in Beijing, I could not provide in-depth analysis of discourse on *Ze Xiao* from government officials. The analysis of this perspective may strengthen the interaction on alleviation of *Ze Xiao* between the government and the public. Moreover, this study has already identified the important role of social, economic, political and institutional factors at local level in shaping the formation of *Ze Xiao* in Beijing. Therefore, it would be necessary to include areas with ample education resources, especially in term of number of popular schools in order to explore additional forces which shape *Ze Xiao* in urban China. Meanwhile, this point also raised the question that how is the case of *Ze Xiao* in Beijing applicable to other parts of urban China. Analysis of discourse on *Ze Xiao* in Chapter four and Chapter five shows *Ze Xiao* became a nation-wide phenomenon in public school admission. Appendix 9 also briefly introduces the commonalities and differences in terms of channels in *Ze Xiao* in different cities of urban China. Obviously, case in Beijing cannot fully represent the whole situation of *Ze Xiao* in urban China. However, the analysis of *Ze Xiao* in Beijing

elaborated the necessity of taking local characteristics into consideration. Therefore, considering the diverse characteristics of cities in China, a comparative study on development of *Ze Xiao* between cities would be useful for further comprehensively interpreting the phenomenon in urban China. Moreover, a comparative study between China's case and cases in Asian and other parts of the world may further diversify the mainstream discussion on school choice at global level. In addition, to further clarify the deeper structure and order of stratification in current Chinese society in rapid market transition, it would be worthy to conduct district based or city based surveys to further testify the relationship between inequality in public schools and institutional change of urban China.

Through deconstruction of knowledge on *Ze Xiao*, I reconstructed the on-going phenomenon of competition in admission process to junior high schools in urban China. The interpretation of *Ze Xiao* can be considered as a puzzle solving and puzzle making process. As long as *Ze Xiao* continues in urban China, further interpretation of this phenomenon is expected to identify more forces which shaped *Ze Xiao* as phenomenon of educational inequality in urban China as socialist state in market transition.

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Appendixes

Appendix 1: China's Education System

Ph.D.	Doctoral Program (3 years)					Higher Education		
Master's	25							
	24	Master's Program (2-3 years)			7			
	23				6			
	22				5			
Bachelor's	21	Undergraduate (4-5 years)			4			
	20			Professional School of	3			
	19	Higher Education Professional		Higher Education	2			
	18	School (2 years)		(Short Cycle, 3 years)	1			
High School Diploma or Secondary Professional School Diploma	17	Secondary	Vocational High School (3 years)	Senior Middle School (3 years)	12	Upper Secondary Education		
	16	Professtional			11			
	15	School (3 years)			10			
	14	Junior Middle School (3 years)			9	Lower Secondary Education		
	13				8			
	12				7			
	11	Primary School (6 years)			6	Primary Education	Nine-Year Compulsory Education	
	10				5			
	9				4			
	8				3			
	7				2			
	6				1			
	5	Kindergarten (3 years)			Kinder- garten	Pre-School Education		
	4							
	3							
Age					Grade			

Appendix 2: Interview Protocol for Principals

Junior High School

- School information in details (School history+ current situation)
Student number/teacher number/teachers' qualification/student performance/facilities/others
- Admission Changes from late 1980s
- Current Admission
 1. Government policies/ school policies
 2. Admission related documents/Application forms
 3. General admission from when to when?
 4. School choice lottery system/ admission criteria & process/ proportion in total enrollment
 5. School choice students/ admission criteria/admission process/ proportion in total enrollment
 6. Cost for parents
 7. Any activities organized by school side regarding admission for parents?
 8. Collaboration with other stakeholders? Please give details
- What is the proportion of students enrolled through lottery system? And through other approaches? Who are they? How are their family backgrounds?
- Benefit/lost from current admission for school? Why do you think so?
- Benefit/lost from current admission for students? Why do you think so?
- Benefit/lost from current admission for parents? Why do you think so?
- Benefit/lost from current admission for community? Why do you think so?
- How do you think parents' position in the process of *Ze Xiao*?
- What does *Ze Xiao* mean to you? And Why?
- How does *Ze Xiao* influence the admission to junior high schools?

- How do you think the discussion that *Ze Xiao* caused social inequality? Why do you think so?

Primary School

- School information in details (School history+ current situation)
Student number/teacher number/teachers' qualification/student performance/facilities/others
- Changes of Admission to junior high school from late 1980s
- Current Admission
 1. Government policies/ school policies
 2. Admission related documents/Application forms
 3. General admission to junior high schools from when to when?
 4. How is primary school involved in the school choice lottery system?
 5. What is the proportion of student enrolled by key schools?
 6. What is the proportion of students involving in school choice lottery system?
Who are they? And how are their family backgrounds?
 7. What is the proportion of students involving in other school choice approaches? Who are they? And how are their family backgrounds?
- Have you ever organized any activity for parents regarding admission for children to junior high school? If yes, what kind of activity did you organize? And Why?
- How do you think parents' position in the process of *Ze Xiao*?
- How do you think the current admission system to junior high schools? And Why do you think so?
- Regarding the discussion on *Ze Xiao* which causes social inequality, how do you think? And why do you think so?

Appendix 3: Interview Protocol for Educational Administrators

1. Could you please introduce public school admission policy in your district?
2. Could you specify the public school admission approaches in your district (for example, school recommendation student, special students, lottery system,..)?
3. How do you understand *Ze Xiao*?
4. What caused *Ze Xiao*?
5. How do you think of the charge of *Ze Xiao Fei* for public school admission?
6. What caused the charge of *Ze Xiao Fei*?
7. How do schools charge *Ze Xiao Fei*? Could you explain the internal relationship between public school, local education authority and parents in terms of charge of *Ze Xiao Fei*?
8. What did government do to tackle the charge of *Ze Xiao Fei*?
9. How to understand balanced education development?
10. What is the situation of balanced education development in Beijing and in your district?
11. What is your suggestion for the balanced education development in Beijing and in your district?

Appendix 4: Interview Protocol with Scholars

1. Could you please recall your experience in school admission to junior high school?
How about your children's experience? And how did public school admission to junior high schools change?
2. How do think of *Ze Xiao* in urban China? and in Beijing?
3. What's your opinion of the key school system or demonstration school system? And how do you think their relationship with *Ze Xiao*?
4. How do you understand diverse approaches/choices for children's school admission to junior high schools? Could you clarify your opinions on School recommendation student approach and Special talent student approach?
5. What caused *Ze Xiao*?
6. Why the government failed in alleviating *Ze Xiao*?
7. How to deal with *Ze Xiao*?
8. How do you understand balanced education development? what is relationship between *Ze Xiao* and balanced education development?
9. Do you think through achieving the balanced education development we can alleviate *Ze Xiao*? Why?

Appendix 5: Interview Protocol with Manager of Private Tutoring Institute

1. Could you introduce your private tutoring institute? (Such as, number of branches, number of students, number of teachers, types of classes, the fees...)
2. Why did private tutoring institutes become popular in recent years? What is the relationship between *Ze Xiao* and private tutoring institute?
3. How do you think of *Ze Xiao*?
4. What caused *Ze Xiao*?
5. How do you understand balanced education development? What is your opinion on key school systems/demonstration schools and the gap between these schools and regular schools?
6. Could you specify Olympic math and English training classes in your institute? Are they popular among students and why? How do you think of this fever? And why do you think so?
7. Do you have pre-admission training class? How does it work?
8. What is your relationship with popular schools, in terms of public school admission?
9. How do you think of government policy on unlinking the pre admission training class and public school admission to junior high schools? Why do you think so?
10. What's your opinion on alleviation of *Ze Xiao*?

Appendix 6: Interview Protocol with Parents

A. Parents' Background

- a. Age/Birth of place/ your parents' information
- b. Household registration (*hukou*); If without local *hukou*, then when did you come to Beijing? & Why did you come to Beijing?
- c. Living place/Living condition/ Home moving experience & Why did you move? Have you ever considered another move? If yes, where? And Why? How do you decide where to live?
- d. Why did you choose to live there? Evaluation of the community where are you living in? Relations with neighbors? Distance to your workplace?
- e. Education background/Education experiences: how did you like school? How was your school like? How do you think of your education level? Have you ever planed to go further? Are there any barriers?
 - Compulsory education: Admission process/admission criteria/cost
 - Post-compulsory education: Admission process/admission criteria/cost
- f. How do you think of education? & Why?
- g. Working experiences:
 - Occupation: How did you come to work at this job? How long have you been working on this job? How many times did you change your job? And Why?
 - Income
 - Working hours
 - Job satisfaction

B. Children's Education

- a. Birth of place/ age /*hukou*/ Change of *hukou*? When & Why?
- b. Living together with you? If not, where and with whom do they live?
- c. How difficult to have a child in school-year? Examples.

- d. Schooling: school name/ school location/ Distance from home/ school's information/grade/ Any school transfer experience? When & Why transfer?
- e. Your expectation for her/his education? How far do you expect him/her to go? Why?
- f. Your involvement in her/his education?
- g. How is her/his schooling going on? Which subject is his/her favorite? Which is not?
- h. Problems/challenges for her/his schoolings? Reasons for those problems/challenges?
- i. Any after school activities, like *Juku*? Or others? Why do you send them to study?
How many times per week? How long does it take for once? Cost?
- j. Any other investment in children's education? Why? Cost?
- k. How important do you think compulsory education is for your child? Why?

C. Choosing school

For G7 students' parents

- a. How did you choose school for your child?
 1. The Admission Policy to junior high school: how much did you understand?
 2. How much do you understand the Principle of proximity? And School choice lottery system?
 3. Follow the principle of proximity or not? Why?
 4. **For parents who chose School choice lottery system:**
 - What was the application process like? Could you explain please? Any documents?
 - Any problems or challenges in this process? What are they and why? How did deal with them?
 - Are you satisfied with the system and the result? And Why?
 5. **For parents who chose other school choices:**

The process of choosing the school your child is attending now.

- Gathering information from where/ whom
 - Talking with whom about schools
 - Visiting schools?
 - Application process
 - Application forms
 - Application criteria: especially from Junior high school side?
 - After school programs for application for junior high schools? What were they? How were they? Did you let your child attend? And Why?
 - Cost: time/money
 - Others: Role of private education institutions in this process? Your experience?
- b. Why did you choose the school which your child is attending now? Any standard?
- c. Have you ever got any help from primary school side regarding your children's promotion to junior high school? What were they? How did you feel?
- d. How did you feel the process? Any problems/challenges?

For G6 students' parents

How are you preparing for choosing school for your child?

1. Are you clear about this year's policy regarding promotion from primary school to junior high school? Could you explain? Where do you get the information? How do you think this year's policy? And Why?
2. Do you have any questions regarding this year's policy or any documents distributed by schools/governments or others? Could you explain in details?
3. Which way you will choose, following the principle of proximity or others? And

Why?

4. Do you have any preference for child's junior high school? And Why is that school?
5. What kinds of information regarding school do you care about? Why?
6. How do you collect information regarding child's promotion to junior high school?
7. To whom you talk about child's school choice? What do you talk?
8. What is your situation now regarding child's school choice? Which stage are you in? How do you feel?
9. Any problems/ difficulties?
10. Have you ever got any help from primary school side? What are they? How do you feel? Any additional help you need?
11. How do you feel the information provided by the key schools regarding admission?
12. How do you think the admission criteria made by the key schools? Or the school you preferred.
13. Have you ever attended the activities organized by private education institutes? And Why did you attend or why not? How do you feel?
14. What else activities do you and your child attend regarding the child's admission to junior high school?

D. About *Ze Xiao*

- a. What is your understanding of *Ze Xiao*? In other words, what does *Ze Xiao* mean to you?
- b. How do you think of *Ze Xiao*? Why?
- c. How do you think of public schools (key schools and non key schools), *minban* schools and private schools? Which type of school did you/do you plan to enroll your child? And Why?

- d. How do you think of current admission process? Why?
- e. How do you think of Principle of proximity? Why?
- f. For parents who did not /do not plan to follow Principle of proximity: Why do you participate in *Ze Xiao* or not?
- g. Do you think *Ze Xiao* can cause social problems? What are they? Why do you think so?
- h. Regarding the current admission to public schools, do you have any ideas for improvement? What are they?

Appendix 7: Interview Protocol with Journalist

1. Could you please recall your experience in public school admission to junior high school? How different it is from current public school admission as you know?
2. How do you understand *Ze Xiao*? And how do you interpret it?
3. How did *Ze Xiao* occur? Could you please share your idea of the background?
4. Could you please analyze the reasons for *Ze Xiao*?
5. Regarding *Ze Xiao*, what kind of issue did you concern in the past years? Could you specify?
6. What kind of issues did you give special attention in terms of *Ze Xiao*? And Why?
7. Could you introduce the approaches of *Ze Xiao* you found in your reports? Which is the most popular approach? And why?
8. Could you share the attitudes of parents, schools, governments towards *Ze Xiao*?
9. How do you think of the policies related to *Ze Xiao*? Do they work? And why? What is your opinion on the improvement?
10. How do you understand the balanced education development? What is the relationship between the balanced education development and *Ze Xiao*?

Appendix 8: Global Comparison of School Choice Policy

Country	Characteristics	Patterns	Objectives
Australia¹	Private sector centered Choice; Quality; Equity	Public subsidy to both Catholic private schools and other Non-Catholic private schools	Maintain private school sector and raise standards; Political motive
UK²	Public sector centered Self-managed School (From cost-effectiveness to quality control); Competition; Cooperation	Open Enrollment	More freedom and choices for parents
		Linking school funding with enrollment	To stimulate motivation of school side
		Grant Maintained School	More autonomy to schools
		City Technology College	More choice/ Specialization
		Public support for poor pupils to private schools	More choice
USA³	Public sector centered Social Justice; Competitiveness of public schools; Academic achievement	Alternative Programs/Magnet School	Desegregation
		Charter School	Autonomy
		Education Voucher	Access for disadvantaged students to private schools
		Inter/Inner District Choice/ Home Schooling	More choices
Japan⁴	Public sector centered Liberalization of education: Diversity & Quality Improvement	Free Choice, Block Choice, Neighboring Area Choice, Specially Approved School, and Specific Area Choice System	Increasing demand from parents according to social issues (bullying, school violence, etc.); Dissatisfaction with quality of teacher and school leadership; Dissatisfaction with standardization; Limited capacity of public schools.

Source: Author

Note: 1. Forsey, 2008; Augus, 2003; D. Hirsch, 2002, OECD, 1994; Potts, 1999

2. Brown, 1990; Hirsh, 2002; OECD, 1994; Walford, 2008

3. OECD, 1994; Andre-Bechely, 2005a, 2005b; Chubb & Moe, 1990; Ladd, 2003; Levin, 1992; Witte & Rigdon, 1993; Lubienski, 2008;

4. Fujita, 2000; Yoshida, Kogure, & Ushijima, 2008; Dierkes, 2008; Hayase, 2009

Appendix 9: Brief Introduction of *Ze Xiao* in Big Cities in Urban China

1. Guangzhou

According to 21st Century Education Research Institute (2011), there are two types of *Ze Xiao* in Guangzhou in 2010. First, to take part in entrance exams held by minban schools or public schools. Second, to take part in test for special talent based school admission. The special talents mainly refer to talents in sports, arts, Olympic math and English. Sponsor fee to public education (educational donation, it is another official title of *Ze Xiao Fei*) is allowed in public school admission. In 2010, it is said that the city as a whole collected 1.1 billion yuan as *Ze Xiao Fei*. Moreover, although Olympic math based student selection has been alleviated in Guangzhou, English based selection became popular in this city recently.

2. Chengdu

According to 21st Century Education Research Institute (2011), about 70% of primary school student in Grade 6 follow the principle of proximity to go to junior high schools. And 30% of Grade 6 students in primary schools go to junior high schools by using other channels. Mainly, these students are memo students and fee charged students. The *Ze Xiao Fei* in Chengdu is from 30,000 yuan to 50,000 yuan. The about 20% of the charged fees is redistributed to the schools which charged fees. And the rest is used for reconstruction of the left behind schools.

3. Nanjing

According to 21st Century Education Research Institute (2011), the school admission policy at lower secondary education is “Free, no entrance exam and proximity” based in public schools; No entrance exam based in *minban* schools”. One characteristics of *Ze Xiao* in Nanjing is that *Ze Xiao* mainly happens among *minban* schools. *Minban* schools enroll students through two approaches, including school lottery and school based admission. School based admission leaves loophole for *minban* schools to select students at

compulsory education level through their own criteria. The same as *Ze Xiao* in other cities, “Three excellence student”, achievements in various types of contests and competitions are the channels for *Ze Xiao*. The collaboration between *minban* schools and private tutoring institutes in terms of student selection is also reported. Since the popular *minban* schools in Nanjing are mainly established by popular public schools, the relation stipulates the “legalization of *Ze Xiao*” in compulsory education.

4. Xianan

According to 21st Century Education Research Institute (2011), 5 public schools at secondary education level are the main focuses for *Ze Xiao* in Xianan. Interestingly, these schools both have *minban* junior high school department and public senior high school department. Moreover, three out of five popular schools are affiliated to local universities. Olympic math became an important criterion for student selection. It is reported that 70% of primary school students in Grade 3 to Grade 4 are studying Olympic math in Xian.

5. Shanghai

According to 21st Century Education Research Institute (2011), public school admission in Shanghai mainly depends on school lottery system. Public schools have two school based admission approaches, including special talent based and school recommendation based. These types of enrollment share 5% of the total enrollment in public schools. In Shanghai, *minban* schools do not follow principle of proximity. They collaborate with primary schools and private tutoring institutes for student selection. It is reported that Olympic math is still important criterion for school admission in *minban* schools. Moreover, the pre-admission training classes are becoming popular in recent years.

Appendix 10: School Admission Schedule in School B

2011 届六年级毕业工作内容及时间安排

时 间	工 作 内 容	责任人
4 月 13—17 日	打印毕业生复核单交由学生复核, 本人及家长签字, 并上网修改各项错误。	钱麟、班主任、学生、家长
4 月 19—20 日	带齐“8 种人”有关材料(证明), 到招办集中办理审查手续。	钱麟、班主任、家长
4 月 22 日	小学启动推荐入学工作。	学校
4 月 28 日 8: 00 — 29 日 17: 00	各小学登录考试中心小升初网站 (http://ftks.org), 网上填报推荐人选并打印名单。	学校
5 月 4—5 日	小学为回外区户籍就读的毕业生打印申请表。【5 月 4 日学校打印申请表, 下午家长携带学生户口(或家庭实际居住地房屋产权证明)原件到校, 领表并填写。】	学校、钱麟、家长
5 月 5 日 17: 00 前	小学上交本校毕业年级正式生名册(从小升初管理平台 http://ftks.org 打印, 加盖公章)。	学校、钱麟
5 月 5 日 17: 00 前	小学持本校申请表、学生户口(或家庭实际居住地房屋产权证明)原件到区考试中心中招办办理转出手续。	学校、钱麟、家长
5 月 5 日	各小学上报本校推荐名单(网站打印)和推荐学生综合材料(学生自荐表、学校推荐表等)。以上材料以推荐初中校为单位区分, 加盖校章。	学校
5 月 6 日	小学将通过审批的申请表等材料发给对应学生。(请家长到校领取。)	学校、家长
5 月 8—9 日	回外区户籍就读的毕业生到接收区县办理转入手续, 完成后将申请表交回原小学。	家长
5 月 11—12 日	小学登陆考试中心小升初网站, 按要求生成毕业生上网用户名及密码, 发给对应小学毕业生。	钱麟、班主任
5 月 14—15 日	体育、艺术、科技传统项目校受理小学毕业生报名。正式生须带本人上网用户名及密码, 借读生带学籍卡复印件。	家长
5 月 17 日 8: 00—18 日 17: 00:	小学毕业生上网填报 (http://ftks.org) 片内双向选择志愿。	钱麟、班主任、家长

Document submission for migrant children with "Green Card"

School Recommendation

Document submission for children who go back to study in hukou registered

School Recommendation

Special talents students

Children without local hukou can apply for special talents student

Mutual Selection

时 间	工 作 内 容	责任人
5月19-20日	小学打印毕业生志愿确认单, 交由学生及家长签字并收回, 月底前统一交招办。	学 校、钱麟、班主任、家长
5月21日 14:00-15:00	对报名的体育特长生进行特长测试(丰台体育中心 14 看台集中)。	家长
5月21日	对报名的艺术、科技特长生进行特长测试(上午 8:30-11:30, 下午 1:30-4:30 在区少年宫进行)。	家长
5月21-22日	片内双向选择初中校到对应小学查阅参加双向选择的小学毕业生综合素质评价手册。	班主任
5月23日 8:00-17:00	小学登录考试中心小升初网站, 录入本校毕业生毕业成绩(等级值)和评语。	班主任
6月1日	下发有关文件, 小学初审合格的从小升初网站(http://ftks.org)打印申请表。	学 校、钱麟
6月3日前	小学上交有关纸介材料。注意时间, 过期不再办理。	班主任、钱麟
6月1-6日	小学毕业生上网查询部分初中校前期录取结果。	学 校、家长
6月26-27日	回外区学生户籍就读的毕业生持申请表和学校打印的初中入学登记表去接收区县办理接收手续。	家 长
7月6日起	小学上网查本校毕业生录取去向。	学 校
7月7-10日	小学毕业生上网查询录取结果。	学 校、家长
7月8日起	中小学开始发放入学通知书。	学 校、班主任
放假前	小学毕业生完成离校刷卡工作。	钱麟、班主任
开学前	小学毕业生持录取通知书到录取校注册。	家 长

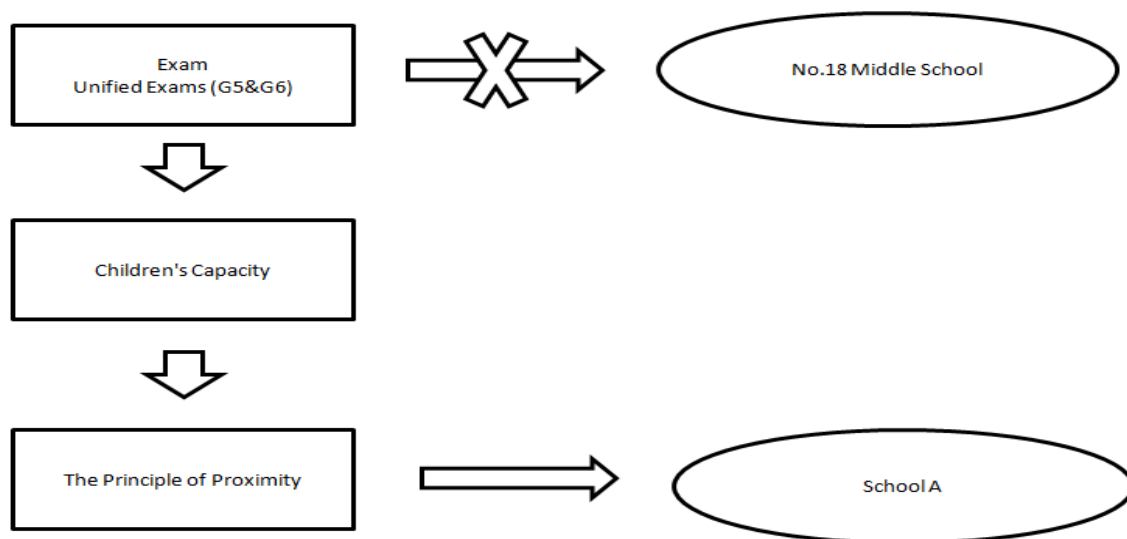
Special talents student Test

Mutual Selection

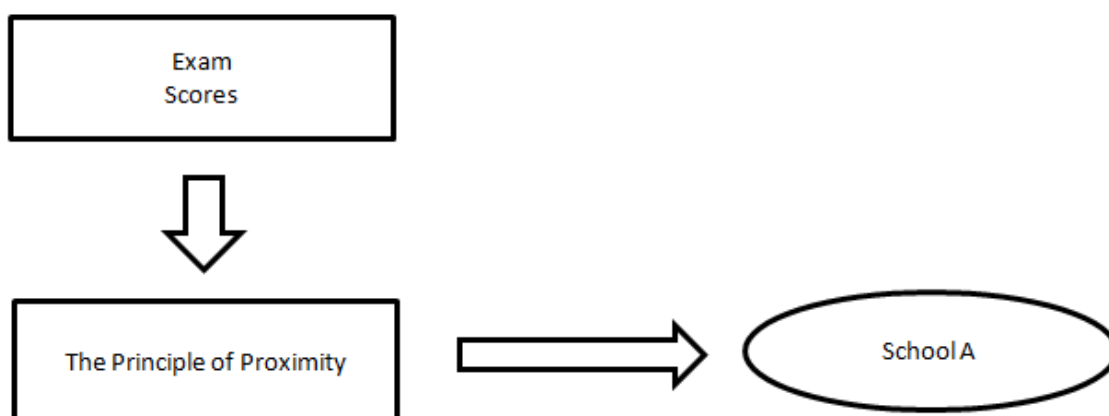
Source: Collected from parent-teacher meeting in School A, April 27, 2011

Appendix 11: Parents' Routes in *Ze Xiao* in Community A

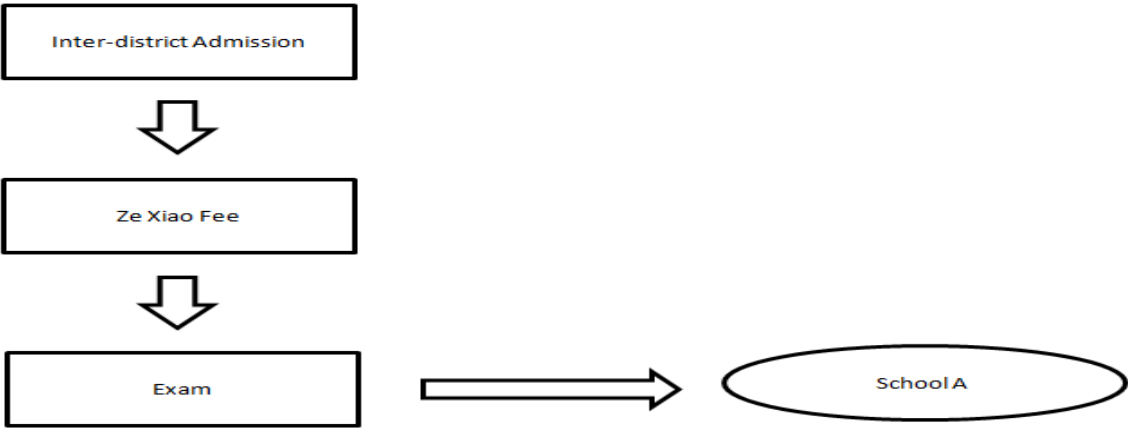
School A 01



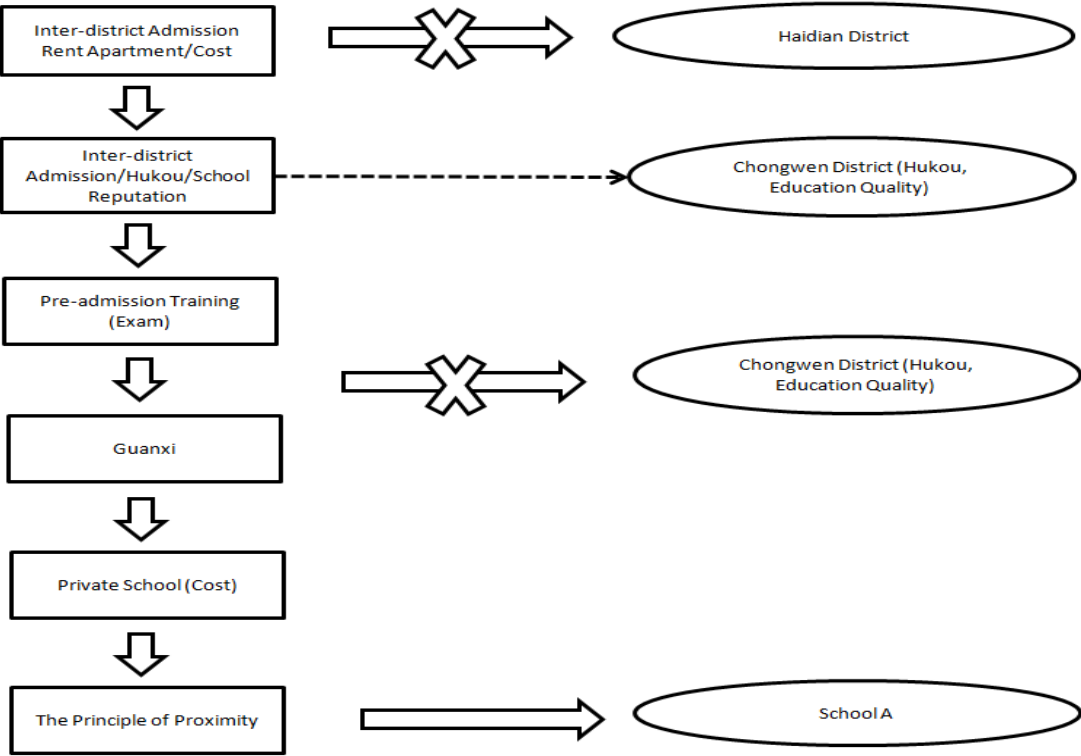
School A 02



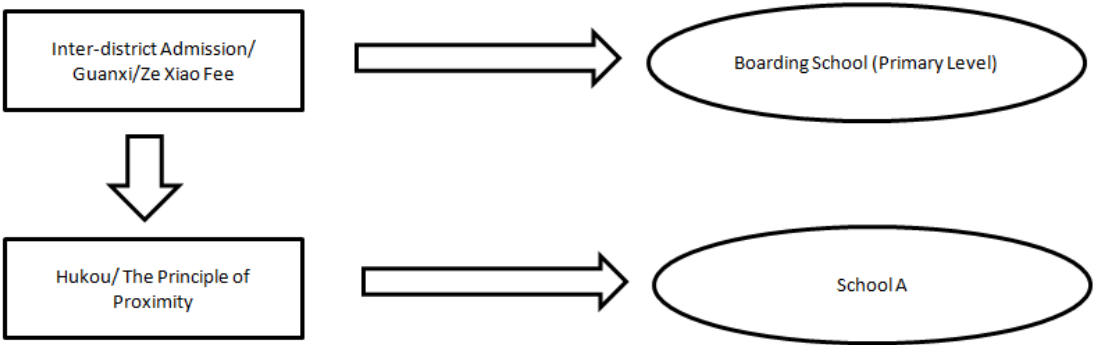
School A 03



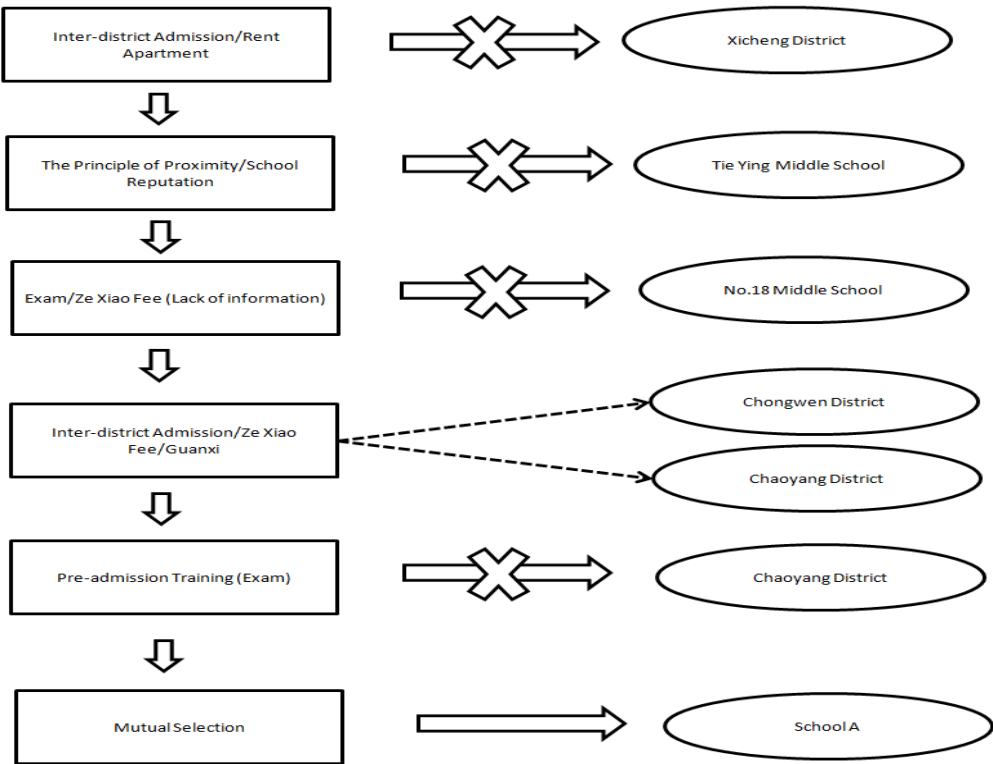
School A 04



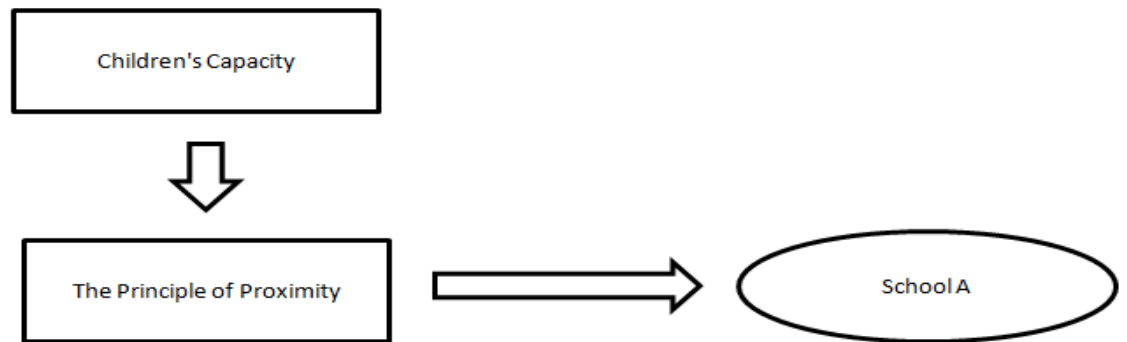
School A 05



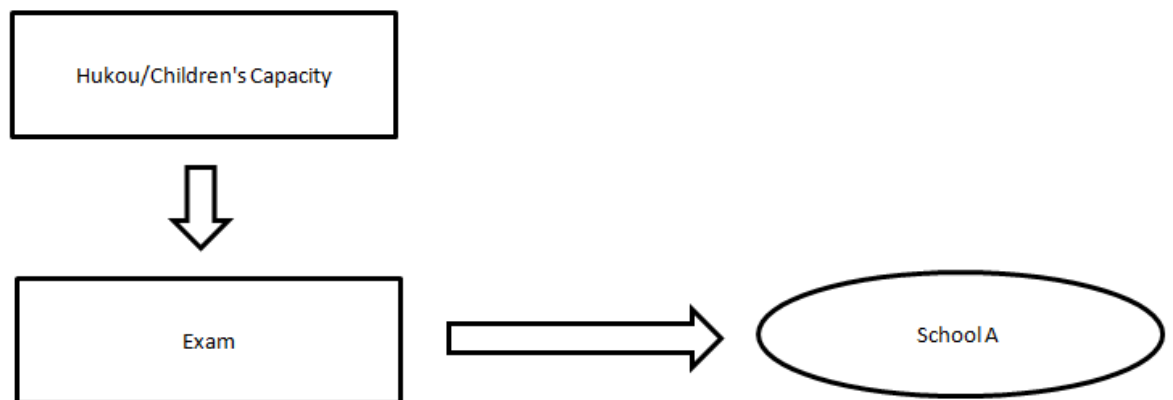
School A 06



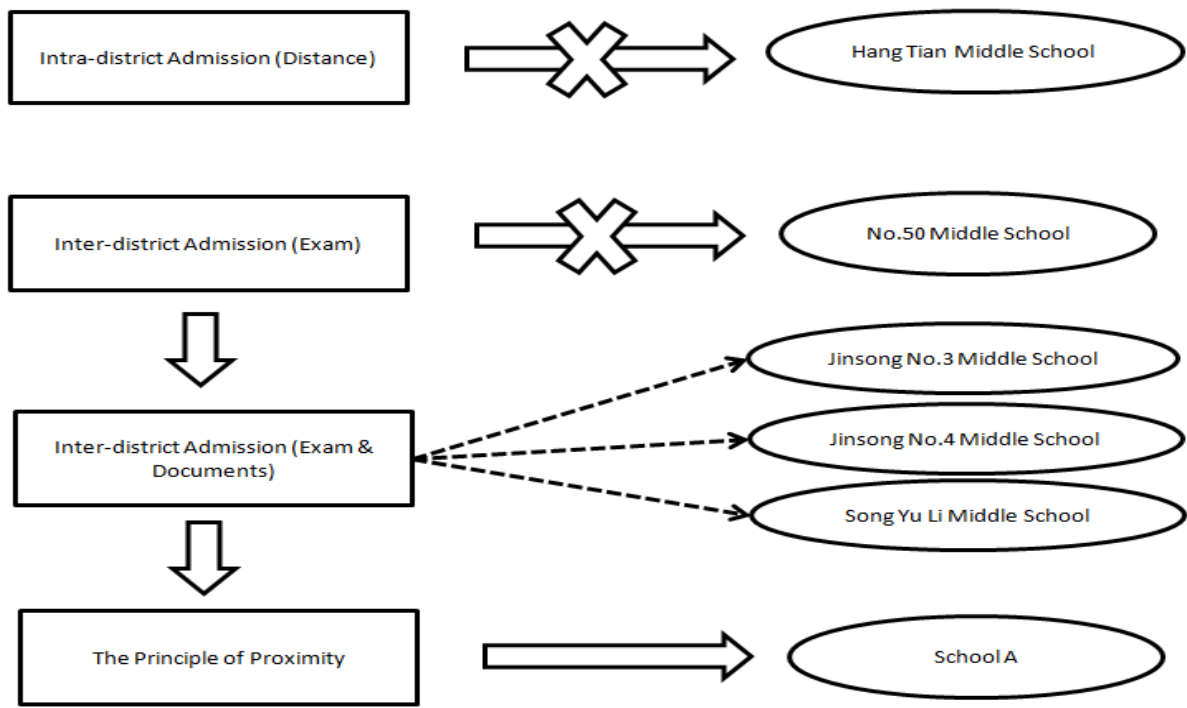
School A 07



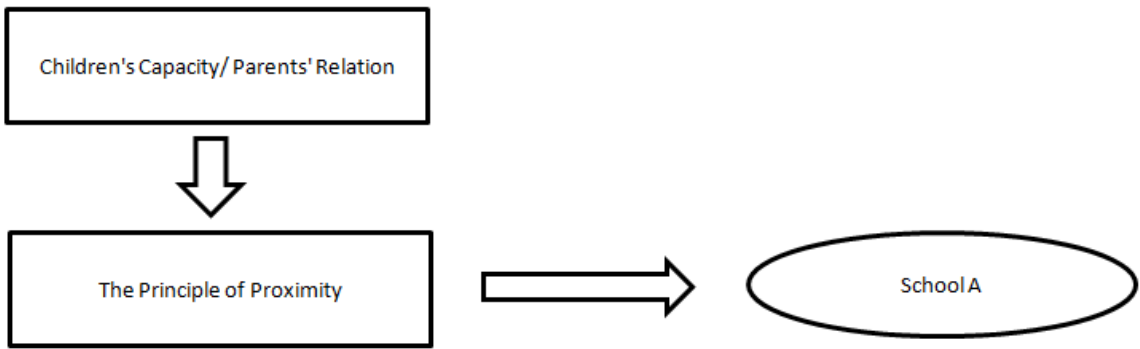
School A 08



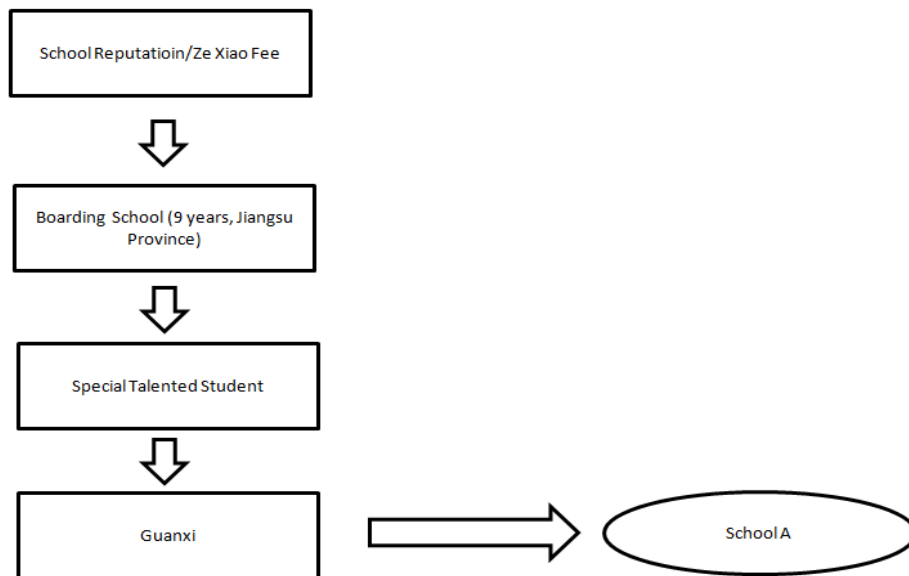
School A 09



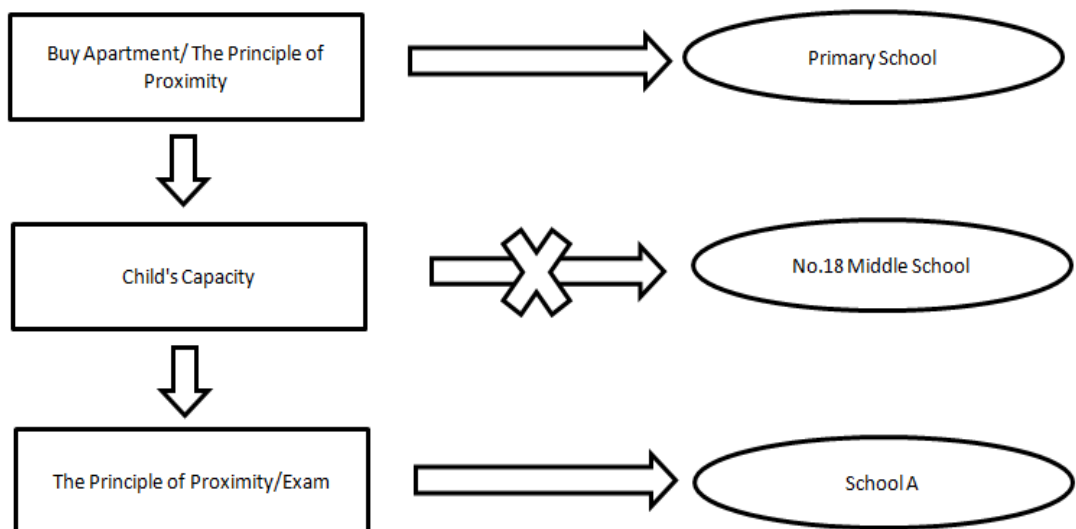
School A 10



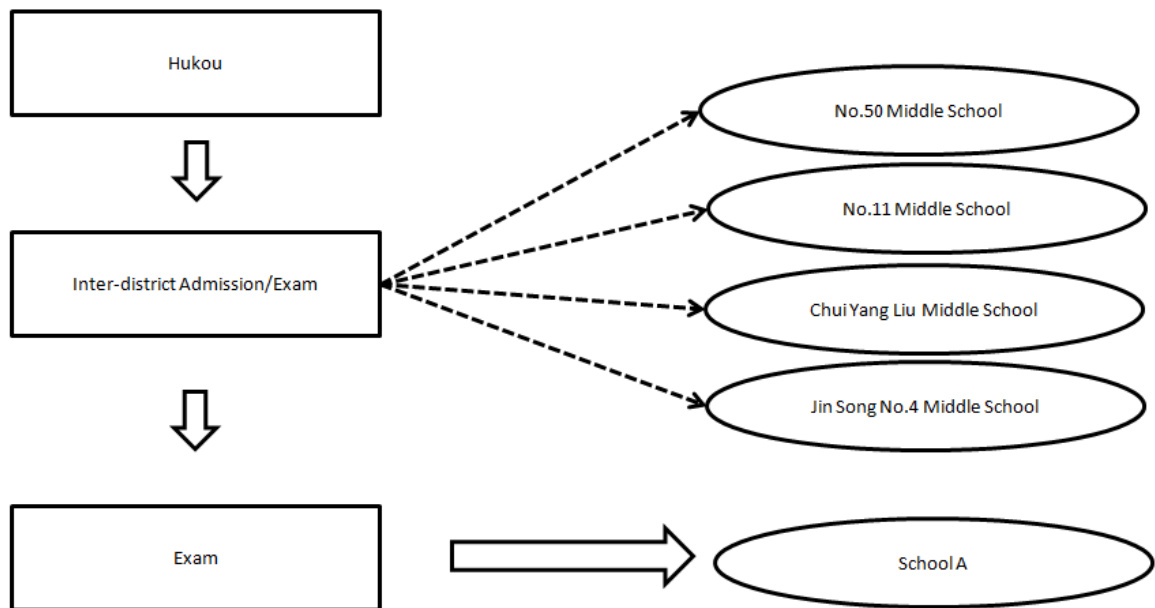
School A 11



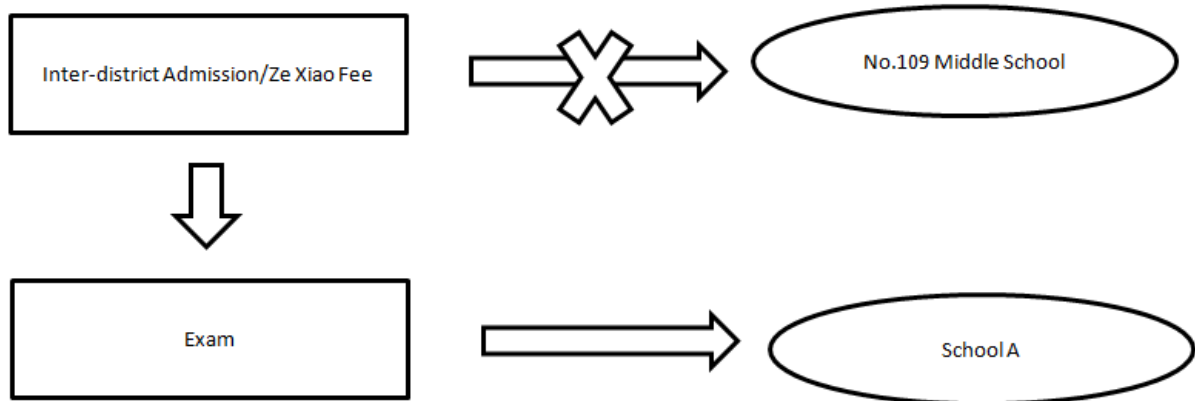
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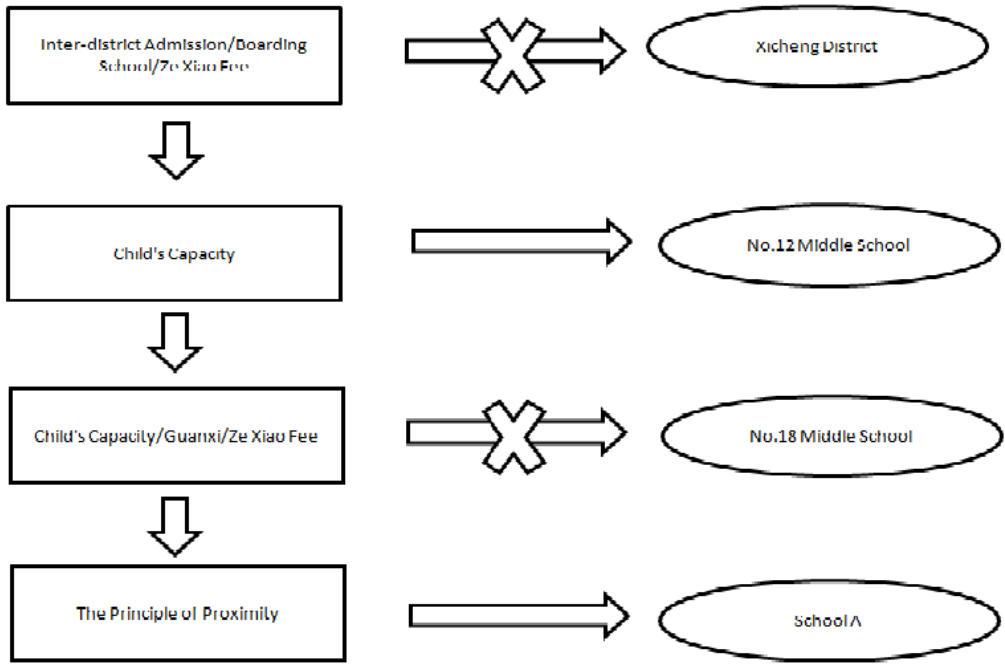
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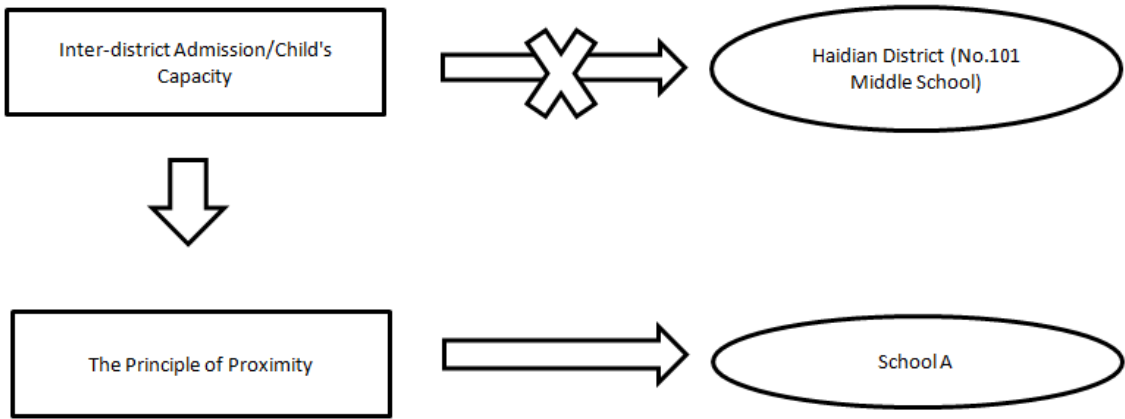
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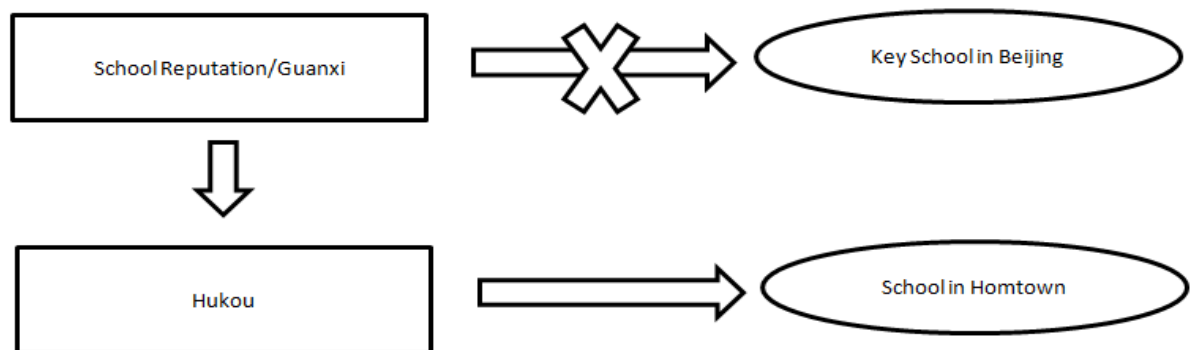
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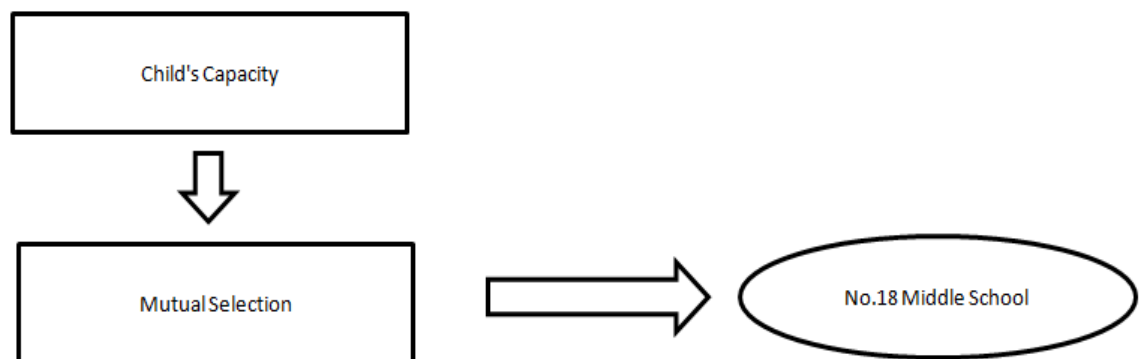
School A 16



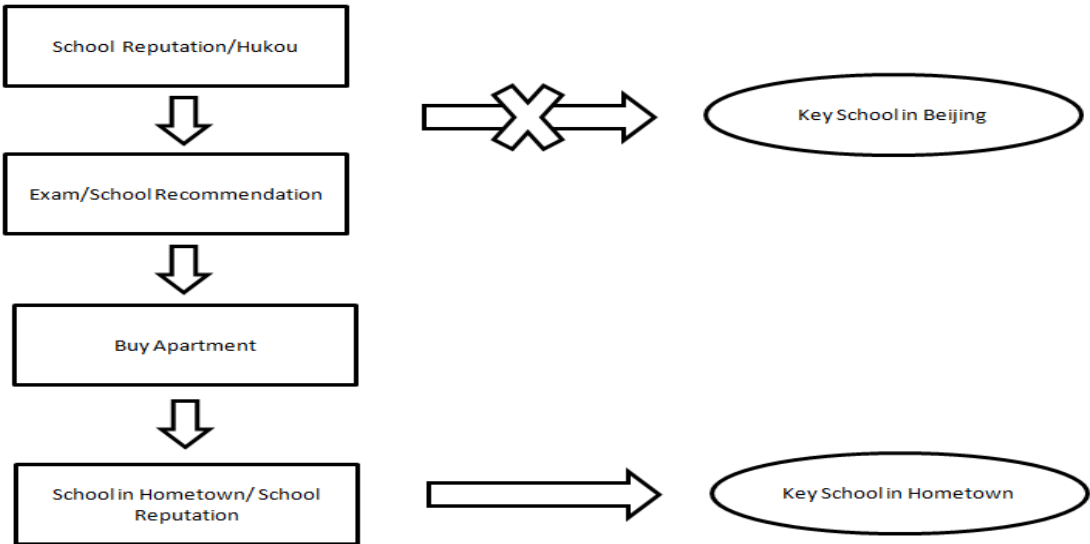
School B 01



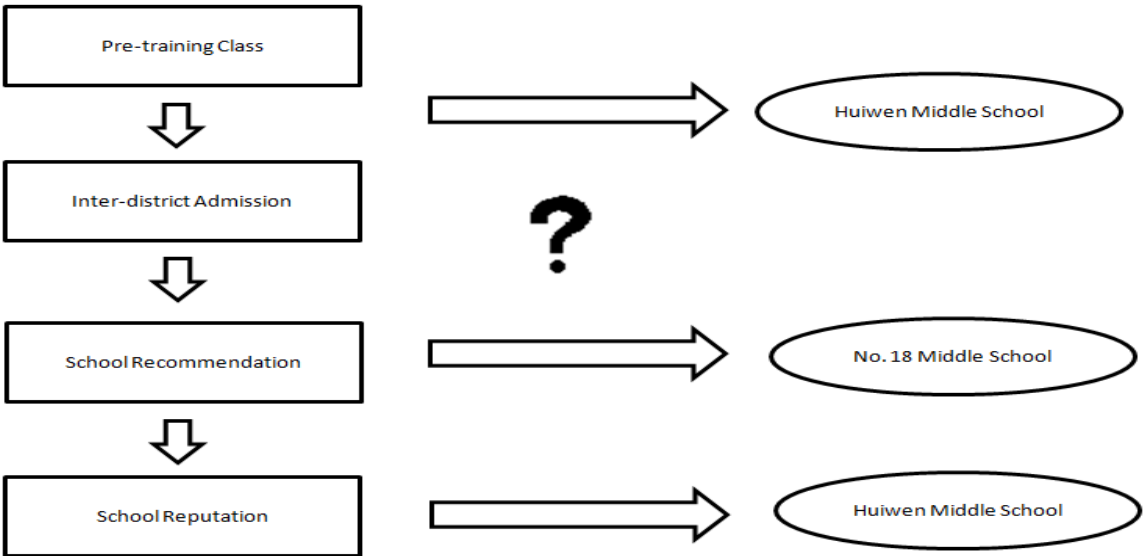
School B 02



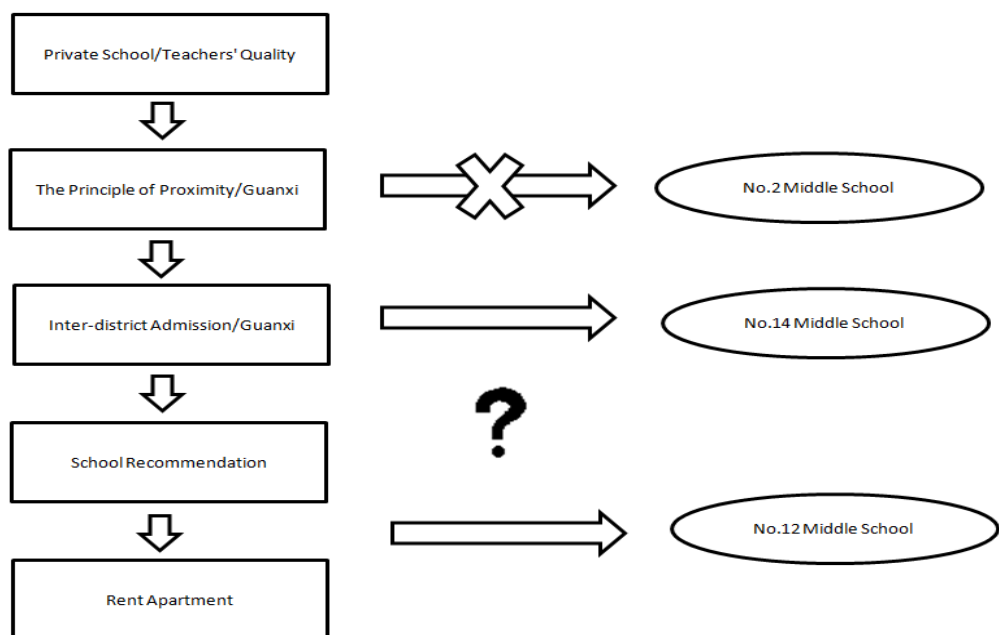
School B 03



School B 04



School B 05



School B 06

