

**Becoming International: High School Choices and Educational Experiences of Chinese  
Students Who Choose to Go to U.S. Colleges**

By

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## **Abstract**

This dissertation focuses on examining the motivations, experiences, and perspectives of socially elite urban Chinese students who attend emerging internationally focused public high schools in China and who plan to study at U.S. universities. Drawing on critical theory, I integrate critical curriculum studies with educational policy studies to demonstrate the complexity of these privileged Chinese students' choices of and subsequent educational experiences with internationally oriented high school programs in China. Employing multi-sited ethnography, this study explores how social, cultural, political, economic and global contexts of education influence and shape these students' educational experiences and aspirations through analyzing an assemblage of data sources, such as participant observation, informal interviews, semi-structured interviews, field notes, media research, policy documents, and site documents. I argue that privatization and marketization of education embedded in curriculum reforms and school reforms in China worsen existing educational and social inequalities and lead to social injustice in changing national and global contexts.

To uncover the internal and external contradictions among social actors such as privileged students and parents, elite schools, and the state, this dissertation examines how neoliberal educational policies and practices influence socially elite Chinese students' educational opportunities, experiences, and identities. In doing so, I argue that under the support of market-based educational reforms, privileged Chinese families utilize the global higher education market, the Chinese education market, and the study-abroad educational consulting market to mobilize their various types of capital for producing a social advantage that can better position their children in the international labor market. I conclude that the process of the production of social advantage is how the elite class and elite institutions employ local and global forces to re-articulate power

and privilege. This re-articulation constructs privileged Chinese students into neoliberal subjects. Given my focus on examining how the students negotiate schooling in the neoliberal assemblage (discourses, practices, and policies) across a range of macro, meso, and micro levels, this study contributes to how we understand the very processes and effects of the making of these new neoliberal subjects.

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## Chapter 1: Introduction

*Education should face modernization, face the world, and face the future.*

(Deng Xiaoping, 1983<sup>1</sup>)

*Pink balloons tied to stair rails were dancing in the wind, which signaled a big event at the international division of Sunny High School today. There was a continuous flow of parents and students walking upstairs to the school gym. The hallway on the second floor was paved with a bright red carpet. The carpet was extended to the gym door that was decorated as a 'Gate to Adulthood' (Chengren Men, 成人门). On each side of the carpet stood 18 display boards that featured the pictures of the nearly 120 high school graduates of the class of 2013 who had received admissions from foreign colleges, mostly from those universities in the United States. Walking through the lovely pictures from birth to 18 years old, female students with light make-up and in various formal dresses and male students in suits and ties stepped over the 'Gate to Adulthood,' accompanied with their parents who were wearing formal casual attire. A professional photographer was invited by the school to capture the memorable movement of crossing the 'Gate to Adulthood' for each student with their parents. Many fresh flower baskets surrounded the gate as well as the stage in the gym. On the backdrop of the stage was written the theme of the coming of age and graduation ceremonies held by the international school, which is "embrace the world, make the Chinese dream come true."*

*Accompanied by fine melody, the ceremony recalled many fond memories and abundant school activities that students experienced throughout their three years of high school. The speech from a parent representative and the blessings from school teachers (both Chinese teachers and foreign teachers) were warm and touching, and expressed their expectations of these students who will start their college life abroad this fall. After student actors demonstrated the adult rite of passage in ancient China, the principal of the international school Ms. Zhao gave an inspiring speech that emphasized the meaning of becoming an 18-years-old youth in contemporary China – to be a citizen who has rights and obligations. She explained that 18-year-old students as citizens should be responsible to themselves, family, and the society. The school gave each graduate a simple but dignified gift – the Constitution of the People's Republic of China – which was handed over from the principal to the students.*

*After the three-hour coming of age and graduation ceremonies, high school graduates gathered on the outdoor stadium and took their graduation pictures together with their teachers and school administrators. Some parents stood outside of the stadium and watched their children in lines. Their facial expressions implied their pride and happiness for their children. Some parents didn't forget to take pictures or videos for their children using luxury cameras, smart phones, or iPads, recording this important moment. When the picture taking was almost over, students threw their jackets into the sky or waved their hands, cheering loudly "World, here we come!"...*

(Field notes, May 31, 2013)

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<sup>1</sup> See Shi (2013).

Deng Xiaoping made the claim on education in the early 1980s, “*Education should face modernization, face the world, and face the future,*” right after the Chinese economic reform called “Reform and Opening Up” (*Gaige kaifang*, 改革开放) under his leadership.<sup>2</sup> The past thirty years have witnessed how elite public high schools in China are shifting toward being open to international cooperation through Chinese educational reforms. Xiaoping could not have possibly envisioned what is happening now to education. Over the past five years, there have been a growing number of elite public high schools in Chinese cities establishing their international high school curriculum programs, which are designed to prepare wealthy urban Chinese students for international college applications. These new programs are often legitimated in the name of China’s New Curriculum Reform, which aims to cultivate quality *rencai* (人才, i.e., human capital) for a new century in order to be prepared to face international competition.<sup>3</sup> The emergent international high school curriculum programs are also supported by the Chinese-Foreign Cooperation in Running School policy, which emphasizes the collaboration between Chinese and foreign educational institutions in order to improve the quality of Chinese education.

This new educational phenomenon is part of the grand narrative of how Chinese educational reforms work towards improving the modernization and internationalization of the Chinese education system, which Deng Xiaoping heralded. My dissertation research pays attention to this phenomenon by looking at the practices and effects of emerging international high school curriculum programs in China supported by China’s New Curriculum Reform and the Chinese-

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<sup>2</sup> Deng Xiaoping continues to be a revolutionary Chinese inspiration. He was an influential leader of China from 1978 until 1992 following the death of Chairman Mao. Reform and Opening Up was started in the People's Republic of China in December 1978 by reformists within the Communist Party of China. This economic reform has been framed as an important program of socialism with Chinese characteristics.

<sup>3</sup> See Hao et al. (2012) for the research report on China’s New Curriculum Reform.

Foreign Cooperation in Running School (CFCRS) policy. Drawing on critical theory, the research project applies sociological and anthropological approaches to the study of the educational practices of such curriculum programs and rising Chinese elite class, as well as educational policy globally. Through analyzing a wide variety of data sources, my study focuses on examining how changing local and global contexts have influenced and shaped the educational experiences and aspirations of privileged urban Chinese students who are able to attend these programs. In doing so, this research is intended to define the problematics of the internationalization of Chinese education, which are complex and embedded in the process of the modernization in China.

On May 31, 2013, I attended the graduation ceremony of the international division of Sunny High School (pseudonym) in Moon City (pseudonym), a cosmopolitan city in China. The scenario described above offers a glimpse of this newly-established international high school program. Like the Sunny High international program, many international high school curriculum programs have emerged in cosmopolitan and metropolitan cities in China. These programs hold similar gorgeous graduation ceremonies for those students who choose to study in such schools and who have gained college admission from the United States and other developed countries in the West. The graduation ceremony is usually held in late May or early June, when the vast majority of Chinese high school students who choose to attend Chinese universities are nervously preparing for the National College Entrance Exam called the *Gaokao* (高考). Different from their “local” choosing Chinese counterparts, seniors enrolled in international high school curriculum programs have released their burdens from the *Gaokao*, held in June 7 and 8 annually. Rather than waiting for college admission based on *Gaokao* test scores announced in late June, these “global” choosing students have received their college admissions in March or April or even earlier than

this from foreign universities.<sup>4</sup> Their lives look much more relaxing in May than their counterparts who still suffer from *Gaokao* test anxiety. Most of these privileged urban high school graduates have received at least 1 to 5 offers from prestigious U.S. universities. According to the international division of Sunny High School, all graduates of the class of 2013 were admitted by top 80 U.S. universities and 60% of these students were admitted by top 50 U.S. universities. Compared with their Chinese counterparts who still compete for top universities in China, these students have gained access to world-class universities and looked forward to their study abroad experiences.

As a PhD student with an 8-year teaching background at urban public high schools in China and the United States, I have a longstanding interest in the process of modernization and internationalization in China. My dissertation research explores how the Chinese education system addresses globalization and utilizes international education as a source of economic and political development to promote the cultivation of particular types of human capital through newly-established public international high school curriculum programs in China. The study aims to unravel the complexities of contemporary China's becoming international as expressed through its educational reforms at multiple levels, including the state, public schools, curriculum, and students. In doing so, my study will contribute to the understanding of the internationalization of Chinese education and the modernization in China in a globalized context.

### **Research Background: Contextualizing the Emergence of International High School Curriculum Programs in China**

In this section, I will briefly introduce how the Chinese education and global education markets intersect to create an emergent hybrid market. This new market contributes to the emergence of international high school curriculum programs that exclusively serve urban Chinese

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<sup>4</sup> For the difference between "local choosers" and "cosmopolitan choosers," see Ball, Bowe, and Gewirtz (1995) and Ball and Nikita (2014).

students from affluent families. First, I will discuss the relationship between the construction of the education market and educational reforms and policies in contemporary China. In this part, I will address how the discourse of education for economic development has influenced three interrelated sets of educational reforms: decentralization and financial diversification in education, New Curriculum Reform of basic education, and Chinese-Foreign Cooperation in Running Schools (CFCRS) policy. Second, I will briefly explain the relation among market-oriented economic reforms in China, the rising Chinese middle and upper classes, and the educational demands of these new social groups. Through laying out this relation, I highlight the potential impact of increasing social stratification on educational stratification. Third, I will pay attention to how global education policies converge with Chinese educational policies. Specifically, I will investigate the case of emerging international high school programs, which serves as a conduit connecting local education market with global education market. I argue that these three strands are inextricably interwoven, which contributes to the creation of the international high school curriculum programs serving the students from rising Chinese middle and upper classes. By pointing out the interconnections of the three strands, this research project situates the newly-established international high school programs in a broader educational and social context at the national and international levels.

***The Construction of Chinese Education Markets: The Discourse of Education for Economic Development and Educational Reforms in Contemporary China***

The educational landscape in contemporary China has been changed since the early 1980s. The market-oriented economic reforms that aim to modernize Chinese society have profoundly influenced educational reforms in contemporary China. In the past three decades, the Chinese government has carried out a series of educational reforms to improve the modernization and

internationalization of its education system. Education for economic development has become the dominant discourse that guides educational reform in contemporary China, as it does in many other countries (Apple, 2006; Ball, 2013; Mok, Wong, & Zhang, 2009). Among the trajectory of the reform, three interrelated sets of education reforms deserve special attention in order to understand the rise of the neoliberal approach to reform Chinese education. The first is the reform of decentralization and financial diversification initially issued in 1985 and restated in 1993,<sup>5</sup> which emphasizes that the central government devolves financial responsibility and management of education to local governments. This education reform calls for local governments and state schools to utilize multiple channels to improve their education services and resource provision (Cheng, 1997; Liu & Dunne, 2009; Ngok, 2007; Tsang, 1996). Such school autonomy reforms encourage state schools with quality educational resources to generate additional revenues through expanding their educational services to meet social needs. This reform led to the marketization of education in China (Mok, 2009; Mok, Wong, & Zhang, 2009).

The second key reform is called the New Curriculum Reform of basic education, which in China covers grades 1-12, including six years of elementary school, three years of middle school, and three years of high school. Initiated in 1999 and fully implemented in grades 1-12 until 2007, this curriculum reform was expected to transform Chinese education from *yingshi jiaoyu* (应试教育, i.e., examination-oriented education) to *sushi jiaoyu* (素质教育, commonly translated as “quality education”) (Guan & Meng, 2007; Zhong, 2006). The New Curriculum Reform emphasizes improving the global competence of the Chinese population in the face of challenges

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<sup>5</sup> The reform of decentralization and financial diversification was initially issued by the *Decision of the Central Committee of the Chinese Communist Party of China on the Reform of the Educational System* in 1985. It was also enhanced by the *Outline for Reform and Development of Education in China* in 1993 (Mok, Wong, & Zhang, 2009; Ngok, 2007).



arising from the knowledge-based economy. It has manifested in the Chinese government the links between the nurturing of *rencai* (人才, i.e., human capital) and the building of a competent nation-state as a response to the requirement of international economic competition (Ball, 2013; Law, 2014; Hannum, 1999; Crabb, 2010). However, the New Curriculum Reform has encountered many “bottlenecks,” which have made the Chinese government seek solutions via external forces. In particular, the state places hope in the introduction of high-quality foreign educational resources through new international collaborative program modes.

This brings to our attention the third important education reform – the Chinese-Foreign Cooperation in Running Schools (CFCRS) policy, in particular, a new development of the policy. Since the new versions of regulations were promulgated in 2003 and enhanced in 2004 (MOE, 2003, 2004), the practices of CFCRS have enabled Chinese universities to explore new talent-cultivating patterns (Chen & Xie, 2010; Zhang, 2003). By 2008, the Chinese government had gradually approved CFCRS High School programs, which are commonly called international high school curriculum programs. These programs were newly created by Chinese elite public high schools in big cities through supposedly cooperating with foreign education institutions. The new international programs imported various foreign curricula, such as General Certificate of Education Advanced Level (A-Level), Advanced Placement (AP), and Global Assessment Certificate (GAC), and integrated them with Chinese national high school curriculum for preparing Chinese students for the foreign college application process (Huang, 2012; Liu, F., 2013; Zhou, 2013; Zhu, 2013). The unique institutional structure of the CFCRS policy brings private education companies into the development of international programs for profit making. To a large extent, the interventions of these private institutions into Chinese public education reforms are tacit business practices.

### ***Educational Demands of New Social Groups: Market-Oriented Economic Reforms in China and the Rising Chinese Middle and Upper Classes***

Educational reforms in contemporary China are closely related to market-oriented economic reforms. Since the late 1970s, China has undergone dramatic social changes associated with its market-oriented economic reforms. Rapid growth of the national economy has led to urban-rural and regional economic disparities and created great social stratification and class difference (Harvey, 2005; Li, Li, & Sun, 2004; Yan & Chang, 2009). The rising middle and upper classes, who mostly concentrate in urban China, utilize their various forms of capital to secure quality education and social mobility for their children (Bourdieu, 1984; Wu, 2014). Chinese key public high schools are favored by these new social classes because they are traditionally ideal paths to elite Chinese universities (Shao & Zhang, 2013; Wang, 2011; You, 2007).

In contemporary China, only grades 1-9 belong to compulsory education.<sup>6</sup> In the post-compulsory education sector such as high school education and college education, however, the merit-based student enrollment measured by test scores still plays an important role in determining students' educational mobility and life chances (Liu, 2013; Hannum, An, & Cherng, 2011). To a large extent, the existing merit-based student enrollment in high school education and college education restricted privileged children's access to quality educational resources. Therefore, the new social classes demanded a market in education for them to diversify their choices.

### ***The Convergence of Global Education Markets and Chinese Education Markets in the Emergence of International High School Curriculum Programs***

Thanks to China's entry into the World Trade Organization (WTO) in 2001, the global

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<sup>6</sup> According to the 1986 *Compulsory Educational Law*, compulsory education in China includes 6-year elementary education and 3-year middle school education. 3-year high school education and post-secondary education belong to non-compulsory formal education.

education market has opened up opportunities for wealthy Chinese students to access top global higher education institutions, especially those in the United States. Particularly since 2008, the year of the global financial crisis, many universities in the United States have faced budget cuts. U.S. universities have become more and more open to wealthy Chinese students who can afford international tuition for their college education. The recent six years have witnessed that going to study in U.S. colleges and universities has become the preferred choice of increasing numbers of wealthy Chinese families (Zhou, 2013). The trend of global higher education and high demand of quality educational resources from new Chinese social classes has created a potentially huge market for education business.

The neoliberal approach to trade in educational services embedded in the General Agreement on Trade in Services (GATS) provides an opportunity for Chinese high schools to enter into that global education market (Ding, Yue, & Sun, 2009; Lao, 2002; Robertson, Bonal, & Dale, 2002).<sup>7</sup> For instance, in the 2003 CFCRS policy, Article 6 states that “Chinese and foreign cooperators in running schools may cooperate to establish educational institutions of various types at various levels. However, they shall not establish institutions offering compulsory education services or special education services such as military, police and political education services.” High school education is non-compulsory education, which not only allows the implementation of the CFCRS policy at the high school level, but also makes high school education services in China open to the global education market. In other words, educational service at high school level can be traded in the global education market, which is a new educational and social phenomena and

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<sup>7</sup> In the 2003 CFCRS policy, Article 6 states that “Chinese and foreign cooperators in running schools may cooperate to establish educational institutions of various types at various levels. However, they shall not establish institutions offering compulsory education service or special education services such as military, police and political education services.” High school education is non-compulsory education, which not only allows the implementation of the CFCRS policy at high school level, but also makes high school education services in China open to the global education market.

also the focus of my dissertation research.

The impact of GATS on policy making for Chinese high school education can be seen in the *National Guidelines for Medium- and Long-term Educational Reform and Development 2010-2020* (MOE, 2010), abbreviated as “*the Guidelines*.” This new education policy puts the internationalization of high school education on the agenda. It highlights the importance of diversifying Chinese high schools, the school-running system, and the modes of education. It also encourages elite Chinese public schools to expand their high-quality education resources to meet the needs of students with differing potential. *The Guidelines* marked a new development in the internationalization and modernization of the Chinese education system as a response to the pressure from global education policies. This can be viewed as what Ball (2012) calls “policy convergence,” which paves a way to create a new conduit linking local education markets to global education markets. The emergence of CFCRS high school programs is a manifestation of the interactions of local and global policies. Therefore, these new programs become key sites to explore the linkages between the “local” and the “global.”

### **Problem Statement**

In the above section, I lay out the local and global contexts where the international high school curriculum programs in China emerge. I argue that the intersection between the global education and Chinese education markets contributes to the creation of these new international programs. By offering an alternative pathway for Chinese students to college education, the emerging CFCRS international high school programs imply a potentially huge market. This market can be seen in a recent social and educational phenomenon: In the last five years or so, a rapidly growing number of urban Chinese high school students who want to apply to universities in the United States have chosen newly-established international curriculum programs in China. In

addition to the international high school curriculum programs approved by the Chinese government, there are many unregulated international programs that focus on preparing Chinese students for international college applications. It is worth studying those unregulated international high school programs. But for the purpose of this research project, I focus primarily on the government-approved international high school curriculum programs for several reasons. First, the intent of studying these legitimated international curriculum programs is to investigate a new kind of official knowledge. Second, given the fact that these international programs are often established by Chinese elite state high schools, focusing on such new curriculum programs helps explain the trend of school and educational reforms in China. Last but not least, the Chinese government wants to regulate non-government-approved international high school programs and close those programs which are judged to be poor quality. This tendency makes it crucial to study the officially accepted international high school curriculum programs in China in order to follow the Chinese government's educational experiments in international curriculum programs.

The regulated international high school curriculum programs have four key features. First, they are supported by the CFCS policy. Second, these programs are created by Chinese elite public high schools in big cities through supposedly cooperating with international education institutions. The new programs are actually schools within schools, whether located within the campus of elite state high schools or with an independent campus. Third, the new programs are designed to prepare Chinese students for their U.S. college application process by exposing them to an internationalized curriculum—an integration of the Chinese national curriculum with various imported international curricula, such as General Certificate of Education Advanced Level (A-Level), Advanced Placement (AP), and Global Assessment Certificate (GAC) (Huang, 2012; Wang, 2012). Fourth, these emerging international high school curriculum programs require

expensive tuition. Officially, these international curriculum programs are ostensibly public. But students who are able to choose these new programs have to pay high tuition. The tuition usually ranges from about ¥60,000 to ¥120,000 (equal to \$9,600 ~ \$19,000) each year, which is far more expensive than that of any state high school whose yearly tuition is approximately ¥800 to ¥2,000 (equal to \$128 ~ \$320). These fee-charging ‘public’ programs exclude disadvantaged students and create unequal access to internationalized curriculum and international education. This situation is a new phenomenon in contemporary China, given its history of merit-based student enrollment measured by test scores. This change in school access promotes the marketization of education in China, which merits a serious study on the effects and implications of these new schools. All the above characteristics, in particular, the issue of expensive tuition, make the emerging international curriculum programs contentious sites in need of in-depth and critical analysis.

As I have mentioned before, the emerging international high school programs are legitimated by the Chinese government. The state sees these programs as a promising way to improve the internationalization and modernization of the Chinese education system and to foster students who will gain international perspectives and cross-cultural understanding for Chinese economic development (National Guidelines for Medium and Long-term Education Reform and Development (2010-2020), 2010). According to *Beijing's Mirror News*, there have been about 90 such high school programs approved by the Chinese government up to 2014. The large scale of the problem makes it significant to investigate these new international programs. The unique institutional structure of the CFCRS policy brings private education companies into curriculum choices and the development of international programs. Despite the rhetorical goals that the Chinese government set up, it is worth examining not only the relations between such programs and for-profit businesses, but also students’ experiences of these new educational programs.

The key point here is that the new ‘public’ schools become key sites where the interests of the state and other stakeholders converge with the private interests of the wealthy Chinese parents who attempt to push their children toward international education as a form of capital conversion (Bell, 1980), and where unique schooling is “implicated in the making of particular sorts of people as well as the making of educational and social exclusions and inequalities” (Youdell, 2011, p. 1). The confluence of the marketization and privatization of education contributes to the emerging international education paradigm, which is embodied in the newly-established Chinese international high school programs. Therefore, examining the educational experiences and subjectivities of the privileged Chinese students who study in the internationally-oriented schools not only helps us understand how these new programs make particular kinds of elite students, but also reveals how the Chinese international high school programs create social exclusions and inequalities.

### **Purpose Statement and Research Questions**

My dissertation examines two interconnected issues, that is, the complexities of Chinese students’ choice to attend newly-established international high school programs and their concomitant schooling experiences. This study focuses on exploring the motivations, experiences, and perspectives of Chinese students who choose to attend the internationally-focused public high schools in China and who hope to study at U.S. universities. The purpose of my study is three-fold: (a) to develop a greater understanding of the complexities and profound implications of students’ choice of these schools; (b) to explore the politics of the students’ subjectivities by examining how they negotiate schooling in the process of preparing for U.S. college application; and (c) to make visible the ideology that undergirds the prevailing discourse of China’s becoming international. My guiding questions are:

1. *Why did international high school curriculum programs emerge at a particular time in China? How were these curriculum programs constructed?*
2. *Why do Chinese students choose to attend particular types of internationally-focused Chinese public high schools? What is their decision-making process in selecting a high school?*
3. *What are Chinese students' educational experiences at their chosen international public high schools in China? How do these students perceive and interpret their experiences?*
4. *How do their choice processes and schooling experiences shape the way the Chinese students think about who they are, what education is for, their sense of belonging, and their own goals, challenges, concerns, and struggles?*

### **Overview of Research Design**

My dissertation project uses critical qualitative research, which not only enables me to draw a more complex and nuanced picture of educational practice and its consequences, but also examine power relations that lead to conditions of social inequality, domination, and social injustice (Carspecken & Apple, 1992; Carspecken, 1996; Creswell, 2007; Denzin & Lincoln, 2000). Given my interest in examining how the educational experiences of privileged Chinese students are connected to social and cultural forces, I employ a critical bifocal design, which urges me to document the very linkages between social structural arrangements and discursive practices, and to reveal important relationships between global and local dynamics (Weis & Fine, 2012).

This study uses multi-sited ethnography (Burawoy et al., 2000; Marcus, 1995, 2009) as a systematic approach to collecting data. I first carried out media research starting from spring 2011 to spring 2014, which involved data collection from major on-line media sources in both the United States and China pertaining to the social phenomenon of Chinese high school students applying to U.S. colleges. At the same time, I examined related national education policies. As aforementioned, there have been about 90 international high school curriculum programs in China approved by the Chinese government up to 2014. Such social and political data at the macro level led me to collect data at the meso level, specifically at research-based public universities in the United States and at public key high schools in cosmopolitan cities in China that have newly established international



curriculum programs.

I then conducted a pilot study with IRB approval from October 2012 to April 2013 at Lake University (pseudonym), a top-ranked public university in Lake City (pseudonym) a metropolitan city in the United States. This pilot study entailed my observing and interviewing Chinese international undergraduate students from Mainland China. An important finding of this study was that more and more Chinese students who choose to go to U.S. colleges prefer to attend internationally-oriented high schools in China. This finding gave rise to the focus of my dissertation study. Informed by the findings from my pilot study, I chose to focus on the new public international high school programs in Moon City, a cosmopolitan city in China. According to the Chinese government document, there are 24 government-approved international high school curriculum programs in Moon City, which are established by 20 Chinese high schools. Among the 24 approved programs, there are 18 China-US high school curriculum programs, 5 China-UK, and 1 China-Canada. I chose Sunny High (a pseudonym of a key public high school) international curriculum program, the largest China-US high school curriculum program in the city. Because this program was created by adopting the International Access Project (IAP) (a pseudonym), the program is named as Sunny High IAP international curriculum program.

From May to September 2013, I conducted my field research at Sunny High IAP international curriculum program, a boarding school that uses an internationalized curriculum integrating Chinese national high school curriculum and the Global Assessment Certificate (GAC) program. I immersed myself in the school by living in the dorm on campus. I conducted surveys of 486 Chinese high school students and 57 teachers (Chinese and foreign) in the school. By going inside the school, I followed students from the school setting to their dorms. Although the school is the primary research site for my participant observation of students, I also followed them to

after-school cramming classes and local community events that these Chinese youth attended, and to neighborhoods where students and parents live. Furthermore, I visited Internet sites popular among student informants (Lee, 2009). I used participant observation, informal interviews, semi-structured interviews, and site document collection to generate rich descriptions (DeWalt & DeWalt, 2002). Besides data from extensive field notes, I carried out in-depth interviews with focal students (20) and their parents (20) as well as their teachers (18) and school administrators (6). In addition, the above data collection, based on multi-sited ethnography at the macro (social), meso (institutional), and micro (individual) levels, also enables me to trace the way neoliberal ideas play out in educational policies and on social media, how these ideas shape educational institutions' reforms, and how these ideas inform the high school choice of Chinese middle-upper and upper-class students and their resultant educational experiences. Data from survey, participant observation, field notes, informal interviews, semi-structured interviews, archival and visual documents, high-profile news, and policy documents are subjected to detailed analysis in the study.

### **Research Significance**

In international and comparative education research, my interests are organized around the idea of how privilege is produced and maintained in educational settings in a new social order that is characterized by the increasing international mobility of capital, labor, media, technology, and ideas. My dissertation work involves examining how wealthy Chinese families use newly-established international high school programs in China as a resource to mobilize different forms of capital in their efforts to guarantee that their children study in world-class universities abroad. This project extends current literature on elite studies that focuses exclusively on Western countries. In addition, unlike research on the construction of advantage that only examines capital conversion strategies used by privileged parents, my study extends such research by going inside

schools in China and bringing to light *how* advantage is manufactured at school and *how* curriculum and pedagogy actually prepare students who plan to study abroad. I argue that socially elite students have access to a differential curriculum that differentiates them from non-elite students. By linking the schooling experiences of privileged Chinese students to their family educational practices, this study will not only demonstrate the way conversion strategies work globally, but it will also help us understand the (re)production of social advantage in education in a globalized context.

Employing multi-sited ethnography, this study explores how social, cultural, political, economic and global contexts of education influence and shape these students' educational experiences and aspirations through analyzing an assemblage of data sources. For example, I investigate the complexity and contradictions of the international education discourse. In doing so, my research informs understandings of how elites tactically deploy global education discourses to their advantage, which is essential to fully understand inequality and foment social justice through education. The research approach employed in my dissertation project makes a methodological contribution that challenges "the structure/agency split" (Ortner, 2006; Weis & Fine, 2012). Given my focus on examining how the students negotiate schooling in the neoliberal assemblage (discourses, practices, and policies) across a range of macro, meso, and micro levels, this study will contribute to documenting the very processes and effects of the making of these new neoliberal subjects.

China's entry to the WTO (governing international trade) in 2001 has promoted the internationalization of Chinese higher education and then high school education. However, less research has been devoted to understanding how the WTO that "instantiate[s] neoliberalism as a global set of rules" (Harvey, 2007, p. 23) influences the internationalization of Chinese high school

education, a recent educational reform in China. My dissertation research works to fill in this gap by exploring a new educational order in relation to the global, national, and local neoliberalization of the socioeconomic and political order. Through examining the limits of what is currently defined as international education, my study has the potential to contribute toward the possibility of establishing alternative forms of international education programs that can benefit all of Chinese society, rather than only specific elite segments of Chinese society.

### **Definition of Key Terminology Used in This Study**

There are two key terms in my study that I need to clarify here, including elites and key public high schools. I here adopt Khan's (2012) definition of elites, which refers to 'those with vastly disproportionate control over or access to a resource' (p. 362). If we link this definition to the field of education, elites mean "those social groups that have attained a degree of financial affluence and who are able to mobilize economic, social, and cultural resources in order to secure access to particular kinds of educational experience" (Howard & Gaztambide-Fernández, 2010, p. 196). The student population that my study focuses on is socially elite urban Chinese high school students who are able to choose to apply for U.S. colleges and who concomitantly choose to attend emerging international high school programs.

Chinese key public/state high schools are the same as Chinese elite public/state high schools in this study. The identity of meaning applies to key public/state universities and elite public/state universities in China. State-run schools and universities have dominated the Chinese education system since the founding of the People's Republic of China in 1949. Basic education in China covers grades 1-12 education, including 6-year elementary education, 3-year middle school education, and 3-year high school education. Historically, the Chinese government has invested more educational resources in urban areas, particularly, small numbers of urban key

(*zhongdian*, 重点) state schools. Key schools that mostly concentrate in urban areas represent quality education, due to their enjoyment of more educational resources from the government, better teaching facilities, and more quality teachers than non-key schools. As Liu and Apple (2016) point out, “among key schools, there are still disparities based on which level of administration they embody: district, county, municipal, provincial, or national levels. The higher the level, the better a key school is in terms of reputation, government support, academic achievement, and so on” (p. 6). The nation-wide establishment of the key school system has permeated all levels of Chinese public educational institutions, from preschool education to tertiary education.<sup>8</sup>

Key schools, particularly those in the stage of compulsory education (grades 1-9), have been criticized due to their negative impacts on educational equality.<sup>9</sup> Although the Chinese government has cancelled the name key schools, it introduced demonstration senior high schools in the mid-1990s (State Education Commission, 1995). This has been viewed as the continuation of the key school policy, which can be confirmed by the fact that the new demonstration schools are more likely to be those former key schools. As Liu and Apple (2016) emphasize, “Whether they are *demonstration schools* for former key state high schools, *converted schools* for former key state middle schools, or [‘211 project universities[’] for former key public universities, key schools and universities still represent the image of high quality of education in the eyes of the Chinese public” (p. 6).

As mentioned above, basic education in China covers grades 1-12 education, only grades

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<sup>8</sup> One of useful books that can provide more details on the evolution of the key school system is Wu’s (2014) *School Choice in China: A Different Tale?*

<sup>9</sup> According to *the 1986 Compulsory Education Law*, every student should complete their nine-year compulsory education. This law has been implemented well for urban students. But there are high drop-out rates among rural students.

1-9 belong to compulsory education. Upon graduating from middle schools, Chinese students may choose to go to regular or vocational study paths in the Chinese public education system.<sup>10</sup> Regular public high schools are designed to prepare students for a College Entrance Examination called the *gaokao* (高考), which most Chinese students must pass in order to attend universities in China.<sup>11</sup> Within the “regular” path, students are sorted again into key (*zhongdian*, 重点) public high schools and non-key/ordinary (*fei zhongdian*, 非重点/*putong*, 普通) public high schools largely based on their test scores on a High School Entrance Examination referred to as *zhongkao* (中考).<sup>12</sup> Attending key public high schools is considered by Chinese people to be an ideal path to Chinese universities, and particularly elite universities (Lewin, 1997; Liu, 2013; Shao & Zhang, 2013; Wang, 2011; You, 2007). Chinese key public schools and universities represent elite education rooted in unique historical, political, economic, and social circumstances. Therefore, Chinese key schools or universities are used interchangeably with the terms Chinese elite schools or universities. It is worth emphasizing again that, different from elite private schools and colleges in such nations as the United States and England, elite educational institutions in China are public.

### **Organization of the Dissertation**

My dissertation focuses on examining the motivations, experiences, and perspectives of privileged urban Chinese students who attend the internationally-focused public high schools in

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<sup>10</sup> Regular high schools are considered to be more prestigious than vocational high schools because they have the highest academic standing. As Lai (2010) points out, “students in regular high schools also have a much higher chance of promoting to higher education and have more promising future labor market prospects, compared to their counterparts in vocational high schools.”

<sup>11</sup> For those Chinese students who win in national academic competitions, they may have chance to be admitted by top Chinese universities without necessarily taking *gaokao*. Recently, along with the implementation of China’s New Curriculum Reform, some universities have been permitted to adopt their own recruiting tactics and assessments (Davey, Lian, and Higgins, 2007; Hannum, An, & Cherng, 2011).

<sup>12</sup> *Zhongkao* is administered by local educational authorities.

China and who plan to study at U.S. universities. Situated in an era of neoliberal global marketization in which education is treated as a private consumption good, this research project examines the lived experiences and subjectivities of socially elite urban Chinese students as they negotiate their formal and informal schooling in preparation for U.S. college applications.

In Chapter 2, I combine my experiential knowledge of modernization, globalization, internationalization, and neoliberalization, relevant existing research and theories, and my pilot study to construct a conceptual framework for this dissertation study. In reviewing previous studies, I first draw on existing research on the newly-established international high school curriculum programs (IHSCPs) in China. By presenting a critical synthesis of the literature, I not only highlight the relation between these emerging IHSCPs and Chinese New Curriculum Reform, but also point out that there is the gap concerning students and families' choice of these new international high school programs and students' concomitant schooling experiences with their chosen high schools. Then, I draw on the literature in elite education and international education in order to map out the intersection of the two fields of enquiry – a new sociology of elite education and the sociology of international education, in which my study is situated. Based on this literature review, I emphasize that the changing social conditions of globalization and neoliberalism has led to new configurations of what conventionally is defined as 'elite education' and 'international education.' I then discuss my research agenda informed by the synthesis of the literature review on international education, elite education, and IHSCPs – to study access to elite tracks by examining school choice and parental preferences; to look at elite schooling and students' socialization experiences by exploring curriculum studies of elite schools. Furthermore, I develop my conceptual framework using prior theories, including Peter Wagner's sociological modernization theory, the critiques of neoliberalism from David Harvey, Wendy Brown, Aihwa

Ong, and Stuart Hall, Bourdieu's concepts of field, capital, and habitus, as well as critical curriculum studies from Basil Bernstein and Michael Apple.

In Chapter 3, I turn to the discussion of research methodology and research methods. I also discuss my positionality, representation, and ethical issues. Data analysis and key findings are included in Chapters 4, 5, and 6. Specifically, Chapter 4 addresses how the emerging international high school programs become the key sites where the private interests of the wealthy Chinese parents who attempt to push their children toward international education as a form of capital conversion converge with the interests of the Chinese key public schools, the state, and various types of for-profit education business. In so doing, the chapter aims to provide a thick description of my research site, where student informants receive their formal high school education. Chapter 5 then deals with formal schooling of these students. The focus is on the students' educational experiences with curriculum, pedagogy, and evaluation inside the international school. Chapter 6 moves into the analysis of students' informal schooling experiences with English training classes and study-abroad consulting companies, which are key parts of their college application preparation. The chapter also discusses students' experiences with international travels and university summer schools in the United States.

In Chapter 7, I discuss the conclusion and implications of this study. As a whole, through focusing on examining educational experiences and subjectivities of privileged Chinese students who study in the newly-established international high school programs, this dissertation research argue that privatization and marketization of education embedded in curriculum reforms and school reforms in China worsen existing educational and social inequalities and lead to social injustice in changing national and global contexts.



## Chapter 2: Literature Review and Theoretical Framework

The year 1976 marked the end of a ten-year Cultural Revolution. I was born in 1976 just after the death of Chairman Mao, whose leadership upheld socialist ideology of traditional collectivism and valued egalitarian ideas. In the Maoist era, individual/private interests should be sacrificed to collective interests. Equality and collective/public solidarity were part of public culture although Chinese people lived under authoritarianism from the central government.

My formal education began in a small rural elementary school in the early 1980s at the dawn of the neoliberal era. All of that time I was educated to contribute to the realization of “Four Modernizations,” of agriculture, industry, national defense and science, and education. The main objective of socialist modernization was aimed to rapidly turn China into a powerful and modern socialist society. Like many Chinese people, I took the domination of economic modernization in China and the dominant discourse of education for economic development for granted.

Growing up female in rural China in the 1980s and 1990s, my sense of socialist China was that every Chinese was able to participate in Chinese society as an equal citizen/member regardless of family background, precisely as textbooks emphasizing collectivity and solidarity had taught me. For a long time, my understanding of the constitution of the masses in Chinese society was highly influenced by the traditional Maoist notion of the masses, which includes “workers, the peasantry, the intelligentsia, and the national bourgeoisie whose interests were harmonious with each other and also with the state” (Lee, 2004; cited in Harvey, 2005, p. 150). The state represented collective (public) interests. This knowledge acquired from my schooling and dominant Chinese discourses was first challenged in the summer of 1989 with the Tiananmen Square event. At that time I was preparing for my graduation from elementary school in my village and imagining what attending the middle school in a town would be like.

One day as I watched our 14 inch black-white TV, I saw many university students protesting in Tiananmen Square in Beijing, the Capital of “our China. As they sat in the heart of Beijing and of the country, they were shouting, refusing to eat and requesting dialogue with national leaders. I did not understand then what they were demanding. Later, many soldiers appeared. As soldiers and students fought each other, there were gunshots, fire, tanks, bleeding, shouting, and crying... Even now, the violent scenes are stored in my memory. Confused villagers discussed what happened in Beijing. Finally I heard on the TV news that soldiers bravely protected our nation and avoided a larger riot; students’ violent protests were repressed; our nation was able to return to a secure and stable status. Yet I was still confused: why did those young Chinese students protest? What did they demand and desire? Do we not believe in our ‘harmonious’ interests and collective solidarity among different components of the Chinese masses and the state? Then, why did our soldiers and our government, whose responsibility was to protect the security of our nation and our people, fight against the students who are the members of that society and who represent the future of our nation-state? These questions were beyond my knowledge then. But now the vocabulary of freedom and democracy has entered my mind. Although I did not quite understand what these terms mean, I knew those Chinese youths gathered to discuss these issues; they took actions to fight for freedom and democracy. To a large extent, these young people’s public participation and engagement in political and civic life represented a hope for democratic political imaginary in China. The collective mobilization made it possible to open up ‘public dialogue’ that can “enhance dialogic relationships between state and citizen” (Newman & Clarke, 2014, p.165). The Tiananmen Square event is still contested on several levels: it marks the crisis of the state; it indicates tensions and conflicts between two main aspects of modernization: economic modernization and political modernization; and it signals an ideological crisis.

Full of memory and confusion about this historical event at the end of 1980s, I finished middle and high school, as well as college in the 1990s. Since 1999, I worked as a classroom teacher in a cosmopolitan city in China. I observed that terms like modernization, globalization, and internationalization had become more common in contemporary China in 1980s, 1990s, and 2000s respectively. From my 22 years of educational and teaching experiences, I noticed that Chinese socialism's commitment to egalitarianism and the discourses of ideal citizens and democratic imaginaries had been diluted in practice alongside the process of Chinese socialist modernization. This awareness heightened from my experience with Chinese key public schools. When I attended a key public high school in the early to mid-1990s, over half of my classmates came from different rural villages. Student demographics were relatively diverse, reflecting, to some extent the diversity of students in Chinese key public schools in the 1990s. The Chinese key school system opened up more opportunities for the children of workers and peasants to access elite education (Liang, et al., 2012). Note that prior to 1949, only children from middle and upper classes could attend elite universities, often leading to upward social mobility. To a large extent, the key school system promoted a more egalitarian distribution of educational resources.

However, recently less children from rural areas are able to attend elite public universities in China. This phenomenon is consistent with my observations as a classroom teacher in a highly selective key high school in a cosmopolitan city in China. During my six years of teaching, I noticed that my students were relatively homogeneous in family background. Many came from advantaged families: well-educated parents who had decent occupations, adequate economic capital, high cultural capital, and/or strong social capital. This demographic shift transformed the role of Chinese public key schools as I observed cosmopolitan middle-class families' desires for quality education and the concomitant anxieties to access key high schools and top universities.

From the late 1990s to the 2000s, I experienced the Chinese New Curriculum Reform that utilized the rhetoric of transforming test-driven education to quality education. Individualization was framed as a popular educational discourse (Fraser, 2009). In the meantime, I witnessed the school choice fever of rising Chinese middle classes and the rapid growth of various for-profit extra-curricular classes outside school in relation to school choice issues. I found that my privileged students and their families were concerned with the idea of attending elite public universities in China, finding highly-paid respected jobs, and securing high social positions. Many of them were developing a cosmopolitan vision of the world, with little interest in becoming a socially responsible person. The discourse of making contributions to Chinese modernization was absent in daily and even pedagogical conversation. Collective sensibility toward building an ideal society also seemed absent among these youths. My colleagues complained that students have become more and more selfish and education has become more and more utilitarian. I had a similar feeling, but wondered why these transformations happened.

Meanwhile, I witnessed the shift of my school from a key school to a school enterprise that recently created an international division, which also was called an international high school curriculum program, in response to privileged parents' needs and the call of promoting the internationalization of Chinese education. These changes occur in a silent but highly effective way. Such transformation opens doors for wealthy families while excluding poor students. The advantaged families bring new demands and expectations for teachers and schools (Weis & Fine, 2012). This evidence has at least two sets of implications. On the one hand, it suggests class struggle in contemporary China and overwhelming class power in education. Such evidence requires critical examination to name this class struggle for what it is and what its implications are for constructing a social democratic society. On the other hand, the evolutionary process of

Chinese public key high schools seems not only to entail “the dismantling of institutions and narratives that promoted more egalitarian distributive measures in the preceding era” (Harvey, 2007, p. 22), but also imply the transformation of people’s commonsense about what counts as a good school, a good curriculum, a good teacher, a good student, and a good system of determining success (Apple, 2015, p. xvii). The internationally-focused high school curriculum programs, as a new development of Chinese key public schools, implies a crucial site where new social relations such as class relations and power structures are mediated through education, where the “local” interacts with the “global,” where the state struggles with the globalization and internationalization of education in its process of seeking modernization, and where particular subjectivities and identities are produced. These first-hand experiences push me think about the questions:

- What is the relationship between existing key school system and emerging international high school programs in Chinese public education? Why do these new international programs emerge at a particular time in China?
- What is the relationship between the emergence of these new curriculum programs and the needs and demands of privileged social groups?
- How do the students who are able to attend these new educational programs understand who they are and their citizenship? How are their subjectivities influenced and shaped by the internationally-focused curriculum programs?
- What is the role of Chinese key public schools under changing economic, political, social circumstances associated with the process of the modernization and recent call for internalization both in China and in a globalizing world?

The reflection on these experiences has undergirded my moral commitment to a more humane, equal, and just education. It has also contributed to the development of my research interests in the sociology of elite education, an important part of the studies on the reproduction of educational and social inequality, as well as its intersection with sociology of international education, an emergent field of research (Resnik, 2012c).

This chapter discusses the theoretical framework of my dissertation through Maxwell's (2005) suggestions for constructing a conceptual framework. He recommends deploying a combination of experiential knowledge, existing theory and research, and a researcher's pilot and exploratory research. I have begun by addressing how my own background, identity, and experience influence and inform this research project. This critical consciousness or subjectivity, as Maxwell (2005) has highlighted, should be used as part of the research inquiry process (p. 38).

The above reflection on my experiential knowledge lays out the multilevel analysis of my critical education project. As Apple (1995, 2006, 2010) often emphasizes, critical educational researchers should think educational issues relationally. In order to articulate and examine the problematics of these new education programs, I situate my study in the social-political project of Chinese modernization and internationalization, as well as a larger social project of neoliberalization and globalization. This dissertation research is involved in examining the issues of social stratification, social class, class power, and upward social mobility via education, particularly the integration of local elite education and international education. In addition to the macro-level analysis of the relation between a new educational phenomenon and political, economic, and social circumstances, I examine (re)production of social and educational inequality through looking at the policies and practices of specific school reforms and curriculum reforms at a meso-institutional level. Student identities and subjectivities are an important part of my micro-level analysis of the outcomes that emerging international high school programs produce. Based on the assemblage of these educational themes, I shall briefly introduce how I further construct the theoretical framework of my dissertation project by reviewing relevant research and theories.

I first review existing studies on newly-established international high school curriculum programs in China. Doing so helps to recognize the complex relations between school choice

issues, curriculum reforms, elite education, and international education, which revolve around these emerging international high school curriculum programs. I then move on to review relevant literature on elite education and international education. This literature review foregrounds the intersection of a new sociology of elite education and the sociology of international education, in which my study is situated. The review also highlights the importance of linking the study of elite students' school/curriculum choice to the construction of global citizen-subjects. The use of these prior research helps justify my study and informs my decision about research methods.

Furthermore, I incorporate five sets of critical theories into the construction of the theoretical framework for my study. These critical theories include Peter Wagner's sociological modernization theory; the critiques of neoliberalism from David Harvey, Wendy Brown, Aihwa Ong, and Stuart Hall; a critical socio-spatial theory; Pierre Bourdieu's notions of field, capital, and habitus; and critical curriculum studies from Basil Bernstein and Michael Apple. Taking up Wagner's (2008, 2012) new sociology of modernity, I distinguish modernization into two elements: democratic modernization and capitalist modernization. These two elements are combined to analyze the tensions and contradictions generated in the process of socialist modernization with Chinese characteristics. In consideration of capitalist modernization under current global conditions, I turn my focus to the impact of neoliberalism and neoliberal globalization on modernization and on current popular discourse of internationalization in China.

I then draw on the notions of neoliberalism from David Harvey, Aihwa Ong, Wendy Brown, and Stuart Hall for analyzing the policies, practices, and outcomes of the neoliberal approach to reform Chinese education. Neoliberalism serves as an overarching concept for my analysis of macro-social changes, meso-institutional transformations, and micro-individual subjectivities. I also draw on a critical socio-spatial theory to analyze the ways in which neoliberal rationality

transforms the identities of the state itself, Chinese key public schools, and wealthy urban Chinese high school students in the complex processes of China's modernization and internationalization. I take two interconnected ways to apply a critical socio-spatial lens to my research. On the one hand, to explore the emergence of the international programs in China at a particular time and space, I combine Bourdieu's notions of field, capital, and habitus and Bernstein's educational code theory with the concepts of neoliberalism and neoliberal globalization to spatialize macro-level education policies, meso-level school reforms, and micro-level parental choice of school. On the other hand, I integrate critical curriculum studies from Bernstein and Apple with Bourdieu's theory of practice to spatialize micro-level educational practices and subjectivities of privileged Chinese students. The relevant notions and theories from Bourdieu, Bernstein, and Apple have strength in analyzing the (re)production of social advantage. In addition to the above prior research and theories, my pilot study functions as an important part of the conceptual framework.

### **Prior Research**

In this section, I first review existing studies on newly-established international high school curriculum programs in China followed a review elite education and international education. This section concludes with my research agenda on the intersection of elite education and international education in a globalized context by critically examining these emerging international high school programs.

### **Literature Review on China's Emerging International High School Curriculum Programs**

The emergence of international high school curriculum programs (IHSCPs) has become apparent in China in the past five years. This new educational and social phenomenon has been drawing attention from Chinese media. The scholarship on these educational programs primarily comes from China. In my review of the IHSCP literature, the four important aspects – the temporal



and spatial features of IHSCPs; key actors involved in these new educational programs; the relation between IHSCPs and Chinese educational reforms; and the debates on IHSCPs – will be discussed in order to show the complexity that underlies the emerging IHSCPs.

First, the descriptive and cased-based literature sketches a large-scale picture of the IHSCPs. As an emergent phenomenon, the IHSCPs have been first developed in first-tier cities in the economically developed coastal regions of China in recent years and have grown extensively in second- and even third-tier cities in these areas. Such programs can be also found in big cities in inland provinces of China today (Li, 2015; Lei, 2013; Long & Wang, 2013; Xu & Gao, 2012). These findings suggest that the emergence of these educational programs is a nationwide, economic development-related, and urban-centered phenomenon pointing to the widespread restructuring of education underway in China.

Second, the literature acknowledges the educational market of IHSCPs. It also describes that the rapid development of these international programs caused their chaos. The emergence of IHSCPs was closely tied to the new wave of study-abroad movement taking place in China – Chinese high school students seeking college education abroad through self-funding.<sup>13</sup> The programs imported a variety of foreign curricula, such as General Certificate of Education Advanced Level (A-Level), Advanced Placement (AP), and Global Assessment Certificate (GAC), and integrated them with the Chinese national high school curriculum for Chinese students who choose to study abroad (Huang, 2012; Liu, F., 2013; Zhou, 2013a; Zhu, 2013). These international programs catered to the needs of wealthy Chinese families and they charge expensive tuition (Tang, 2014; Xu, 2014, Zhou, 2013a, 2015). Although these programs were first established by private

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<sup>13</sup> This phenomenon was also observed in the increasing number of self-funded Chinese international undergraduate students in the United States, which has been the largest group of international students since 2009 (Abelmann & Kang, 2014; Valdez, 2015).

and people-run schools in China, Chinese key public high schools are now the main actors creating IHSCPs (Long & Wang, 2013; Xu, 2013; Xu & Gao, 2012). Programs established by key high schools were favored by Chinese parents (Liu et al., 2014; Wang, 2014)

Third, previous studies highlight the relation between IHSCPs and Chinese educational reforms. The development of these international programs are influenced by recent Chinese education policies such as the Regulations of Chinese-Foreign Cooperation Running School (CFCRS) and the National Guidelines for Medium and Long-term Education Reform and Development (2010-2020) (abbreviated as *the Guidelines*). For instance, Lei (2013), Tang (2014), Xu (2014), and Yin (2014a) point out that CFCRS is the dominant mode adopted by IHSCPs. The CFCRS policy, initiated in the early 1990s, has continuously developed during the 2000s. This policy was extended from the field of Chinese higher education to high school education (Chen & Xie, 2010; Wang, 2011, 2012; Zhang, 2003). By utilizing the mode of CFCRS, the new programs are expected to introduce quality foreign curriculum programs in order to promote Chinese curriculum reforms and diversify Chinese high school education to meet different social needs. *The Guidelines* was released in 2010, proposing, for the first time, the goal of cultivating international talents. It states the requirement of educating a large number of international talents with an international perspective, who are familiar with international rules and are able to participate in international affairs and competition (Gu, 2010; Yin, 2014a). The literature suggests that the promulgation of *the Guidelines* provides space for the development of IHSCPs because these curriculum programs are regarded to have the potential to promote the cultivation of innovative talents in China (Liu et al., 2014; Xu, 2015b). By linking Chinese educational reforms to international education, the IHSCPs are expected to help Chinese education go global, become international, and cultivate “international talents.”

However, the IHSCPs established by public high schools are contested. Some Chinese scholars argue that these international programs utilize public educational resources to only serve students from affluent families. This results in unequal distribution of quality educational resources and creates educational inequalities (Zhu, 2013; Wang, 2014; Xiong, 2015a, 2015b). The researchers further argue that despite the rhetorical goals of promoting the process of the internationalization of Chinese basic education, the IHSCPs in practice have become preparatory programs for study abroad. There are also concerns about the “brain drain” these international programs might create. These debates make IHSCPs a controversial issue.

The existing literature on IHSCPs provide some directions for my research. They inform the importance of linking the study of IHSCPs to Chinese education policies and the construction of “international talents” for the purpose of nation building. The studies recognize the controversial effects and problems of IHSCPs, especially the public ones; yet the literature tends to take the discourse of globalization and the internationalization of Chinese education for granted. Most of the existing research on IHSCPs pay attention to the issue of curriculum integration and struggle. However, they didn’t take into account the relation between knowledge and power (Apple, 1993, 2004). Thus, I will attend to the politics of curriculum reforms and educational policies and practices in order to better understand the tensions and contradictions of IHSCPs.

### **Literature Review on Elite Education and International Education**

The international curriculum programs created by Chinese key public high schools are the focus of my study. As Chinese scholars have criticized, to a large extent these new high school programs help prepare Chinese students for applying for top universities overseas. The insertion of international curricula into the Chinese national education system creates an international track in local elite public schools. This evidence seems to suggest that the IHSCPs not only reflect a new

development of Chinese elite public schools, but also signal the internationalization of education at school level in China. In this sense, the IHSCPs become a nexus between elite education and international education. They serve as the route between elite schools in China and elite higher education institutions abroad. Does this route mean a new elite education track or a new type of elite education? If so, what sociological meaning and implications does the international/transnational track have? What are the theoretical, methodological, and empirical challenges of researching this new elite education? This discussion suggests the importance of looking at the public IHSCPs by examining the interplay of elite education and international education in a changing local, national, and global context. In what follows, I will review the literature on elite education and international education, respectively. The purpose of doing so is to lay out the intersection of the two fields of enquiry – a new sociology of elite education and the sociology of international education, in which my study is situated.

### ***Review on Elite Education***

Elite education is a small yet very dynamic research area. Recently, there has been a growing renewed interest in the education of elites (Howard & Gaztambide-Fernández, 2010; Howard & Kenway, 2015; Kenway & Koh, 2015; Maxwell, 2015; van Zanten, Ball, & Darchy-Koehlin, 2015). Studying the role of elite education is essential to better understand inequalities in education and society and to propel social justice (Gaztambide-Fernández & Howard, 2010a). This recognition is particularly important in the age of globalization characterized by neoliberalism and the increasingly wider gap between the rich and the poor because it is not simply about theory and methodology, but also about policy and ethical commitment (Beaverstock, Hubbard, & Short, 2004; Caletrío, 2012; Harvey, 2014; McCarthy & Kenway, 2014).

There is no single definition of the term *elites*. This is partly because “elites are different and differently constituted and understood in different places” (Ball, 2015, p. 234). There are different kinds of elites, such as old/new elites, local/national/global elites, and economic/cultural/political elites according to time, space, and field, respectively (Howard & Kenway, 2015).<sup>14</sup> These categorizations imply different elite fractions and their intersections. Here, I refer to elites as “those with vastly disproportionate control over or access to a resource” (Khan, 2012, p. 362). There is an overlap between the notions of elites and social class.<sup>15</sup> Gaztambide-Fernández and Howard (2010b) adopt the notion of elite class. Maxwell (2015) further suggests that we “integrate the concept of an elite class – comprising various fractions – within social class theory.” For the purposes of this dissertation, I am going to use the terms of elite interchangeably with the privileged and advantaged as well as middle and upper classes.

The study of elites and elite education overlaps with the research on social class and education (Ball, 2015; Howard & Kenway, 2015a; Weis, 2014; Weis & Dolby, 2012), which is partly demonstrated in the wide use of Bourdieu’s notion of capital in both sets of literature. The concepts of privilege and power lie at the center of critical analysis of class reproduction in and through elite education. Privilege refers to “the specific advantages granted to (or seized by) particular individuals or groups,” while power means “the authority and capacity to affect other people’s lives in significant ways” (van Zanten, 2015, p. 4). Class analysis in the research on elite education has been underscored in order to unravel the role of elite institutions in reinforcing inequality (Gaztambide-Fernández & Howard, 2010b; Howard & Kenway, 2015a; Kenway & Koh,

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<sup>14</sup> For a brief summary of elite categorizations, see Howard and Kenway (2015, p. 1016).

<sup>15</sup> There are debates on the concepts of elite and social class. For the debate on the notion of elites, see Howard and Kenway (2015a). Wright et al. (1998) and Wright (2005) offer a nice review on the debate on social class. The relationship between these two concepts deserves rigorous discussion (Ball, 2015; Howard & Kenway, 2015a; Maxwell, 2015). There has been a debate on whether elites are a distinct social class (Maxwell, 2015).

2015; Koh, 2014; Stevens, 2009). Hence, I see the overlap between studies of elites and elite education and research on social class and education as an entry point in reviewing elite schools and elite schooling.

Substantive studies on elite education have provided important insights into how elite schools engage in the making of social class and class distinction. Ethnography is a popular research methodology employed in this literature (e.g. Demerath, 2009; Howard, 2008; Gaztambide-Fernández, 2009; Klan, 2011; Weis, Cipollone, & Jenkins, 2014). Researchers have expanded their focus on elite private schools to include elite public schools (Branglinger, 1993; Demerath, 2003; Howard, 2008; Weis, Cipollone, & Jenkins, 2014). More attention have been given to students' elite schooling experiences and perceptions of privilege. These ethnographic studies contribute to a deeper understanding of the production of advantage and in class-making.

However, there is a need for better understanding the macro structural dynamics regarding the relationships between educational capital and the (re)production of elite status. As Gaztambide-Fernández and Howard (2010b) stress, future research should focus more on examining elite students' access to educational resources and opportunities, as well as understanding how curriculum and pedagogy at such schools shape and influence these students' subjectivities. In particular, global and transnational elites emerge in the process of neoliberal globalization. Researchers have called attention to the links between elite education and the formation of these emergent elites (Ball, 2015; Caletrío, 2012; Howard & Kenway, 2015; Schijf, 2013). More research should be devoted to examine how globalization reshapes the production and reproduction of privilege and the flows of power within, between and across nations (Maxwell, 2015, p. 17). Globalization makes the study of elites and elite education more challenging, theoretically and methodologically.

Some very recent work on elite education is concerned with the composition of elite education system, elite schools and elite schooling at a global level (e.g. Brooks & Waters, 2015; Howard's & Kenway's collection, 2015; Kenway's & Koh's collection, 2015; McCarthy's & Kenway's collection, 2014). This new literature recognizes that previous studies on elite education tend to be nation bound, which subscribes to 'methodological nationalism' (Kenway & Koh, 2015a). International mobile students and their experiences and subjectivities are the foci of this emerging research. A transnational frame of analysis is highlighted in the research, which matches with the international and transnational mobility of students and parents. These studies might contribute to the research on global and transnational elites and their education. Different from the existing literature that focuses more on the issue of elite education within western contexts, the essays in the special issue of *Globalisation, Societies and Education on Elite Schools in Globalising Circumstances* "look at the contemporary status and challenges confronting the British elite school model as it exists in England and as it thrives today in former colonial outposts in eight other countries: South Africa, India, Barbados, Singapore, Hong Kong, Australia, Argentina and Cyprus." Drawing on Burawoy's (2000) notions of global forces, global connections, and global imaginations and employing a multi-sited global ethnography, these papers examine elite schools in contemporary circumstances pertaining to the post-colonial context of globalization (McCarthy & Kenway, 2014, p. 167). However, attention should also be paid to elites and elite education in communist and post-communist nation-states (Howard & Kenway, 2015a). In doing so, we must go beyond what Wang (2013) calls "methodological Westernism."<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>16</sup> The tradition of research on the education of elites has mainly come from western contexts such as the United States, England, France, and Australia. Much of the research has paid attention to elite students (e.g. Draelants & Darchy-Koechlin, 2011; Howard, 2008; Maxwell & Aggleton, 2010), elite families (e.g. Lareau, 2003; van Zanten, 2015a), elite schools (e.g. Bourdieu, 1996; Cookson & Persell, 1985; Connell et al., 1982; Demerath, 2009; Howard,

Despite an increasingly segment of ‘the new rich’ in China (Goodman, 2008), we know little about the relation between these new elites and elite education in the local, national and/or international context. For example, the emerging IHSCPs in China are currently underway to change Chinese elite public high schools. What is the role of this new type of elite schools? Will they contribute to the formation of new elite groups? Such questions are under-researched. They should be the focus of what Kenway and Koh (2015) call “a new sociology of elite education.” Situating my study in this new field, I attend to how Chinese elite public schools are influenced by globalization and interact with international education.

### ***Review on International Education***

The field of international education is relatively new. International education at school level has become apparent over the last couple of years (Dolby & Rahman, 2008; Resnik, 2012a, 2012c). The internationalization of national systems of education is one of the main forms of school-level international education (Hayden, 2011), which is the focus of my review.

It is recognized that international curricular programs such as the International Baccalaureate (IB) program play a key role in the internationalization of education. Some recent studies address the percolation of international curricula into local private and public schools (Doherty, 2009; Doherty, Mu, & Shield, 2009; Doherty, Luke, Shield, & Hincksman, 2012; Resnik, 2012c; Tarc, 2009; Tarc & Tarc, 2015; Vidovich, 2004). For instance, Weenink (2008) examines international tracks in state-sponsored schools in Netherlands. These studies pay more attention to the IB program adopted at the secondary education level within such nations as Australia, Singapore, and Netherlands. Tarc (2009) points out that over half of the IB schools are state schools.

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2008; McDonald, Pini, & Mayes, 2012; Gaztambide-Fernández, 2009; Klan, 2011; Weis, Cipollone, & Jenkins, 2014), and admissions processes of elite colleges (e.g. Karable, 2005; Stevens, 2009) within nation-states.



This evidence can be understood from two interconnected perspectives: from the top-bottom perspective, this fact “results from strategies aimed at insertion of the IB into national education markets and its adaption to different national systems” (Resnik, 2012b, p. 295); from the bottom-up perspective, it demonstrates that under the pressure of globalization, national education systems have become internationalized through adopting international educational programs and curricula. By examining parental choice of international curriculum programs, the studies emphasize that schools and middle- and high-income families deploy internationalization strategies to produce advantage for their students and children (Aguiar & Nogueira, 2012; Doherty, et al., 2012).

School-level international education is “an emerging and promising field of enquiry” because it is closely related to the issues of globalization, social mobility, international and transnational mobility of students and parents, identity formation, social stratification, and the link between education and the nation state (Resnik, 2012b, p. 291). These are the common themes shared with the aforementioned research directions in the sociology of elite education. The concepts of globalization, neoliberalism, global imaginary, cosmopolitanism are viewed as important analytical tools in critical studies on international education (Doherty et al., 2009; Tarc & Tarc, 2015; Weenink, 2007, 2008). Based on the interviews with parents whose children attended an internationalized form of education in Netherlands, Weenink (2007) argues that “cosmopolitanism (cosmopolitan capital) is a form of social and cultural capital” (p. 495). Waters and Brooks (2011) and Resnik (2012b) suggest that Bourdieu’s notions of capital, habitus, and field be used to analyze how advantage is produced through international schools and programs.

In order to go deeper into the understanding of the internationalization of education at the school level, future research on local international curriculum programs should connect to the study of international students, international educational networks, and international education

policies (Resnik, 2012b). Like the literature on elite education, the themes of social class and elites also emerge in the literature on international education. Further studies need to examine how international curriculum programs “create classed spaces that are situated both nationally and globally, while simultaneously questioning the very construction of those categories” (Dolby, 2012, p. 370). Attention should be also given to the daily educational experiences and subjectivities of students who attend international schools/programs. Moreover, as Resnik (2012c) finds in her study on the expansion of the IB, “certain national contexts and educational traditions encourage IB schools, while others hinder their propagation” (p. 249). Besides IB programs, we know little about other various international curriculum programs adopted by nation states and their international educational networks, their influence on curricular reforms and students’ learning. Thus, incorporating the study of international education policies into the research agenda described above should be underscored. Qualitative research is suggested for conducting such work. Resnik (2012b) further notes that a new research methodology – a global ethnography or multi-sited ethnography – can be employed in international education research because this methodology sees sites as fluid and contingent and it can capture “the possible connections, disruptions and disjunctures that flow from the global, regional and local” (p. 304).

My literature review shows that sociology of international education and a new sociology of elite education share some common analytic concepts, research directions, and research methodology. The changing social conditions of globalization and neoliberalism has led to new configurations of what conventionally is defined as elite education and international education. While local schools are rescaling to the globalizing context and becoming internationalized, international education is percolated into a national education market and becoming localized to different national systems. These simultaneous bottom-up and top-down processes create

international/transnational spaces of education. Do these social spaces represent new fields of power? If so, how are power and privilege produced in and through these new spaces? What are the new processes of elite formation being developing within these emerging fields? My study attempts to answer these questions by examining the changing dynamics and meanings of privilege and power. In the next section, I will discuss my research agenda informed by the synthesis of the literature review on international education, elite education, and IHSCPs.

### **Research Agenda: Intersection between Elite Education and International Education in a Globalizing Context**

This section highlights the importance of looking at the *processes* in the production of educational advantage and the construction of privilege elite status. By taking up Gaztambide-Fernández and Howard's (2010b) suggestion of including the examination of how elite students gain access to educational resources and opportunities and how curriculum and pedagogy at schools shape the students' subjectivities, I focus on school choice and schooling experience of socially elite Chinese students in order to capture the processes of the (re)production of privilege. This approach helps to examine "the *objective* circulation of privilege and power" and "the *subjective* construction of privileged and 'empowered' individuals" (van Zanten, 2015).

Following in the footsteps of McCarthy and Kenway (2014b), Kenway and Koh (2015b), Howard and Kenway (2015b), and others who pay more attention to elite schools and schooling in globalizing circumstances, I will take a closer look at the educational experiences and subjectivities of the students who attend the IHSCPs, newly established by Chinese elite public high schools, in order to grasp the new dynamics of elite subjectivities and elite schooling in the age of globalization. In so doing, I also draw attention to the production of elites "enmeshed in complex historical, economic and cultural dynamics and pressures articulated through

globalisation and its variable and generative impact upon educational and social stratification” (McCarthy & Kenway, 2014, p. 166). In what follows, I will outline my approach to examining how elite class status is experienced (in both material and subjective terms) and redefined by the students who attend the IHSCPs.<sup>17</sup>

### *Elite Schools, Educational Choice, and Parental Strategies*

The objective circulation of elites is well reflected by their access to elite tracks. Previous studies on elite education found strong links between elite groups, schools, and universities (Maxwell, 2015; Weis, Cipollone, & Jenkins, 2014). Given their role in facilitating entry into elite higher education institutions, elite schools often serve as valued resources and opportunities for elite families to secure educational advantage for their own children.<sup>18</sup>

The existing literature points out that school choice is a crucial dimension in reproducing social advantage of elite groups and restricting the openness of elite track to other groups (Ball, 2003; van Zanten, 2015b). Substantive studies on school choice draw on Bourdieu’s (1986) notion of capital to examine how the middle-class families mobilize their economic, cultural, and social capital in the process of school choice and choice-making (e.g. Ball, 2003; Ball & Gewirtz, 1997; Gewirtz, et al., 1995; Power, et al., 2003; Reay & Ball, 1997; Wu, 2008, 2013). These studies open up a space for examining how the educational practices of elite families and institutions within a broader supportive policy context work together to drive processes of elite reproduction. The studies also contribute to the examination of social class identity formation. As Ball and Nikita

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<sup>17</sup> Here, I paraphrase Gaztambide-Fernández and Howard’s (2010b) statement that “elite class status is experienced in both material and subjective terms” (p. 200).

<sup>18</sup> Drawing on Kenway & Koh (2015), I define elite schools as those primary and secondary schools that are highly selective, academically and/or financially. Compared to non-elite schools, elite schools are well-resourced. They not only enjoy material privileges, but also have the capacity to produce the best of the best (Gaztambide-Fernández, 2009; Koh, 2014).

(2014) note, school choice not only “reflects the identity of the parents, where they are coming from and their aspirations (and anxieties),” but also “forms the identity of the children, in relation to known or uncertain futures” (p. 89). Both aspects should be explored.

I will part from the existing research on school choice that is nation bound and focuses more on western contexts, by taking school choice as a global phenomenon into consideration. By attending “more carefully to choice in a framework of mobility, globalization and related new kinds of social class identities and interests” (Ball & Nikita, 2014, p. 82), I emphasize the importance of integrating two existing fields of inquiry – curricular choice and school choice – within the context of the internationalization of education at school level (Ball & Nikita, 2014; Doherty et al., 2009). Thus, I argue that studying the choice of IHSCPs not only enables me to examine “new kinds of social class identities and interests,” but also permits me to investigate the relation between neoliberal educational policies and the processes of elite formation.

### ***Elite Schooling and Students’ Socialization Experiences: Curriculum Studies of Elite Schools***

To fully understand the processes of the construction of privilege elite status, I link the study of the choice of these international programs with students’ educational experiences with their chosen programs. This approach highlights the importance of studying elite schooling. It involves examining “the framing and content of students’ socialization experiences in elite institutions and maps out how they come to think of themselves and be perceived by others as privileged and ‘empowered’ individuals” (van Zanten, 2015, p. 6). As noted above, substantive ethnographic studies on elite education have employed sociocultural approach to studying students’ elite schooling experiences and the role of cultural practices in the production of privilege. However, little attention has been paid to how curriculum and pedagogy themselves “accomplish or play a role in the production of particular elite subjectivities” and how students “come to

understand themselves as subjects” (Gaztambide-Fernández & Howard, 2010b, p. 204). This point leads me to incorporate curriculum studies into the research on elite schooling, which directs attention to the relationship between knowledge and power. As Bernstein (1977) underscores, school knowledge is the most important factor to structure students’ schooling experience and consciousness. I will discuss this point shortly in the section of critical curriculum studies.

To summarize, in this dissertation project I connect the study of school/curriculum choice of elite students and families with students’ educational experiences in their chosen schools/programs in an effort to better understand the processes of the production of advantage and students’ elite class identity formation. This research agenda is supported by Maxwell and Aggleton’s (2014a) argument that “to examine processes that produce and reproduce positions of privilege, the family, school, and individual young people’s ‘projects of the self’ need to be considered together to understand how practice and trajectories are shaped” (cited in Maxwell, 2015, p. 20). My approach to study both objective dynamics and subjective meanings of privilege and power is also guided by critical scholars such as Bourdieu who underscore the importance of transcending the dichotomy of individual subjectivity and societal objectivity and looking into the relations between structure and agency. The logic of thinking relationally about macro-structure and micro-practice informs critical qualitative research or what Weis and Fine (2013) call *critical bifocality*, the research methodology that my study will employ. I will discuss this in Chapter 3. In the next section, I will discuss the theoretical framework of my study.

### **Developing My Conceptual Framework Using Prior Theories**

In the introduction of this chapter, I have addressed my experiential knowledge of modernization, globalization, internationalization, and neoliberalization. Informed by the literature, I situate the issue of the production of advantage in a framework of neoliberal globalization,

mobility, related new forms of social class identities, and new educational and social inequalities. My research project draws on critical theory that is “always concerned not merely with how things were but how they might be and should be” in order for human emancipation to be realized (Bronner, 2011, p. 1-2). The ultimate goal of examining the links between elite education, privilege, and power is to seek an alternative, higher quality and more equitable education for all children.

In this section I will begin with a brief discussion on modernization in order to clarify the relation between normative theory of education and empirical studies of neoliberal education reforms. I then discuss the other four components of my conceptual framework, including the notions of neoliberalism and neoliberal globalization; critical socio-spatial theory; Bourdieu’s concepts of field, capital, and habitus; and critical curriculum studies from Bernstein and Apple.

The concepts of neoliberalism and neoliberal globalization not only map out the macro structural dynamics for this study, but also contextualize my analysis of significant institutional transformations and the students’ educational practices. A critical theory of space points to education space as a social product of power relations. Applying a critical socio-spatial lens to my study informs the importance of linking the spatialization of macro-level education policy to the spatialization of micro-level educational practices. Theories from Bourdieu, Bernstein, and Apple complement each other in a way that we can connect microeducational processes of the family and schooling to the wider processes of social reproduction and macropower and class relations.<sup>19</sup> By synthesizing the above-mentioned concepts and theories, my study explores how the students’ lived experiences and subjectivities are shaped by the educational processes at the micro level, institutional transformations at the meso level, and social, political, and economic power at the

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<sup>19</sup> According to Bernstein (1990), class relations refer to “inequalities in the distribution of power, and in the principles of control between social groups, which are realized in the creation, distribution, reproduction, and legitimation of physical and symbolic values that have their source in the social division of labor” (p. 13).

macro level, as they negotiate the process of preparing for U.S. college application. In so doing, this research project aims to unravel the complexity of a distinctive ‘regime of truth’ – China’s becoming international at the levels of student, elite family, school, and the State.

### **Modernization Theory<sup>20</sup>**

Drawing on Wagner’s (2008, 2012) new sociology of modernity, I distinguish modernization into neoliberal modernization processes and democratic modernization processes.<sup>21</sup> For the purposes of this project, neoliberal modernization processes mean the ways that neoliberal capitalism create socioeconomic inequality, benefit privileged social groups, construct citizens’ self-knowledge as consumers, and politically undermine thick democracy. In contrast, democratic modernization processes do not simply create equal opportunities for citizens to become economic entities, but ensure people have equal opportunities to participate in and construct all aspects of daily life. More importantly, democratic modernization processes open up spaces for people to collectively determine the reasons and norms for constructing a society, as well as promoting solidarity to build a more equal, humane, and just society.<sup>22</sup> Here, I make the distinction between

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<sup>20</sup> I am very grateful to Quentin Wheeler for his engagement and generative conversations on critical educational studies. His comments throughout the writing process helped clarify my arguments in this dissertation.

<sup>21</sup> Employing a historical-comparative sociology of modernity, Wagner (2012) explains that modernity has always been associated with progress such as material progress and political progress (p. 28-32). This explanation highlights economic and political forms of modernity, respectively. Democracy is the dominant interpretation of political modernization, while capitalism is the predominant mode of economic modernization. It is worth noting that capitalist modernization is being turned into neoliberal capitalist modernization in the recent neoliberal phrase of capitalism, abbreviated as neoliberal modernization.

<sup>22</sup> Liberal-democratic capitalist modernization is the dominant mode of modernization in the West, which is what Dale (1989, 1990) call “conservative modernization.” Apple (1996, 1998, 2000, 2006) further illuminates that there is a new hegemonic bloc who holds “conservative modernization” as its aim of educational and social policy. For example, in *Educating the “right” way: Markets, standards, God, and inequality*, he classifies four major elements within this new alliance, including *neo-liberals* with the vision of market, *neo-conservatives* with a focus on cultural restoration, *authoritarian populists* concerns with security and traditional values of family and religion, and *professional new middle class* with commitment to management and relevant technical skills. For my observation, there is a similar profound hegemonic bloc underway that may contribute to the development of conservative modernization in contemporary China. Although this deserves further careful investigation, for this dissertation, I will focus on examining neoliberal forces that transform public education in China.



contemporary capitalist/neoliberal modernization process and democratic modernization process in order to examine the tensions and contradictions in the process of socialist modernization with Chinese characteristics, a unique form of modernization process based on Chinese historical, socio-political, and economic contexts.

In addition, arguing for “modernity as experience and interpretation,” Wagner (2012) suggests that a critical analysis of modernization focus on examining “the experiences of modernity by the social actors themselves and on the interpretation they gave to these experiences” in specific cultural programs (p. 36). Taking up this suggestion, I study China’s modernization project by examining emergent international high school programs in China. I pay particular attention to how students’ subjectivities are influenced and shaped by neoliberal rationality. In the next section, I shall discuss the concepts of neoliberalism and neoliberal globalization.

### **Neoliberalism, Global Capitalism, and Neoliberal Globalization**

Neoliberalism, global capitalism, and neoliberal globalization are overarching concepts for my analysis of education polices (globally and nationally), school and curriculum reforms, and students’ educational experiences and subjectivities. The three terms are closely related, necessitating a focus on the connections between them rather than dealing with each in isolation. Among these terms, neoliberalism is most critical because it facilitates the processes of global capitalism and neoliberal globalization.<sup>23</sup> In other words, without neoliberalism, the other two would not exist. Drawing on the critiques of neoliberalism from Harvey, Ong, Brown, and Hall, I highlight that neoliberalism is not only a social project but also a social process, which leads to the formation of the neoliberal hegemonic system. These four critical scholars put different emphases

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<sup>23</sup> Neoliberalism itself came to prominence in the 1980s (Hall, Massey, & Rustin, 2013; Harvey, 2005, 2007; Jessop, 2002; Steger & Roy, 2010; Weis & Fine, 2012).

on the characteristics and problems of neoliberalism. However, they all agree about neoliberalism's close ties to capitalism, its widespread, and its different forms. They are all aware of neoliberalism's deleterious impact on social life.

From the political-economic perspective, Harvey (1989, 2005, 2007) points out that neoliberalism's political scheme aims at reestablishing the conditions for capital accumulation and restoring upper-class power. His critique of neoliberalism emphasizes that the concepts of "capital accumulation," "class interests and power," particularly elite classes and their power and interests, "education market" (including the marketization, commodification, and privatization of education) and "neoliberal state" are meaningful categories in understanding neoliberalism as a creative destruction in educational and social equality. For instance, Harvey (2005) argues that neoliberalism is characterized by three interrelated factors. First, individual freedoms, especially consumer choices and entrepreneurial skills, should be liberated. Second, in order to ensure such consumer rights, institutions must be transformed toward opening up free trade markets. Third, the state should play an important role in creating and legitimating the changed institutional framework (most often, through policy making) so as to enable individuals to advance their agencies and practices. These features highlight the interrelations of individual liberties (e.g., rights, needs, and choices), institutional changes, and the transformation of the role of the state under the pressure of neoliberalism. Harvey's critique of neoliberalism informs my approach to examine the practices and effects of neoliberalism in the field of education, which involves the complex relation between educational choices and experiences of elite Chinese students, market-

based school and curriculum reforms, and the role of the state in creating markets in education and promoting the privatization of education services through policy making and implementation.<sup>24</sup>

In addition, Harvey (1989, 2007) points out global turn toward neoliberalism. He argues that the widespread neoliberalism is interlinked with the process of global capitalism characterized by flexible accumulation of capital. The flexible accumulation process pursues free trade among nations and global integration of markets, reducing multidimensional globalization to economic globalization. This is what is called “neoliberal globalization” – the market version of globalization (Apple, 2010; Ball, 2013; Beyer, 1994).<sup>25</sup> This analysis of neoliberalism extends my study from national to global scales because it points to the complex interrelation of neoliberalism, global capitalism, and neoliberal globalization, which brings attention to such notions as “global/transnational capital,” “global class,” and “global education markets.” For example, the notion of global class challenges the traditional nation-state centered concept of class and shifts the locus of class formation from national to emergent transnational space. This concept entails developing further understanding of global education market, the role of international education, and the changing role of state in relation to neoliberal class project on a global scale. Thus, exploring the role of emerging forms of international education in the formation of new global class requires us to go beyond what Beck (2007) calls “methodological nationalism.”<sup>26</sup>

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<sup>24</sup> Au and Ferrare (2015) provides specific criteria for what counts as “corporate education reform.” They define corporate education reform as “an extension of the neoliberal state.” For details, see Au & Ferrare (2015), p. 8.

<sup>25</sup> In my dissertation, I employ the terms neoliberal globalization, economic globalization, and capitalist globalization interchangeably.

<sup>26</sup> Robinson and Harris (2000) make a similar argument. For example, they emphasize that “Globalization compels us in this way to modify some of the essential premise of class analysis. An understanding of the changes bound up with globalization requires that our methods and epistemological assumption revert back to those of classic political economy, which set out to theorize a set of relationships that were not self-evident in contemporary practices in order to highlight both structure and historic movement latent in existing conditions” (p. 14).

An urgent theoretical and practical task for critical education scholars is to demonstrate empirical evidence about class struggle in education and to name it for what it is. This task is significant in my study, both for understanding neoliberal practices in China and for exploring the implications of the reconstruction of class power under neoliberal global capitalism. The former involves examining how social and educational inequality is created by emergent economic elites in China who are able to exercise their class power through education. The latter involves documenting how a particular type of global class is formed through international education under neoliberal globalization as well as exploring the implications of this newly emerging social group.

Ong's critiques of neoliberalism focus more on how neoliberalism affects cultural practices. Drawing on Foucault's notion of governmentality, Ong (2006) extends Harvey's definition of neoliberalism as a theory of political economic practices by highlighting that neoliberalism is a technology of governing, "which is reconfiguring relationships between governing and the governed, power and knowledge, and sovereignty and territoriality" (p. 3-4). She emphasizes that neoliberalism as a technology of governing involves two kinds of optimizing technologies: *technologies of subjectivity* and *technologies of subjection*. The notion of *technologies of subjectivity* points out that neoliberalism governs populations "through the production of 'willing', 'self-governing', 'entrepreneurial selves'" (Ball, 2012, p. 3). The concept of *technologies of subjection* points to the management of populations through the administration of special spaces in terms of state sovereignty. Ong (1999) argues that neoliberal reason and mechanism enables the state to differently regulate populations for optimal productivity by deploying administrative strategies and adopting graduated sovereignty. Her critique of neoliberalism articulates citizenship and sovereignty. As she notes, "in the era of globalization, individuals as well as governments develop a flexible notion of citizenship and sovereignty as strategies to accumulate capital and

power” (Ong, p. 6). Ong’s analysis of neoliberalism informs about my investigation of the citizenship of elite Chinese students and state sovereignty reconstructed by neoliberalism and neoliberal globalization, which is a key part of their transformed subjectivities.

Integrating Marx’s analysis of capitalism and Foucault’s discussion on neoliberal reason, Brown (2015) formulates neoliberalism as a governing political rationality. She further develops Harvey’s argument of neoliberalism as creative destruction by underscoring that neoliberalism is profoundly destructive to political life, public life, and especially educated public life. Going further than Ong’s thoughts about the relations between citizenship and state sovereignty, Brown pays particular attention to neoliberal transformation of subjects, states, and their relation. In her discussion of the remaking of subject and state, Brown (2015) argues that under neoliberal reason:

“both persons and states are construed on the model of the contemporary firm, both persons and states are expected to comport themselves in ways that maximize their capital value in the present and enhance their future value, and both persons and states do so through practices of entrepreneurialism, self-investment, and/or attracting investors” (p.22).

Specifically, she explains that neoliberal rationality “disseminates *the model of the market* to all domains and activities – even where money is not at issue – and configures human beings exhaustively as market actors, always, only, and everywhere as *homo oeconomicus*” (p. 31). Competition is formulated as normative when human beings are remade as *homo oeconomicus*.

Similarly, neoliberal rationality configures the state as the manager of a firm. She points out that “democratic state commitments to equality, liberty, inclusion, and constitutionalism are now subordinate to the project of economic growth, competitive positioning, and capital enhancement” (p.25). By highlighting the impact of neoliberalism on the principles, practices, cultures, subjects, and institutions of democracy, Brown pushes us to think about “the depth of its penetration into the remaking of state-citizen relationships” (Clark, 2005, p. 450). Brown’s analysis on the remaking of the state and subjects orients my study on the subjectivities of elite

Chinese students and urges me to link identity studies to their implications for political life and educated public life. Given the central role of education in state-building, social reproduction, and cultural politics (Bourdieu, 1990, 1998; Apple, 1996), my research focuses particularly on the relations between neoliberalism and education reform. As Brown (2015) suggests, “To understand how neoliberalism become a governing political rationality, we need to examine a set of developments in formulations and practices of governance” (p. 122). This argument implies the spatial and temporal framework of neoliberal project and process including her notion of governance. Given the scope of my inquiry, I pay more attention to education governance and its complex relations to the reconstruction of citizen-subjects and changing social forces.

Furthermore, Hall’s argument that neoliberalism creates new conjunctural crises that arise when different social forces and contradictions come together in the same moment guides my study to explore the complex interconnections between the ideological crisis, the crisis of education, and the crisis of the state. Given the widespread and profound impact of neoliberalism on society, Hall (2011) argues that “the present situation *is* a conjunctural crisis, another unresolved ruptural of that epoch which we can define as ‘the long march of the Neo-liberal Revolution’” (p. 705). Further, Hall, Massey, and Rustin (2013) suggest that we focus on the current neoliberal conjuncture, which “includes class and other social interests, new institutional arrangements, the exercise of excessive influence by private corporations over democratic processes, political developments” (p. 15). Recognizing the interplay between neoliberalism, global capitalism system, and neoliberal globalization, Hall et al. (2013) points out that neoliberalism is a hegemonic project and process, which is not limited to the national state. One way to see how neoliberal hegemony operates globally is to take into account the economic, ideological, political, and social dimensions of the current crisis beginning with the 2008 economic crisis following the collapse of the global

financial system. Taking up Hall's (2011) emphasis in investigating "a neo-liberal culture and thus of consent and the permeation of popular conscious" (p. 721-722), my study is situated in a global context examining how the daily struggles of students, parents, and educators connect to wider structures.

By employing a conjunctual approach, I look closely at the entanglements of tensions, contradictions, and conflicts in/around emergent international high school curriculum programs in China. In doing so, this project aims to reveal the crises of education, ideology, and the state, which are created by market-oriented educational and social reforms nationally and globally. By policing the conjunctual crisis, my study contributes to seeking effective counter-hegemonic interventions.

To summarize, my synthesis of the critiques of neoliberalism from Harvey, Ong, Brown, and Hall involves the integration of neo-Marxist, neo-Gramscian, poststructural, and postmodern theories. Apple (1996) emphasizes this method to analyze neoliberalism. The 'balancing act' between both "post" and "neo" here requires the recognition of both the material and the social relations involved in neoliberalism (Apple, 1995; Ball, 2012). In general, my study focuses on examining the dialectic relation of structure and agency. Specifically, this dissertation involves a complex interplay of multilevel issues within a global economic crisis -- material forces, class relations and interests in both national and global contexts; institutional practices, relationships and forms that are discursively constituted as economic; the formation of subject positions and identity (Apple, 1996; Ball, 2012; Clark, 2008). In addition to drawing on neo-Marxist, neo-Gramscian, and poststructural perspectives, this study takes up a postmodern position to deconstruct the discourse of the internationalization of education. Further, the study also entails the investigation of global, national, regional, and local relations, pointing to the importance of integrating spatial dimensions into the analyses of social relations. The spatiality of social relations

challenges the conventional approaches to “uncover the organizational, political, and cultural struggles over education” (Apple, 1996, p. 134). This wide range of scales requires the multilevel analysis alongside a conjunctural analysis to take into account “mutually constitutive and relationally intertwined dimensions of sociospatial relations” (Jessop, Brenner, and Jones, 2008, p. 389). The requirement foregrounds the necessity of taking Bourdieu’s relational field analysis into consideration, a discussion of which I will pick up shortly.

### **Critical Socio-Spatial Theory**

In recent years, there has been an increasing interest in spatial relations in critical education research (Gulson & Symes, 2007; Robertson, 2010; Ferrare & Apple, 2010). Drawing from Lefebvre (1991), Massey (1994, 2005), Soja (1996), Smith (1992), Brenner (2003), and Jessop et al. (2008), Robertson (2010) has summarized the key assumptions of critical socio-spatial theory: space is socially produced; spaces are social relations stretched out; and space constitutes and is constituted through power relations in social transactions (p. 15-18). She emphasizes the importance of linking spatiality to time and sociality in order to develop a better understanding of contemporary knowledge formation, social reproduction, and the construction of subjectivities. She maintains that education space should be viewed as “a crucial site, object, instrument and outcome” constituting the complex processes of power, production, and social relations (p. 15). Ferrare and Apple (2010) further offer insights into the ways of doing critical spatial analysis of educational issues – “spatializing macro-level education policy;” “spatializing micro-level educational practices;” and using spatial tools such as social network analysis to examine spatial processes in education. These ideas influence my dissertation in three ways: First, they inform my thinking about the newly-established international high school curriculum programs in China as an emergent education space. Second, they lead me to integrate Bourdieu’s notions of field, capital,



and habitus with critical curriculum studies from Bernstein and Apple in order to spatialize both macro-level education policy and micro-level educational practices. Third, they guide me to employ social network analysis to trace out the ways in which this education space was produced.

Rooted in a critical socio-spatial theory, social network analysis (SNA) focuses on analyzing and representing relationships between social actors. It has recently been recognized as a powerful methodological tool for critical education research (Au & Ferrare, 2014; Ball, 2012; Ferrare & Apple, 2010; Gulson & Symes, 2007; Robertson, 2010). According to SNA, social relationships consist of nodes and ties. Nodes represent social actors such as individuals or organizations within the network, while ties represent relationships between social actors. Thus, SNA focuses on both identifying social actors in social networks and examining how they are related to each other (Dicken et al., 2001; Larsen & Beech, 2014). More importantly, applying a critical lens to a SNA approach entails focusing on power relations embedded in social network relationships (Ball, 2012; Ferrare & Apple, 2010). SNA has been recognized as “a methodological development,” which challenges traditional education research approaches that often hold the binary views of the relations between the global and the local (Larsen & Beech, 2014). Although global educational spaces have been increased by globalization processes and phenomena, very few researchers use SNA to study concrete empirical evidence and look at power relations among social actors in such emerging space. My dissertation fills in this gap by using SNA to critically examine emerging international high school programs in China.

### **Bourdieu’s Concepts of Field, Capital, and Habitus**

Field, capital, and habitus are the central concepts of Bourdieu’s theory of social practices. The literature review on elite education and international education has shown that research in the two subfields of the sociology of education recognize the role of these three concepts in analyzing

how advantage is (re)produced through education. Considerable attention has been given to Bourdieu's concepts of cultural capital. However, less attention was paid to habitus and field. Although both sets of literature point to the emergence of international/transnational spaces of education, less research has focused on examining whether these social spaces represent new fields of power "within which new processes of elite formation are being developed" (Maxwell, 2015, p. 17). In response to this research lacuna, we not only need to recognize the fundamental interplay between these three concepts in Bourdieu's thinking (Ball, 2015), but also need to extend the concepts from the national field of power to international/transnational spaces.

The central focus of Bourdieu's sociology is on the relationship between culture, power, and social positioning. The concepts of capital and habitus appear earlier than the notion of field in his work. Bourdieu conceptualizes resources as capital when they become objects of struggle as valued resources for individuals, families, groups, or organizations to maintain and enhance their positions in the social order (Swartz, 1997, p. 73-74). Bourdieu (1986) extends Marxism's idea of capital to include various kinds of capital: material (economic), cultural, social, and symbolic. His notion of economic capital is similar to capital in Marx's sense of the word, including money and property. Cultural capital exists in three forms, including the objectified state, the embodied state, and the institutionalized state. The first one refers to material objects possessed by people or organizations like books and works of art. The second one includes dispositions, habits, and taste for 'high art.' The third one is expressed in terms of educational credentials, qualifications, or certificates. Bourdieu (1986) defines social capital as "the aggregate of the actual or potential resources which are linked to possession of a durable network of more or less institutionalized relationships of mutual acquaintance and recognition." He emphasizes two characteristics in his concept of social capital: a resources is connected with group membership and social networks;

social capital is based on mutual recognition (p. 248-249). Bourdieu (1986, 1990) argues for capital conversions where different forms of capital can be converted from one type to another.

Bourdieu's concept of habitus represents "an attempt to transcend dualisms of agency-structure, objective-subjective and the micro-macro" (Reay, 2004, p. 432). As Harker and May (1993) comment, "Habitus sets the boundaries within which agents are 'free' to adopt strategic practices" (p. 174). For Bourdieu (1990), agents' practical sense or a "feel for game" enables the dialectic of structure and agency (p. 66). Their strategic practices, based on the tuitions of the practical sense, are oriented by habitus. It is worth noting that Bourdieu uses habitus to account for cultural disjuncture and social change, rather than simply for social reproduction (Wacquant, 2014). Among many explanations about habitus, he wrote that habitus is composed of:

...systems of durable, transposable *dispositions*, *structured* structures predisposed to function as *structuring* structures, that is, as principles which generate and organize practices and representations that can be objectively adapted to their outcomes without presupposing a conscious aiming at ends or an express mastery of the operations necessary in order to attain them. (Bourdieu, 1990, p. 53, emphasis added)

This quotation emphasizes habitus as "a dispositional theory of action" (Wacquant, 2014). Some key features of habitus are worth noting here. The set of transposable dispositions constituting habitus are "durable but not eternal" (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992, p. 133). Thus, habitus is changing and changeable. The language of "*structured* structures" and "*structuring* structures" captures the malleability of habitus, which refers to the relation between *primary* habitus and *secondary* habitus. As Wacquant (2014) explains, the *primary* habitus is the set of dispositions acquired through early class-specific socialization experiences within families. The *secondary* habitus is grafted with the *primary* habitus and subsequently produced through education and both implicit and explicit pedagogies. Habitus is acquired over time and across different spaces. In addition, habitus alone never results in definite practices; rather, "it takes the *conjunction of*

*disposition and position*, subjective capacity and objective possibility, habitus and social space (or field) to produce a given conduct or expression” (Wacquant, 2014, p. 5, original emphasis). As Swartz (1997) notes, “Practices occur when habitus encounters those competitive arenas called fields” (p. 141). This point is well demonstrated in Bourdieu’s (1984) summary formula in *Distinction*: [(habitus) (capital)] + field = practice (p. 101). The interplay of habitus, capital (particularly cultural capital), and field generates the logic of practice (Bourdieu, 1990). Field is a central pillar in this formula because it denotes a structured social space in which habitus and capital operate. As Bourdieu and Wacquant (1992) emphasize, “A *capital does not exist and function except in relation to a field*” (p. 101, emphasis in original). These analyses point to the importance of looking at the concept of field and doing relational field analysis.

Bourdieu’s notion of field is a duality, which is composed of two inseparable constituents – the space of positions and the space of position-takings (Ferrare & Apple, 2015). The former refers to “the structured systems of practices” while the latter refers to “expressions of agents” such as tastes, choices, preferences, stances, or styles. Both spaces must be analyzed together (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992, p. 105). Habitus, where agents’ perceptions of positional possibilities are inscribed in, serves as the mediating force between positions and position-takings (Ferrare & Apple, 2015, p. 47). To better understand Bourdieu’s concept of field and its relation to the notions of capital and habitus, we need to recognize four structural properties of fields. First, “fields are arenas of struggle for control over valued resources” or capital. Actors struggle over particular forms of capital in fields. Second, “fields are structured spaces of dominant and subordinate positions based on types and amounts of capital.” This property highlights the unequal distribution of specific capital. In order to maintain or improve their positions in the field, actors use different kinds of *field strategies*, such as conservation, succession, and subversion. Third,

“fields impose on actors specific forms of struggle” (Swartz, 1997, 122-125). As Swartz (1997) illuminates,

For fields to operate there must be agents with the appropriate habitus to make them capable and willing to invest in particular fields. New arrivals to fields must pay the price of an initial investment for entry, which involves recognition of the value of the game and the practical knowledge of how to play it. (p. 126)

This statement points to a relatively neglected research area – “identifying the types of habitus that attract individuals to particular fields,” and also directs attention to the emergence of conflict and tension in a given field. This tacit acceptance of the rules of the game is what Bourdieu calls *doxa*. *Doxa* leads to the *misrecognition* of power relations and thereby contributes to maintaining social order. Fourth, fields have relative autonomy. This property emphasizes the “dual character of their interconnectedness with and independence from external forces” (p. 126). Great attention has been given to internal analysis of field, particularly contradictions under the internal logic of the field. Interfield contradictions deserve careful attention too, as Swartz (1997) suggests.

Further, Bourdieu and Wacquant (1992) note that “[i]n analytic terms, a field may be defined as a network, or a configuration, of objective relations between positions” (p. 97). This point resonates with what they argue – “to think in terms of field is to *think relationally*” (p. 96, emphasis in original). They also highlight three necessary and interconnected steps to do a field analysis. First, research must relate field-specific practices to the field of power at given historical moments. Second, research must map out the objective structure of the relations between the positions occupied by the individuals, groups, or institutions as they compete for the legitimation of their power within the particular fields where their practices occur. Third, research must analyze the habitus of agents brought to these fields and identify the social trajectories that the agents pursue within the field of struggle (p. 104-105).

Bourdieu's concepts of field, capital, and habitus are theoretically and methodologically important. They offers avenues for understanding the way that the international/transnational spaces of education, where IHSCPs are situated in, constitute a new field of power relations and also a field of struggles. These concepts enable me to examine the ways in which the new Chinese elites have control over or access to valued educational resources. Bourdieu's field analytical perspective leads me to emphasize how class, habitus, and trajectory shape the entry of agents into the field. His field analysis also directs my attention to the interconnection between micro-educational processes of the family and schooling, meso-institutional transformations, and macro-social change and power relations.

While Bourdieu's relational field analysis are powerful, he is more concerned with "power games, positioning, position taking, strategies of various forms of capital accumulation and dissipation" than "the inner constitution of a specific signifier of distinction." As Bernstein (2000) comments, Bourdieu's theory of cultural reproduction is more concerned with "relations to" than "relations within." To some extent, his concepts of field, habitus, and capital lack the ability to "describe the process of construction, organization and transmission modes of pedagogic discourse" (p. xiv). This limitation points to the need for linking critical curriculum studies to Bourdieu's theory of practice so to develop a fuller understanding of the processes of social production revolving around access to and acquisition of educational knowledge.

### **Critical Curriculum Studies<sup>27</sup>**

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<sup>27</sup> Critical curriculum studies is a loose term, as argued by some scholars such as Sadovnik (1995). It consists of what is known as the "new sociology of education" in England and what Young (2008) calls the American tradition of "critical curriculum studies." Michael Apple's (1979) groundbreaking book *Ideology and Curriculum* incorporates the sociology of knowledge into the development of a critical approach to the curriculum. It marks an important milestone in a continuing process of developing the field of critical curriculum studies.

It is not my purpose to review the long tradition of critical curriculum studies; rather, in this section, I focus on synthesizing the structuralist, neo-Marxist, phenomenological, and interpretative approaches to curriculum studies by discussing Bernstein's education code theory and Michael Apple's perspective on a critical approach to the curriculum.<sup>28</sup> This theoretical synthesis guides me to examine how curriculum and pedagogy actually prepare privileged students for study abroad, how advantage is constructed inside the school, and how students' subjectivities are constituted and shaped by their schooling experiences.

### ***Bernstein's Educational Code Theory: Curriculum, Pedagogy, and Evaluation***<sup>29</sup>

Bernstein has developed a systematic approach to understanding the relationships among the social division of labor, the family, and the school. His later work focuses on "connecting macropower and class relations to the microeducational processes of the school" (Sadovnik, 1995, p. 7). Bernstein's unique contribution to critical curriculum studies is to uncover ideology and power relations by examining the underlying structures of school knowledge and practice. His notion of educational code refers to a "regulative principle, which underlies various message systems, especially curriculum and pedagogy" (Atkinson, 1985, p. 136). There are three message systems: curriculum, pedagogy, and evaluation constituting the underlying structure of the realizations of formal educational knowledge. He defines curriculum as "what counts as valid knowledge," pedagogy as "what counts as valid transmission of knowledge," and evaluation as "what counts as a valid realization of the knowledge on the part of the taught" (Bernstein, 1977, p. 85). The notion of educational code "bears some relation to Bourdieu's concept of habitus." As

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<sup>28</sup> Van Manen (1977) explains that "The interpretive approach to curriculum seeks to analyze and clarify meanings, perceptions, assumptions, prejudices, and presuppositions. This approach attempts to make experientially meaningful the curriculum as a subjective and interpersonal process" (p. 214).

<sup>29</sup> I would like to thank Leonel Lim for his thoughtful comments on Bernstein's theory. Leonel offered very helpful advice and support throughout my reading of Bernstein's work and critical curriculum studies.

Bernstein (1990) explains, “code may be regarded as an attempt to write what may perhaps be called pedagogic grammars of specialized habituses and the forms of their transmission which attempt to regulate their acquisition” (p. 3). Thus, Bernstein’s code theory helps explain how Wacquant’s (2014) *secondary* habitus is produced through both visible and invisible pedagogies.

Classification and framing are two fundamental concepts used to analyze the structure of the message systems. Here, he developed a series of paired concepts to examine the role of the structurally differentiated knowledge, its transmission and acquisition in the construction of students’ identities. For Bernstein (1977), *classification* is concerned with the organization of knowledge into curriculum, while *framing* is related to the transmission of knowledge through pedagogic practices. The concept of *classification* is used to examine *power relations* between categories by focusing on the degree of boundary maintenance. The concept of *framing* is used to investigate *social control* on communications in local, interactional pedagogic relations between teachers and students, between students and parents, etc. Thus, particular attention should be given to the issue of “*who controls what*” in terms of “the *internal logic* of the pedagogical practice” (Bernstein, 2000, p. 12, original emphasis).

Bernstein outlines two types of curriculum codes: collection and integrated. The *collection code* refers to a curriculum characterized by strong classification and framing. In this code, knowledge is hierarchically organized into distinct subjects and educational contents are well insulated. Teachers are more likely to determine what is taught, when, and where. This code brings *positional knowledge*. By contrast, an *integrated curriculum code* is featured by weak classification and framing, meaning subjects are more interdependent; teachers tend to cooperate with colleagues and students; students have more freedom and are able to express their individuality and difference. These characteristics entail new forms of communication, such as



*personalized knowledge*. Drawing from Durkheim, Bernstein's analysis of "the way in which the shift from collection to integrated curriculum codes represents the evolution from mechanism to organic solidarity, with curricular change marking the movement from the sacred to the profane" (Sadovnik, 1995, p. 9). In reality, there may be mixed types of codes within the same educational system. Thus, the questions of "who receives which code, at what age, and at what educational level" involve the issues of power relations and social control (Macdonald, 1977, p. 27).

Furthermore, Bernstein highlights the relation between pedagogy, symbolic control, and identity. He argues that how knowledge is transmitted and acquired profoundly constructs and shapes students' pedagogic identities. Thus, his concepts of expressive order, instrumental order, and pedagogic device deserve special attention. Bernstein (2000) explains that the expressive order deals with the transmission of conduct, character, and manner, while the instrumental order is concerned with the transmission of specialized skills and bodies of knowledge (p. 96). The expressive and instrumental order tends to lead to the construction of different identities – positional or personalized, respectively. These two orders further result in different social relations within the school – "stratified" from the expressive order or "differentiated" from the instrumental order (Bernstein, 1977). For individual schools, there may be variations in the relative strengths of each of the two orders. Also, there are often tensions between the orders, as Bernstein underscores. The concepts of expressive order and instrumental order helps me make sense of parental preferences for particular types of schools and curriculum programs, which goes deeper than just using Bourdieu's notion of a conversion strategy.

Bernstein's concept of pedagogic device is also useful as it helps to develop a more nuanced understanding of the relationships between education, cultural power, and social control

through looking at how pedagogic processes shape consciousness differentially.<sup>30</sup> As Bernstein (2000) illuminates,

Essentially the pedagogic device is a symbolic ruler, ruling consciousness, in the sense of having power over it, and ruling, in the sense of measuring the legitimacy of the realisations of consciousness. The questions become whose ruler, what consciousness? In this way there is always a struggle between social groups for ownership of the device. Those who own the device own the means for perpetuating their power through discursive means and establishing, or attempting to establish, their own ideological representations. (p. 114)

He further points out the intrinsic grammar of the pedagogic device, which consists of distributed rules, recontextualising rules, and evaluative rules. These three rules are interrelated and hierarchically organized rules: “recontextualising rules are deriving from the distributive rules, and evaluative rules are derived from the recontextualising rules” (p. 28). The distributed rules distribute different forms of consciousness to diverse social groups through distributing access to official knowledge and access to the possibility of new knowledge. Thus, the distributed rules not only “always convey a distribution of power relations” (Lim, 2015, p. 44), but also create a specialised field of the production of discourse, which is “controlled more and more today by the state itself” (Bernstein, 2000, p. 31). The recontextualising rules construct the formation of specific pedagogic discourse. For Bernstein, pedagogic discourse is a recontextualising principle for the circulation and reordering of discourses, which creates recontextualising fields. He distinguishes these fields into an official recontextualising field (ORF) and a pedagogic recontextualising field (PRF). The former is created and dominated by the state, while the latter consists of various agents with practicing ideologies. It is PRF that creates both relative autonomy of education and struggle over pedagogic discourse and its practices (p. 33). It is worth noting that Bernstein’s notion of field is similar to that of Bourdieu, which refers to a social space of contestation (Singh, 2002). The

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<sup>30</sup> The pedagogic device is a key concept of what Bernstein calls “a sociological theory of pedagogy.”

evaluative rules regulate pedagogical practice by defining the standards that must be reached and providing the criteria to be transmitted and acquired (p. 114-115). As Bernstein (2000) emphasizes, “[e]valuation condenses the meanings of the whole device,” which is “to provide a symbolic rules for consciousness” (p. 36). Overall, the pedagogical device is “a condition for the production, reproduction, and transformation of culture” (p. 37-38). It identifies three hierarchically related fields, that is, the fields of production, recontextualization, and reproduction (Singh, 2002). This pedagogical device offer a much more complex analysis of the distribution, recontextualization, and evaluation of educational knowledge, as well as the construction of pedagogic identities.

Bernstein links the concept of pedagogic device to the study of contemporary curricula reforms, which guides me to examine the relationship between the emerging international high school curriculum in China, Chinese educational reforms, and the construction of new pedagogic identities. Bernstein (2000) highlights that an education reform can be “regarded as the outcome of the struggle to produce and institutionalise particular identities.” He proposes four pedagogic identities in the official arena through educational reforms, including retrospective, prospective, de-centered market, and de-centered therapeutic identities. These four pedagogic identities represent different approaches to regulating and managing contemporary moral, cultural, economic, and technological changes. He stresses that “these different approaches to the management of change are expected to become the lived experience of teachers and students, through the shaping of their pedagogic identity” (p. 66). This point foregrounds the importance of examining students’ and teachers’ experiences with curriculum, a crucial part of what Apple (2004) calls the curriculum-in-use. I will return to this point shortly.

Bernstein’s (2000) analysis of pedagogic identities guides my study to link pedagogic practices at individual and institutional levels to wider processes of social production. The

identities are distinguished into those generated from centering resources and those constructed from decentered resources. Centering resources are managed by the state and often concerned with national discourses. Centered resources tend to focus on the past and construct retrospective pedagogic identities (R.I.) and prospective pedagogic identities (P.I.). The management of retrospective identities leads to the state's tight control over discursive inputs of education, but not over its outputs, while the management of prospective identities requires the state to control both inputs and outputs of education. Thus, Bernstein (2000) refers to R.I.s as an "old conservative" position and P.I.s as a "neo-conservative" position.

By contrast, decentered resources draw from local resources where relevant institutions have some autonomy over their resources. They often consider local discourses and focus on the present. Decentered resources produce two de-centered pedagogic identities: de-centered market (D.C.M.) and de-centered therapeutic (D.C.T.). The D.C.M. identity is constructed by local markets. This instrumental identity reflects external contingencies and is oriented towards satisfying external competitive demands. Bernstein (2000) refers to D.C.M. identity as "neo-liberal" position, which constructs the identity of educators and students "less through mechanism of introjection but far more through mechanism of *projection*" (p. 70, original emphasis). By contrast, the D.C.T. identity is formed by "complex theories of personal, cognitive and social development," which are the means of a control invisible to students and educators. The therapeutic identity is "oriented to autonomous, non-specialised, flexible thinking, and socially to team work as an active participant" (p. 68). Unlike instrumental identities that are external and produced by projection, therapeutic identities are internal and constructed by procedures of introjection. As Bernstein puts it, "[w]hereas the D.C.M. position projects contingent, differentiated competitive identities, the D.C.T. position ideally projects stable, integrated identities with adaptable co-operative practices"

(p. 70). He highlights the importance of recognizing the concept of self, pointing out that the self is regarded as a personal project in the construction of the therapeutic identity. He refers to the D.C.T. identity as “professionals.”

Bernstein (2000) emphasizes that de-centered identities are individualized constructions. The D.C.T. identity is constructed by the competence model of pedagogic practice and context, which is based on the concept of empowerment. The D.C.M. identity is produced by the performance model of pedagogic practice and context. The competence mode is directly linked to symbolic control. The performance mode is more directly linked to the economy although it clearly has symbolic control functions (p. 54). These oppositional identities and modes may coexist and interact with each other, which may lead to the pedagogic schizoid position.

The analysis of the above four pedagogic identities show different positions and oppositions reflecting the struggle for dominance within the official arena of educational reform. It is worth noting that the different identity constructions do not replace or displace each other; instead, mixing of the models and modes may take place. They may have a complementary and/or shifting relation, depending on context. Also, Bernstein (2000) mentions that globalizing capitalism weakens stable collective resources, which entails “a disturbance and disembedding of identities and facilitated new identity constructions” (p. 72). He applies the model for the construction of the aforementioned pedagogic identities to model the emerging identity field and its arenas of opposition. He then proposes the prospective re-centering pedagogic identity that is “essentially future oriented in contrast to the past of retrospective and the present of de-centered identities” (p. 76). This feature points to the possibility of a new prospective identity. The identity of becoming involves a new fusion, which may denote the schismatic tendency in the construction of the prospective re-centering pedagogic identity. This process of becoming also leads to a re-

centered state, as Bernstein notes. This analysis seems consistent with Brown's critique on neoliberalism in terms of the remaking of the state and subjects. Although Bernstein's idea of pedagogic device doesn't directly address the relation between neoliberalism, neoliberal globalization, and education, it provides useful analytic tools for unpacking the pedagogic identities of students, educational institutions, and the state in a changing globalized world.

### ***Apple's Politics of School Curriculum: Knowledge and Power***

Drawing on the critical tradition of curriculum studies in the United States., Michael Apple also takes up the work from Bourdieu, Bernstein and other European critical scholars such as Michael Young and Geoff Whitty to look at how the stratification of school knowledge and curriculum differentiate children. He highlights three concepts for uncovering the relations between knowledge and power, including Williams' (1961) selective tradition, Althusser's (1971) ideology, and Gramsci's (1971) hegemony. His critical discussion of official knowledge and hidden curriculum influences my dissertation research, both theoretically and methodologically.

Apple's (1976, 1996, 2000) notion of official knowledge is an excellent embodiment of his concerns with the control, selection, and distribution of "ideological" knowledge in society. The selection and organization of curriculum (knowledge) involves social and ideological choices (Young, 1971, p. 24). He emphasizes the importance of taking crucial questions about the selection of knowledge seriously: Where does knowledge come from? Whose knowledge is it? Who selects it? Why is it organized and taught in particular ways and to which particular groups? (Apple, 2000, 2004). Apple's contribution to the nuanced investigation of official/ legitimate knowledge offers powerful strategies for understanding the ways in which the form and content of curricular knowledge serves ideologically to support and naturalize structurally-based social and economic inequalities (Weis et al., 2006, p. 5). Thus, critical curricula scholars must recognize, document,

and examine “the intensely political nature of the knowledge legitimization processes” (Weis et al, p. 3). Apple’s definition of official knowledge and his emphasis on the issue of selective tradition of curriculum guides me to uncover ideology and power relations embedded in Sunny High IAP by investigating who participates in and/or is involved in the selection and organization of curriculum, in which ways, and for whose interests.

Apple’s concept of hidden curriculum is also very useful to my study. Drawing on the study from Jackson (1968) and Dreeben (1967), Apple (1971, 1977 with King, 1988 with Beyer, 1995, 2004) further examines the nature of social (in particular, labor) control of the norms, values, and belief systems embedded in the form, content, organization of the curriculum, the classroom, and the evaluation of students.<sup>31</sup> As he illustrates,

“The hidden curriculum in schools serves to reinforce basic rules surrounding the nature of conflict and its uses. It posits a network of assumptions that, when internalized by students, establishes the boundaries of legitimacy. This process is accomplished not so much by explicit instances showing the negative value of conflict, but by nearly the total absence of instances showing the importance of intellectual and normative conflict in subject areas. The fact is that these assumptions are *obligatory* for the students, since at no time are the assumptions articulated or questioned. (Apple, 1971, p. 29, original emphasis)

Here, Apple highlights the unmarked ways in which the taken-for-granted day-to-day regularities of school allow particular ideologies, serving the interests of particular social groups, to circulate. These hidden ways actually contribute to the reproduction of ideologies that buttress existing structurally-based inequalities. Furthermore, Apple’s study on hidden curriculum “advanced the discussion from labor force correspondence to consideration of gender, race, conflict, resistance, and the political function of schooling” (Margolis et al., 2001, p. 13).

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<sup>31</sup> Other contemporary critical curriculum scholars such as Jean Anyon (1980), Henry Giroux (1981, 1983), and Peter McLaren (1989) have also discussed hidden curriculum.

Regarding methodological considerations of how to study official knowledge and hidden curriculum, Apple (2004) notes that “[s]chools do not only “process people;” they “process knowledge” as well. He suggests that a critical researcher should pay greater attention to the “stuff” of curriculum with a focus on the issues surrounding the knowledge that is actually taught in schools and what is considered to be socially legitimate knowledge. This approach points to the importance of examining curriculum-in-use and the school’s cultural, economic, and political positions. He claims that schools as an institution and school life are not neutral.

Apple (1978) also emphasizes three major inquiry areas of school life in understanding the relationship between ideology and school experience. They are: “the actual and hidden content of knowledge, the process of teacher-student interaction within classrooms, and the common-sense categories that educators, students, and sociological researchers use to order, guide, and give meaning to their actions” (p. 495). He suggests that a curriculum scholar needs to seek “social interests embodied in the knowledge form itself,” rather than taking for granted that curricular knowledge is neutral. He further illustrates:

The points also imply that one must study curriculum in use within schools. Instead of input-output studies of school achievement, the researcher needs to “live” in classrooms, to see the complex forms of interaction that occur in classrooms. In this way, more accurate pictures can be got of which particular “kinds” of students “get” what particular kinds of knowledge and dispositions. This makes analyses of the labeling process in schools of particular importance, obviously. Furthermore, one can see how knowledge is actually created and used in school settings. Finally, the tacit teaching of a less overt, hidden curriculum can be documented.” (Apple, 2004, p. 15)

Apple’s brief statement offers valuable insights into the issues of how to conduct critical curricular research. He emphasizes the importance of investigating curriculum-in-use and pertinent school life in order to uncover hidden power relations. He suggests that a critical researcher should describe what goes on in school. The focus on the micro-process of schooling requires him/her to observe social interactions among students and teachers in the school settings. In particular, one



must pay special attention to “how the basic day to day regularities of schools contribute to student learning the ideologies” (p. 20). Specifically, one should look critically at “the tacit teaching to the student of norms, values, and dispositions that goes on simply by their living in and copying with the institution expectations and routines of schools day in and day out for a number of years” (p. 13). Consistent with the phenomenological inquiry emphasizing how social actors construct knowledge and practice through socialization, the research approach Apple advocates for enables critical scholars to document the process of how particular knowledge and practice is created and used. This powerfully examines the relationship between the actual and hidden content of knowledge, social interaction, symbols at schools and the principles of social and cultural control in a society. This phenomenological inquiry to curricular programs complements Bernstein’s structuralist approach to curriculum studies.

The combination of Bernstein’s educational code theory and Apple’s emphasis on studying curriculum-in-use synthesizes the study of the structure of curriculum and pedagogy with the study of specific curriculum experiences. Through this synthesis, I am aware that to examine *how* internationalized curriculum, pedagogy, and evaluation actually prepare students who plan to study abroad, I should pay attention to not only what they learn, but also how they learn content. Specifically, this combination perspective leads me to examine how curriculum, pedagogy, and evaluation prepare privileged children for managerial and highly paid jobs by linking students’ schooling experiences to the construction of advantage (Anyon, 1980; Willis, 1977). This uncovers power relations and social control embedded in the education system.

### **Pilot Study**

This section is devoted to how my pilot study contributes to the construction of the conceptual framework and the design of the dissertation research. With IRB approval, I conducted

an exploratory study titled “Transnational Experiences of Chinese International Undergraduate Students in U.S. Colleges” from October 2012 to April 2013. This study tested my research ideas and methods and explored their implications for this dissertation research (Maxwell, 2005, p. 56-57), which will be discussed after a brief description of the pilot study.

In the pilot study, I recruited international undergraduate students from mainland China who were enrolled in Lake University (pseudonym), a world-class public university in the United States. I employed ethnographic methods such as participant observation and interviews to explore these students’ decision-making to come to America, their high school experiences in China, their transitions from Chinese high schools to Lake University, and their college experiences in the United States. The study involved a general observation of 12 male and female Chinese international undergraduate students and semi-structured interviews with 3 focal research participants. The focal participants include one female student from Beijing, a cosmopolitan city in China and two male students, respectively, from Zhengzhou and Chongqing. Zhengzhou is the capital of Henan Province, located in Central China. Chongqing is also a metropolitan city in Southwestern China.

This pilot study informs my theoretical framework by offering insights into the educational choices and experiences of such Chinese international undergraduate students. There are some important themes emerging from the study, which direct me to include the concepts of neoliberalism and neoliberal globalization, Bourdieu’s theory of practice, and critical curriculum studies as crucial components of the theoretical framework of the dissertation study. For instance, this study highlights the complexity of the students’ choice and decision-making processes to select a university in the United States. Their struggle over an elite education in China and their desire for an international education in a globalized world illustrate the changing socioeconomic,

political, and geographic environments influencing and shaping their beliefs and behaviors. The in-depth interview data demonstrate how these students negotiate their formal schooling at the high school level, along with their overwhelming use of educational services outside of school such as English training classes during their U.S. college application process. This study also reveals the active involvement of these students' parents in this process by illuminating how privileged social class in China utilize capital conversation in international education markets to secure educational resources and opportunities for their children. These themes direct my attention to the marketization and privatization of education facilitated by market-oriented neoliberal reforms and neoliberal globalization, as well as Bourdieu's theory of practice.

Interestingly, participants in this pilot study did not attend the international high school curriculum programs due to the dearth in such programs. However, all focal participants consistently pointed out the growing trend of Chinese high school students who chose to study at U.S. colleges attending the emerging international high school curriculum programs, thus leading to my focus on this new trend. Along with the focus, I integrate critical curriculum studies into the development of the conceptual framework.

The pilot study also shapes my research design. In addition to confirming the advantages of using ethnographic research methods such as providing a "thick description" of participants (Geertz, 1994), the study has provided me with an opportunity to make adjustments and revisions in the dissertation research. For example, as already noted, the students' interpretations and perspectives on their educational choices and experiences point out the complex interplay between their formal and informal high school activities inside and outside school, as well as the key role that their parents played in educational practices. In response to the former, I expanded my focus to include both students' high school educational experiences inside and outside school in the

dissertation study. The latter informs the need for interviewing parents. Thus, I expanded the scope of inquiry to include parents as research participants.

In summary, the conceptual framework of the dissertation study is constructed by a theoretical convergence. It is constituted through the interaction between my experiential knowledge, relevant existing research and theories, and the pilot study.

### Chapter 3: Research Methodology and Research Methods

Critical ethnography begins with an ethical responsibility to address processes of unfairness or injustice within a particular *lived* domain. By “ethical responsibility,” I mean a compelling sense of duty and commitment based on principles of human freedom and well-being and, hence, a compassion for the suffering of living beings. The conditions for existence within a particular context are not as they *could* be for specific subjects; as a result, the researcher feels an ethical obligation to make a contribution toward changing those conditions toward greater freedom and equity. The critical ethnographer also takes us beneath surface appearances, disrupts the *status quo*, and unsettles both neutrality and taken-for-granted assumptions by bringing to light underlying and obscure operations of power and control.

(Madison, 2011, p. 5)

I argued that greater reflection on the part of the researcher might produce more inclusive, more flexible, yet philosophically informed methodologies sensitive to the power relations inherent in fieldwork... I argued that fieldwork is intensely personal, in that the positionality and biography of the researcher plays a central role in the research process, in the field as well as in the final text.

(England, 1994, p. 87)

This chapter discusses research methodology and methods used in this dissertation study.

The chapter consists of two main parts. The first part introduces research methodology and methods, data collection, and data analysis and interpretation. The second part deals with some of the issues of the researcher’s positionality, representation, power, and research ethics.

#### Research Methodology and Methods

This dissertation project uses critical qualitative research. Consistent with my theoretical framework, this research approach not only enables me to draw a more complex and nuanced picture of educational practice and its consequences, but also examine power relations that lead to conditions of social inequality, domination, and social injustice (Carspecken & Apple, 1992; Carspecken, 1996; Denzin & Lincoln, 2000; Eisner, 1998). Given my focus on exploring the relationship between structure and agency, I employ critical bifocality, as a theory of method, to look at the very linkages between social structural arrangements and discursive educational

practices in a globalizing world (Weis & Fine, 2012). Specifically, this theory of method guides me to collect macro-structural data such as educational policies on the one hand, and to gather micro-level data from school, curriculum programs, and family on the other hand.

This dissertation is not a traditional bounded ethnographic case study on a school or a community. Rather, I follow ethnographically neoliberal policies as they flow through different levels, from macro, meso, and micro levels, in different spaces. I look at how the neoliberal policies are taken up on the ground at a particular school and by rising Chinese elite class. Given the fact that my research pays particular attention to the links between education, globalization, and internationalization, I draw from the approaches of global ethnography and multi-sited ethnography to highlight the importance of recognizing “the multiple fields, scales, and mobilities associated with globalization” (Epstein, Fahey, & Keyway, 2013, p. 471). The concepts of global ethnography and multi-sited ethnography challenge the ethnographic tradition that views a single and bounded place as the research field. Burawoy et al. (2000) introduce global ethnography as a research methodology by emphasizing the three dimensions of globalization – global forces, global connections, and global imaginations. Marcus (1998) points out the emergence of multi-sited ethnography in the globalized era. My study follows these new research approaches to examine the flow and impact of neoliberal policies. Instead of only selecting a single and bounded place like a school as the research site, I explore the various sites within the social, economic, and political landscapes of privileged Chinese young people’s lives, such as online media resources (part of popular culture), in-school time, out-of-school time and activities, Internet forums, and Internet websites. Thus, I used multi-sited ethnography as a systematic approach to collecting data. In the next section, I will address how I gather data systematically.

## **Research Methods and Data Collection**

I used ethnographic research methods to collect data. I first carried out media research from spring 2011 to spring 2014, which involved data collection from major on-line media sources in both the United States and China in regard to the social phenomenon of Chinese high school students applying to U.S. colleges and the development of international high school curriculum programs in China. At the same time, I gathered related education policies. This macro-level social and political data reveal that these two phenomena are interconnected; they involved the mobilities of wealthy Chinese students and they have global and national scales.

Based on this macro-level data collection, I then conducted a pilot study with IRB approval from October 2012 to April 2013 at Lake University (pseudonym), a top-ranked public university in a metropolitan city in the United States. As I have discussed in chapter 2, this small-scale study entailed my observing and interviewing Chinese international undergraduate students from Mainland China. The study highlights a trend that an increasing number of Chinese students who choose to go to U.S. colleges prefer to attend international high school programs established by Chinese public key high schools in cosmopolitan and metropolitan cities in China. This finding was consistent with what the on-line media news suggested.

The macro-level data and data from the pilot study led me to focus on newly-established international high school curriculum programs in Moon City (pseudonym), a cosmopolitan city in China. I paid attention to collecting data from major on-line news that reported on these international programs as well as relevant policy documents. These meso-level data show that there were 24 government-approved international high school curriculum programs in the city. I analyzed the policy documents regarding each of these programs. These analyses reveal that the programs were framed as Chinese-Foreign Cooperation Running School (CFCRS) high school

curriculum programs. Under the support of the CFCRS policy, these curriculum programs each had a similar structure – Chinese high schools as Chinese partners and foreign high schools as foreign cooperation partners. I visited the websites of these Chinese and foreign schools. I found that while most of the Chinese partner schools are public key high schools, the majority of the foreign partner schools are U.S. private high schools. In addition, each international high school program adopted various international curricula, such as A-Level, AP, and GAC. The Sunny High IAP International Curriculum Program is the largest one among these 24 newly-established international high school curriculum programs in Moon City, so I selected it as a case study.

Sunny High IAP Program is a boarding high school. This high school is only 10-12 grade. It is affiliated with Sunny High School, which is a top-tier public key school in Moon City. There were 486 Chinese high school students and 57 teachers from China and foreign countries (such as the United States, the United Kingdom, Australia, New Zealand, and Canada) in 2003. From May to September in the year of 2013, I conducted my field research in the program. I fully immersed myself in the school by living in the girls' dorm on campus for nine weeks.

I surveyed students in all the *banji* (homerooms) for grades 10, 11, and 12. Most *banji* had 24-28 students. My survey asked the students' age, gender, the status of household registration (Moon City residents or non-Moon City residents), type of middle school they attended, family structures, parents' educational levels and occupations, socio-economic conditions, and parental involvement in their education. About 16.5% of the 486 students either declined to complete my survey or were not in class or school at the time when I conducted the survey. It is worth noting that although the official graduation day was May 31<sup>st</sup>, many 12<sup>th</sup> grade students were not in school in May. Since they had received admission to foreign colleges – mostly to colleges in the U.S. – the students had been busy with graduation travels with classmates, attending extracurricular



classes for their hobbies or driving schools, or staying at home to take a rest or learn cooking that would prepare them for their lives abroad. This situation impacted the number of students who participated in the survey, such that the survey return rate is 83.5%. Data from the survey provided me with basic demographic information about students and their family background.

From May to mid-July, I spent my weekdays and most weekends on campus. I participated in the everyday life that these students experienced at school, from the sounding of the chimes at 6:30 a.m., to wake up the students, until 10:30 p.m., when lights went out. I ate meals with students and teachers in the school cafeteria, observing and informally talking with them. I visited both boys' and girls' dorms, chatting with students and dorm teachers. I participated in daily school activities, such as the flag-raising ceremony and speeches on Mondays, morning exercises, eye massage exercises, self-study at night, etc. Such participation not only gave me a sense of the students' daily routine, but also made my presence appear to be more natural and helped me build rapport with students and teachers over time. I also participated in students' extra-curricular activities, clubs, events during the Annual Psychological Health Week, the twelfth graders' rehearsal for graduation-performance as well as their graduation ceremony and performance, and so on. These activities were held inside the school. I observed the interactions among students as well as their intercourse with teachers in the classrooms, hallways, the cafeteria, dorm, athletic spaces, in other available school spaces, at career day, new students' recruitment days, during ACT tests, final exams, community service, etc. I also acted as an unpaid substitute teacher for a 10<sup>th</sup>-grade class, which provided me with a valuable opportunity to approach 10<sup>th</sup> graders.

Although my focus participants were high school students in the school, I used the snowball method to recruit teachers, school administrators, and parents. My field work at the school confirmed this design and informed me of the importance of including educators in my study

because it helped me gain a whole picture of students' life at school and more deeply understand their schooling experience. Therefore, I conducted participant observations with and interviewed teachers because I believed that doing so would give me a more complete picture of students' educational experiences. Thus, I observed classroom teaching and staff meetings, and participated in teachers' professional development taking place on both weekdays and weekends to generate data related to pedagogical and curricular matters.

Some preliminary findings from informal talk with students and teachers as well as the semi-structured interviews with students revealed that students' parents played a crucial role in their educational experiences for choosing this school and getting access to the school. Parental involvement in these students' education also included such practices as helping seek and choose which *zhongjie* (中介, study-abroad consulting companies) to work with on their child's U.S. college application. Hence, I also observed parents in parent-teacher conferences, parents' training programs, career days, etc. This approach facilitated my data collection of parental involvement in their children's education. In addition, I spent the middle of July through late August contacting and interviewing sixteen parents face-to-face and four via phone. In-depth interviews with parents provided me with data about which families these students come from, how these parents are involved in their child's (most of them are only children) education, and how they perceived their children's high school experiences.

Besides having informal interviews with my research participants, I carried out in-depth interviews with focal students, their parents, teachers, and school administrators. I used a snowball method to recruit the research participants. Gender, ethnicity, household registration status, geography, and academic level were variables considered for the selection of focal student participants. In addition, I collected archival and visual data regarding school recruitment policies,

school mission statements, classroom schedules, curriculum materials, school itineraries, notices, news, and reports from both the school website and on-site field work.

The school was the primary research site for my participant observation of focus students. However, I also followed them to after-school cramming classes and local community events that the students attended, and to neighborhoods where students and parents lived. Furthermore, I visited Internet sites popular among student informants (Lee, 2009).

After I left the field school at which I conducted my field research, I continued to generate data in the fall of 2013 by visiting the school website and collecting news from local mainstream media about Sunny High IAP Program and other international high school curriculum programs in Moon City. As data were processed, I conducted follow up research and performed member checking from November 2013 to May 2014 by phone and via email or Skype. I also generated data by visiting the Internet sites of relevant organizations that were involved in the development of Sunny High IAP Program.

In summary, I employ multi-sited ethnography to collect data at the macro-, meso-, and micro-levels, which allows for the triangulation of data in a spatial way. This approach also enabled me to trace the way neoliberal ideas play out in educational policies and on social media, how these ideas shape educational institutions' reforms, and how these ideas inform the high school choice of Chinese middle-upper and upper-class students and their resultant educational experiences. In-depth interviews with 20 focal student participants, their parents (20), as well as their teachers (18) and school administrators (6) are a crucial part of the data used in this dissertation and are thus subjected to detailed analysis. These interviews complement and triangulate data from other different resources, including the survey, participant observation field notes, informal interviews, site document collection, policy documents, and online resources.

## Data Analysis and Interpretation

Survey data sets were sorted and analyzed using Microsoft Excel. Data from field notes, school documents, policy documents, on-line media news, and data from Internet sites were imported into MAXQDA (version 11), a qualitative data analysis software. Interview data were transcribed and also entered into MAXQDA. These qualitative data were subjected to analysis using MAXQDA.

Drawing on Saldaña (2013), I employed first and second cycle coding methods to code the qualitative data. I also wrote analytic memos in this coding process. The data were initially coded inductively. For instance, in the first cycle coding, I adopted In Vivo coding, initial coding, and values coding for interview data. This method allowed me to pay close attention to participant voices, including their language, perspectives, and worldview. For example, some significant In Vivo codes (words and phrases which were used by interviewees), such as “IAP brand,” “the international high school curriculum program as a green industry,” are used to preserve research participants’ perspectives. During the first cycle coding, I themed my coding and identified themes at both a manifest level and a latent level. In doing so, I found some overarching themes that responded to my research questions. For instance, the large theme of the marketization of education became apparent as coding progressed, while the overarching theme of the privatization of education was embedded in such smaller themes as parental school choice.

Based on the first cycle coding, I categorized data based on themes, developed the most salient categories, and determined major themes from the data. I combined this focused method with axial coding and pattern coding to explore the relations between categories and subcategories.<sup>32</sup> For instance, I identified a set of subcategories – international activities at the

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<sup>32</sup> Saldaña (2013) explains the key features of focused coding: “Follows in Vivo, Process, and/or initial coding. Categorizes coded data based on thematic or conceptual similarity. Searches for the most frequent or significant

levels of individual students and families, school, educational companies, and the Chinese state – based on a set of codes such as traveling abroad, oversea college destinations, attending international summer schools, international college choice, future plans, curriculum integration (integrating Chinese high school curriculum with various international curricula), and diversification of curriculum by importing quality international curriculum. The subcategories were then classified into the category of promoting international engagement at different levels in China, which contributes to theorizing the theme of the internationalization of education. It is worth noting that same codes were often double and triple classified. For example, the codes of traveling abroad, attending international summer schools, and interacting with study abroad agents were also categorized as informal schooling.

Observation data and data from school documents, policy documents, on-line media sources, and Internet sites were similarly coded and analyzed. Different sets of data were triangulated. The triangulation of data enhances the validity and reliability of the research findings. For instance, the process of coding interview data and field notes foregrounded such codes as China Bridge (pseudonym), ACT, Inc., and ACT Education Solutions, Limited, which are some key social organizations involved in the development of the Sunny High IAP Curriculum Program. These codes are consistent with and confirmed by the codes deriving from policy documents and online sources like the websites of these organizations. Based on this triangulation, I employed further focused and axial coding to analyze the relations and interactions among these organization, which leads to the social network of analysis of Sunny High IAP Program.

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Initial Codes to develop the most salient categories in the data corpus” (p. 264). Axial coding focuses on exploring “how the categories and subcategories relate to each other” (p. 261). Pattern coding is defined as a category label “that identifies similarly coded data” (p. 266).

From the first and second cycle coding, I was able to identify major themes, conflicts, and problems, which were analyzed through the lens of the theoretical framework. The themes and tensions were also interpreted in light of their relation to existing scholarly literature. In the analysis and interpretation process, I simultaneously used the evidence in my study to break new theoretical and empirical ground (Weis, Cipollone, & Jenkins, 2013, p. 224). For example, I began to interpret the data in regard to how family choice practices, formal schooling, and informal schooling shape the subjectivities of socially elite students. Linking to the existing literature on elite education and international education, I also analyzed how my research findings spoke back to these sets of literature, how the findings informed a new pathway linking local elite education to international elite education, and what role this conduit played in making a new social class and their identity formation. I further considered how larger economic, political, and social changes and macro-level educational policies impact school reforms and these students' educational opportunities, access, and experiences. Consensus and conflict among new Chinese elites, public key schools, and the state were revealed and interpreted. I then analyzed the effects and implications of the consensus and conflict among these social actors.

### **Reflections on Research Methodology and Methods**

This study aims to critically understand the relations between social actors' lived experiences and social structures. I integrate my prior experiences in elite settings into this chapter. In response to my narratives in chapter two that explore how the macro theory of modernization, neoliberalism, and globalization come to bear on educational experiences, I here examine the ground-up experiences that I have gained from being a student and later a teacher in elite public Chinese high schools, as well as being a graduate from a top-ranked Chinese university and now becoming a PhD candidate in a world-class university in the United States. Through this narrative,

I seek not only to illustrate *who* I am, but to also explore *when*, *where*, and *how* I am (Denzin, 1997). This way of deliberately writing my autobiography has at least three advantages.

First, it demonstrates how my political and intellectual commitments and positions are shaped by these personal experiences. These reflections highlight the role of my ethical obligation to educational equity and social justice in the research endeavor, which resonates with the critical ethnographer's ethical position that Madison (2011) emphasizes in the quotation that opens this chapter. I connect my life experience to this study. Doing so enables me to use the association to guide and test my reflection (Mills, 1959). My personal experiences have called me to use critical ethnography as a research methodology. I maintain that theory informs and is informed by my own reflection, which offers me a different analytical vantage point. Reflection and positionality guide my thinking and lead me toward "more inclusive, more flexible, yet philosophically informed methodologies sensitive to the power relations inherent in fieldwork" (England, 1994, p. 87).

Second, the narrative in this section shows my unstable and shifting social status categories, while also illustrating the dynamic ways in which I was positioned as both insider and outsider in the world of elite schooling. My social categories and my own autobiography are implicated in the process of studying elites (Gaztambide-Fernández & Howard, 2012, p. 301). As I will discuss later, the complexity of my insider-outsider status shapes the research process in terms of gaining access to the study school and elite Chinese participants, negotiating fieldwork, and representing the research. By taking a reflexive stance throughout the research process, I see my subjective experience and positionality as the sites of inquiry. These approaches not only allow me to explore the power relations between me as a researcher and my research subjects within broad social hierarchies and structures, but also enable me to maintain an awareness of how my insider-outsider status impacts the way I was perceived by my participants and how my positionality shapes both

the data and its analysis (Gaztambide-Fernández & Howard, 2012, p. 290; Howard & Kenway, 2015, p. 1013). As England (1994) nicely summarizes in the quotation cited at the beginning of this chapter, it is vital to place positionality, subjectivity, and reflexivity at the center of the methodological challenges and exploration. Paying attention to these issues forces me to acknowledge my own power, privilege, and bias, and holds me accountable for my own moral responsibility regarding representation and interpretation (Madison, 2011, p. 8). This method foregrounds the importance of addressing the issues of representation, power, and research ethics, which are crucial aspects of critical qualitative research in general and the study of elites and elite education in particular (Howard & Kenway, 2015; Lee, 2005; Lee, 2009; Madison, 2011; Ostrander, 1993; Semel, 1994).

Third, I use this narrative to make comparisons with my participants' stories and experiences of elite schooling. This comparison highlights how social conditions of elite education have changed in the past two decades in China. It also points out that more inequality and further injustice have been created by the process of change. More importantly, my experiences with elite schooling serve as reminders of the role that elite educational institutions play in upward social mobility for disadvantaged students. As emphasized by Salverda and Abbink (2014), "Elites only exist vis-à-vis other social groups – be they the marginalized, dependents, supporters, or counter-elites. Addressing the relations between elites and non-elites" (p. 16). The study of elites and elite education should take these social relations seriously (Howard & Kenway, 2015, p. 1020). Recognizing this relationality contributes to a better understanding of persistent and new inequalities in educational systems from a social stratificationist perspective. Although this dissertation focuses more on examining how elite privilege is constructed in a changing context, the ultimate purpose of doing so is to address educational opportunities for disadvantaged



populations. To some extent, my narrative, which highlights the experiences of more marginalized students in elite schools, supplements the absence of the production of disadvantage in my data analysis chapters. This helps my research avoid providing support for “elite narcissism” (Cookson & Persell, 1985; Epstein, 2014; Howard & Kenway, 2015).

In what follows, I will divide my biography into two parts. The first part focuses on my prior experiences in an elite public high school and top-ranked state university in China. The second part of my narrative concerns my teaching experiences in an elite public high school in a cosmopolitan city in China and later in a U.S. public high school, as well as my study-abroad experiences. These narratives will not only show my research trajectory, but also pave the way for my reflection on aspects of my field work, such as gaining access, negotiating field work, positionality, research representation, and ethical dilemmas.

### **My Autobiography and Positionality – Part One**

I was a former student in a key public high school in a county of a third-tier city in China. I am a survivor and beneficiary of the Chinese elite educational system because it offered me an opportunity for upward social mobility. As a daughter of a peasant family, I was raised by the popular Chinese idea that “education can change your life.” However, the road to chase such a dream is thorny for a girl who comes from a disadvantaged family. I experienced emotional and psychological transitions from a rural elementary school to a middle school in a town, and then to a key public high school in a county, in order to be assimilated into a more “civilized” society. This process was not only accompanied by a lot of struggle with a sense of inferiority and low self-esteem, but also required many negotiations of parental expectations and gender stereotypes at school and in society. My parents, who only received limited education, expected me to attend a normal school after graduating from the middle school and then become an elementary teacher

in my home town. This expected career path would not only relieve the financial pressures on my family, but also meet social norms – teaching is a secure and suitable job for women. However, as an ambitious girl, I was eager to attend a university in a cosmopolitan city where I could gain a broader horizon for life. Achieving this dream meant that I had to be highly competitive in the Entrance Examinations for High Schools (*zhongkao*) for admission to a very selective college prep high school and then in the Chinese National Entrance Exam (*gaokao*) for a top-tier Chinese university. I promised my parents that I would not make them disappointed. Being "compelled to excel" was my only choice.<sup>33</sup>

I attended a key public high school, the best high school in my home town, based on my high test score in *zhongkao*. In my first year of high school, I had over 60 classmates. Most of us came from different rural villages. We were selected based on academic ability, measured by grades and results on the examination. High-stakes test-driven learning and teaching dominated my three-year high school life. Test anxiety was intertwined with my eagerness to attend a top-ranked Chinese university. Being able to attend Beijing Normal University (BNU), an elite public university in China, changed my life trajectory. But on the way there, I witnessed the majority of my childhood playmates being 'left behind' and becoming cheap labor such as peasants and factory workers. I observed that many of my high school classmates suffered from depression and were also 'left behind' in the college entrance competition. Many years later, when I read the research report titled *The Silent Revolution*, I found that the article evoked in me a complex feeling about the function of the Chinese elite educational system: on the one hand, the test-oriented teaching and learning based on meritocracy equated with academic selectivity results in inhumane

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<sup>33</sup> I adopt the notion of compelled to excel from Louie (2004).

education; on the other hand, the existence of meritocracy represented in the Chinese key school system has opened up opportunities for disadvantaged children like me to access elite education, which often leads to upward social mobility, as Liang, et al. (2012) have also noted. This first-hand experience has not only undergirded my moral commitment to a more humane and just education, but also contributed to the development of my research interests in the sociology of elite education and reproduction of educational and social inequality.

Sitting in classrooms at BNU that were dominated by female students, which is consistent with a reality that teaching is a gendered job, I silenced myself, not because I was dumb, but because I needed time to reflect on who I was and figure out what I should do. My identity, as a first-generation female college student from a rural region, made me distinct from the majority of my college classmates who were from cities. Social stratification and class distinction became clearer to me than ever before. Unlike those from cities or towns, we rural students had no special talents such as dancing, drawing, and playing musical instruments. We spoke Chinese with strong dialect accents. But being able to access an elite Chinese university opened up more opportunities for us to develop our knowledge and skills. I was thirsty for knowledge and immersed myself in extensive reading in the literature and philosophy that was related to my major in Chinese language and literature. Two years of silence allowed me to think about the culture of power. It also offered me a valuable opportunity to explore the code or rules for participating in power. I eventually was able to stand out, speaking standard Mandarin Chinese, becoming skilled in literary criticism, and publishing academic papers. I wondered why I always seemed to lag behind in the beginning and was able to excel later on. Was this my learning style? If so, how was this style related to my family background and previous learning experiences? I also questioned why students like me have to experience painful times and stress in order to catch up academically? These questions

were rooted in my mind and informed my research interests in revealing class privilege and educational advantage in attempts to understand inequality and inequity. In addition, these educational experiences are in conjunction with my choice of critical qualitative research, which uncovers, examines, and critiques the social, cultural, and psychological assumptions that structure and limit our ways of thinking and being in the world (Carspecken & Apple, 1992; Merriam, 2002).

### **My Autobiography and Positionality – Part Two**

After graduating from BNU, I became a classroom teacher in a highly selective public high school in a cosmopolitan city in China. Being a Language Arts teacher as well as a class advisor, I observed cosmopolitan middle-class families' desires for quality education and parental preference of Chinese key public schools, as well as both children's and parents' anxieties about accessing top-ranked Chinese universities. During my six years of teaching in the elite public school, I experienced the implementation of the Chinese New Curriculum Reform, which aims to reduce students' excessive academic burden and transform test-driven education into quality education. This teaching experience enabled me to become aware of the complexity of educational reforms. For instance, I noticed that the curriculum reform impacted students' schooling experiences in a paradoxical and contradictory way. The notions of "student-centered teaching and learning," "participation in the classroom," and "critical thinking," imported and introduced from the West, were highlighted. The collaborative, dialogic, and inquiry-based learning was implemented inside the school (Cui, 2001). These progressive educational ideas empowered students as active learners because they focus on the learning process rather than on the end result. For a period of time, my school and fellow teachers had made efforts to curtail the excessive amount of homework and tests. Students were happy with the educational reform.

However, the rapid and rampant development of for-profit, off-campus classes that prepare students for tests were coupled with the implementation of the curriculum reform because examinations continued to be used to select students for elite educational institutions. Along with the lower amount of homework that the school assigned to students, parents added more at home and sent their children to private tutors. I witnessed my students becoming exhausted by taking various extra-curricular classes; parents feared that their children would lose the education game by reducing the work load. My school found “creative” ways to show token compliance with the new educational policy, while having to resist attempts to reduce academic burden and testing in consideration of maintaining the school’s reputation, which largely depended on students’ test scores. Students’ academic burden increased rather than decreased under the New Curriculum Reform, as Cheng and Yang (2014) and Zhao (2014) also point out. The contradictory results have led to considerable controversy surrounding the reform and put new pressure on teachers’ work. These experiences made me wonder how the curriculum reform affects students’ formal and informal educational experiences and how teaching and learning is reconstructed by educational reforms in a changing context. These perplexing questions motivated me to pursue graduate study in education abroad.

What broadens my horizons and enables me to think about educational issues in relation to shifting local, national, regional, and global contexts are my master’s study on secondary education in the U.S. as well as my teaching experiences as a full-time classroom teacher in U.S. public schools. Working with racially, culturally, and linguistically diverse high school students in the United States gave me a broader look at how social class, race, ethnicity, gender, language, and immigrant status impact teaching and learning. These educational and work experiences also increased my knowledge of American curriculum and pedagogy, which led me to question the

impact of newly imported Western educational ideas (such as individuality and creativity) on Chinese educational and curricular reforms. Armed with a comparative perspective drawn from my teaching experience in both China and the United States, I came to question the ways in which the processes of exporting and importing “advanced” international educational ideas, policy, and curriculum have influenced Chinese education reforms in recent years.

When studying and working in the United States, I keep in touch with my colleagues and school administrators in the Chinese key public school where I used to work. Informal conversations with them have kept me updated about the implementation and effects of the New Curriculum Reform as well as the school’s development. They told me that the school had established its international division, often called international curriculum classes, which serves wealthy Chinese high school students who plan to attend prestigious universities abroad. Since then, I have attended to this new trend in school reforms.

My research interest in the newly-established international high school curriculum programs was reinforced by my PhD study at the University of Wisconsin-Madison. Along with the coursework that I have completed in the departments of Curriculum and Instruction and Educational Policy Studies, I have had the opportunity to study with renowned critical scholars. These learning experiences have not only shaped my critical approaches to studying curriculum programs and educational policies, but also enhanced my commitment to engaging in social justice-oriented research and promoting educational equity.

In addition, the apparent presence of international Chinese undergraduate students at this world-class university is consistent with and confirm the phenomenon happening in China – a rapidly growing number of Chinese high school graduates seeking college education at prestigious universities abroad. Being a graduate student at UW-Madison has offered me more opportunities

to have informal conversations with the international Chinese undergraduate students from Mainland China on the campus. My encounters with such students often happen in bus stops and on campus buses. The similar identities that these students and I shared, such as being Chinese from Mainland China, speaking Mandarin Chinese, and being students at UW-Madison, made it easier for me to approach them and initiate conversations with them. My informal chats with such students gave me an impression of the complexity of their high school educational experiences surrounding their preparation for U.S. college applications. In addition to family support, the students mentioned that emerging international education programs helped them with their college application preparation. These informal interactions made me wonder about their choice, decision-making, and pathways to U.S. universities. By linking what I learned from the Chinese undergraduate students whom I randomly met at UW-Madison to the development of international high school program in my former school in China, I have become more curious about the role of such new educational programs and students' experiences with these programs.

This autobiography demonstrates my research trajectory. It foregrounds my positionality. It also highlights my insider-outsider status in regard to elite schooling. In what follows, I will discuss how my positionality and changing identities shape the research process, particularly the aspects of gaining access to the study school and elite Chinese participants, negotiating field work, representing the research, and dealing with ethical dilemmas.

### **Gaining Access to the Study School and Elite Chinese Participants**

The challenges of studying elites and elite institutions have been documented and discussed in the existing literature on elite education. The power that elite groups and institutions are equipped with and high-status positions that they hold are widely recognized as the major factors that protect elites themselves from being studied (e.g. Desmond, 2004; England, 2002;

Gaztambide-Fernández & Howard, 2012). The need to negotiate access to them requires strategies to overcome this challenge (Cookson & Persell, 1985; Gaztambide-Fernández, 2009; Maxwell & Aggleton, 2015; Ostrander, 1993). The strategies that I employed to access the field school include using my own social network, making the right contacts with the right people, and discovering common ground and establishing mutually beneficial relationships between the researcher and participants. While the entry to the study school opened up opportunities for accessing elite students and families, I become aware that my own identity shaped access to the field school and these Chinese elite groups.

My negotiation of access to the Sunny High IAP Program started in the spring of 2013 after the identification of the study school. As a former teacher in the junior high school division of Sunny High, I knew some teachers and administrators in Sunny High International Division. Using these connections, I contacted Ms. Zhao, a school administrator of the Sunny High IAP Program who used to be my colleague. I introduced her to the research project on educational experiences of Chinese high school students who choose to go to U.S. colleges. I emphasized that this project aims to examine the internationalization of education, a topic that she expressed a strong interest in. Ms. Zhao commented that the internationalization of education was a hot topic in China and deserved research attention because it was a trend that has been of primary importance in recent years and will continue to reshape the Chinese education system. She mentioned that the school was exploring ways to promote international education and had also encountered some problems. She welcomed me to come to the school, doing the research and using my expertise to help students and teachers. She considered me an educational “expert” largely because of my educational background of studying in a prestigious U.S. university, although I never accepted that privileged status. I told her that I was happy to take this research opportunity to learn from the school and



make a contribution to the school improvement agenda. To some extent, Chinese national and school policies that emphasize innovation and internationalization provided a crucial opening for me to carry out the research with critical aims and for the school to welcome my coming with practical purposes (Howard & Kenway, 2015; Sadlier & Aguilera, 2015). The perceived mutual interests along with my identity as a former teacher in Sunny High and related social connections enabled me to easily gain access to the school.

Similarly, my elite status deriving from the credential from a world-class U.S. university and the experience of living and working in the U.S privileged me and offered me the possibility of establishing mutually beneficial relationships between me as a researcher and these participants. The students and their parents, who were willing to participate in this study and spend time being interviewed, often perceived me as an insider from a top-ranked U.S. university, who could provide them with useful information about U.S. college application and admission processes and the experience of living in the United States. Despite my background of being from a low-income family in rural China, my ability to attend elite universities in China and particularly in the U.S. leveraged my social identification and changed the power relationship between me and elite participants. In this sense, my identity shaped access to the new Chinese elite class.

### **Negotiating Field Work**

Gaining access is important, but only the first step in the complicated process of entering the research context. Field work, particularly regarding the study of privileged groups and institutions, requires the constant negotiation of relationships (Gaztambide-Fernández & Howard, 2012; Hoffman, 1980). Ostrander (1993) emphasizes the need for “being aware that gaining access is not the same as establishing the trust required for getting useful data and that there will likely be an ongoing process of being [‘]checked out[’]” (p. 9). This point highlights the importance of

forming and maintaining rapport with participants in the field. Doing so in Chinese elite settings require the researcher to overcome social and cultural barriers and negotiate power relations. I will discuss this issue surrounding the role of gatekeeper, mutual relations, and being an insider-outsider.

As mentioned above, Ms. Zhao was the right person for me to contact. She served as the gatekeeper in the field school (Agar, 1988). Through her help, I was allowed to live in the girl's dorm on the campus of this boarding school. Of course, I needed to pay reasonable lodging expenses. Being able to live in the dorm was a great opportunity for me to see and hear about students' life outside the classrooms. In addition, Ms. Zhao introduced me to school staff and permitted me to attend staff meetings and professional development meetings on weekends and during summer vacation. She recommended that I use school meeting rooms for interviews. All of these supports contributed to the productive field work that I was able to conduct.

However, I became aware that I had to deal with some hierarchical issues. For instance, although I had received an official site permission letter from the school principal that granted me permission to conduct the study, during my first day in the school, Ms. Zhao reminded me that I could not introduce my research project to teachers and students or do classroom observations until she discussed the project with school administrators at the main campus of Sunny High. She suggested that I tour the school first and get some general sense of the school, which matched my original plan. She also cautioned me that students and parents in the school were very sensitive to "strangers" who studied them and the school had to be very careful about this issue. In order to avoid unnecessary trouble, my presence had to be natural. I had to respect her suggestions, which is suitable within the Chinese social and cultural system. Those who are outsiders of the Chinese culture and education system might have felt strange about what Ms. Zhao suggested. However,

being a former teacher of Sunny High offered me an insider's understanding of this institutional culture and allowed me to navigate the field.

In addition, the school took initiative to "use" me, which showed its power on the one hand and offered me a great opportunity to access teachers and students on the other. For example, after meeting with school leaders, I was asked to give a talk to the school faculty and staff, which would be an official introduction to me and my study. Given my unique identity, such as being a former class advisor in Sunny High, Ms. Zhao asked me to serve as a substitute teacher for a 10<sup>th</sup> grade class for one week when the homeroom teacher was sick. She emphasized that the reasons for this arrangement were not only that she trusted me to be able to take on relevant responsibilities, but also that it would give me great access to the students. I could not decline, given my relationship to the school and the benefits that I would gain.

Ms. Zhao's top-down arrangements provided me with more opportunities to access school resources and gather school site documents. To some extent, she granted me insider status. I noticed that my interactions with Ms. Zhao impacted how teachers and staff perceived me. They viewed me as an insider who had worked in Sunny High and received support from school administrators. For example, many of them called me Teacher Liu, even though I was not an official teacher in the school. They also perceived me as an outsider who had high status associated with study-abroad experiences and conducting an international research project. Being conscious of hierarchy relations, I positioned myself on equal footing with teachers that I studied by putting more emphasis on my outsider learner status. Furthermore, I did volunteer work at ACT Test Day and new students' oral interview examinations. Through participating in these events, I was able to develop a rapport with teachers, have informal conversations with them, and at the same time observe students.

There was no dichotomy in the insider-outsider status. I found myself constantly shifting between presenting myself as an insider and as an outsider to gain information about the internal dynamics of the school. This method helped minimize the limits and maximize the opportunities of being seen as either an insider expert or an outsider learner (Gamson, 1995, p. 86). For instance, when interviewing students and international teachers, I put an emphasis on my graduate student identity. This not only enabled me to develop a rapport with these informants, but also “influenced the information to which I would be given access” (Hoffman, 1980, p. 47). For example, many student participants called me Shuning rather than Teacher Liu. We chatted in the school cafeteria and on their ways to after-school TOEFL preparation classes. After I came back to the United States, I continued to nurture and develop the mutual relationship with research participants. I talked with them on phone. We kept in touch via email. For those informants who were admitted to the U.S. university where I studied, I provided them with information about living and studying in the university. I also gave them rides to an airport. These ongoing relationships provided me with updated information about the students’ high school experiences in China and college experiences in the United States.

### **Representation and Ethical Issues**

The literature on the study of elites has discussed gaining access and establishing rapport with informants because such issues are regarded as common challenges. Relatively less attention has been focused on the problem of the representation of the research and ethical dilemmas in studying elites and elite institutions (Gaztambide-Fernández & Howard, 2012). In this section, I will discuss the issue of research representation by critically reflecting on my own privilege, power, and positionality. I will address research ethics by looking at the issues of confidentiality and protection of anonymity, disclosing research aims, and sharing the result.

In the above section, I reflect on my privilege and the power that elite institutions and credentials have equipped me with. This reflective stance contributes to developing a deeper understanding of myself as the researcher of elites and elite schools. By recognizing my own advantages in relation to the disadvantages of others, I was able to “identify the ways that privilege and power remained hidden and unacknowledged” in the elite school that I studied (Gaztambide-Fernández & Howard, 2012, p. 298). Being conscious about my privileged status, I attempted to manage my identification as an insider-outsider and balance power relations between me as a researcher and participants so that I could build trust with informants and collect useful data. Furthermore, engaging in reflexivity throughout my research process allows me maintain awareness of my positionality in shaping data collection, analysis, and interpretation (Howard & Kenway, 2015, p. 1013; Maxwell & Aggleton, 2015). For instance, like Gaztambide-Fernández and Howard (2012), I realize that “my interpretations of what I witnessed during my field work were constructed by particular perspectives, knowledge, and assumptions grounded in my own background” (p. 295). In other words, my positionality on data interpretation guides me to seek the way in which I represent my participants through writing. Thus, I become aware that interpretation of data and representation of the research is involved in a researcher’s ethical position and concern, to which I will turn next.

Intricate realities in the process of studying the Sunny High IAP Program and privileged Chinese students and parents created many ethical dilemmas, particularly in regard to confidentiality and protection of anonymity, disclosure of my research intentions, and sharing the results. During my field work in the school, I found that school administrators were sensitive about discussing the school’s collaboration with its partner – China Bridge, a Chinese education company. There was an administrative meeting on the campus attended by administrators from the

school and from China Bridge. The school was unwilling to have me observe the meeting because they thought that this was not related to my study and the meeting was about negotiating the contract between the two parts, which was important for the school to keep confidential. My in-depth interviews with school administrators further confirmed that the collaboration contract and negotiation details were sensitive topics because they were concerned with the distribution of profits from students' tuition fees. I found that this for-profit collaboration was intentionally kept hidden from the public, although many students and parents expressed their awareness that there was a for-profit exchange in this collaboration. However, the school wanted to protect its good image as an educational institution for the purpose of dedication to education rather than for profit-making. It seemed that the company came to an agreement regarding the maintenance of this school's image. Thus, the exposure of senior management staff on the company's part was limited. In my interview with the executive director of China Bridge, who worked in the school, she seemed unwilling to discuss insider information about the company and even the names of the company's leaders. I wondered if I should respect confidentiality of participants, as conventional standards of research ethics dictate (Swalwell, 2014). However, my own research sensibilities told me that I should explore "this forbidden story" because it is key to revealing the dynamics of the production of advantage and eliteness, which is the critical intention of my study. This tension between what conventional ethical standards regulate and the stance of being a critical scholar put me in an ethical dilemma that made me consider the necessity of taking what Gaztambide-Fernández (2015) calls an "un/ethical position," a different ethical stance that researchers in the study of elites are required to take (p. 1141).

Facing limited access to the forbidden story, I used Internet sites and social media as an alternative method to gather data. In order to effectively advertise their educational products and

services, the company designed comprehensive websites (both Chinese and English versions) that provided me with detailed information about the company history, structure, and mission, as well as the International Access Project (IAP, pseudonym) curriculum program. In addition, China Bridge created a Chinese microblogging website (*weibo*, 微博) that allowed me to collect data on the company activities and students' socialization.<sup>34</sup> An advertisement video for the IAP curriculum program was posted on the Youku website, a popular social media outlet in China.<sup>35</sup> The advertisement video was recorded at the field school during my fieldwork. I observed the process of how the school, teachers, and students prepared for the video recording. However, I did not gain access to the final product until I found it through social media. In the video, company leaders were interviewed and their names were shown, which provided me with valuable information to examine the networking of social actors and relevant educational institutions. In this sense, social media creates methodological opportunities for me to explore new sites, which extended the scope of my inquiry (Staubhaar, 2015).

One of ethical concerns about using social media and Internet sites in my study is whether I should give anonymity to the relevant social institutions that were engaged in the development of Sunny High IAP Program. This issue was closely connected with the protection of participants. In order to maximize the protection of informants, I used pseudonyms for the company, as I did for all research participants. There is an ethical dilemma here: as a critical researcher, I have ethical responsibilities to protect participants. In doing so, I may have to protect those elite institutions and avoid exposing them to the public. I have concerned about whether this action contributes to

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<sup>34</sup> *Weibo* is akin to Facebook and Twitter. It is one of the most popular Internet sites in China.

<sup>35</sup> *Youku* is one of the top online video and streaming service platforms in China.

the maintenance of eliteness and reproduction of advantage. I wonder if this further creates conflicts with my ethical obligation to reveal the “truth,” hidden rules, and power.

In addition, given my relation to the field school and personal connections with administrators and teachers, I found myself facing a challenge related to “the psychology and ethics of writing critically about those who have consented to be studied by us” (Gusterson, 1993, p. 61). Being regarded as a trustworthy insider, participants like Ms. Zhao “shared information and perspectives that they only revealed to other insiders,” although sometimes she did so involuntarily (Gaztambide-Fernández & Howard, 2012, p. 296). She did not emphasize that I could not share the information in my writing. However, as a native Chinese person and former teacher in Sunny High, I understood that she assumed I should know the hidden institutional culture and would not share the “secrets” with the public. This implicated me in the problem of “protecting the integrity of the research and the researcher when studying elites” (Ostrander, 1993, p. 14–15, also cited by Gaztambide-Fernández & Howard, 2012).

Similarly, I encountered the challenge of disclosing my research intentions. Given my knowledge of Chinese elite institutions and society, I do not think that I could gain access to the field school and participants if I fully disclosed the critical intentions of this social justice-oriented study. Similar challenges include, but are not limited to, sharing the research results. During the fieldwork, I had an informal conversation with the executive director of China Bridge in the school cafeteria, she mentioned that a researcher from a top-ranked U.S. university studied their IAP programs and reported positive results. She asked me what I found in my research about the IAP program. She hinted that I was expected to show the positive aspects of the program in my writing. School administrators also expressed their interest in reading my dissertation and expected me to translate it into Chinese so that they could know what I wrote. This situation raised a question



about how a critical researcher should share the research results with the field school and participants. Given my plan to conduct follow-up research in the school, I wonder what will happen if the school cannot accept my criticism about the program. More likely, they will not allow me access to the school for future studies. In consideration of these issues, I still keep in mind what Gaztambide-Fernández (2015) claims: researchers who study elites and elite schools must be willing to take risks in efforts to research elites for social justice purposes, even though they have to risk the possibility that their own status as researchers would be undermined.

## Chapter 4: The Production of a Neoliberal Education Space: The Creation of Sunny High

### IAP International Curriculum Program and Parental School Choice

*The principles of the market and its managers are more and more the managers of the policy and practices of education. Market relevance is becoming the key orientating criterion for the selection of discourses, their relation to each other, their forms and their research. This movement has profound implications from the primary school to the university.*

(Bernstein, 2000, p. 87)

*I was waiting for a taxi in front of the school gate of the Sunny High International Division around 8 a.m. when a lady in her forties approached me and asked in a hurry, "Excuse me, Teacher, do you know where the site is for the recruitment of Sunny High International High School Curriculum Program? I am trying to sign my child up for the program." "This is the Sunny High International Division," I explained to her, "The on-site recruitment, consultation, and registration is held in the main campus of Sunny High, rather than here. I am going there now..." The lady thanked me for this information and generously gave me a free ride. Sitting in their Toyota car, she and her husband started to chat with me. They told me that they are Moon City residents. Their daughter just graduated from middle school and received the test score of zhongkao. Unfortunately, her zhongkao score was not high enough to allow her to win admission to key public high schools. She was very upset and locked herself at home. They had to save their daughter and tried to find a good alternative choice for their only child. They heard of this international program from friends and thought that it might be a good choice for their daughter... Thirty-five minutes later, we arrived in the Sunny High main campus. Two striking red banners were hung along the corridor, introducing two unique high school curriculum programs of the school – "Liberal Arts Laboratory Curriculum Program – A Cradle for High Quality and Interdisciplinary Talents;" "IAP High School Curriculum Program – A Foundation for Students Seeking to Study Abroad." Over 20 parents and students were in the school gym. Some of them looked at the IAP program information shown on display boards – "Diverse Curriculum Content, Meet Multiple Needs;" "Participate in International Exchange, Expand Student' Horizons;" "Integrated Practice Activity Curriculum;" and "Sunny High IAP Class 2013 College Admission Report." Some talked to teachers on the consultation area ...*

(Field notes, July 6, 2013)

An hour's drive north of central Moon City, the city's suburbs have been filling up with new housing developments. Sunny High International Division is located in a northern suburb of this cosmopolitan city. There used to be towns and villages, where several large former state-owned factories and enterprises, military units, and military research institutes were located. Thus workers and employees of these socialist work units (*danwei*) were the main residents here before

the 2000s.<sup>36</sup> Over the past decade, urban sprawl and the expansion of gentrification has impacted this suburb. Many parts of this area have been gentrifying. Several residents who have been here for a long time still live in this area. But more and more newcomers – rising middle and upper classes – have moved in. Sunny High International Division is situated in one of the gentrified neighborhoods, where a mixed population lives – some are workers and employees of the work units mentioned above and some are members of the new middle class. Not far from the school, there are some high-end residential communities. Some of the students attending this school have family homes in these expensive apartment complexes. However, in general, the school doesn't exclusively serve the neighborhood in which it is located although it was originally designed as a part of the community.<sup>37</sup> The tuition required by the school is still high for both the new middle class who just moved in and old residents who still remain in this area.

Sunny High School consists of three divisions – a senior high school division on the main campus, a junior high school division with an independent campus, and an international division also with an independent campus.<sup>38</sup> This unique structure reflects a popular model of “schools

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<sup>36</sup> See Bray (2005) for details on the *danwei* system in China.

<sup>37</sup> When the real estate company who developed this neighborhood purchased the land from the Chinese government in early 2000s, the government policy required that the development company must leave a certain area for the use of education. Thus, the company was building a school and at the same time looking for a partnership with a school. Due to social networking and the social reputation of Sunny High, the company wanted to collaborate with Sunny High to build a new school in this neighborhood. During that time, Sunny High was facing the needs of expanding their school's enterprise and was experiencing a severe shortage of school space. Thus, the mutual interests from the real estate development company and Sunny High facilitated the collaboration of both parties. Originally, the partnership proposed that the company was responsible for providing “hardware,” such as school buildings; Sunny High is responsible for offering “software,” such as hiring teachers, recruiting students, and running daily teaching activities. However, because of the merger and acquisition of the real estate development company, the company could not own the school property and it asked Sunny High to purchase the school. Eventually, Sunny High applied for money from the Chinese government and bought the “hardware” of the school. Through the government's support, Sunny High owns the new school. Therefore, the school is officially state-owned because Sunny High is a public school.

<sup>38</sup> Further study should explore how Sunny High became a school enterprise in response to relevant educational policies and in the name of better meeting social needs.

within schools” (*xiao zhong xiao*) in China. There are two main international programs in Sunny High International Division. One is the Sunny High IAP program run by Sunny High, which is the focus of my study. In other words, the Sunny High IAP program is a school-within-a-school program.<sup>39</sup> Thus, I also call the program a school.

Up to 2014, the Moon Municipal Commission of Education had approved 24 international high school curriculum programs that were established by 20 Chinese high schools.<sup>40</sup> Among the 24 government-approved programs, there were 18 Chinese-American high school curriculum programs, 5 Chinese-British programs, and 1 Chinese-Canadian program. Sunny High IAP Program is one of the Chinese-American high school curriculum programs. It is the largest of the government-approved public international high school programs in Moon City. The school tuition was about ¥70,000 (approximately equal to \$10,000) per year in 2013.<sup>41</sup>

In this chapter, I will look closely at the Sunny High IAP Program, one of the emerging international high school curriculum programs in China, to explore my first and second guiding research questions in this dissertation project: (1) Why did international high school curriculum programs emerge at a particular time in China? How were these curriculum programs constructed?

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<sup>39</sup> The Sunny High IAP program serves Chinese high school students. Another international program in Sunny High International Division is actually a branch school of an American international school system, which includes grade 7 through grade 12. This program rents school buildings and facilities from Sunny High International Division and has its own administrative system. The students who attend the latter program come from South Korea, Kazakhstan, Thailand, and other Asian countries. The program has recently started to recruit Chinese students due to the short supply of students. In the eyes of Sunny High IAP students, the latter program is a truly international school. Although both programs are in the same campus, they have minimal interaction.

<sup>40</sup> Among the twenty Chinese high schools who have established international high school curriculum programs, seventeen of them are key public high schools; two of them are people-run schools; and one is a private school.

<sup>41</sup> A survey conducted by Peking University shows that in China, average annual family income in 2012 was ¥13,000, approximately \$2,100. There is an urban-rural divide in household wealth distribution. For instance, in 2012, average family incomes in urban and rural areas were about \$2,600 and \$1,600, respectively. Xie and Jin (2015) point out that the richest 1% Chinese families owned more than one-third of China’s total household income, while the poorest 25% accounted for less than 2% of total income.

(2) Why do Chinese students choose to attend particular types of internationally-focused Chinese public high schools? What is their decision-making process of selecting a high school? By linking the analysis of the emergence of this educational program to students' choice of the program, this chapter points out that the newly-established international public high school curriculum program in conjunction with parent-initiated school choice indicates the production of a neoliberal education space, where the interests of the Chinese key public schools, the state, and various kinds of for-profit education business converge with the private interests of the wealthy Chinese parents, who attempt to push their children toward international education as a form of capital conversion. The aims of this chapter are three-fold: first, to provide a thick description of my research site, where student informants receive their formal high school education; second, to produce an in-depth understanding of how these students get access to these international programs; and third, to develop a deep understanding of the neoliberal character and implications of the policy and practices of the Chinese-Foreign Cooperation Running School (CFCRS) high school programs.

The chapter falls into five parts. In response to the guiding research questions that will be discussed in this chapter, I will first introduce the Sunny High IAP International Curriculum Program. Then, I will focus on the network analysis of this curriculum program. In Chapter 1, I have discussed why international high school curriculum programs emerged in a particular time in China in a general sense. I have also addressed some general features of these international programs. In Chapter 4, my analysis of the Sunny High IAP program is based on the following critical curriculum questions: who designs what kinds of curriculum, for whom, for what purpose(s), in which way, under what circumstances, and with what results? Using network ethnography methods (Ball & Junemann, 2012; Howard, 2002), I will map out the networks of the social actors who are involved in the development of the Sunny High IAP International Curriculum

Program.<sup>42</sup> I will focus particularly on examining the interactions and power relations between these social actors in the network relationships. The purpose of the network analysis is to make the tacit relationships between the social actors involved in the CFCRS high school programs visible. The network analysis points out the involvement of for-profit education corporations into the curriculum development in the way of collaboration and partnership for the purpose of profit making. It highlights the commodification of curriculum, the privatization of education, and global education business.

In the third section, I will examine student choice of the Sunny High IAP Program. By looking at the complex choice and decision-making process, this part explores the identities, interests, and strategies of these students and their parents. By connecting the issue of parental school choice with the network analysis of the educational program, this chapter will make visible the breadth and the depth of processes of the marketization and privatization of education in both Chinese and international contexts.

In the fourth section, I will discuss the interest convergence of the state, Chinese key public schools, various kinds of for-profit education business, and wealthy Chinese families in the emergence of public international high school curriculum programs. Finally, the chapter will end with a discussion of the production of neoliberal education spaces by highlighting the interplay between neoliberal educational reforms, international high school curriculum programs, and parent-initiated school choice.

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<sup>42</sup> Network ethnography refers to “the process of using ethnographic field methods on cases and field sites selected using social network analysis” (Howard, 2002, p. 561). Through incorporating an ethnographic approach into social network analysis, network ethnography provides “a mapping of the form and content of policy relations in a particular field” and “offers a broader and richer access to the ‘social’ in social networks than has been the case using just terrestrial data” (Ball, 2012, p. 5). As a variant of social network analysis, network ethnography aims to provide a “thick description” of a network and focuses on examining power relations embedded in the network made up of different social actors (Ball & Junemann, 2012; Wittel, 2000).

### **Sunny High IAP International Curriculum Program**

In this section, I will briefly introduce the Sunny High IAP program before moving to the discussion of its curriculum structure and design. This section provides important context and builds a foundation for the network analysis and parent-initiated choice of the program.

Sunny High is an elite public high school directly administered by the Ministry of Education (MOE). Because it is located in Moon City, the school is also administrated by Moon Municipal Commission of Education. School principals of Sunny High were often invited by MOE to discuss high school education reforms, which not only allowed the school leaders to participate in the process of policy-making but also enabled them to gain insider information about education policy directions. Given its close relation to MOE, Sunny High is often given privileges (such as material and policy supports) to implement educational reforms. This school acts as an experimental site and is expected to play a leading role in exploring effective curriculum reforms, which makes the study of the emerging Sunny High international program more significant in understanding the character of Chinese educational reforms.

The Sunny High IAP International Curriculum Program was established in 2008. It is one of the four CFCRS public international high school curriculum programs that the Moon Municipal Commission of Education first approved in the year of 2008. When I conducted the fieldwork in the program in 2013, there were about 480 Chinese students (from grade 10 to grade 12) and over 100 full-time school staff. There were 57 teachers and school administrators. The remaining staff worked in nonacademic-related services, such as the cafeteria, engineering and maintenance, and the school dorm. Most of these staff were migrant contract workers.<sup>43</sup> Academic staff were

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<sup>43</sup> Future research could look closely at the working experience of the nonacademic-related school staff because it reflects some labor issues embedded in the school setting.

divided into two groups: 26 teachers and 3 school administrators in the Chinese curriculum part; 28 teachers and 1 executive director in the international curriculum part. All teachers and administrators in the former category were Chinese citizens, who were hired by Sunny High.<sup>44</sup> Twelve of them had master's degrees and two had doctoral degrees. Those in the latter category were hired by China Bridge International Education Services Co., Ltd. Among the 28 teachers, 14 of them were international teachers, who came from the United States of America (5), the United Kingdom (2), New Zealand (2), Australia (1), Canada (1), South Africa (2), and Zimbabwe (1).<sup>45</sup> There were eleven teaching assistants for these international teachers. All the TAs were Chinese. The executive director was also Chinese. All Chinese teachers in the international curriculum part could speak English. Most of them received their master's degrees in English-speaking countries, particularly from the United Kingdom. Seventeen of the teachers in the international curriculum part had master's degrees and four had received doctoral degrees. The complicated composition of school staff is a manifestation of the complex curriculum used in the school.

The general framework of the Sunny High IAP curriculum program actually consists of two main sets of curriculum systems: the Chinese national high school curriculum and the Global Assessment Certificate (GAC) program. The former consists of eight content areas of study, including Language and Literature, Math, Humanities and Society, Science, Technology, Art, Sports and Health, and Integrated Practice Activity. It includes the following subjects: Chinese Language Arts, Foreign Language (English), Math, Ideology & Politics, History, Geography,

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<sup>44</sup> Academic staff hired by Sunny High are divided into two major categories: The majority of them are official employees of Sunny High who are regular civil service teachers and receive full benefits from the school; some of them are contract teachers, for whom the school is not responsible to provide with Moon City household registrations (*hukou*) and retirement benefits.

<sup>45</sup> Among the 14 international teachers, 12 of them are male and 2 are female. The majority of the teachers are white. Two of them are black. Two of them are oversea ethnic Chinese (*huayi*), including a British-Chinese and an American-Chinese.



Physics, Chemistry, Biology, Information Technology, General Technology, Music, Fine Arts, Physical Education, Research-oriented Study, Community Service, and Social Practice. They are compulsory subjects and serve as the core part of the Chinese high schools' new curriculum. This curriculum structure is designated through the aforementioned New Curriculum Reform. The Chinese high school curriculum is administered by local government authorities, which are overseen by the Ministry of Education, one department of the Central Government of the People's Republic of China. The Ministry of Education initiated the New Curriculum Reform and in general, it is also in charge of the Chinese School Curriculum, including the high school curriculum.

When it comes to the international curriculum, its core part is based on the Global Assessment Certificate (GAC), which includes the following subjects: Academic English (listening, speaking, reading, and writing), Mathematics, Computing, Business, Science, Social Studies, and Study Skills. In order to meet the needs of students who want to study in English-speaking countries for their college education, the international curriculum was expanded to create test preparation courses, for tests including the TOEFL (Test of English as a Foreign Language), ACT (American College Test), SAT (Scholastic Assessment Test), and SAT subject tests. Test preparation is a crucial part of the international curriculum in the Sunny High IAP program because it aims to prepare students for admissions into higher education institutions in the West, particularly those in the United States.

The curriculum used in the Sunny High IAP program was quite chaotic. It was in the ongoing development phase, largely depending on the needs of students. For instance, in addition to the Chinese curriculum and international curriculum discussed above, the school has developed a variety of elective courses over time in order to “stimulate students' learning potentials and meet their needs of future college education.” The elective courses include AP (Advanced Placement)

courses (such as AP Calculus, AP Microeconomics, AP Chemistry, AP Statistics) and school-based courses (such as Marketing, Public Speech, Football and American Culture, and Chinese Traditional Culture). Elective courses are either taught by international or Chinese teachers. Some of the courses are designated as special courses, which are taught by teachers outside of the school, who are collaboratively hired by the Chinese and International parts of the school.

When introducing the program characteristics, the school highlights that its IAP high school curriculum encompasses the Chinese national curriculum, the Global Assessment Certificate, test preparation courses, elective courses, and integrated practical activities. According to the school website, this curriculum construction makes full use of the advantages of Chinese and international curricula, leading to a more diverse and practical program that not only teaches students the basics of the Chinese high school curriculum, but also gives them more choices. This curriculum program aims to meet the diverse needs of students and to promote students' overall development and personality development.

The Sunny High IAP International Curriculum Program is legitimated by both High School New Curriculum Reform and Chinese-Foreign Cooperation Running School Policy. High School New Curriculum Reform was implemented in Moon City in 2007.<sup>46</sup> According to the reform, there are three levels in the structure of the senior high school new curriculum, including fields of study, subjects, and modules. This curriculum structure is intended to shift the emphasis away

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<sup>46</sup> In 2003, the Ministry of Education promulgated Chinese High School New Curriculum Reform (Experimental). The reform agenda expected that the High School New Curriculum Reform will be fully implemented in Mainland China by 2007. However, after first conducting the reform in four provinces (including Shandong province, Guangdong province, Hainan province and Ningxia Hui Autonomous Region) in 2004, the Chinese government has gradually implemented the High School New Curriculum Reform in other provinces. It took until 2012 for the reform to be implemented in all high schools across twenty provinces, five autonomous regions, and four major cities in Mainland China.

from “compulsory and subject-centered” to “elective and cross-disciplinary.”<sup>47</sup> The elective modules, which I take up in my next chapter, not only give space and autonomy for both local authorities (such as the Provincial Education Bureau) and schools in curriculum choice, but also require “unprecedented responsibility and capacity for local authorities, schools and teachers” (Wang, 2012, p. 18). As a reputational key public high school, Sunny High is always at the cutting edge of Chinese curriculum reform. When Sunny High Principal Mr. Wang applied for the approval of this new program from the Chinese government in 2007, he had to make an oral defense and present the rationales for Sunny High creating this international curriculum program. He framed the program as school curriculum reform in order to tailor to individual student needs, particularly the needs of students who want to pursue their college education abroad. Based on the shared needs of these students, Sunny High provides them with the international curriculum of GAC – a differentiated curriculum – as an elective curriculum, which the students collectively choose. According to Mr. Wang, the national compulsory curriculum accounts for 50 to 60% of Sunny High IAP’s International Curriculum Program, while the remaining 40 to 50% of the curriculum is related to the international curriculum, which is chosen and designed by the school. This way of framing the Sunny High IAP International Curriculum Program has legitimated this new program in the framework of High School New Curriculum Reform.

Like many other government-approved “public” international high school curriculum programs in China, the Sunny High IAP International Curriculum Program was also approved under the CF CRS policy. According to the government document, Sunny High and Jefferson Independence High School (pseudonym) in the United States are partner schools. As

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<sup>47</sup> My next chapter on students’ educational experiences with the curriculum program will more deeply explore the curriculum.

aforementioned, Sunny High School is a well-known elite Chinese public high school in Moon City. Jefferson Independence High School is a private school located in Washington State. It is listed as the official foreign collaborator of Sunny High for the establishment of Sunny High IAP International Curriculum Program.

The above information has provided a sense of what kind of curriculum the IAP is, who designed it, and for whom. In what follows, I shall give further information about the organizations involved in the IAP creation because doing so will allow us to examine the crucial part of the curriculum questions – “for what purpose(s), in which way, and with what results?” In the following section, I will discuss some important findings on a range of organizational actors involved in the development of the Sunny High IAP program, particularly focusing on the activities, purposes, and interests of these participants. Using the diagram (see **Figure 1**), I will also describe the relationships between these social actors in order to uncover the characteristics of network governance reflected in the new development and practices of High School New Curriculum Reform and the CFCRS Policy.

### **A Network Analysis of the Sunny High IAP International Curriculum Program**

In this section, I employ a simple directed graphing technique to visualize the relationships between social actors surrounding the development of the Sunny High IAP program. The diagram shown in the section not only helps trace where the Chinese and foreign parts of the internationalized curriculum come from, but also illustrates the affiliations and interactions between social actors who are involved in the new joint international program. Specifically, I will first analyze multiple forms of partnership embedded in the creation of the Sunny High IAP International Curriculum Program. Second, I will trace the flow of the GAC program in order to uncover the commodification of curriculum. Third, I focus on investigating where China Bridge

comes from to illuminate the privatization of Chinese public institutions. I conclude with a discussion that reiterates how my network analysis reveals this emerging international high school curriculum program in conjunction with the global education industry. Critical to this discussion is an awareness of how collaboration and partnership are seen as neoliberal strategies to privatize public education.

### ***The Rise of Multi-Stakeholder Partnerships: The Role of Private Corporations***

To begin with, I shall discuss the partnership between Sunny High School and Jefferson Independence High School. According to the CFCRS policy, any international high school program should have Chinese and foreign education institutions as collaborators who work together around teaching activities for Chinese students. As mentioned above, the government file that documents the approval of the Sunny High IAP program shows that Sunny High and Jefferson Independence High are partner schools.

Jefferson Independence High is a private school in the United States. According to the American school's website, it is "a Washington State approved and nationally accredited independent school," serving homeschooled students and other independent learners. Jefferson Independence High School provides very flexible education services to students and families, including "global distance learning" and "homeschool and un-schooling recognition and support." This U.S. private school is responsible for issuing official Washington State high school diplomas to the students graduating from the Sunny High IAP program. However, Chinese school administrators, teachers, and students in the program knew less about this foreign school and had fewer interactions with it than expected. Sunny High knew about the American school through

China Bridge. In interpreting the roles of the official foreign partner school and China Bridge, an administrator of the Sunny High IAP program Mr. Bian explained,<sup>48</sup>

China Bridge did what the partner school in the United States was supposed to do...Frankly speaking, Jefferson Independence High School is only for solving the problem of how to get government approval of our international program.

Mr. Bian's statement reveals that despite having an official foreign collaborator, Sunny High actually collaborated with China Bridge, who represented the foreign part of the joint IAP program. This evidence demonstrates that "little-p policies" were "formed and enacted within localities and institutions" for the particular interests of social actors (Ball, 2013, p. 8). Specifically, Sunny High, China Bridge, and Jefferson Independence High participated in the remaking process of the CFCRS big-P Policy in order to legitimate the Sunny High IAP program. The role of China Bridge in building the partnership between Sunny High and Jefferson Independence High raises the question: what is the role of private corporations in the global partnership for education?

After discussing the partnership between Sunny High School and Jefferson Independence High School, I will now address China Bridge's partnerships with Sunny High, Jefferson Independence High, and ACT Education Solutions, Ltd. China Bridge is a key organization in facilitating the establishment and development of Sunny High IAP program. Its agential role was demonstrated in two ways, according to Mr. Wang, the administrator of Sunny High. On the one hand, China Bridge helped with making connections between Sunny High and Jefferson Independence High in dealing with the partnership required by the CFCRS Policy, as described above. On the other hand, the Chinese company has connections with the foreign curriculum providers of the IAP program. Specifically, China Bridge not only imported the GAC program

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<sup>48</sup> Pseudonyms are used for all interviewees in this study. Interviews with these research participants were conducted in Chinese. I translated the transcriptions quoted in this chapter into English.

from the U.S. By cooperating with ACT Education Solutions, but also facilitated the connectivity between two different curriculum systems by connecting and activating the IAP program through the partnership with Chinese elite public schools. As demonstrated in the name of the International Access Project (IAP), China Bridge constructed the project that helps international education services come into China, aids Chinese students to go abroad, and assists Chinese elite public schools to become international.

The IAP international high school program was designed by China Bridge International Education Services Co., Ltd. in collaboration with ACT Education Solutions, Ltd. Both China Bridge and ACT Education Solutions are for-profit education companies. The former is a Chinese firm located in Moon City, a cosmopolitan city in China, while the latter is an American company located in Iowa City in the United States. The mission of the IAP program is “devoted to high school international education in China.” Specifically, it aims to “innovate high school curriculum by bringing students early access to first-rate international education.” However, given the fact that its service targets are those Chinese high school students who want to study abroad, the practical goal of the IAP program is to help students prepare for the world’s elite universities, “where they hone their talents and strive to become tomorrow’s leaders, entrepreneurs and innovators.” The problem here is not only in who have more opportunities to become such people, but also in what the implications are for cultivating these kinds of people both for the nation-state and the global society.

There are two points worthy of note here regarding the IAP program: curriculum integration and IAP network schools. Based on the importation of the GAC program from ACT Education Solutions, China Bridge invited educational experts and consultants from Chinese universities and educational institutions to discuss how to localize the GAC program for the needs

of Chinese students. As a result, this Chinese education company put GAC together with the Chinese national high school curriculum and gave the combined product a new name called the International Access Project (IAP). The rationale of combining these two curricula is to “provide students a solid foundation for learning that combines the best elements of both Chinese and Western courses.”<sup>49</sup> This discourse is consistent with what the Chinese government expects in their official educational reforms.

When it comes to IAP network schools, an interesting part of the IAP program is that it is like a business incubator. Specifically, the IAP program needs to be activated through collaboration with partner schools who are eligible to run high schools, get a government permit to run an IAP program, recruit Chinese students, teach the Chinese curriculum, and so on. One of the effective strategies that China Bridge employs is to seek partnerships with elite Chinese public high schools. There are two main reasons why China Bridge always sought partnerships with such public schools. First, such schools are state schools and they are able to teach the Chinese national high school curriculum. Second, these schools are elite state schools who have quality educational resources and who have reputational capital to attract socially elite Chinese families. Therefore, they are able to recruit their children, who want to study abroad. As long as there are students who study the internationalized curriculum, the companies can make money by asking for fees for using their curriculum. The rationale of this unique program-running mode is articulated in the company’s advertisement: “Prestigious high schools, leading to world top universities”; “Entering prestigious high schools, stepping into the world’s top-ranked universities.” Since the IAP program was begun in 2005, China Bridge has worked with 26 network schools in 16 different provinces in China. Most of the IAP network schools are concentrated in cosmopolitan and metropolitan

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<sup>49</sup> This quotation is from the China Bridge website.



cities in China. According to the company website, there have been over 5,000 students enrolled in the program throughout China. The number of student enrollment continued to increase. The Sunny High IAP International Curriculum Program is the largest of the IAP programs in China.

As previously mentioned, China Bridge imported GAC through its partnership with ACT Education Solutions and put GAC together with the Chinese high school curriculum to create a new product, the International Access Project (IAP). The company regards IAP as its own brand and is ambitious to make it into the most influential brand in the field of the internationalization of Chinese basic education. Branding IAP is an effective strategy that Chinese Bridge adopts. It appears that China Bridge has an ownership of IAP. However, when exploring where GAC – the core curriculum of IAP – comes from, several foreign organizations come to our attention. In the next section, I will trace the flow of the GAC program, which not only further discusses the central role of China Bridge in the network, but also reveals the commodification of curriculum.

### ***The Flow of the GAC Program: The Commodification of Curriculum***

According to the GAC official website, “The Global Assessment Certificate™ (GAC) program is an internationally recognized university preparation program for students who do not have English as their first language. It is a product of ACT Education Solutions, Limited (a wholly owned subsidiary of ACT Inc.)” This shows that the GAC curriculum is owned by ACT Education Solutions, while ACT Education Solutions belongs to ACT, Inc. In other words, it is ACT, Inc. who actually owns the GAC curriculum.

However, my network analysis finds that GAC as a university preparation program was originally developed by Campus Group International Education Services, Inc. (CGIES) in 1995. This company is a subsidiary of a private education company called Australian Company Campus Group Holdings (CGH) established in Sydney, Australia in 1994. Both CGH and CGIES are for-

profit. CGIES is one of the two main divisions of CGH. Like its parent company, CGIES views international students from Asian countries who want to study at English-speaking universities as target customers. The company focuses on preparing such students for international college admissions by providing them with the GAC curriculum program that emphasizes improving academic and linguistic skills. In addition, establishing the partnership with “pathway universities” that recognize GAC is another strategy adopted by CGIES in order to provide international students with a “seamless path into universities.” According to the Observatory on Borderless Higher Education (2005), CGIES has agreements with approximately 110 “pathway universities,” mostly concentrated in Australia, the United States, the United Kingdom, and Canada.

Although GAC has increasingly become an internationally recognized university preparation program under the efforts of CGIES, this international curriculum program made less money than CGH expected. As a result, in 2005, CGH decided to sell CGIES with its products, including GAC, to American College Test (ACT), Inc. ACT, Inc. is a well-known non-profit organization based in the United States. Through the acquisition of CGIES, ACT, Inc. created a new for-profit subsidiary, which is named ACT Education Solutions. This new company is in charge of the educational programs that CGIES previously owned. The GAC program is one of the main programs that ACT Education Solutions currently runs.

Through selling and buying activities, the GAC program was handed over to ACT Education Solutions. This action taken by ACT Inc. signals that this U.S. assessment giant intends to expand its traditional provision of educational services for U.S. citizens into global education services for international students. The intervention of ACT, Inc. in the process of the flow of the GAC curriculum creates the bundling relation between ACT and GAC. In addition, the cooperation between China Bridge and ACT Education Solutions allowed the GAC-ACT bundle to be

imported and sold into the Chinese education market. Consequently, the Sunny High IAP became an ACT test center. However, only those students who enrolled in the Sunny High IAP can take ACT in the test center because they paid tuition fees that allowed them to use the GAC curriculum. This issue touches on the requirement and distribution of expensive tuition that students should pay for attending the IAP program. Below is a selection from my interview with Mr. Wang in which he addressed why the “public” international curriculum program required high tuition:

**SL:** As you mentioned, such international high school programs do charge tuition. How do you explain why the international programs created by Chinese public schools require students to pay tuition fees?

**Mr. Wang:** Because...uh, this thing...because compared with other students...these students want...how can I say this?...they want...want to study foreign curriculum. Foreign curriculum is...is not provided by the State. The Chinese High School Curriculum doesn't offer foreign curriculum. In addition, the cost (of foreign curriculum) is VERY HIGH...VERY HIGH. So I need to charge some fees.

**SL:** What do you mean “cost”? What does the cost include?

**Mr. Wang:** At first, curricular fees. You use foreign curriculum. All foreign curricula require a fee payment. [We] must pay curricular fees!

**SL:** Really?

**Mr. Wang:** Yes. Of course!

**SL:** Pay to whom?

**Mr. Wang:** Pay to those who design the curriculum.

**SL:** Who? Who are they?

**Mr. Wang:** ACT, Inc., whom I mentioned before.

**SL:** Ok. They designed...

**Mr. Wang:** They designed [the curriculum]. It is they that designed the (GAC) curriculum.

**SL:** Do we pay money to them (ACT, Inc.)?

**Mr. Wang:** I don't know to whom the money was paid. We have the agency (China Bridge) to deal with these things.

**SL:** OK. It (China Bridge) is the agency.

**Mr. Wang:** Details...I am not clear about the details. But we *do* need curricular...curricular fees.

**SL:** Oh! This is a new thing!

**Mr. Wang:** If you use A-Level curriculum, you also need to pay curricular fees.

**SL:** Oh. Oh.

**Mr. Wang:** If you don't pay, who will allow you to use their curriculum?

**SL:** No wonder the cost is high.

**Mr. Wang:** Of course! In addition, foreign teachers...the cost of hiring foreign teachers is expensive. The State cannot pay such fees for you...cannot pay such fees for meeting the needs of *these* students. The state doesn't have the capacity [to pay fees for those students who need to use foreign curriculum]. So the students must sponsor tuition fees. Right? They don't offer free teaching to you. They are not volunteers.

The commodification of curriculum is revealed by the flow of the GAC program and by Mr. Wang's emphasis on the cost of using the foreign curriculum. His taken-for-granted attitude towards the payment for the use of foreign curriculum reflects the popular spread of the idea of commodifying education. In addition, his lack of knowledge about who receives the funds for curricular fees further highlights the important, yet invisible, role of China Bridge as a for-profit agency in the network of various institutions involved.

### ***Where does China Bridge Come From?: The Endogenous Privatization of Education***

Given the central role of China Bridge in the network, it is worth digging into this education firm itself in order to understand power relations between involved social actors. The data show that China Bridge often emphasized its MOE-related background when marketing the IAP program. This is not just a marketing strategy, but also reflects its relations with background institutions. China Bridge is a for-profit International Education Services firm created by China Center for International Education Exchange (CCIEE). CCIEE is an education consultancy company established in 2001, which is affiliated with China Education Association for International Exchange (CEAIE). CCIEE is an independent corporate entity. However, it is positioned as a joint-stock partnership enterprise and it belongs to collective property. International

educational cooperation and exchange are the major education services that CCIEE provides. One of the main departments in CCIEE is called the Join Program Department and IAP is the major program of this department. CCIEE entrusted China Bridge to develop and run the IAP program. There are some interesting ties between China Bridge and CCIEE. For example, the main leaders of China Bridge are also the employees of CCIEE.

CCIEE's relation to the MOE is based on its affiliation with CEAIE, which was established in 1981 and administrated by MOE. In 1991, CEAIE was sanctified as a non-governmental organization by the Ministry of Civil Affairs (MCA) of the People's Republic of China. Both the MOE and the MCA are the departments of the State Council. If we trace the line from the State Council to China Bridge demonstrated in the diagram, we can find that the affiliations embody the privatization process of Chinese public institutions from dot-gov institutions, through dot-edu organizations such as the MOE and CEAIE, to the dot-com firm CCIEE and the dot-cn corporation China Bridge.<sup>50</sup> This is a typical example of the endogenous form of privatization that Ball (2007) underscores. This type of privatization is also one manifestation of social policy reform with Chinese characteristics. It signals the trend of the privatization of Chinese public institution.

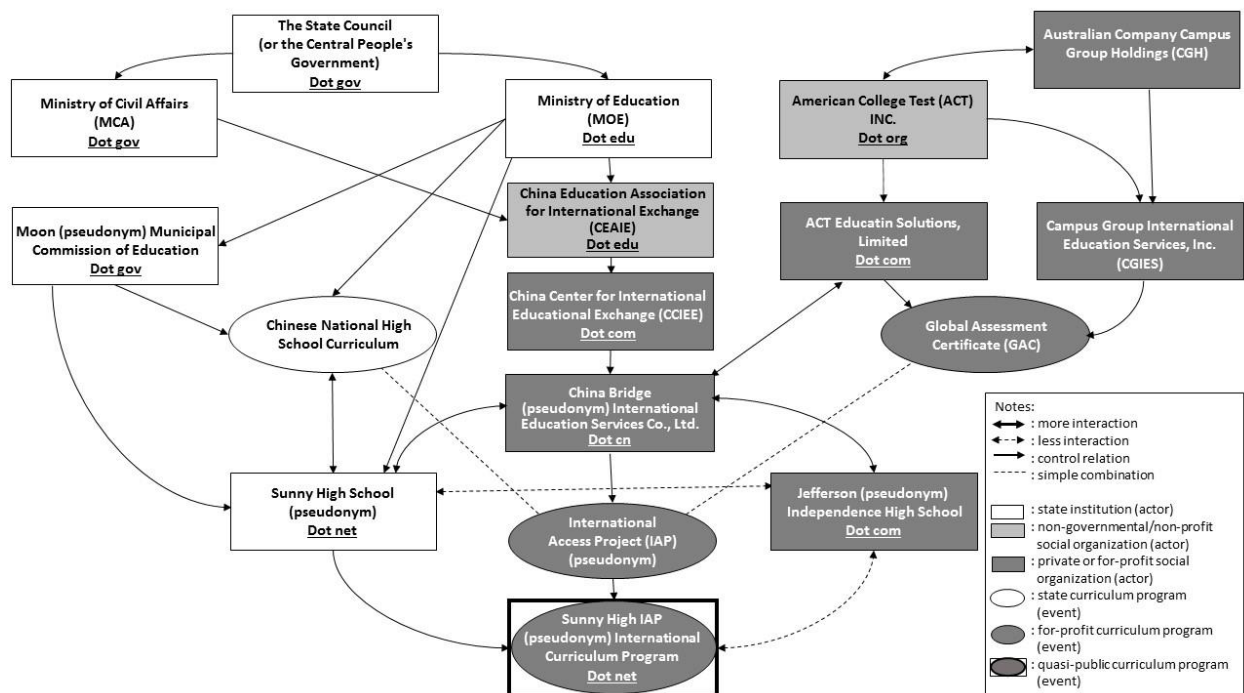
When looking at the power relations between the social organizations bearing on China Bridge (see **Figure 1**), this study has found that the Central Government has strong control over the MOE, as it does for the MCA. The strength of the relationship between CEAIE and the MOE is not as strong as that between the Central Government and the MOE. However, although CEAIE is designated as a non-governmental organization, it still receives guidance and supervision from both the MOE and the MCA. The unique relations between CEAIE and the MOE can be found in the evidence that the president of CEAIE was the former Vice Minister of the MOE. As a non-

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<sup>50</sup> See Howard, 2002.

profit organization, CEAIE represents the Chinese education sector to conduct non-governmental, educational exchange and collaboration. Nevertheless, CCIEE derives from CEAIE as a for-profit education company despite its position as collective property. Affiliated with CCIEE, China Bridge is a private for-profit firm. In this line, the further educational institutions are from the Central Government and MOE, the more likely they are to be businesses, and the less control the State has over them.

**Figure 1** The network of Sunny High IAP International Curriculum Program



It is starting with CCIEE that educational institutions become private. However, CEAIE as a non-governmental and non-profit organization is also problematic given its relation to CCIEE, a for-profit institution. Such similar problematic issues can also be found in the establishment of ACT Education Solutions, a for-profit subsidiary of ACT, which is itself a non-profit organization. Although located in different contexts, the same strategies were used for the endogenous

privatization of education. As corporate brands, both the IAP curricular program and GAC curricular program were developed for profit by their respective corporations.

***Global Education Business: Collaboration and Partnership as Neoliberal Strategies, Exogenous Privatization of Education, and Neoliberal Educational Governance***

My analysis of the Sunny High IAP curriculum program demonstrates how multiple stakeholders from different contexts and sectors – Chinese and international markets, public and private sectors – are connected and involved in the creation of this educational program for the purpose of making profit. By showing the rise of multi-stakeholder partnerships and the flow of the international curriculum, the network analysis points out that the Sunny High IAP International Curriculum Program has implied a global education business, which reveals that education governance in the era of neoliberal globalization is not limited to the activities of the state.

Based on the network analysis, I argue that Chinese educational reforms – in particular, High School New Curriculum Reform and the CFCRS policy – create opportunities for the private sector to participate in public sector education. For instance, Sunny High established its IAP international curriculum, which caters to the needs of students who want to pursue their college education abroad, in the name of promoting High School New Curriculum Reform. Facilitated by the CFCRS policy, partnership and collaboration are common strategies for the private sector to get involved in the reform of public education. As revealed in the network analysis, “collaboration” and “partnership” are effective managerial strategies in developing the Sunny High IAP International Curriculum Program. Sunny High IAP was established through the partnerships between private and private, such as China Bridge and ACT Education Solutions, China Bridge and Jefferson Independent High, and private and public, such as China Bridge and Sunny High.

The use of both private-private and public-private partnerships make this new program transform education into a business, a global education business (Ball, 2012).

As the diagram shows, social organizations on the right side are from the United States and Australia and most of them are private educational institutions. Chinese organizational actors and curricular programs on the left side are public, while those in the middle are mixed. But as the graph shows, China Bridge as a private institution is at the center of the network. As a central actor, the company has more connections with both Chinese and foreign private institutions. Given its partnerships with multiple social organizations both in Chinese and international contexts, China Bridge brings “the ‘informal authority’ of diverse and flexible networks” into a changing Chinese educational landscape (Ball & Junemann, 2012, p. 3). This implies a new form of education governance in China, a network-based governance that goes beyond the nation-state. This educational governance indicates the exogenous privatization of Chinese public education institutions by bringing various for-profit organizations into state educational reforms.

The exogenous privatization intertwined with the endogenous privatization of Chinese public education reveals the neoliberal character of education reforms in China – the privatization of education, which also reflects the reform characteristics in other social domains in contemporary China. The growth of forms of privatization in education was interwoven with the marketization of education and existing hierarchical power of the State, which implies changes in the modalities of the state – the shift from government to governance that involves the adoption of devolution, decentralization, public-private partnership, and other managerial strategies (Brown, 2015; Rhodes, 1997). In Ball’s (2009) words, the rise of network-based neoliberal governance mixed up with bureaucratic government and old forms of governance leads to the formation of heterarchical governance, which is filled with tensions, inconsistencies, dilemmas, and contradictions.



The network analysis points out that collaboration and partnership are regarded as neoliberal strategies to privatize public education. As disclosed above, China Bridge is a result of the endogenous privatization of Chinese public education institutions. When introducing itself, the education company always puts its background institutions, such as CCIEE and the MOE, at the forefront. This company utilizes its unique relations to the MOE as social and political capital when seeking partnerships with Chinese elite public schools and marketing its educational services to schools and parents. Besides initiating partnership and building networking with other private firms, the public-private partnership between Sunny High and China Bridge is even more crucial among the relationships in the network because this relation is the precondition for foreign private sectors to be involved in the Chinese state education system. Furthermore, this public-private partnership marks the exogenous form of privatization in education. As Ball (2012) reminds us, the public-private partnership tends to blur the public-private divide. This is best represented in the quasi-public and quasi-private identity of the Sunny High IAP program. As mentioned in the introduction and confirmed in Principal Wang's statement, such a program is ostensibly public but requires families to pay high tuition fees.

In addition, contractual relations between these two institutions deserves further discussion. According to the agreements in their contracts, Sunny High is responsible for providing school infrastructure, recruiting students, teaching the Chinese high school curriculum, administrating IAP students, and issuing Chinese high school diplomas. China Bridge is primarily in charge of running the GAC curriculum system and consultancy services for students' overseas studies, including hiring foreign teachers and managing them, monitoring the GAC teaching quality, and providing students with career counseling. As school administrators from Sunny High all expressed, the contractual relations are filled with tensions and conflicts, which require continuing

negotiations surrounding the distribution of profits and responsibilities between the two institutions. The tensions and contradictions will be discussed in more detail in Chapter 5 and 6.

In summary, the network analysis of the Sunny High IAP International Curriculum Program demonstrates how the marketization and privatization of education is manipulated at the macro-social and meso-institutional levels. The analysis reveals the underlying and invisible relations between social organizations that were involved in the establishment of the Sunny High IAP International Curriculum Program. In this section, I discover the latent patterns of interests and struggles that shaped the creation of this international education program at the institutional level. In what follows, I will seek out how parental choice of the program reflects the interests and strategies of a burgeoning Chinese elite class in the struggle for legitimation and recognition.

### **The Choice of International High School Curriculum Programs: ‘New’ Parental Choice of School in China?**

This section continues to look at an increasing marketization and privatization of education by critically examining Chinese students’ choice of the Sunny High IAP International Curriculum Program. While the network analysis demonstrates the marketization and privatization of education at the macro (social) and meso (institutional) levels, a focus on parental school choice highlights how individuals operate at the micro-social level, particularly in their motivations and decision-making processes regarding this international high school curriculum program. By exploring how the students and their parents make sense of high school choices, this section is intended not only to uncover the complexities of these students’ choice to attend internationally-focused high schools, but also to further illuminate the ways in which marketization and privatization of education is boosted by parent-initiated school choice.

Previous studies on school choice in China have pointed out that parental choice of school is a bottom-up movement in the Chinese context (Wu, 2008). School choice practices, particularly in the compulsory education sector, are officially banned by the Chinese central government. However, this official discourse was challenged by some political and historical conditions as well as economic and social changes, including the Chinese government's insufficient investment in education, the existing key school system, and social class changes in contemporary China (Liu & Apple, 2016; Wu, 2014). These conditions and changes contributed to the formation of the school choice market in China. They also made school choice policies become a field of contestation. The conflicts between the central government's call for the prohibition of school choice and actual parental choice practices created "grey markets" within which the interests of middle-class Chinese parents converged with those of Chinese schools and local governments. Following the footsteps of this research, I examine the practices and effects of the choice of newly-established international high school programs.

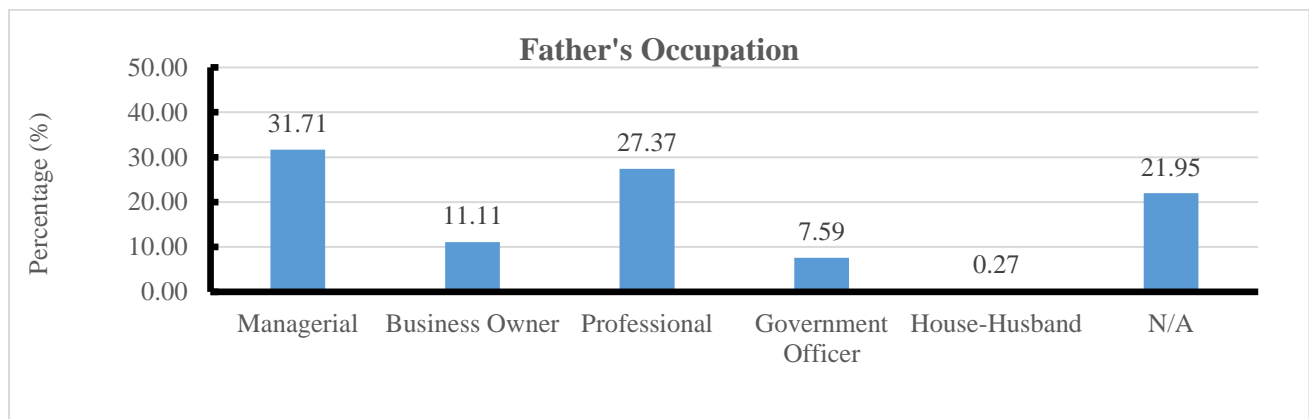
Students enrolled in Sunny High IAP International Curriculum Program are divided into three groups. The majority of them are Moon City residents. About one-fourth of the students did not have Moon City household registrations (*hukou*, 户口). Among these students, half of them have received elementary and middle school education in this city. Another half have completed their pre-high school education from provinces outside Moon City. Despite of the difference in having or not having Moon City *hukou*, the students have similar family backgrounds. Their parents are higher managerial and professional people, business owners, or government officers who have high economic capital, social capital, and/or cultural capital (See **Figure 2-7**).<sup>51</sup> In the

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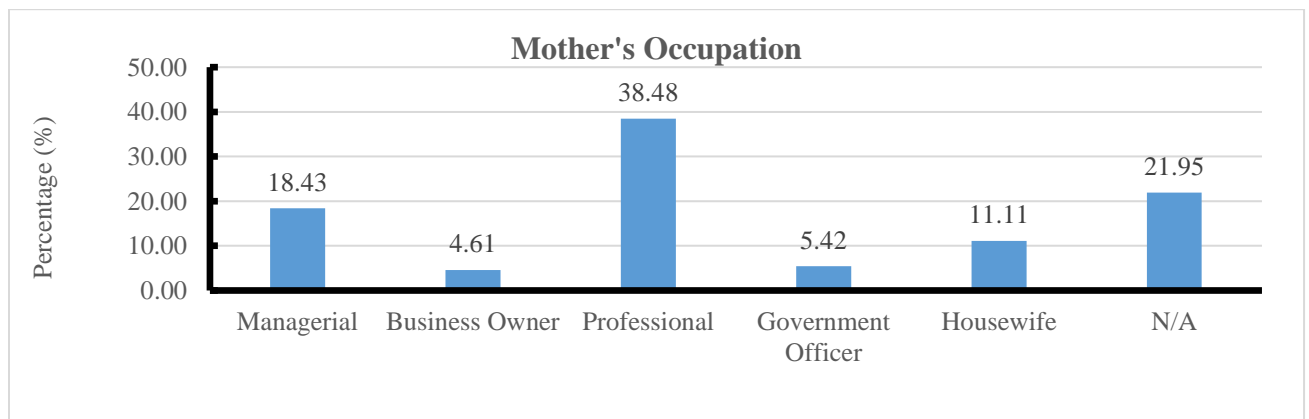
<sup>51</sup> My survey data show that some students refused to answer the question about their parents' occupations because this is a sensitive question for them. Based on my observation, such parents are more likely to do government-related jobs. See Chapter 3 for my reflection on this issue.

language of the school teachers and administrators whom I interviewed, these parents are successful people (*chenggong renshi*, 成功人士). In other words, they belong to the beneficial interest group in contemporary Chinese society (Yan & Chang, 2009). Based on family incomes, these socially elite groups would be considered middle-upper and upper classes. My survey data also shows that 80% of the students in the school have attended public key schools at their compulsory education stage (See **Figure 8**).

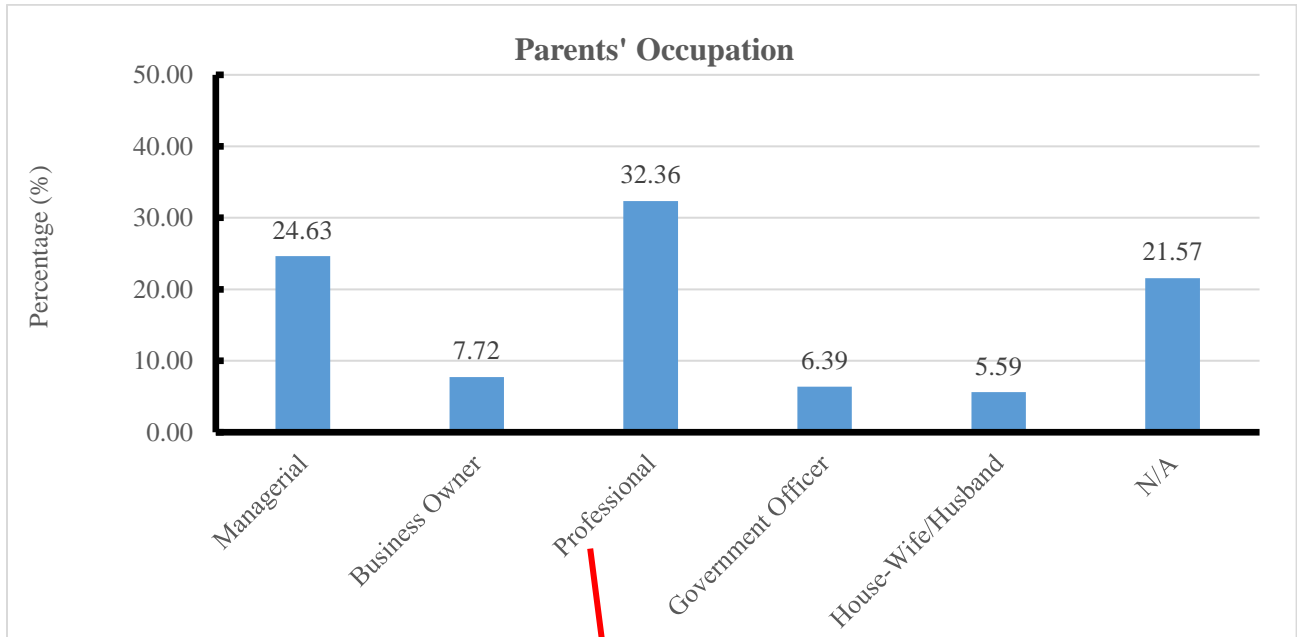
**Figure 2**



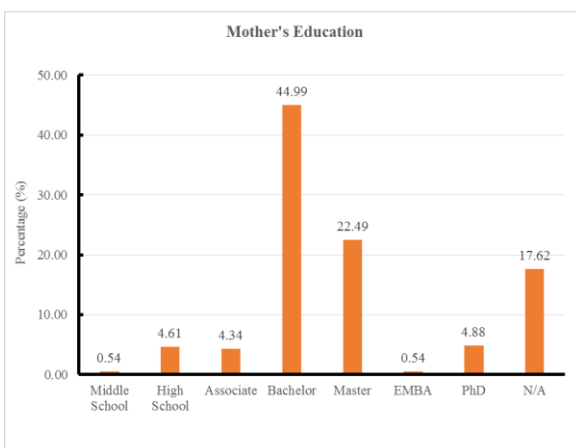
**Figure 3**



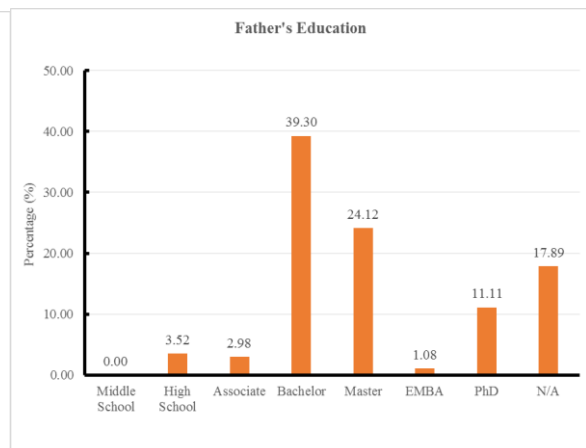
**Figure 4**



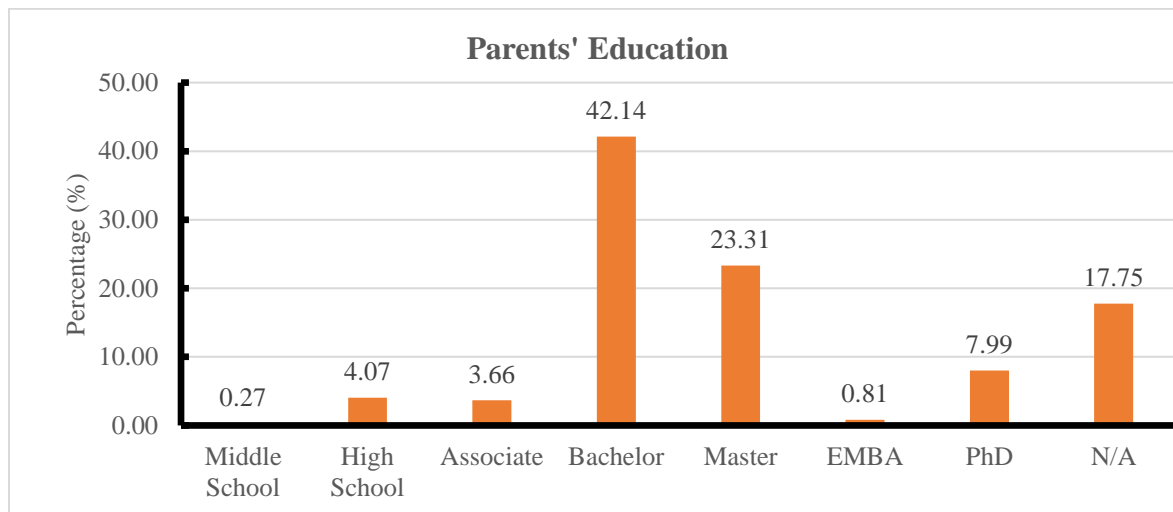
**Figure 5**



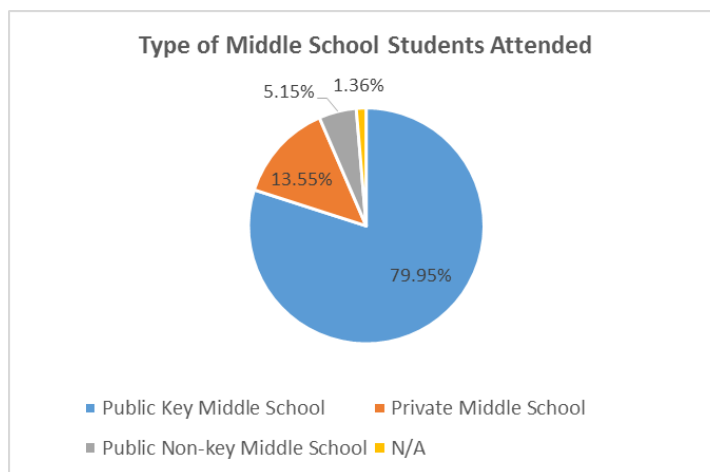
**Figure 6**



**Figure 7**



**Figure 8**



The interview data reveal the complexity of the motivations and contextual factors that influenced the high school choice of these socially elite Chinese students. The data also show that the students and their families actually made complex nested choices, which involved the intertwining of college choice, high school choice, and curriculum choice. The parents of these students were highly engaged in the processes and decision-making behind choosing a high school. To a large extent, student choice of a high school is parent-initiated school choice. I will discuss these findings in an integrated way.

For the majority of the students attending Sunny High IAP, failure to get admitted to public key high schools due to their low test scores (*zhongkao*, Entrance Exam for High Schools) is the most important reason why they chose international divisions or international curriculum programs created by public key high schools. Like their academically elite Chinese counterparts, these students preferred attending key high schools because usually only excellent students could be selected by such schools and also the schools act as a symbolic threshold to access elite higher education in China. As a parent interviewee explained,

There are too many thresholds in the Chinese education system. Why? It is because we have too many people in China. The expansion of college enrollments has led to the result that many Chinese college graduates cannot find jobs. The labor market is extremely competitive. The key school system could keep you on the elite track – entering a key elementary school, a key middle school, and then a key high school and an elite Chinese university. If you have no access to the key school system, there is no hope to get in a good university and get a good job. If you are not on the (elite) track, then there is less probability for you to succeed and find a job.

This excerpt highlights the importance of entering the elite track in the Chinese education system. Like their parents, the students recognized that in the Chinese context, educational qualifications from elite institutions serve as “a screening device” and elite education acts as “an arena of competition and social exclusion” (Ball, 2003, p. 15). Thus, competing for access to the traditional elite track is taken for granted by the students. However, their low test scores have jeopardized their access to Chinese elite education. But the international curriculum programs created by public key high schools open up an alternative elite pathway for them, not to the Chinese elite universities that they originally preferred, but to the world-class universities that are even more valued than the former. This is exactly true for my student informants such as Feng and Lili, who are Moon City residents and have studied in public key middle schools. Their high school choices were oriented toward elite college education.

Like Feng and Lili, Weiwei received his compulsory education in Moon City. Choosing the IAP program in the Sunny High International Division was also not his first choice. His dream was to attend Sunny High School, just as did many of his middle school classmates who studied in the Middle School Section of Sunny High (Sunny Middle School) – a first-tier public key middle school.<sup>52</sup> However, because of the lack of a Moon City *hukou* and his low test scores in *zhongkao*, he had to choose an international program that allowed him to pursue preparation for his college education. As his mother Ms. Fan explicated when being asked why she sent Weiwei to Sunny High International Division,

In fact, it is because of the problem of *hukou*. When you go to high school, you are certain that you will go to college. You study in a high school in Moon City. But you don't have the *hukou* of this city. You cannot attend the *Gaokao* here. What will you do? If I let him go back to Shijiazhuang [the capital of Hebei Province] and live with his dad, Weiwei doesn't want to do so and I don't either. So he must study in Moon City. Then if you complete high school education here and you cannot attend the *Gaokao*, what will we do? Although I knew someone who could help Weiwei attend Sunny High and other key high schools, what would he do after finishing high school? At that time, I was thinking that whatever high school he would attend, he must study abroad. He cannot attend the *Gaokao* in Moon City. He cannot go back to his hometown to take the *Gaokao* because what he studies here is different from the one there. In addition, the cut-off points of exam scores [the *Gaokao* scores] in Hebei Province are particularly high. If you don't learn what will be tested there, then how could you take their *Gaokao*? It is just so much uncertainty... very unsure of... There isn't any security. So we, I and Weiwei, both agree that he must go to college abroad.

As a single mother, Ms. Fan is a successful business woman. After graduating from college, she had worked in a state-owned travel agency in Shijiazhuang for several years. She migrated to Moon City and built a travel agency with her friends in 2001. She always chose key public schools for Weiwei. As she underscored, “I must send him to good schools. No matter how much money

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<sup>52</sup> There are basically two different tiers of public key schools in Moon City. The first tier of public key school are the reputational ones on the municipal level. The second tier of the schools are those on the district level.



is paid, I want him to go to good schools. So his elementary and middle schools are very good schools, key schools.” However, because she didn’t belong to a “special talent” group according to the Talent Introduction Policy in Moon City, she couldn’t receive the *hukou* of this cosmopolitan city. The household registration system restricted her son’s entry to middle school and high school. With the help of friends, she found an appropriate person and paid ¥150,000 (approximately equal to \$23,000) school choice fee for Weiwei to enter Sunny Middle School. She didn’t even know the distribution of the choice fee and how much money was actually paid to the school.<sup>53</sup> She noted that she didn’t need to know because what she cared about was the result – paying this choice fee did help her son go to the desired school. She also could use this social network (of course, along with the need to pay choice fees or sponsor fees) to help Weiwei enter Sunny High. However, knowing that her son is not an academically top student and heavily influenced by his learning environment, she was worried that he would be not as competent as academically elite students at Sunny High and thus might be looked down on by others. Worrying that such a stressful experience would make him lose his confidence, Ms. Fan would prefer to choose a “smooth pathway” for her son by sending him to Sunny High International Division.

In my interview with her, Ms. Fan expressed the feeling of “no way out” and repeatedly said “what will I do?” For Weiwei and her, to some extent, choosing to attend Sunny High IAP is a “reluctant” choice. However, it is also a strategic choice because despite the restriction of the household registration system, Ms. Fan was able to utilize her economic, social, and cultural capital to help her son navigate the process of seeking access to alternative pathways to elite education. Compared with millions of children from low-income migrant workers, who face

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<sup>53</sup> This reflects what Liu and Apple (2016) emphasize – “payment for the choice of desired schools has become ‘a hidden rule’ in China, which leads to choice-fee related corruption” (p. 10).

similar difficulties in accessing educational resources and opportunities in China, Weiwei was able to overcome or circumvent the barriers using his mother's economic, social, and cultural capital.

Ms. Fan was also aware of a high value of educational credentials from U.S. and Canadian universities. She was particularly interested in the opportunity for her son to work abroad. Knowing the difficulty of obtaining a green card in the United States for international Chinese undergraduates, Ms. Fan thought that it might be better for Weiwei to go to Canada and study for a master's degree after he got a bachelor's degree in the United States. As she noted, "International students could get work visas when they graduate from Canadian universities. But this doesn't happen in the United States." Although she said that she didn't care if her son could choose to return to China for work, she preferred that Weiwei could acquire and accumulate working experience abroad. She believed that this path could create a high reference point for her son's employment in an international company in China. As she emphasized, "There are too many students studying abroad. If you come back to China right after graduation, you would not secure any competitive advantage. If you have some distinctive ability such as English communication skills and foreign working experience, it would make a difference." Ms. Fan's aspirations of her child's future employment in a cosmopolitan world were interwoven in her decision matrix. The opportunities embedded in her choice of Sunny High's IAP Program are a way of distinguishing her son from others in a competitive, global marketplace (Maxwell & Aggleton, 2015). Not showing interest in cultural diversity and open-mindedness, Mr. Fan emphasized the role of the acquisition of English competence and the accumulation of international work experiences in occupying high-status positions in a competitive global market. She appeared to be a "pragmatic cosmopolitan" (Weenink, 2008).

Like Weiwei, Baixue also migrated to Moon City. Her father was a general manager of a large state-owned company in Jiangsu Province. Her mother used to work in a bank and later had become a housewife. Baixue mentioned that her college-educated parents valued improving her independent living skills and critical thinking ability, which have been influenced by Western educational ideas. Her father has thought about sending her to study abroad since she was an elementary student. When he moved to Moon City in 2006, due to a temporary change in his business location, he brought Baixue to the city with the hope of broadening her horizons. Baixue attended a first-tier public key middle school near the apartment that her parents purchased in this city as their new home. Although owing to the property being in the district where the key school is located, Baixue's family had to pay sponsor fees in order to let her enter the school because they didn't have Moon City *hukou*. When her father moved back to the capital city of Jiangsu for work, he left Baixue and her mother in Moon City because he believed that Baixue could receive a higher-quality education and obtain more educational resources and opportunities in this cosmopolitan city.

Although facing the problem of lacking Moon City *hukou*, as did Weiwei, Baixue didn't emphasize it as a key pushing factor that influenced her choice of the international high school program. Instead, she highlighted the impact of her father's expectations, the role of their social network, and her own learning preferences on her choice of high school. As she described, her father expected her to develop an international perspective by studying abroad. Being a general manager of a big enterprise enabled Baixue's father to know what kind of person, with what competencies – abilities, knowledge, skills, and experiences – is desirable. He argued that having an international and open mind is an important disposition that should be cultivated. Under the influence of her father, Baixue became interested in studying in the United States because in her

eyes, U.S. universities could help to develop her critical thinking skills, creativity, and multicultural competence. She told me that she originally planned to come to the U.S. for graduate education rather than college education because this would allow her to learn more about Chinese culture, which could build a solid foundation for her studying abroad. However, by talking with the children of her parents' friends and colleagues who attended Chinese universities, Baixue became aware of the problems with college education in China. These factors impacted her decision to go to a U.S. university.

Influenced by this college choice, Baixue chose to attend an internationally-oriented high school rather than a regular high school because the former could better meet her needs and learning preferences and aspirations. She stressed that "such a high school could allow me to concentrate more on preparing for the U.S. college application." In addition, she noted that she liked studying based on her interests rather than passively following teachers' instruction. However, the latter was the dominant teaching model that a regular high school was more likely to adopt. Thus, a traditional high school was excluded from her consideration. She then turned her attention to choosing what kind of international high school programs she will attend. In this process, she encountered many questions, as she highlighted.

The following interview excerpt illuminates Baixue's process of selecting an appropriate international high school curriculum program.

**Baixue:** There are too many choices. In fact, international high school programs in China are very chaotic – private ones and public ones. Among the public international programs, there are IAP, A-Level, AP, and other various types of curriculum programs, depending on which partner institutions the public high school collaborated with. Because I have decided to go to U.S. colleges, I didn't consider those international programs oriented toward universities in the United Kingdom, Australia, and other countries. Eventually, my focus was on three kinds of international high school programs, including Orange High A-Level Program, Apple High AP Program, and Sunny High IAP Program. I didn't choose the A-level program because I knew some friends who attended this program (they are not good

students). In addition, my mom and I visited the school and did some research about the program. We found that the school wind is just so-so.<sup>54</sup>

**SL:** Could you be more explicit about this? Why do you think that the school wind of Orange High A-Level Program is “just so-so”?

**Baixue:** In fact, many Chinese high school students who choose to go to college abroad are such students: they don’t study well at school and have low academic performance. But their families are very rich and could send them abroad. For these super riches, studying abroad is like “gold plating.” There are many such students attending Orange High A-Level Program. The personal qualities of the students are differentiated. Some of them are the children of Shanxi coal bosses.<sup>55</sup> I decided not to choose this international program because I don’t want to study with these students.

**SL:** You excluded the Orange High A-Level Program.

**Baixue:** Yes! I then considered Apple High’s AP Program. I am a kind of person who likes conducting comprehensive research when I desire to know something. My mom and I visited the Apple High AP Program. I also looked at the internet forum of the program.

**SL:** Internet forum?

**Baixue:** Yes! Internet forum. I took a look at the internet forum of the Apple High AP Program. I found that the Apple High AP Program and its regular high school classes were located in the same school campus. There are emotional confrontations between students in Apple High regular classes and those who attend the Apple High AP Program.

**SL:** Interesting! Could you tell me more about this?

**Baixue:** The students in regular classes at Apple High look at the students in the AP Program as those less talented who only rely on their parents’ money to get in Apple High and by contrast they attend Apple High based on their high academic achievement. Well, the latter group of students think that regular high school students are too cheesy/corny (*tu, 土*). There are emotional confrontations between them. They didn’t say it in a frank manner. But you could feel the tension through reading their replies. Thus, I think that this is not necessary.

**SL:** What do you mean “not necessary”?

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<sup>54</sup> The term of the school wind is directly translated from Chinese to English. The school wind (*xiaofeng*, 校风) reflects the culture of a school, but it is close to the meaning of what Bernstein (1977) calls “expressive order” that is concerned with conduct, character, and manner.

<sup>55</sup> Shanxin is a province of China. It is located in the North China region. Coal mining is important to Shanxi’s economy. Shanxi coal bosses are part of China’s “new rich.” They possess immense wealth and usually have extravagant lifestyles. Thus, Shanxi coal bosses have become a special term for parvenus (*baofahu*, 暴发户).

**Baixue:** I mean it is not necessary to be involved in such oppositions. I think that these oppositions are too naive. Because people live in different social environments, these differences can unavoidably produce misunderstandings and conflicts. If I were to attend the Apple High AP Program, I may have to get involved in the confrontations, which I don't like. Therefore, I decided not to choose this program, either. After a consideration of Sunny High IAP Program, I chose to attend this program.

**SL:** You compared these different international high school programs. What makes the Sunny High IAP Program more attractive to you?

**Baixue:** There are four reasons why Sunny High IAP Program attracted me. First, it is an international high school program [she had decided to choose such a program]. Second, it is an international program that was designed for students who will go to U.S. universities [she have decided to study in the U.S.]. Third, it has an independent campus [she don't have to deal with potential oppositions with students in Sunny High's main campus]. Fourth, it is created by Sunny High, and Sunny High is a prestigious school.

Baixue was an independent, confident, and mature 12<sup>th</sup> grader. She was open and flexible to working and living abroad in the future, as did her parents. She articulated the complex decision matrix as facing too many educational choices – college choices in an international context and various kinds of international high school curricula. Her parents played a key role in the process of choice and decision-making. As a child of open-minded parents, Baixue has played a significant role in making the decision of which kinds of college, high school, and international program she should attend. The four reasons why she chose to attend the Sunny High IAP Program indicate that the program matches the needs, preferences, and tastes of students like her. Given the key role that parents play in the decision-making process of school choice, this match should be also understood as parental preferences for their schools. These themes reflect the more personalized identities of new Chinese middle- and upper-class families (Bernstein, 1977; Power & Whitty, 2002). Moreover, I argue that the choice processes also shape the subjectivities of these students. For instance, in the process of choosing an appropriate international high school curriculum program, Baixue distinguished herself from the children of extremely wealthy families as well as

highly able regular Chinese high school students, which points out who she thinks she is. This resonates with what Ball and Nikita (2014) point out – school choice “reflects the identity of the parents” and also “forms the identity of the children” (p. 89). The data from my interviews with Qiang and his parents further support this argument.

When I first knew Qiang, he was an 11<sup>th</sup> grader. He loved sports. Using a Chinese term, he was a sunshine boy who was considerate, positive, and showed respect to others. He left his contact information on the survey form that I distributed at the school and expressed his willingness to be interviewed. As a native resident, Qiang was born and grew up in Moon City. His father Mr. Song was a human resource manager in a foreign company located in the city. His mother Mrs. Liao was a co-founder of a studio for child and adolescent counseling. Both parents were actively involved in Qiang’s education. I interviewed his parents together.

Qiang was in the public key school system from preschool through middle school. He studied in a math experimental class in Sunny Middle School. However, he ranked behind the majority of his classmates in terms of standardized test scores. Like many parents of the students enrolled in Sunny High IAP, Qiang’s parents were more concerned about his physical and psychological health than his academic achievement. Not expecting him to be admitted by regular key high schools, Qiang’s parents had tried to persuade him to study abroad and choose to attend the Sunny High IAP Program because he was originally not interested in this option. Rather than imposing their ideas on the child, they utilized various ways to convince Qiang to study overseas. They encouraged him to listen to U.S. radio stations and popular songs to increase his motivation to learn English because they knew that Qiang was not good at English, which is one of the main reasons why he didn’t feel confident in and became uninterested in studying abroad. They also asked Qiang’s best friend, who had chosen to study in a U.S. high school, to convince him to come

to the U.S. for college education. Not surprisingly, Qiang finally accepted his parents' suggestion – and chose to attend the Sunny High IAP Program – after receiving his *zhongkao* scores and knowing that he was not eligible to enter a key high school. It turned out that Qiang's parents had successfully prepared a “back-up” for him.

When I asked Qiang's parents why they chose the Sunny High IAP Program for their son, they traced back to what influenced their decision to send Qiang to study abroad. As Mr. Song explained,

I have a friend who told me that he will send his child to study abroad. I knew his child didn't study well at school. Of course, this friend has more financial capital than us. In our chat, he mentioned that a government officer whom we both knew also sent his child to study abroad. This officer is a very wise person. People like him know that there is no development and no hope in China, so they choose to send their children to study abroad. You know, such government officers have political and social power. They *could* send their children to good schools and even good colleges by delivering a leader's memo or using their social network. But why didn't they send their children to Chinese universities? Why didn't they use their power? Instead, they choose to send their children abroad. Why? This thing impressed me and influenced me. It made me think... These people are smarter than us. Their choice could not be wrong. Then, I told my wife that we should also send our child to study abroad...

Mr. Song's statement highlights the impact of social network/social capital on choice and decision-making. It also points out the educational preferences of different elite factions (political elites, economic elites, and cultural elites) and their influence on each other. These elite classes compete for the available positions in the field of elite education in an international context.

In addition, Mr. Song notes that the problems of test-driven teaching and learning in dominant Chinese schools are another important factor for influencing their decision-making. As he noted,

There was also an incident that influenced our decision. When Qiang was in 9<sup>th</sup> Grade, his elementary school classmate, who also studied in the same middle school as Qiang, committed suicide. She was a very poor girl! Her mom had sent her to many various kinds of extra-curricular classes – violin, drawing, English, Math, and so on – since she was a



preschooler. I heard from other parents that as long as her mom heard of what after-school classes other kids attended, she immediately registered the classes for her daughter... Fortunately, this girl's academic achievement was very high and she was able to attend an experimental class in the middle school. For a period of time, we doubted if we should learn from this parent. Qiang's mom and I intentionally avoided sending him to many extra-curricular classes. Our son's congenital health conditions are not good. He needs more physical exercise and sleep... Anyway, this girl was a highly able student. She was a top student in the middle school. But she often slept in class because in addition to completing school assignments, she had several after-school tutoring classes every day. Parents commented that she had high test stress before *zhongkao*. Her test scores in a mock-exam was not satisfactory, which directly led to her suicide. This incident shocked us. It was horrible! It was a tragedy! We don't want our son to experience such stress. But if he studied in a regular high school, he might have to have such a stressful high school life.

The incident that Mr. Song described was reported in media. Similar tragedies have been periodically recorded in many of China's cities. However, for Mr. Song and Mrs. Liao, this was not something written in text. It happened in their real lives. This incident made them worried about their child's future and reinforced their educational preferences. In fact, similar concerns are also expressed by Weiwei's mother. When Mr. Song and Mrs. Liao heard of international high school programs, they were attracted by the program advertisements' emphasis that such programs helped students pursue a personalized study plan. "It sounded like students enrolled in the programs had a relaxing school life and also could easily go to U.S. colleges," Mr. Song said with a smile. More importantly, in 2011, the year when Qiang graduated from middle school, the first class of students from Sunny High IAP graduated. The school reported that all graduates got admitted by top 50 U.S. universities. This news excited Qiang's parents. They knew that these students were not high academic achievers. The students entered the Sunny High IAP Program with much lower test scores in 2008. "If such students went to top 50 U.S. universities, our child could easily do so, too," Mr. Song emphasized. As he further stated,

Unlike some parents who think that Ivy universities are the best for their children, we think that the top 100 U.S. universities are fine for us. Students attending the top 100 [U.S.] universities are not worse than those in *Qinghua* [Tsinghua University] and *Beida* [Peking

University]. In addition, the former have more advantage in language (English) and certain other skills. With this said, if Qiang attends a top 100 university, it means that he has already attended Chinese *Qinghua* and *Beida*. That's fine for us. In addition, we care more about his long-term development. We hope him to continue to study in the U.S. for Master and PhD degrees.

Mr. Song and his wife also expressed a wish for Qiang to work and live in the United States.

For Qiang's parents, school habitus and performance, college destination, and university ranking became important criteria when they chose an appropriate high school for their child. These criteria reflect what Bernstein (1977, 2000) calls instrumental order and the personalized identities that the order leads to.

Further, both Mr. Song and Mrs. Liao emphasized that the curriculum in Sunny High IAP Program was most appealing to them. As Mrs. Liao illuminated,

The school advertisement highlighted that students would study the Chinese high school curriculum, an American curriculum GAC, an elective curriculum, and AP in the Sunny High IAP Program. The curriculum is the most attractive thing to us. Although the students will not attend the *Gaokao*, they still learn the whole Chinese high school curriculum, which I think is good... After all, our parents are school principals and university professors. I used to be a college teacher. We are all people in education. We think that Chinese elementary and secondary curriculum is relatively good. But we don't really like Chinese college education. Because of my job, I am able to see the abnormal educational phenomenon: Chinese preschoolers learn elementary school curriculum in advance; elementary school students learn secondary school curriculum ahead of time... College students study for exams. Some don't even study for exams. They just waste their time in college. I think that college education is a splendid time in a person's life. High school is a golden time for a person to form his/her views on life and values. We hope that our child studies the Chinese secondary school curriculum. We hope that he stays with us before he turns 18 years old. We don't want to send him abroad before 18. During his high school years, we could help him reinforce his views on life and values.

Mrs. Liao's perceptions of how they chose the Sunny High IAP Curriculum Program reflect her preferences for the expressive order that the Chinese curriculum could transmit. She also had a relatively ambivalent attitude toward Chinese school curriculum. Linking Mrs. Liao's and Mr. Song's inclination toward the Chinese high school curriculum in the integrated school curriculum to their desire for the instrumental function of Sunny High IAP Program enables us to

recognize the interests and identities of these new kinds of social groups or classes. Furthermore, Mrs. Liao's sense-making of the choice of the curriculum program implies that such an emerging international high school curriculum program not only worked as "a form of social production," but also open "new identity trajectories" (Doherty et al., 2009, p. 759). How the curriculum program, particularly the tensions between the instrumental order and expressive order, shapes the students' identities will be discussed in detail in Chapter 5 and Chapter 6. Here, I focus on using Bourdieu's notions of field, capital, and habitus in his theory of practice as analytical tools to interpret the data surrounding the reproduction of advantage.

The above analysis of students' and parents' choice of high school demonstrate how their educational practices were shaped by struggles for elite positions through access to elite education. When they encounter the constraints of the elite education system in China, such as competitive high-stakes testing and the restriction of household registration systems, the growing Chinese elite class struggle to maintain and enhance their positions in the social order through access to Chinese elite higher education institution. Thanks to neoliberal globalization, elite higher education institutions in the West open opportunities for these social groups to access the field of international elite education. The emerging international high school curriculum programs in China provide the Chinese elite class with a new educational pathway to elite education in an international context. These international programs become an intersection of the field of elite education (in both Chinese and international contexts) and the field of social classes, which constitutes a new field of power relations and also a field of struggle. Thus, these social actors "unwittingly reproduce or change those class distinctions simply by pursuing their own strategies within the sets of constraints and opportunities available to them" (Swartz, 1997, p. 134). Bernstein's concepts of expressive order and instrumental order in his theory of educational code

help specify the constitutions of class habitus. In what follows, I will focus on analyzing how these elite class's field-specific practices are related to class strategies and the field of power.

The educational practices of this growing Chinese elite class in fields were interest driven. Their aspirations for either Chinese or international elite higher education institutions represented their struggle over important forms of cultural capital – including educational capital, which is often translated into elite educational credentials, an institutionalized form of cultural capital (Waters, 2006). For active choosers with a cosmopolitan sensibility such as Baixue and her parents, studying in high-ranked U.S. universities led to the cultivation of critical thinking skills and international mindedness, an embodied form of cultural capital. Whether for “reluctant choosers” or “active choosers,” accumulating more valuable forms of cultural capital was a taken-for-granted strategy to secure a dominant position in the field of power.

The parents of these privileged students were highly strategic in their decisions to engage with an international education market. Capital conversion was used to transfer strategic advantage from the privileged parents to their children. The above interview data have revealed how the new Chinese elite families utilize various type of capital – economic, cultural, and social capital – in the process of choice and decision-making. Particular attention should be given to the use of economic capital because it acted as a precondition for the educational choice of the Chinese elite class. Some of the parent participants have tabulated the cost of attending an international high school program and a U.S. university – It was about ¥2,000,000 (approximately equal to \$300,000). The “volume” of economic capital (material resources) needed for this educational choice excluded the families who do not have the ability to pay the educational cost. The taste for this new elite education is not cheap (Ball, 2015). Only wealthy Chinese families are able to buy access to international educational resources and opportunities for their own children and convert their

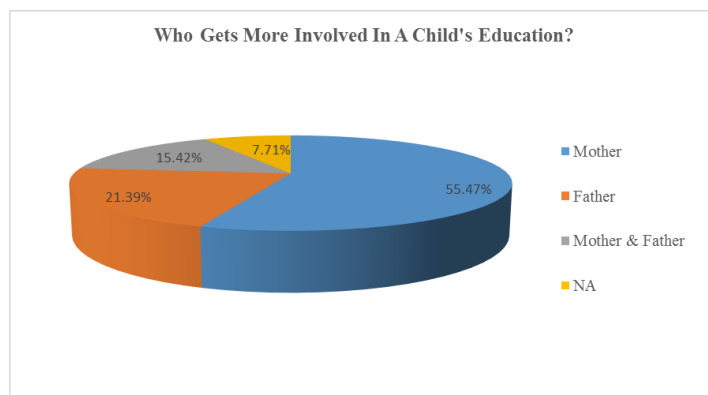
economic capital into cultural capital and social capital that could be further converted into financial capital. As a male parent whom I met in the Sunny High IAP graduation ceremony highlighted, “The classmates and schoolmates who you study with matter a lot because you study in this school for preparation for the U.S. college application and also for building a social network for the future use.” The social capital accumulated through the construction of social connections made at the school has the potential to be converted into economic capital through access to valued information and resources. Class strategies used by new elite Chinese families lead to social production.

Although my focus here is on class analysis, there are really important gender-related issues deeply intertwined with issues of class, education, and economic, cultural, and political power. For instance, the role of mothers in the school choice process deserves special attention in this study. Analyses of survey data showed that mothers were more involved in their children’s education (See **Figure 9**), which is consistent with my interview data. When I asked my focal student participants to recommend me to interview their parent(s) who cared about and was more engaged with their education, the majority of the students emphasized the crucial role of their mothers. It turns out that in the study 80% of parent participants are female. Consistent with the literature, my study confirms the key role of mothers in educational decision making (Ball, 2003; Gewirtz, Ball, & Bowe, 1995; Reay & Ball, 1998), which is reflected in the anxieties that Weiwei’s mom expressed and the aspirations that Qiang’s mom held for her child.

The survey data also show that two-third of the mothers are professionals and even more (73%) are college educated. Further careful study is necessary to reveal the complicated dynamics involved in the educational choice practices of these highly-educated professional women. Here I

only give a brief discussion of the issues pertaining to the labor of housewives in the school choice process.

**Figure 9**



Given the fact that a significant percentage (11%) of the students' mothers were housewives, attention should be given to the hidden labor within Chinese elite families to guarantee making the right choice. This could help better understand how privileged families work in and through education for ensuring the reproduction of advantage (Apple, 2005; Griffith & Smith, 2005). Mrs. Gao, the mother of Hua, was a housewife. She had an associate's degree and used to be an accountant. Her husband was the owner of a medium-sized company in Moon City. He was busy with his work. Thus, Mrs. Gao was in charge of Hua's education. Hua was a 9<sup>th</sup> grader and a Manchu ethnic minority. He liked wearing an MCM luxury leather backpack (worth \$900) and name-brand clothes. His *zhongkao* test scores were too low to enter Sunny High's IAP Program, but his parents helped him enter the school by mobilizing their economic and social capital. However, Hua's academic performance continued to be low in high school.

During an interview, Mrs. Gao expressed a feeling of guilt for not making the best choice of middle school for Hua, because she chose to send him to a private middle school in Moon City, rather than a public key middle school. She ascribed Hua's poor academic achievement to this "wrong choice." Learning from this lesson, she actively collected high school information from

her friends. Even after sending Hua to Sunny High IAP, she didn't stop gathering information and seeking a better choice for him. Knowing that Hua had low academic performance in the school, she sought advice from study-abroad consulting companies and decided to send Hua to a U.S. high school. Eventually, Hua left Sunny High IAP after one year and attended a high school in the United States. Mrs. Gao hoped that this approach could allow Hua to easily access U.S. universities.

This case demonstrates the complicated effects of the availability of such Chinese women's unpaid work. On the one hand, full-time mothers in the new Chinese elite-class families have time and resources to pursue educational choices for their own children, which leads to the reproduction of advantage and class difference and inequality. On the other hand, the anxieties and worries related specifically to choice-making generate emotional burdens and affective inequalities, which reflects dominant and subordinate positions in the field of gender.<sup>56</sup> Thus, this analysis of choice practices of the rising Chinese elite class points out that the field of school choice constitutes and is constituted through classed and gendered power relations.

In summary, this section examines the complexities of the students' choice and decision-making to attend international high school curriculum programs. It demonstrates the practices of market-based parent-initiated school choice in China. I argue that the rising Chinese middle-upper and upper classes mobilize various types of capital and power in an international education market to pursue their class interests. Their educational practices, whether their deployment of class strategies or their unconscious acceptance of the rules of the game in which they play, contribute to the production of the fields of international high school curriculum programs and international elite education, which overlap with multiple other fields, such as social class and gender. In this process, fields and field-specific practices shape social class identity formation. Therefore, I argue

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<sup>56</sup> Further studies should examine privileged Chinese women's experiences of their children's educational choices.

that these processes and practices of parent-initiated school choice enhance the breadth and depth of marketization and privatization of education, which not only exacerbates social inequality, but also produce neoliberal subjectivities and construct the identities of new class fractions.

**Interest Convergence: Constructing International High School Curriculum Program as a Legitimate Space and the Politics of Educational Reforms<sup>57</sup>**

The network analysis of Sunny High IAP Program maps out the positions and interactions of the social actors involved in the development of this CFCRS high school program. The analysis of students' and parents' choice and decision-making in selecting the program points out the class interests and strategies of the new Chinese elites. These analyses together outline the objective structure of the relations between the positions occupied by key stakeholders, including growing middle-upper and upper-Chinese class, public key high schools, the Chinese state, and various domestic and international for-profit business. Although each stakeholder has their own interests and competes for the legitimation of their power within the particular fields where their practices occur, marketization and privatization of education facilitated by neoliberal globalization and education policy and practice open up space for them to converge to maximize their own interests and realize their common interests. I argue that it is the interest convergence of these stakeholders that leads to the production of a neoliberal educational space, which is represented by emerging international high school curriculum programs. In this section, I will look at how the interests of public key high schools, the Chinese state, and various domestic and international for-profit business converge with the interests of the new Chinese elites.

As I have mentioned in Chapter 1, market-oriented educational reforms have led to the creation of education markets in China. The stretch of neoliberal education policy and practice into

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<sup>57</sup> I would like to thank Dr. Gloria Ladson-Billings for her thoughtful comments on interest convergence.



international spaces via neoliberal globalization processes encouraged increasing internationalization of education markets (Ferrare & Apple, 2009). The globalization of higher education provides the possibility for students from Chinese elite families to pursue international education as a form of capital conversion for occupying dominant positions in their respective fields. The emerging international high school programs in China meet the private needs and interests of the privileged class – upward social mobility. Affluent families became key actors in the international high school curriculum program market. As a parent commented, “Compared to the grey markets of parental choice of Chinese public key schools, the international high school curriculum program market is a transparent market because it lists the price [tuition] I need to pay for service provision. The emerging international high school curriculum programs are demanded by and cater to rising Chinese wealthy families.

For public key high schools like Sunny High, developing an international high school curriculum program has educational, social, political, and economic meanings. As school administrators emphasized, such a program met a social need and provided those students who could not access Chinese elite universities with an opportunity to make their college choice globally. The international program was framed as having great potential to improve Chinese education reforms. It helped leverage its international profile and enhance the school reputation in order to occupy a competitive position among key school. In this sense, developing an international high school curriculum was for the maintenance and production of the school’s elite-ness. As school administrators emphasized, the market of international high school curriculum programs was very competitive. The school needed to compete for students in the recruitment markets.

More importantly, the tuition-charged international program generated important revenue for school survival and development. As the administrator of Sunny High IAP, Mrs. Zhao, notes:

Sunny High IAP Program is an experimental project. It plays a leading role in developing international high school curriculum programs in Moon City. It is on the cutting edge of Chinese educational reforms. If this program is well developed, the State would popularize our successful reform experience. In fact, the international program is a new growth point. It is a new point of educational growth. It is also a new economic growth point. We indeed need to run this program. The government didn't invest in the program. Thus, students and families themselves need to make investments in it. This program helps improve Sunny High's and our teachers' economic and living conditions because the 15% annual increase in teacher salary largely depends on the economic efficiency of this program. Therefore, this program is a new economic growth point of our school. It is a growth point of Sunny High.

This statement highlights the financial interests that the international program brought to Sunny High. The curriculum program became a crucial source of nonbudgetary income for the school. From another perspective, the profits that the program made for the public key school alleviate the financial burdens that the Chinese government bears in term of its investment in public schools.

The Chinese state legitimated the newly-established international high school curriculum program as an experimental project. This discourse allowed the state to embark on educational reforms to advance the modernization and internationalization of Chinese education and cultivate quality human capital for developing the Chinese economy and engaging in positional competition in a global market. This rhetorical interest is expressed in the CFCRS policy that encourages the development of international high school programs. From a pragmatic point of view, creating the international program catered to social needs (specifically, the needs of growing Chinese elite class) and avoided a drain of capital from China. In this sense, the new program enables the state to differently regulate populations for optimal productivity (Ong, 1999).

For various educational businesses, profit-making is the main interest that drove them to engage with the development of international high school programs. The involvement of the American private school in the Sunny High IAP Program indicates its interest in expanding education services for homeschooling in the U.S. into a global education market, while the

presence of the ACT company signals this U.S.-based assessment firm's interest in building its international reputation and occupying a high-status position in the field of international education. "Collaboration" and "partnership," advocated by neoliberal education policies like CFCRS, allow these educational businesses to pursue their own interests in the field of international high school curriculum programs.

To be sure, emergent international high school curriculum programs are socially produced through the interactions between these dominant interest groups. Of course, there are the tensions and conflicts between these dominant interests groups. For instance, the school's pursuit of quality curriculum development and its emphasis on the long-term development of the program were conflicted with China Bridge's focus on profit-making and lack of dedication to student learning. In addition to the interfiled contradictions, there are internal tensions and contradictions within each field. For example, the school struggled with balancing its economic interests and educational commitment to students. The state itself faced many challenges surrounding the development of "public" international high school curriculum program. The ideology of the Chinese Communist Party is still a dominant ideology. However, market-oriented practices of international high school curriculum programs supported by state educational reforms benefit only students who come from privileged families. In addition, parent-initiated school choice practices have created a new ideological form – "possessive individualism," which is contradictory to the ideological formation that the Chinese Communist Party wants (Apple, 2006; Liu & Apple, 2016). This contradiction leads to an ideological crisis and the crisis of both educational and the state (Liu & Apple, 2016), which be further discussed in the following chapters. However, a question must be raised here: Whose interests are carried out by these international programs? Who is included? Who is excluded? What do schools stand for? Who benefits from educational reforms?

## Conclusion

In this chapter, I employ spatial and field analysis to examine the creation and choice of international high school curriculum programs. By locating the emergence of international high school curriculum programs in both Chinese and international contexts, I spatialize macro-level education policies such as High School New Curriculum Reform, Chinese-Foreign Cooperation Running School (CFCRS) Policy, and school choice policy. Using a network analysis, I focus on how New Curriculum Reform and the CFRCS Policy structure and are structured by the space of international high school curriculum programs. By examining the participation of organizational actors in the development of the Sunny High IAP International Curriculum Program, this chapter demonstrates that various Chinese and foreign private organizations were involved in the network of the international program for profit making purposes. By revealing the underlying and invisible power relations between social organizations, I argue that these market-oriented Chinese educational reforms open up space for the private sector to participate in public-sector education, which promotes the marketization and privatization of education.

The chapter also spatializes micro-level choice practices of the rising Chinese elite class. Situating choice “in a framework of mobility, globalisation and related new kinds of social class identities and interests” (Ball & Nikita, 2014, p. 82), I focus on examining the complicated choice and decision-making process of selecting a high school in order to expose the taken-for-granted social relations operating at the micro-level of family educational practices. I argue that parent-initiated choice practices are driven by the class interests of new Chinese elite families. I argue that these choice practices enhance the breadth and depth of marketization and privatization of education by not only reproducing class advantage but also creating new social class identities.

Linking the issue of parental school choice to the network analysis of the educational program, this chapter further explores how the private interests of the middle-upper and upper-class Chinese parents, who attempt to push their children toward international education as a form of capital conversion, converge with the interests of the Chinese key public schools, the state, and various kinds of for-profit education business. I argue that neoliberal globalization and educational policies facilitate this interest convergence. Based on this interest convergence, multiple stakeholders construct international high school curriculum programs as a legitimate space for learning and for profit-making. Of course, there are tensions and conflicts between these dominant interest groups, which implies that the space of international high school curriculum programs constitutes a new field of power relations and also a field of struggle. In this sense, I argue that the creation of and parental choice regarding international high school curriculum programs contribute to the production of a neoliberal education space, a space where multiple fields overlap, such as the fields of elite education, international/transnational education, social class, gender, and political, economic, and cultural fields.

The analysis of the Sunny High IAP program and parent-initiated school choice in this chapter reveals that the newly-established international high school curriculum programs offer a “seamless pathway” for wealthy Chinese high school students to access elite global universities. This finding has rendered these educational programs problematic because they transform public services to serve private individual interests. This chapter suggests the importance of exploring the in-use international high school curriculum programs and in-depth studies are needed to examine students’ educational experiences within these curriculum programs, which is the focus of Chapter 5 and Chapter 6.

## Chapter 5: A New Form of Elite Schooling: Preparation for U.S. College Application,

### Privilege, and Power

*Education is central to the knowledge base of society, groups and individuals. Yet education also, like health, is a public institution, central to the production and reproduction of distributive injustices. Biases in the form, content, access and opportunities of education have consequences not only for the economy; these biases can reach down to drain the very springs of affirmation, motivation and imagination. In this way such biases can become, and often are, an economic and cultural threat to democracy. Education can have a crucial role in creating tomorrow's optimism in the context of today's pessimism. But if it is to do this then we must have an analysis of the social biases in education. These biases lie deep within the very structure of the education system's processes of transmission and acquisition and their social assumptions.*

(Bernstein, 2000, p. xix)

*After having completed their registration the previous day in the Sunny High home campus by bringing their zhongkao scores, about 300 middle school graduates came to the Sunny High International Division to take an English test in the morning and attend an oral examination and interview in the afternoon. The test and interview focused on examining students' English levels – listening, reading, writing, and speaking – which are important criteria in selecting appropriate students for the Sunny High IAP Program. Before the morning test started, dozens of parents crowded in front of the school gate, watching their children enter the school. Private cars were parked along both sides of the streets near the school. I noticed that the popular brand names of these cars included Volkswagen, Toyota, Honda, Mazda, and Buick. Other parents drove luxury vehicles such as Audis, Volvos, Lexuses, Mercedes, or BMWs. They dropped off their children and then left...*

*Some parents sat on the benches at the neighborhood plaza located in front of the school. I approached a group of 6 parents (4 females and 2 males) at a corner and asked if they were waiting for their children who were taking the test inside the school. They said yes and asked who I was. After listening to my introduction and learning about my research project, they became interested in my experience of living and studying in the United States. As the conversation shifted from my university's ranking to the increasing competition among prospective study-abroad Chinese students, one parent commented that in another school, the Orange High A-Level Program, there were about 800 student applicants taking the recruitment test. However, there were only 80 placement spots for new students. At least, the competition for admission to the Sunny High IAP Program was not that fierce.*

*A female parent cut in, saying, "I heard from some colleagues that students cannot learn in-depth knowledge from such international high school curriculum programs. Their content learning is much lower than that of students who study in regular high schools. What can we do?" A male parent made a joke, commenting, "See, one more concerned parent." He expressed his opinion: "The internationally oriented schools focus on improving students' abilities and broadening their horizons rather than teaching content." The female parent continued to express her anxiety and emphasized, "I don't know if the pathway that we choose is right or not." She repeatedly mentioned her deeply ambivalent feelings by sharing her son's case: "My child has been admitted to an experimental class*

*at a key high school. If he studies hard, he could attend a 985 or 211 university in China [i.e., a top university].<sup>58</sup> He could study abroad for graduate school after finishing his college education in China. However, instead, we are choosing this pathway [the internationally oriented school]. Even though there are many problems in Chinese education, high school education in China provides a solid foundation for students. I know that the solid content learning is targeted for the gaokao. However, completely giving up this pathway [traditional preparation for the gaokao], I worry that I will regret the decision. On the other hand, if we choose the traditional pathway rather than the international high school program, I will still have a lot of concerns. After all, the world is internationalized. My son will eventually study abroad. I am worried that if he goes overseas late, his linguistic ability and habits of thinking will be fixed and he would be left behind. Thus, this ambivalence makes me anxious and torments me all day. This anxiety keeps us parents in a constant state of distress. We are so ambivalent...*

(Field notes, July 7, 2013)

Sunny High International Division is a boarding school. It is surrounded by school walls which separate the school from resident apartments. A security office is located on one side of the school gate and serves as a checkpoint to manage the entry and exit of students, teachers, and guests. The school area is not big. A main pathway from the school gate to student dormitories divides the campus into two parts – instruction buildings, cafeteria, students’ dorms, tennis courts, and gyms are on one side; a standard school stadium and a renovated library are on the another side.

At the center of the school is a round flowerbed where a big rock inscribed with Sunny High’s school motto is placed. The school motto is derived from the Analects of Confucius, reflecting Sunny High’s expectations of students’ conduct, character, and manner: “Having a firm and sincere aim, learning extensively, and becoming a modest and upright person.” This motto represents the humanistic spirit that Sunny High pursues. By placing the school motto at the center of the campus, Sunny High aims to transfer the expressive order to its international division.

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<sup>58</sup> The 211 and 985 project universities mean Chinese elite universities. The names of the 211 project universities and the 985 project universities derive from the educational policies – the 211 Project and 985 Project – launched in the 1990s. These two polices aim to transform Chinese universities into world-class universities (Chiang, Meng, & Tian, 2015).

Different from conventional Chinese schools where buildings are usually separated from each other, five instructional buildings in the school are connected. This picturesque building style embodies some features of school curriculum integration which I will discuss shortly. School buildings in the Sunny High International Division are named with some famous phrases from the Analects of Confucius. In front of each building, there is a white square stone inscribed with the source and meaning of the building name. Between the school buildings, there is a well-designed man-made stream, a bridge, pavilions, sculptures, and a variety of small flowerbeds. Gorgeous green plants and blooming trees surround the school buildings and make the campus charming. Many student participants highlighted that the beautiful campus environment and good school facility were two of the main reasons why they liked the school best.

The school intended to create an elite environment and culture. This intention is well embodied in the decoration of the hallway and library. Inside the school buildings, the pictures of top 10 U.S. universities and other world-class universities in England, Canada, and Australia are hung on the walls in the hallways. These are the dream universities of the students in the Sunny High IAP Curriculum Program. However, as my student informants have noted, the top 50 American universities are the achievable goals for the majority of students in this school. In the newly remodeled school library, there is a huge picture called *The 100 Most Influential People in the World* occupying an entire wall in the reading area. This picture puts both Chinese and foreign cultural, political, and intellectual elites together, such as Plato, Confucius, Karl Marx, Lenin, Mao Zedong, Deng Xiaoping, Margaret Thatcher, Marie Curie, and Albert Einstein. Such school environmental design – the landscape, interior design, and mottos that claim to capture the school essence – serves as a hidden curriculum, delivering tacit elite knowledge to the students.



This chapter focuses on examining students' educational experiences at the Sunny High International Division and their interpretation and perception of their formal schooling in the school. The purpose of the chapter is threefold: first, to explore how curriculum and pedagogy play a role in the production of advantage and particular elite subjectivities; second, to deconstruct the pedagogic discourse of "becoming international" at student and institutional levels; third, to develop a deep understanding of the practices, effects, and implications of Chinese New Curriculum Reforms and the CFCRS high school programs. To achieve these three goals, I will first discuss how school curriculum is differentiated and diversified for meeting the needs of socially elite Chinese students. In this section, I will shed light on the selection, organization, and legitimation of the Sunny High IAP Curriculum Program by looking at the role of Chinese educational reforms. In particular, I will focus on analyzing the practices of curriculum integration, the structuring of pedagogic activities, and the construction of a college counseling and guidance system for the purpose of preparing the students to apply for U.S. colleges. Then, I will examine students' interpretation and perception of their socialization experiences with school curriculum and pedagogy. This section will look closely at how the students come to think of themselves and how they internalize their elite status. Finally, I will discuss the school's struggles and changing identities in this process. The chapter will conclude with a discussion of the role of structurally differentiated school knowledge, its transmission and acquisition in the construction of students' schooling experience and consciousness, as well as Chinese elite public high schools' formation of new identities. I argue that Sunny High IAP uses relative autonomy to create U.S. college-going curriculum and pedagogy for meeting the needs of socially elite Chinese students, and that this practice not only contributes to the production of privileged and empowered individuals, but also enhances the school's own instrumental identity and neoliberal positions.

## **Crafting Curriculum Reform: Differentiating and Diversifying School Curriculum for the Needs of Students**

As I have mentioned in Chapter 4, the Sunny High IAP International Curriculum Program was legitimated as a CFCRS high school program. It was also framed as an experimental attempt to implement Chinese High School New Curriculum Reform. Based on the discussion of the IAP international high school curriculum program in Chapter 4, the following section will go deeper into the framing and content of the curriculum program. Combining Bernstein's educational code theory and Apple's politics of school curriculum, I will not only examine the selection, organization, and legitimation of the Sunny High IAP International Curriculum, but I will also look at the transmission of school curriculum through pedagogic practices. I will pay particular attention to the production and reconstruction of pedagogic discourse and practices. These inquiries lead to the analysis of the politics of valid school knowledge (curriculum) and valid transmission of knowledge (pedagogy) while also setting the stage for the examination of the students' schooling experience and consciousness.

### ***Selection, Organization, and Legitimation of the School Curriculum***

My examination of the selection, organization, and legitimation of the school curriculum is guided by the in-depth questions about curriculum – Where does knowledge come from? Whose knowledge is it? Who selects it? Why is it organized and taught in particular ways and to which particular groups? (Apple, 2000, 2004). This examination will be combined with the analysis of pedagogic practices. To begin with, I will briefly elaborate on the role of Chinese educational reforms. Chinese educational reforms, such as the Chinese New Curriculum Reform, Chinese-Foreign Cooperation Running School (CFCRS), and the National Guidelines for Medium- and Long-term Educational Reform and Development (2010-2020), emphasize the need for reforming

Chinese school curriculum, internationalizing Chinese education, and cultivating international talents in order to prepare for international competitiveness, to improve Chinese economic development, and to enhance nation-building.<sup>59</sup> This discourse, influenced by neoliberal ideologies, serves as the distributive rules which are controlled by the state who struggles over nation building in the context of neoliberal globalization. Further, the discourses of improving Chinese curriculum, promoting the internationalization of Chinese education, and nurturing international talents are recontextualized into specific pedagogic discourse within local contexts. This is the focus of the following discussion.

The Chinese High School New Curriculum Reform has set up a national high school curriculum framework which consists of a minimum of 144 credits, including 116 compulsory credits and at least 28 elective credits. This curriculum design aims to shift the Chinese curriculum from a highly centralized approach to a distributed three-tiered (state, province, and school) model in order to serve every individual student's all-round development. The compulsory 116 credits are designed for studying the mandated courses which have been addressed in Chapter 4. Chinese high school students are provided with elective modules (a minimum of 28 credits) that allow students to choose appropriate courses to learn based on their individual interests. The elective modules are composed of two sub-modules. Students should choose to gain at least 22 credits from Elective Module I, a module which authorizes allows schools to design diverse elective courses

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<sup>59</sup> The original term of "international talents" in Chinese is "guoji rencai" ("国际人才"). "Guoji" means "international." "Rencai" include two words in Chinese – "ren" means "person;" "cai" means "talent" that includes certain kinds of intelligence, ability, or competence. Chinese people think that "cai" (talent) can be cultivated through education in addition to having it when someone is born. This might be a little from how western people understand talent. In this study, "guoji rencai" means someone who has international perspective, cross-cultural understanding, and can work on some jobs in relation to international affairs. In order to help English-speaking readers to understand this term, I translate "guoji rencai" into "international proficientier." I use "international proficientiers" and "international talents" interchangeably in order to keep the meanings evoked by the policy documents and interviewees.

based on the state-mandated subjects. Students should also earn a minimum of 6 credits from Elective Module II – a local, school-based curriculum.

Under this framework, Sunny High constructed the IAP high school curriculum to meet the needs of students who choose to pursue college education abroad. There are five main components in the school curriculum, including: Chinese high school curriculum, the international curriculum Global Assessment Certificate (GAC), test preparation courses, disciplinary elective curriculum, and integrated social practice courses (See **Figure 10**). While the Chinese high school curriculum and integrated practice courses belong to the compulsory credits, the remaining curricula fall into the category of elective credits. As described in Chapter 4, the pillars of the Sunny High IAP curriculum are the Chinese curriculum and the international curriculum. From the former curriculum, the students in Sunny High IAP complete the 144 required credits. They earn 108 elective credits from the latter curriculum. It is the flexible elective module that provides Sunny High with relative autonomy to develop a differentiated curriculum for socially elite Chinese students.

Furthermore, the CFCRS policy legitimates the involvement of multiple stakeholders in the development of the Sunny High IAP International Curriculum Program, particularly the elective components. As a public key school, Sunny High has an advantage in teaching the Chinese curriculum because the school has a high-quality teaching force. Sunny High has also accumulated rich experience in developing the integrated social practice courses. These advantages are transferred to Sunny High IAP. However, Sunny High lacks the ability to teach the international curriculum, U.S. test preparation curriculum, and relevant elective international curriculum such as AP courses. Nevertheless, the unique institutional structure of the CFCRS policy enables Sunny High to collaborate with private educational companies to develop the elective curriculum.

Figure 10

## Sunny High IAP Curriculum Framework

<b>Chinese High School New Curriculum Framework (minimum 144 Credits)</b>	<b>Compulsory Credits (116)</b>	<b>Chinese National High School Curriculum</b>	<b>13 Compulsory Courses:</b> Chinese Language Arts; Mathematics; English; Physics; Chemistry; Biology; Geography; History; Ideology and Politics; Technology; Music; Fine Arts; Physical Education.
		<b>Integrated Social Practice Courses</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Cultural Explorations &amp; Social Practice:</b> Shanxi &amp; Jin Culture; Anhui &amp; Hui Culture; Shanxi &amp; Zhou, Qin, Han, and Tang Culture, etc.</li> <li>• <b>International Exchanges:</b> Summer Abroad Programs such as UC Berkeley Summer School; Model United Nations in China and Harvard World Model United Nations; Youth Camp International; International Young Leaders Forum such as Asia-Pacific Young Leaders Summit, etc.</li> <li>• <b>Thematic Activities:</b> Science Festival; Art Festival; School Sports Games; Excursion to Mount Tai; Cross-Country Orienteering, etc.</li> <li>• <b>School Clubs &amp; Organizations:</b> Robot Club; Cartoon and Animation Club; Music Club; Basketball Club; National Studies Club; Drama Club; Chinese Students Association in USA, etc.</li> <li>• <b>Voluntary Activities</b> in Science &amp; Technology Museum, Bus Stations, Hand in Hand Schools, etc.</li> <li>• <b>Community Service</b> in certain neighborhood communities.</li> </ul>
	<b>Elective Credits (minimum 28)</b>	<b>GAC International Curriculum</b>	<p><b>Level I:</b> Academic English I – Listening &amp; Speaking Skills; Academic English I – Reading &amp; Writing Skills; Study Skills for Independent Learning; Mathematics I – Fundamentals; Business I – Communication Skills; Computing I – Introduction to Computing for Academic Study.</p> <p><b>Level II :</b> Academic English II – Listening &amp; Speaking Skills; Academic English II – Reading &amp; Writing Skills; Mathematics II – Probability, Statistics &amp; Finance; Science II – Scientific Principles; Business II – Business Studies; Computing II – Data Management.</p> <p><b>Level III:</b> Academic English III – Listening &amp; Speaking Skills; Academic English III – Reading &amp; Writing Skills; Mathematics III – Calculus &amp; Advanced Applications; Science III – General Science; Business III – International Business Studies; Computing III – Digital Communications.</p>
		<b>Test Preparation Curriculum</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>TOEFL:</b> Grammar; Vocabulary; Listening; Speaking; Reading; Writing.</li> <li>• <b>ACT:</b> English; Mathematics; Reading; Science; Writing.</li> <li>• <b>SAT:</b> Reading; Writing; Mathematics; Physics; Chemistry.</li> </ul>
<b>Disciplinary Electives/Elective Curriculum</b>		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>AP Courses:</b> AP calculus; AP Physics; AP Chemistry; AP Biology; AP American History; AP Psychology; AP Statistics; AP Microeconomics; AP Macroeconomics.</li> <li>• <b>Elective Courses Taught by International Teachers:</b> Debating; Public Speech; Cultural Anthropology; Introduction to Marketing; Introduction to Psychology; Introductory French, etc.</li> <li>• <b>Elective Courses Taught by Chinese Teachers:</b> AMC Contest Training; American Football &amp; American Culture; Screen Arts &amp; Culture; Chinese Traditional Culture; Physics and Thinking Training; Group Psychological Education; Introduction to Chinese Seal Cutting; Selected Reading of British and American Fantasy Literature, etc.</li> </ul>	

For instance, China Bridge, the defacto school partner, is in charge of teaching the GAC curriculum and ACT test preparation courses. This company also teaches TOEFL courses. However, because students are not satisfied with these TOEFL courses, the school outsources TOEFL classes to Noah (pseudonym) Education Co., Ltd., an education training company that focuses on preparing students who choose to study in North America for required admission tests such as the TOEFL, ACT, and SAT. In addition, teachers outside the school are hired to teach SAT test preparation courses and AP classes. The school uses travel agencies to take care of summer abroad programs.

Linking this discussion to the network analysis of the Sunny High IAP curriculum program in the previous chapter, we see multiple actors, such as the state, a key Chinese high school, and a variety of for-profit educational companies, “exercise their power setting limits on what counts as legitimate knowledge, knowledge forms, and pedagogy” (Au, 2008, p. 644). It is neoliberal educational reforms that open up a space for these actors to work together for the selection, organization, and legitimation of knowledge and pedagogies to cater to the needs of privileged Chinese students. In this process, classroom teachers and students have less autonomy to make curricular choices and decisions. It is elite organizations, educational experts and authorities, and educational companies who participate in the key stages of the curricular development and determine the overarching form and content of the curriculum.

The official goals of Sunny High IAP are to cultivate excellent middle school graduates into outstanding high school students who absorb the essence of Chinese traditional culture and also develop multicultural and international perspectives. These dispositions are expected to build a solid foundation for students to become cross-cultural, international proficientiers in the future. The five types of curriculum adopted by the school have been rationalized to meet the students’ different needs: Chinese high school curriculum for students’ growth needs; GAC for their needs

associated with making the transition from high school to an overseas college; test preparation curriculum for students' needs regarding applying to college abroad; elective curriculum for students' future development needs; and integrated social practice courses for students' needs connected to comprehensive quality development. In spite of the rhetorical discourse (which asserts that this new international program aims to cultivate international proficientiers), in what Bernstein (2000) calls the official recontextualizing field (ORF), the pedagogic practices of the school in the pedagogical recontextualizing field (PRF) concentrate on preparing students for their U.S. college application process. This focus is certainly reflected in how the school evaluated its own achievement. The criteria used to assess school performance included students' test scores on the TOEFL, ACT, and AP, as well as the actual outcomes of students' U.S. college admissions. In the years of 2012 and 2013, 100% of the school's graduates received college admissions from top 80 U.S. universities and over 60% of them were admitted to top 50 U.S. universities. Such performances were presented and highlighted on the school display boards and website.

### ***Curriculum Integration and Pedagogic Practices: Restructuring Curriculum and Pedagogy***

As demonstrated in Figure 10, the curriculum in the Sunny High IAP program is miscellaneous. Over the past five years, the school has changed its curricula, and curriculum reform is still underway in the school. Curriculum integration is regarded as the key theme of curriculum reform in order to better meet the needs of the students. School administrators and teachers in the Chinese school part were actively engaged with curriculum integration practices. They participated in weekly faculty meetings and professional development workshops on weekends and during summer vacations to discuss how to effectively integrate various kinds of curriculum and how to effectively prepare students for the U.S. college application process. The needs of socially elite Chinese students regarding U.S. college admissions play a pivotal role in

restructuring school curriculum and pedagogic activities. Attention to these needs is “a manifestation of the pedagogic device in operation,” which controls what should be included and what should be excluded (Au, 2009, p. 132).

One of the school initiatives with regard to curriculum integration was to have Chinese and international teachers share the same offices. This arrangement broke the segregation between these two groups of teachers. Although there was still less interaction between Chinese and international teachers due to language barriers, this physical mixture opened up a space and created a possibility for both parties to learn from each other.

Based on the feedback from students and parents, the school became aware that there were repetitions between the teaching and learning of the Chinese and international curricula and there was a need for integrating curriculum content. Reforming English, math, and science teaching in the Chinese curriculum part have been put first on the agenda. The conventional curriculum and teaching of these subjects in Chinese high schools targeted student preparation for China’s *gaokao*. With the focus shifting from China’s *gaokao* to U.S. college application, old models of curriculum design for and instruction of these core subjects had to be changed in order to fit college admissions criteria in the United States. English teaching and learning in the Chinese curriculum were subject to change as needed to help students with TOEFL preparation. Similarly, Chinese high school math, physics, chemistry, and biology curricula needed to integrate with the math and science sections of the GAC, ACT, and AP curricula. These curricular changes were intended to reduce students’ course loads and to improve effective teaching and learning practices.

The curriculum integration model described above reveals the power of the international curriculum, particularly the influence of U.S. college entrance tests. The school curriculum was being oriented toward what Bernstein (1977) calls integrated curriculum code which features weak



classification and weak framing. As school teachers point out, the Chinese subjects such as Chinese language arts, history, political science, and geography, which are less related to the U.S. tests, have been marginalized. The in-depth knowledge of the specifically Chinese subject matter has become less important because this knowledge is not evaluated by the U.S. tests. Students study these Chinese subjects and then take the *huikao* (会考, Joint Graduation Examination or High School Academic Proficiency Test) which is a requirement for graduation.<sup>60</sup> From the realist perspective, students complete the learning of Chinese language arts, the humanities, and other compulsory subjects and pass the *huikao* that satisfy the state-mandated requirement in subject matter competence for the Chinese high school graduation diploma. This credential is required for freshman application to U.S. higher education institutions. In this sense, the Chinese high school curriculum is instrumental to students' U.S. college application.

In the curriculum integration process, it becomes apparent that the acquisition of English language skills and the knowledge of math, the sciences, and American society and literature are valued in the school because these skills and knowledge are measured by the U.S. tests. By contrast, Chinese subjects, particularly Chinese language arts and other humanities, are downgraded to the rhetorical study of Chinese culture. To a large extent, U.S. college entrance tests replace China's *gaokao*, shape the organization of the school curriculum, and mold school pedagogic practices. However, tests such as the TOEFL, the ACT/ SAT, and AP exams are only part of the U.S. college admissions criteria. Other criteria also exert profound impact on the structuring of curriculum and pedagogic activities at Sunny High IAP which is the focus of my analysis in the next section.

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<sup>60</sup> The *huikao* (会考) is the examination based on a national curriculum set by the Ministry of Education. The test is designed and administered by the provincial education departments. The *huikao* is not a high-stakes test for Chinese high school students. However, it is a prerequisite for taking the *gaokao*; that is, students must first pass the *huikao* in order to take the *gaokao*.

***Building a College Counseling and Guidance System: The Ongoing Construction of U.S. College Knowledge and School Culture***

In addition to the integration of curriculum content, Sunny High IAP is developing a college counseling and guidance system in order to better prepare students for the U.S. college process. The school made intense efforts to learn about U.S. college admissions criteria. Based on the U.S. college knowledge that the company China Bridge brought in, the school facilitated several seminars to help Chinese teachers become familiar with the U.S. college application process. Beyond those college entrance test scores, the teachers came to understand that U.S. colleges and universities also have the scope to consider grade point average (GPA), students' extracurricular activities, personal statement, and recommendation letters. Many Chinese teachers were surprised by the intricacies of the college process. They realized that U.S. colleges' autonomous enrollment and multiple admissions criteria are distinctively different from Chinese college admissions that largely depend on a sole criteria – scores on the *gaokao*. This distinction has led to a changing school culture which has had a profound influence on their work.

The Sunny High IAP administrators classified U.S. college admissions criteria into two categories –“hard” and “soft” strengths. The former include students' high school GPA, as well as their scores on such U.S. college entrance tests as the TOFEL, the ACT/SAT, the SAT Subject Tests, and AP exams. The latter is composed of students' comprehensive qualities such as leadership, creativity, collaboration, communication, participation, service, and responsibility. These college admissions criteria regulate and restructure school pedagogic activities. The school works on providing a multipronged, systematic approach to planning for and participating in the U.S. college application process.

Sunny High IAP is dedicated to offering students systematic, accurate, and effective guidance about college planning, academic careers, activities, and the application process. It also respects students' individualization. The school encourages students to self-manage their academic careers and the array of required tasks in regard to college application. As school administrators Ms. Zhao and Mr. Wang underscored, Sunny High IAP provides students with a platform to achieve college application success. This platform's discourse guides the school to structure pedagogic activities to ensure that all students are equipped with access to information, resources, and opportunities.

College planning and advising begins upon students' entry into the high school. In Grade 10, students are provided with information about the structure of the IAP curriculum program and study skills for the diverse curricular. The school develops some practical curricula that aim to teach students knowledge in the characteristics and categories of U.S. colleges and universities, as well as their college admissions principles, procedures, and selection criteria. Practical curricula also give students information on how to assess their strengths and weaknesses, how to enact personalized practical activities, and how to participate in and create student clubs. College advising at this stage focuses on teaching students how to independently plan and organized their own academic work and extracurricular activities. College counseling in Grade 11 concentrates on test preparation for the TOEFL and ACT/SAT. Students are strongly encouraged to manage their test timelines on their own. During this year, the school provides students with various practical curricula related to foreign college application procedures and materials, college-major classification, and the writing of recommendation letters and personal statements for college applications. Guidance on the completion of application forms and AP course selection are the focus in Grade 12. This is the most relaxing year in this high school. After submitting application

materials, Sunny High IAP students turn their attention to AP coursework that is designed to extend their learning and build a foundation for their college education abroad. This timing and sequencing foreground a foreign college-going and preparation culture.

College preparation permeates both Sunny High's timing and sequencing and all other areas of school life, which is similar to what Weis, Cipollone, and Jenkins (2014) have found in their ethnographic studies. The U.S. college-going culture is reflected in the information and resources provided by the school. It is embedded not only in curricular and extracurricular offerings, but also in daily pedagogic practices. To support students' college application, the school has developed a school profile. In order to provide students with more opportunities for social services volunteering, the school makes connections with several neighborhood communities, schools, and museums. The school also advocates that "everyone could become a guidance counselor." Drawing upon resources from teachers, professionals, parents, and senior schoolmates/school's alumni, the school intends to build a team that can provide students with effective college advisement. For instance, Sunny High IAP takes advantage of family resources and invites experts and professionals to the school's Career Day. Career Day guest speakers include CEOs, company (domestic and international) managers, TV program directors, and high professionals such as doctors, lawyers, and architects. These Chinese elites both introduce various high-paid professions and give students advice on career choice.

Since 2011, the school has established a College Counseling and Guidance Center which is an emergent initiative for Chinese public high schools. The center is composed of so-called professional guidance counselors from China Bridge. These counselors organize international college fairs at the school and bring in college admissions representatives from a variety of U.S. colleges and universities, such as the University of California, Irvine; Ohio State University;

Syracuse University; Duke University; University of Rochester; and Savannah College of Art and Design. These U.S. postsecondary institutions hold informational meetings in the Sunny High International Division and answer students' and parents' questions. Students attend these sessions to learn more about potential college choices. Visits from U.S. college representatives comprise an essential component of the college culture at the school in terms of realizing the goal to "let the world come into the campus; let students go global."<sup>61</sup>

The College Counseling and Guidance Center also provides students and parents with information about academic planning, course selection, career planning, and college application. Their educational services are offered in various formats, such as curricula, workshops, seminars, salons, and one-to-one. For instance, in regular grade-level meetings held for parents, the staff at the center introduces information about college application procedures and preparation to parents. However, the one-to-one guidance is tricky. As Feng, a 12<sup>th</sup> grader, commented,

The teachers at the College Counseling and Guidance Center are those who are assigned by China Bridge to the school. The center in practice is a *zhongjie* [study-abroad educational consulting company] of China Bridge. It [the center] is an agency of China Bridge. You can come there and ask for counseling. I went there [the center] twice. However, if you want more in-depth counseling, you need to sign a contract with their *zhongjie* [pay fees].

What Feng revealed is tacit knowledge known by Sunny High IAP student and teachers. In spite of the frequent presence of the College Counseling and Guidance Center, few students seek individual college counseling from the center. The students focused on in this study expressed distrust in the center.

In addition to the above pedagogic activities on college counseling, college choice, and career choice, Sunny High IAP has planned to work more on the creation of college dossiers for

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<sup>61</sup> This quote is from Sunny High IAP.

each student. It endeavors to develop personalized course scheduling for each student and explore how to manage students in a changing school environment. The school also attempts to create a *zouban* (走班) system which matches with students' personalized course scheduling.<sup>62</sup> The school also wants to hire more quality bilingual teachers who are able to teach in English and teach AP courses. These efforts are motivated by the school's belief in what a school should do in terms of better meeting the needs of students, building the brand of Sunny High IAP, and making the program and school more competitive, as the school administrators emphasize.

### **Students' Perspectives of Their Schooling Experiences: The Construction of Elite**

#### **Subjectivities**

In this section, I will look closely at the experiences and perceptions of students at Sunny High IAP. In so doing, I will focus on not only exploring how they internalize their elite status, but also on examining how their schooling experiences shape the way they think about who they are; their sense of belonging; and their ambitions, concerns, and struggles. As Gaztambide-Fernández (2009) states, “when individuals tell stories about their experiences, they construct and enact particular version of how they understand themselves and their social context” (p. 13). My approach to study students' subjectivities helps to understand the relation between their identity formation and local contexts.

#### ***Access, Distinction, and Privilege***

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<sup>62</sup> Zou (走) literally means “walk,” and ban (班) refers to class. The *zouban* (走班) system means that while a curriculum and teachers are fixed, students go to the classes they choose. This new system is different from the traditional class system in Chinese public high schools – a group of students are assigned a class upon their entry into a high school and they are fixed in the class for a whole year. Instructors in different disciplines come to the class to teach subject matter. Some people translate the *zouban* system into “class-selection system” or “optional class system.”

As I have discussed in Chapter 4, Sunny High IAP students distinguish themselves from others in their school choice processes. The students are selected based on their *zhongkao* scores, English tests, and interviews. Of course, the extent to which their parents can afford the expensive tuition is the premise of students' access to this fee-paying school. However, some of the study's focal students tended to overlook the role of their families' economic status in their entry into the school. Their taken-for-granted assumptions and ignorance are consistent with their interpretation of Chinese counterparts attending regular Chinese high school in comparison to their joining a "public" international high school program – "It is just about a different choice," as a Sunny High IAP student commented. This naturalized choice discourse shows their taken-for-granted privilege on the one hand; on the other hand, the discourse implies that the students intentionally create images of themselves as individuals who do not totally rely on their parents' economic capital to get access to the school. The latter point is echoed by the evidence that many focal students differentiated themselves from the second-generation rich (*fu erdai*, 富二代) and the second-generation officials (*guan erdai*, 官二代). They mention that the children of these rich citizens and these officials usually attend either truly international schools or study abroad at early ages. These findings point out that Sunny High IAP students position themselves in relations to "others" (Howard, 2010; Maxwell & Aggleton, 2010). This way to define self-identity also reflects students' understanding of class fractions among privileged Chinese.

### ***Differentiated Schooling, Distinction, and Empowered Self***

Once enrolled in the Sunny High IAP program, students are exposed to curriculum and pedagogy oriented by the U.S. college-going culture. Focal students consistently emphasize that a wide range of extracurricular activities in the school provides them with many opportunities to perform their different talents and enable them to demonstrate their excellence. They underscore

that they are provided with more free time and choices than students in regular Chinese high schools. These advantages allow them to take ownership of their study and enable them to become more independent and competent than regular Chinese high school students. These abilities, skills, and competences improve their comprehensive quality, a key term highlighted in Chinese New Curriculum Reform. Like their parents, the students think that they deserve these educational opportunities given their merits and talents (Khan, 2011).

For students like Qiang who love sports, the school provides adequate time to play basketball, soccer, and football. For students who are not high academic achievers, such as Kai and Lili, Sunny High IAP offers opportunities to take advantage of their strengths to develop their confidence and leadership. Kai used to be a self-described “ordinary” student. He had lacked confidence in himself in middle school because his academic scores were not outstanding. When he entered Sunny High IAP, he noticed that academic scores are not the only criteria to evaluate students’ performance. Participation and performance in extracurricular activities are also valued by the school culture. He became an active member of Music Club and showcased his singing strength in school events. These schooling experiences made him become more confident in himself. Lili loves literature and writing. She initiated a literature club with her friends and created a school magazine. In order to publish each issue of the magazine, she looked for sponsorship by contacting several study-abroad educational consulting companies. One of the companies agreed to give her club money on the condition that the company would be allowed to do a workshop advertising their study-abroad consulting services in the school. She tried to convince the school to support the club by accepting this condition. However, the school rejected this request. As Lili mentioned, “The school thought that it has already collaborated with China Bridge. It is not appropriate to have a similar company come to the campus.” Finally, she looked for help from



Noah Education, the TOEFL training company that collaborates with the school. Noah Education readily agreed to sponsor her club. As a mutual benefit, the school magazine gave a special column to Noah Education. In her three-year high school experience, Lili dedicated herself to the club development. In this process, she improved her leadership by recruiting new club members and collaborating with others. More importantly, she emphasized that she learned “practical knowledge” – how to fundraise and make negotiations with different agents. The “practical knowledge” that Lili mentioned is different from disciplinary knowledge. Using Lili’s language, the acquisition and accumulation of the former type of knowledge is empowering and will make her better able to accommodate to society because she believes that future society will prefer talented individuals who possess such knowledge and skills,

Living in this boarding school benefits the students. It provides them with a socialized space to develop friendships. The majority of Sunny High IAP students are the only child in their families. It is the first time for them to live in students’ dormitories. This new experience enables them to develop independence and learn how to respect and help each other. As Weiwei said, “I make a lot of friends in the dorm. We play together and share information about U.S. universities and college applications.” The dorm-living experiences together with participation in school extracurricular activities simultaneously provide students with opportunities to improve their competences while offering them first-hand materials for their college essay writing, as Weiwei emphasized. In this sense, the acquisition of competence-based learning has become instrumental to their college application, a personal performance project.

Students also recognize that their English communication skills have been significantly improved by being exposed to the international curriculum and interacting with international teachers. Many of them agree that the most valuable aspect of the GAC curriculum is that it helps

students become familiar with the evaluation forms, such as essay writing, group discussion, and presentation. Students are aware that these skills will be helpful for them in terms of making a transition to U.S. college education. These competence-based and skill-based learning experiences provide Sunny High IAP students with an advantage and distinguish them from regular Chinese high school students. By positioning themselves in relation to others, these young people develop what (Giddens, 1991) calls the “reflective project of the self” and what Beck (1992) calls “individualization”. As Miaomiao illustrated,

Compared with them [regular Chinese high school students], we have stronger comprehensive qualities. For example, yesterday I read a news [article]. It said that a Chinese high school graduate attended UCLA with a high SAT score – 2200 or 2300. But he was removed from the university because he failed five classes out of six. His academic failure resulted from his inability to write essays, participate in group discussion, and make good presentations. He was a Chinese bookworm and received an academic dismissal. We do much better in those aspects [essay writing, group discussion, and presentation]. In addition, our school has a variety of extracurricular activities. Even though regular high schools have such activities, their students are unwilling to participate in these activities because doing so is not useful to them and instead it will occupy much of their time. They could use the time to complete some worksheets [for *gaokao* preparation]... In a word, they concentrate more on study. We have a richer school life.

Miaomiao was a female 11<sup>th</sup> grader. She had attended a private international high school program in her home province of Anhui. But she was not satisfied with the learning environment there. She transferred to the Sunny High International Division with the help of her mother who used to be a manager of a big, state-owned company and now is a province government officer. Miaomiao told me that compared with her former high school that is just for profit-making, the Sunny High International Division is much better because it is a public school where school quality can be guaranteed. For her, this boarding school has a positive learning environment and good facilities – comfortable students’ dormitories and a clean school cafeteria.

Miaomiao was a careful observer. In addition to the difference that she described above, she mentioned the distinction between Sunny High IAP students and regular Chinese high school students in terms of dressing.

**Miaomiao:** In addition, these two different groups of students look different... For example, one day students in both the Sunny High home campus and the International Division went hiking in the Hebei Province. At the first glance, we could figure out the dressing difference between us and them.

**SL:** Don't you wear same school uniforms?

**Miaomiao:** Yes. We did wear same school uniforms. But there was a difference. Sunny High IAP students made some changes on the uniforms – narrowing and cutting down pants, drawing some pictures on the top. Some girls in our school permed their hair while Sunny High girls tended to wear ponytail. In addition, students at Sunny High IAP are active and engage in school activities while students in Sunny High are disciplined.

The difference in clothing and dressing reveals the different tastes of Sunny High IAP and Sunny High students. Even among Sunny High IAP students, there are still some differences in terms of lifestyles. Miaomiao argued that students who attend this school come from families who belong at least to the middle class. When I asked her how she figured out this class status, she explained to me that

You can see this from the financial ability of these families. Three-year school tuition costs about ¥240,000. Four-year college education in the USA costs at least ¥1,500,000. Add these two items. You can see that a family needs to pay at least two millions yuan [approximately \$300,000]. In addition, when you go to the U.S. Embassy to apply for a student visa, you need to show them your family's financial status. The minimal saving has to be one million yuan. Otherwise, you cannot get a visa. The U.S. government needs to make sure that your family has the ability to pay your tuition. Otherwise, they [the U.S. government] won't allow you to go to their country to study...

Miaomiao told me that compared to the families from which most of her classmates come, her family is “poor.” I asked her how she knew this. She said, “You can figure out it from what the rich students use, such as accessories, handbags, shoes, cell phones, cosmetics, and so on.” She mentioned that one of her roommates used a hair accessory that costs several hundred yuan while

she only used an eight-yuan one. Miaomiao pointed to her iPhone and said, “I only have one phone. They may have several ones. A handbag they use may look very ordinary, but it actually cost several thousand [yuan].” Miaomiao’s description points out her sense of class status and class fractions among the privileged Sunny High IAP students.

Many focal students admit that they benefit from the U.S. college application information and resources provided by the school. This is true for Danyang who transferred from a second-tier key high school to Sunny High IAP in the second semester of his 10<sup>th</sup> grade. Danyang’s father is a government officer, and his mother works as a manager in a state-owned bank. His parents had been sending him to English training classes since he was young. He was a top student in an experimental class in his former high school. His teachers expected him to attend a first-tier elite Chinese university. However, that was not Danyang’s goal.

In the last year of his middle school, his father brought him to visit a colleague whose son studied in the United States for graduate school then became an engineer in an American company and currently lives a good life with a wife and two children. This is the kind of life that Danyang’s parents expected him to have. Encouraged by his father’s colleague, Danyang started to attend TOEFL preparation classes during the summer before high school started. He continued to go to the TOEFL classes on weekends and even after school on weekdays when his high school life began. Both after school classes and regular coursework were heavy. The latter were especially intensive. Different subjects’ teachers gave a lot of homework every day. At the beginning, he stayed up late and tried to complete school assignments after TOEFL classes. As a result, he was often sick. His mother suggested that he give up school homework.

The teaching pace for 10<sup>th</sup> grade in Chinese public high schools is very fast. The subject content is not easy. Without completing daily homework, Danyang was not able to catch up with

his schoolwork. His grades went down. His subject teachers and class advisor were very concerned about him and discussed with him about how to improve his grades. After knowing that his decreasing grades resulted from his preparation for U.S. college preparation, the teachers took turns to talk with him and convinced him to give up his choice and concentrate on *gaokao* preparation. They thought that only academically poor students choose to study abroad, but Danyang was a good student and didn't need to choose to go abroad for his college education. Danyang argued with his teachers and emphasized that it was his own choice and others should not interfere with it. Then, his relationship with teachers and the school became intense. The school even informed him that if he continued to not complete his daily homework or ask for leave from TOEFL classes, he would get punishment. His mother came to the school and tried to negotiate. But she failed. Since then, his family started to consider international high school programs. Finally, he chose to transfer to Sunny High IAP because this program would not exert too many restrictions on his choice and practice regarding overseas college application. On the contrary, he gained more useful information about U.S. college applications. As he described,

Before I attended the Sunny High International Division, even though I had taken TOEFL classes, I actually didn't know much about U.S. college application procedures and requirements. When I came here, I came to know that the application process is very complicated. There are many things that we need to prepare: extracurricular activities, ACT, a personal statement, and so on. I was very shocked when I first heard of this information at this school. In the past, I thought that I just needed to prepare for TOEFL tests.

College information provided by the school was very helpful to Danyang. In addition, he viewed international teachers in the school as very useful resources because they could help him practice English. By talking with international teachers, he also acquired useful information about college admissions and what college life overseas looks like. For him, international teachers are academic and cosmopolitan capital (Tarc & Tarc, 2015). By attending this school, he was able to

access and acquire such capital. However, Danyang was not satisfied with the “subtraction” of the Chinese curriculum (McNeil, 2000, 2013). He thought that the curriculum taught in the school was too shallow, especially compared with his content learning in the former high school. He was concerned about the negative impact his not having gained in-depth learning of subject content might have on his college education in the United States.

Feng, who was called *xueba* (学霸, curve wrecker) by his classmates, had similar concerns as Danyang. He complained about the shallow content of the Chinese curriculum taught in the school. He argued that those students who study in regular Chinese high schools and who will also go to U.S. colleges acquire more in-depth content knowledge than him. This differentiation might put him in a challenging situation in a U.S. university. He recognized that he may have to study hard in order to academically catch-up. In addition, Feng commented that “the international curriculum GAC is too easy.” He said, “Learning GAC is only for taking the ACT.” Like many students, he suggested that the school reduce the time distributed to GAC and even remove GAC from the school curriculum. Feng told me that “[t]here are some errors in the GAC textbooks. They are actually designed by some Australia companies.” He showed his GAC textbooks to me, pointing out several errors and explaining to me why he thinks these textbooks are not rigorous.

I looked at the textbooks and found that all these so-called textbooks only have white and black colors except the covers which have a colorful GAC logo. The books are organized according to skill-based modules. Strictly speaking, the textbooks are more like workbooks. In fact, international teachers don’t like the textbooks, but they have to use and teach them because the company requires them to do so. In my interviews with international teachers, they expressed their dissatisfaction with the company’s content and pedagogic and bureaucratic control (Au, 2009). Even many students don’t like the GAC curriculum, and they stress that “it is useless.” But they

are required to buy the textbooks which cost several thousand yuan. As Yifei, a female student, commented, “Yes, our parents indeed have money. We can afford these textbook fees. But they are not worth that amount of money.” Such discursive control over the process of formal schooling not only has a profound impact on pedagogic identities (Au, 2009), but also influences how students think about the relations between students and the school – a relationship which will be discussed shortly.

Liang also didn't like the GAC curriculum. He emphasized that college application information rather than teaching quality is the best thing that the school provided him. He was not satisfied with the school's cancelation of many extracurricular activities for 11<sup>th</sup> graders and placing more emphasis on college test preparation. He observed that senior schoolmates wasted time in the 12<sup>th</sup> grade after submitting college applications. He didn't want to have such “free” time by paying expensive tuition. Under the help of a study abroad educational consulting company, he transferred to a U.S. public high school in a southern city after he finished 11<sup>th</sup> grade at Sunny High IAP. He paid a total of ¥100,000 for the services from the company, the American public school, and his host American family. He stated, “I want to experience American culture, make American friends, and improve English communication skills.” He described the school demographic information as follows: 80% of the school students were white; 10% were Latinos; 5% were African-Americans; and 5% were international students mostly from Europe, Vietnam, and other Asian countries. He was the only student from Mainland China.

Liang spent eight months at the American school. His first semester was lonely but very busy. He took regular coursework and AP classes and at the same time prepared his U.S. college applications. During the second semester, he started to make friends with American students. He thought that the high school year that he spent in the American high school was very substantial.

As he underscored, “I only paid more ¥20,000 [the yearly tuition at Sunny High IAP is about ¥80,000], but I achieved my planned learning goals and also received an American public high school diploma which is better than a Chinese high school diploma. The money was worthwhile.” He was not sensitive about the racial issues in the American school because he believed that as long as his academic performance was good enough, nobody could discriminate against him. He was very confident in himself because he was the only one in the school that year who was admitted by a top 40 U.S. university. By contrast, the majority of the students in the school attend local, non-ranked university. He recognized his advantage – his family can afford out-of-state college tuition to support his studying in the top-ranked American university, an advantage which many of his American schoolmates didn’t have. He also emphasized that study abroad enabled him to develop a wide vision and gain different perspectives which allowed him not be brainwashed by one-side knowledge. He explained that “many Chinese netizens cursed Japan without really knowing it.” However, the international perspective that he has gained has kept him from becoming a “distorted patriot.”

Liang chose to leave the Sunny High IAP program for a better high school education. His choice can also be understood as his resistance to the subtractive teaching and learning in the school. He commented that to some extent, Sunny High IAP students are *shiyan pin* (试验品, experimental product) of this “experimental” international high school curriculum program. Utilizing his parents’ economic and cultural capital, he was able to take actions to resist being a *shiyan pin*. For those Sunny High IAP students who neither liked learning the GAC curriculum and taking the ACT, nor chose to transfer to a U.S. high school, they could still take advantage of the freedom and choice available at the school and navigate their schooling. Some students chose to take the SAT which meant that they didn’t have to take GAC classes. When the majority of their



classmates have GAC classes, they could choose to study in the school library or in their dorms. In reality, many of these students ask for leave and study at home. Yifei was one such student. She spent most of her first semester in Grade 12 at home and did self-study. Sometimes, she went to Starbucks where she would work through TOEFL worksheets, read novels, or talk with *laowai* (老外, foreigners). She described herself as *tuochan sheng* (脱产生). *Tuochan* (脱产) literally means “leaving occupational work.” *Sheng* (生) means “students.” In this context, *tuochan sheng* (脱产生) refers to students who leave a regular course of study to learn at home and/or who attend after-school TOEFL and SAT classes for U.S. college admissions. Yifei’s mother supported her choice because this allowed her to see Yifei every day.

*Tuochan sheng* have accounted for a significant percentage of the Chinese high school students who choose to study abroad. In my pilot study, all three focal students had been *tuochan sheng* when they prepared for their U.S. college admissions. They officially enrolled in key Chinese high schools, but actually didn’t attend regular a course of study for a period of time. The practices prioritized by the US colleges they wanted to attend did not align with how the Chinese public schools were structured. My research data show that these unregulated choice actions and concomitant pedagogic practices reinforced the privatization of education and the construction of the self. This can be found in Yifei’s interpretation of how she worked through the college application process:

Students in my class adopted self-study. Many of us think that in our three-year high school, more often we studied on our own. Teachers didn’t play a helpful role in our study. More often, it was we students who set up our own clear goals. Then, we strived for our own goals for ourselves.

Yifei used her agency, choice, and privilege to navigate formal schooling. Her unique educational experience shaped how she thought about her relationship with teachers and the school.

Like many of her classmate, Yifei perceived that she achieved success with her college applications on her own. Her concept of self is a manifestation of the effects of market-based educational reforms and the privatization of public education. In addition, her case points out the importance of linking the examination of students' educational experiences inside the school to their informal schooling experiences revolving around U.S. college admissions in order to better understand the construction of the personal project and the conceptualization of the self. The former is the focus of this chapter. The latter will be discussed in the next chapter.

***Strong Bonding with Classmates and Weak Attachment with the School: Students' Sense of School Belonging***

Like many teenagers in the world, students at Sunny High IAP value friendship. Like regular Chinese public high schools, the Sunny High IAP program assigns students into different classes called *banji* (班级, similar to homerooms in U.S. schools) upon their entry into the school. Students study with same classmates in the originally assigned class for all three years of high school. This is a typical feature of Chinese public schools. Studying together in a same *banji* for three years enables Sunny High IAP students to develop close relationships with their classmates. Living in the students' dormitories provides them with more socialized spaces to develop their friendships. Students express a strong bonding with their classmates and roommates. Upon graduation, students themselves organize their farewell trips to celebrate their graduation with classmates. This has become a student-initiated and self-organized activity that takes place outside school.

However, when asked about their senses of belonging to the school, few focal students expressed their strong bonding with the school itself. Many of them showed a paradoxical feeling about the Sunny High IAP program. On the one hand, they appreciated the information, resources,

and opportunities that the school provided them. They confirmed their entitlement to the privilege of an internationally oriented education and the international program established by Sunny High (Gaztambide-Fernández, 2009, p. 6). On the other hand, they lacked a sense of school belonging. As Yifei commented, Sunny High students have enacted their SunnyHighian identifications and are proud of their collective identities. By contrast, students in the Sunny High IAP program don't identify themselves as SunnyHighians although the international division is part of Sunny High.

Students' detachment with the school is influenced by two factors: In the students' eyes, the school is like a business; U.S. college preparation dominates the school life. The first factor can be found in Baixue's explanation when she talked about school belonging:

This school didn't give students a sense of belonging. It [the school] is like a hotel. During this time, I am on my business trip in this city. I want to live here. Then I pay money, I live here. It [the school] doesn't give me any *extra* service. It doesn't provide me with any *extra* help. For example, The College Counseling and Guidance Center that I mentioned to you didn't give us a helping hand; instead, it became an obstacle... To my understanding, Sunny High and China Bridge are a whole as a school. But the school does a very confusing thing; on the one hand, it asks aboveboard for my money [make profits]; on the other hand, it expects me to *zun shi zhong dao* [尊师重道, literally "honoring the teachers and revering their teachings."] In this context, it means "honoring the school and revering its pedagogy." When a person wants both things, I feel that he/she is too greedy! I think...that what this persons wants is too much!...Then when someone is too greedy [like this], he/she will disgust others! Then all students are sick of it [the school].

The school works hard to meet the needs of students by helping them prepare for U.S. college admissions. However, the students don't accept test-oriented school culture although they gain instrumental benefits from it. The school's efforts are not recognized by the students. Their detachment from the school can be explained by Bernstein's (1977, 2000) concepts of the school's instrumental order and expressive order. As Bernstein's (2000) argues, "a school with a weak expressive order and a dominant and high divisive instrumental order is likely to move a number of pupils to a role involvement of 'detachment'" (p. 45). He explained, "The more the instrumental order dominates schools..., the more examination-minded they become and the more divisive

becomes their social organization. The greater the emphasis on this type of instrumental order, the more difficult it is for the expressive order to bind and link all the pupils in a cohesive way” (p. 39). The Sunny High IAP program’s instrumental order is profoundly shaped by the intertwining of neoliberal ideologies, market-based educational reforms, and test-based teaching and learning which further leads to the daily struggles that the school encounters in the construction of its expressive order and missions – a point that I will elaborate on later.

### ***Students’ Envisions and Aspirations of their Future***

In my interview with the study’s focal students, they repeatedly emphasized the importance of “ability” and “competence,” such as “team work” and “communication skills,” particularly “English communication skills” for their future occupations. They envision themselves in world-class U.S. universities and subsequently, equally elite spaces (Gaztambide-Fernández, 2009, p. 6). Many of them tend to pursue careers related to international or transnational companies. High academic achievers such as Feng and Danyang are eager to pursue graduate study after finishing their college education in the United States. Their college major choices are based on both their interests in science and considerations of possible high-level professional positions such as engineering professor and doctor.

In addition, there is a gendered difference in the aspirations and ambitions among these Chinese young people. For female students like Miaomiao, finding their Mr. Right is their main plan for the future. As she mentioned, her boyfriend was her middle school classmate and is now a freshmen in a top 30 U.S. public university. Her family members like her boyfriend, and his family likes her. Parents on both sides had expressed their desire that they get married in the very near future.

**SL:** What is your plan for the future?

**Miaomiao:** To be a housewife. [She responded my question very quickly without any hesitation.] I think that being a housewife is not an easy job. First, you need to educate your children. Second, you need to educate your husband. Third, you need to take care of four parents. You need to make all housework well organized and properly educate children. Being a good housewife means that you need to learn education, finance, and nutrition. I originally planned to learn nutrition at college. But my biology and chemistry learning is very poor...

**SL:** Where do you want to spend your life?

**Miaomiao:** The United States.

**SL:** Why?

**Miaomiao:** Because he [her boyfriend] wants to live there. He wants to immigrant there. We are the same person. He doesn't like the Chinese social environment

**SL:** What about the Chinese social environment don't you like?

**Miaomiao:** That is, a capable person cannot find a good job, but an incapable person can find a good job by relying on *guanxi* [social network]. Even the former can find a job, but he/she might get a low salary, be subjugated, and have no chance to fight to change for the better. In addition, there are pollution problems in China. I actually don't mind [these issues]. But my dad and mom also want to live in the United States. So I will live there.

**SL:** Your dad and mom want to live there?

**Miaomiao:** Yes. They want to live there and buy a farm, raising pigs and cows.

Miaomiao told me that doing academic research is not her strength. She thought that a top 40 U.S. university was suitable for her because she thought that she was not an academically good student. But she also said that she believes her comprehensive quality is very good. Therefore, a top 40 U.S. university would be a good match for her situation. She added, "I plan to become a housewife after I have children. But before that, I will work." She mentioned that her father, who is a retired military officer and now plays stock market, supported her plan. She continued, "He always tells his friends about the benefits of three things that a girl should do: get married early; study abroad; and have more children. He encourages me to be an educated housewife with good

taste who can manage her family well, support her husband' career, and properly educate children, rather than just being an ordinary housewife who can cook and clean a house.” Of course, Miaomiao's aspiration has been built on the premise that her husband must be wealthy, as she emphasized. Miaomiao is not the only student in the Sunny High IAP program who has such an ambition. She highlighted that some of her classmates whose mothers are housewives also want to become a housewife. For these girls, studying abroad is a good way to find the Mr. Right – a man who is like them with similar family backgrounds, educational experiences, tastes, and lifestyle.

Like Miaomiao, the majority of focal students prefer to live and work in the USA in the future, as is expected by their parents. However, they are flexible in regards to possible employment in China because they believe that their U.S. educational credentials give them an advantage in the Chinese labor market. As Weiwei illustrated:

**Weiwei:** If I graduate from a U.S. university and then come back to China, I will have more opportunities than those who graduate from Chinese universities. I will have more advantages [than them] because I will have received a Western education. Few people receive such an education. This is what is called *wu yi xi wei gui* [物以希为贵, literally, “rare object for expensive,” that is, the rarity of an object increases its value]. In addition, companies in China value educational credentials from Western universities because we have to admit that Western education is better than Chinese education.

**SL:** Why do you think that Western education is better than Chinese education?

**Weiwei:** The main criterion is university ranking. In addition to the ranking, graduates from Western universities are more competent in work. This is common-sense!

Weiwei perceives as common sense that university ranking is important, that U.S. diplomas are of high value, and that graduates cultivated by Western education are competent. This perception comes from daily conversations with his mother and interactions with internet forums. His mother runs a travel agency which collaborates with international and Chinese travel agencies. Most customers that her company serves are *laowai* (foreigners). She told Weiwei that foreign people

are better than Chinese. She attributes this phenomenon to the success of Western education. Her observation and opinion is consistent with what many Chinese netizens argue in internet forums.

Some students aspire to become entrepreneurs or philanthropists, preferably with an international perspective. In their social imaginaries, the elite images of the self are highlighted.<sup>63</sup> The students' understanding of their social existence and their relations with others are limited by the construction of their personal projects. This is reflected in Weiwei's understanding of what education is for, what a citizen's responsibilities and obligations mean, and what counts as "international talents" when he responded to my question about how he understands the school's educational goals presented in the school display board in regards to the cultivation of international talent.

**Weiwei:** I think that the school kind of exaggerates them [educational goals]. From my personal perspective, study is not for others or the nation-state, but for myself and my parents. I think this is what my study is for. Perhaps, the school needs to consider something and think that we should study for the nation-state and contribute to the nation-state and the society. But I think, this is, this is ... In practice, it is just for individuals. You can raise yourself. We don't live for the nation-state... If you study well and live well, you can become more independent. I think this is what study more is for...

I continued to ask him how he understood the rites in the coming of age and graduation ceremonies – students' pledging under the Chinese flag and reading the Constitution of the People's Republic of China. He explained,

**Weiwei:** I think that this was a serious moment for a Chinese citizen. It was a crucial moment for a coming of age rite. More importantly, it [the rite] reminded us that we had become adults. We will observe discipline and obey laws. We also have our own responsibilities and obligations to help others.

**SL:** How do you understand responsibilities and obligations?

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<sup>63</sup> Here, I draw on Taylor's definition of "social imaginary," which refers to "the ways people imagine their social existence, how they fit together with others, how things go on between them and their fellows, the expectations that are normally met, and the deeper normative notions and images that underlie these expectations" (p. 23).

**Weiwei:** Perhaps this means that when you enter society, you need to... how can I say this?... Responsibilities mean that you need to help others and take more things into considerations. You need to make a plan for your own life. Unlike what we did in our childhood when our parents usually made a plan for us. [Now] It is more about how we can learn to survive in the society. In the situation when nobody helps you, how can you survive and create your own world?

**SL:** How about obligations?

**Weiwei:** Obligations, perhaps, mean helping parents and taking care of parents.

**SL:** I noticed that when I mentioned “international talents,” you laughed. Why?

**Weiwei:** I think that the notion of “international talents” is too empty. What count as “talents”?

**SL:** What do “talents” mean to you?

**Weiwei:** A talent means someone who can live a very good life. In addition, he/she can make some contribution to society.

**SL:** For example?

**Weiwei:** For example, how many employment opportunities can I provide to people? Do my arguments and thoughts have a significant impact on academia? Not mention that you can win a Nobel Award. At least, you can make some contribute to social progress. I think that this is what talent means.

Weiwei perceives that education is “just for individuals.” Elitism is embedded in his interpretation of the responsibilities and obligations of a citizen. His understanding of talented individuals as being either economic elites or academic elites reflects typical ambitions of Sunny High IAP students. The personalized and positional self coexists in their imaginaries of social surroundings. The coexistence and interaction of these oppositional identities lead to the pedagogic schizoid position, as Bernstein (2000) points out. For example, on the one hand, Weiwei recognizes that in theory he needs to help others; on the other hand, he is concerned about how he can survive “in the situation when nobody helps him” and how to “construct his own world” in a



competitive environment. His understanding of the way in which he can “make some contribution to society” and “help others” concentrates on becoming an elite professional in a hierarchical globalized society. The cosmopolitan elements embedded in the construction of becoming “international talents” denotes a new fusion of identity constructions which points to, using Berntein’s language, the schismatic tendency in the formation of the prospective re-centering pedagogic identity. Indeed, such a pedagogic schizoid position is also reflected in the school’s struggles and changing identities. This will be the focus of my next section.

### **School Struggles and Changing Identities**

The Sunny High IAP program is established and developed in the neoliberal conjuncture where a number of forces, such as the interests of the rising middle and upper Chinese class, market-based social and educational reforms, the state’s call for competence-based curriculum reforms, the involvement of private corporations into public education, and neoliberal globalization intensified by the 2008 economic crisis, come together (Hall, Massey, & Rustin, 2013). This larger social context influences the school’s internal organizational processes associated with its ongoing school and curriculum reforms (Apple, 2013; McNeil, 2013). In this section, I will discuss four main struggles that the school currently encounters in the reform process. These struggles concentrate on enhancing the management of students’ attendance, building a school alumni association, negotiating with China Bridge, and identifying a meaningful school mission.

The biggest challenge that the school faces is how to effectively manage students’ attendance. The school is dedicated to meeting the needs of students by preparing them to be admitted to U.S. colleges. Although the school attempts to develop diverse curricula to support students’ college entrance test preparation, students are not satisfy with the quality and efficiency

of TOEFL, ACT, and SAT courses. As a result, attending after-school TOEFL and SAT/ACT classes is a popular choice for Sunny High IAP students. Often, students need to leave early from the school in order to attend these training classes. Many of them need to ask for leave for several days to take their SAT tests in Hong Kong and other Asian countries.<sup>64</sup> All these activities challenge school management. The school faces a dilemma: on the one hand, as a formal educational institution it needs to regulate students' attendance; on the other hand, the school has to give students permissions to leave for these test-related activities because they are crucial parts of students' college application preparation.

To make a compromise, the school has recently purchased and installed a security system. Each student receives an electronic card. The card contains their parents' and class advisors' contact information. Every time students leave school for after-school classes, they need to check out in the school security office and scan their cards. Then their parents and teachers will immediately receive a cell phone message informing them of the students' leaving time. Parents need to confirm that they know and allow their children to leave school. A same procedure is conducted when students return to the school. The rationale of adopting this security system is to carefully track students' attendance and establish the boundaries regarding the responsibilities of the school and the parents; that is, the school is not responsible for students when they leave school for their chosen after-school activities during the regular course of study. The hidden curriculum behind the adoption of this security system not only has more to do with controlling and legitimizing the pursuit of private autonomy, but it also reflects the school's dilemma between meeting students' needs and maintaining the school's expressive order.

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<sup>64</sup> There are no SAT test centers open to Chinese students in Mainland China. Students who choose to take SAT tests need to fly to places outside Mainland China to take the test.

As an elite institution, Sunny High IAP recognizes the power of social networks, as do Sunny High IAP students and parents. School administrators have become aware of the potential resources and power that the socially elite Chinese students could bring to the school in light of their family backgrounds and the elite status that the students will achieve in the near future. Thus, in 2013 the school initiated an alumni association. The original idea focused on inviting graduates to come back to the school and share their successful application experiences and U.S. college life with current Sunny High IAP students. As a first step, the school invited graduates to attend a workshop facilitated by school administrators. However, only a couple of school alumni accepted the school invitation and came to the workshop. School administrators were disappointed. This situation resonates with students' weak sense of school belonging discussed above. It reflects the tensions between students and the school. In order to change this situation, Sunny High IAP has set up a preparatory committee for the alumni association. An inspiring theme has been created – “Alumni Affinity, Close Ties; Chinese Soul, Global Awareness.”

In addition, the school intends to construct IAPer identifications for the Sunny High IAP program. However, many students don't even know what IAP means. As I have discussed in Chapter 4, the full name of IAP is International Access Project (IAP). It is a curricular project created by China Bridge through combining the Chinese high school curriculum and the Global Assessment Certificate (GAC) program. China Bridge has built partnerships with key high schools throughout China and established IAP network schools. Sunny High IAP is one of them. It has become the company's flagship IAP school, as the school administrator Ms. Zhao noted.

Despite the official IAPer identity that the school endeavors to build, teachers and students seldom accept this identification. As Teacher Huang complained, “We teachers work hard and make the school better and better. China Bridge takes away our achievement as theirs and use it to

advertise their company.” Mr. Huang participated in the whole process of preparing for and recording the advertisement video for the IAP curriculum program. When he received the final product, he got angry because the whole video doesn’t highlight the Sunny High IAP program. In reality, the main materials used in the video, such as interviews with students and teachers, school activities, campus background, are all derived from this school. He came to realize that the advertisement video that he devoted himself to was utilized for the interest of the company. The video has been posted on public social media. I watched the video and agreed with Teacher Huang. The entire video is impressive; inspiring background music, a professional interpreter’s engaging explanations, substantial content, and vivid scenarios all contribute to a clear theme – how successful and promising the IAP program is that China Bridge created. Mr. Huang didn’t understand why the school allowed the company to steal its achievement. His question is one that many teachers in this school have. But they tacitly accept that this kind of thing should not be transparent to the public and only the school administrators have the right to know the “truth.”

School administrators have the power to access insider information. They also have troublesome challenges to deal with. Each semester, the school invites students and parents to democratic seminars, listening to their feedback, comments, and suggestions on curriculum, teaching, and school activities. From these seminars, school administrators have heard that the most common complaint is about the GAC curriculum. They know that students are not satisfied with the poor quality of the international curriculum and want the school to cut down or reduce the use of the curriculum. However, these kinds of things are not strictly speaking controlled by the Chinese part of the school. It is China Bridge and the ACT that control the international curriculum.

As demonstrated in Chapter 4, the GAC curriculum is bundled with the ACT. The ACT is regarded as the final evaluation of students' learning of the GAC curriculum. In other words, if students choose to take ACT tests for their U.S. college admissions, they have to learn the GAC curriculum. This forced consumption of the international curriculum is intertwined with the interests of Sunny High, China Bridge, and ACT Education Solutions. When advertising its IAP curriculum program to Chinese families, the school emphasizes two competitive advantages of the program, compared with other international high school curriculum programs: first, students can take ACT tests at school rather than somewhere else; second, the IAP curriculum program allows students to learn both Chinese and international curricula. The international curriculum prepares students to make a good transition to overseas colleges. Thus, Sunny High wants to keep the advantage of having the campus be an ACT test center in order to make its own international high school program competitively attractive to Chinese families.

For the company part, how much and how long students learn the GAC curriculum determines the amount of the profit that they can gain from students' tuitions. The cost of the ACT test is fixed. China Bridge cannot make money from the test. The GAC curriculum, however, is profitable. Hence, both China Bridge and ACT Education Solutions are unwilling to reduce the use of the GAC curriculum since a reduction will decrease their percentage of the distribution of the school profits. However, the company part is aware that they have to satisfy their customers and need to maintain a partnership with Sunny High.

The interest convergence from the Chinese and the company stakeholders allows them to make a negotiation with each other in consideration of the needs of students. As a result, the company agreed that given students' higher learning level, all Sunny High IAP students don't need to take the fundamental level of the GAC curriculum. In the past, students learned the GAC

curriculum, but their grades in GAC courses were not included in their official transcripts and didn't impact their foreign college applications. However, to change students' learning attitudes toward the GAC curriculum, China Bridge negotiated with Sunny High to include students' GAC grades in their official transcripts. Both sides came to an agreement on this point. In so doing, the school expected students to take their learning of GAC seriously. Such negotiations and compromises reveal that through collaborating with Chinese elite public schools, private corporations participate in the control of school knowledge.

Currently, China Bridge works hard to make good use of international teachers and Sunny High Chinese teachers as knowledge workers, as well as students' feedback to revise the GAC curriculum. The process of localizing the international curriculum benefits ACT Education Solutions. The U.S. company uses the IAP program as a successful case when advertising its product to new customers across the globe. My analysis here reflects the process of the production, circulation, and distribution of knowledge in the context of neoliberal globalization. The involvement of multiple stakeholders and their partnerships point out the mechanism of educational governance which I have discussed in Chapter 4. In the formation process of "neoliberal educational governance," wealthy Chinese students and an elite Chinese public school become neoliberal subjects. Their identities are constructed for this "new" form of educational governance (Singh, Kenway, & Apple, 2005). I have analyzed students' identities by examining their interpretations and perceptions of their educational experiences inside the school. Here, I will discuss the school's changing identities through analyzing its struggles with the identification of meaningful educational goals, as well as other struggles described above.

In a professional development seminar organized by the Chinese administrators at the Sunny High IAP program, school teachers sat together, learning the knowledge of U.S. college

application procedures and requirements. The theme of this seminar focused on teaching Chinese teachers how to write recommendation letters for students and how to build portfolios for each student. This knowledge is quite new for Chinese teachers. They listened attentively to the presentations by Chinese guidance counselors from the company. At the end, school administrator Mr. Tian stood up and wrapped up the seminar. He emphasized how fierce the study-abroad and international high school curriculum program markets are and how dedicatedly the school and teachers should strive for meeting the needs of students. In his closing remarks, he encouraged all teachers to take their work seriously and also asked questions for himself and these teachers: “In addition to meeting students’ needs, do we miss anything important in our school’s educational goals? What counts as a meaningful school mission?” These questions caused some teachers to be deep in thought.

This scenario captures the school’s struggles with the changes to its moral basis in globalizing circumstances. The school takes educational markets, school competitions, and the priority of students’ private needs for granted which reflects that neoliberal ideologies have hegemonized its common sense (Hall & Massey, 2010; Hall, Massey, & Rustin, 2013). Chinese educators’ confusion about educational goals denote an ideological crisis in what education is for. The changes regarding the bias and focus of official knowledge, along with the emphasis on U.S. college admissions, shape the school’s pedagogic identities. For instance, using the relative autonomy that Chinese educational reforms provide, Sunny High IAP constructs de-centered identities. On the one hand, the school produces a de-centered market identity in response to external market exigencies. This instrumental identity is reflected in the school’s pursuit of the performance of its pedagogic practices, such as students’ test scores and top U.S. college admission rates. On the other hand, the school attempts to enact de-centered therapeutic identity by improving

its internal competence, such as maintaining its expressive order, seeking meaningful school missions, and facilitating international exchanges. As Bernstein (2000) notes, the former type of identity represents a “neoliberal” position while the latter refers to a “professional” position. In addition, the school’s emphasis on selecting the best elements of the Chinese curriculum and pedagogy for the construction of the integrated school curriculum is a manifestation of its prospective identity and “neo-conservative” position. In the current context, these identities and positions coexist at Sunny High IAP. However, the neoliberal subjective position and the instrumental identity is dominant.

### **Conclusion**

In this chapter, I highlight the role of neoliberal Chinese educational reforms in the selection, organization, and legitimation of the school curriculum at the Sunny High IAP program. These reforms serve as the distributive rules and “mediate the social order through distributing different forms of knowledge and consciousness to diverse social groups” (Wong & Apple, 2003, p. 84). Key Chinese public high schools use relative autonomy provided by these Chinese educational reforms to construct internationally oriented curriculum programs for meeting the needs of socially elite Chinese students. Despite the official rhetorical discourse of cultivating international proficientiers, the pedagogic practices of the Sunny High IAP program focus on preparing students for U.S. college admissions.

By elaborating on the role of U.S. college admissions criteria in molding curricular selection and reorganization and pedagogic practices, I conclude that the content and framing of the school curriculum and pedagogic practice, whether completed or ongoing, have shaped and will shape students’ college admissions processes (Weis, Cipollone, & Jenkins, 2014). The ongoing making of U.S. college-going school culture highlights an instrumental order of the school



which shapes students' socialization experiences, consciousness, and identities (Apple, 2004; Bernstein, 1977, 1990, 1999, 2000). In the shaping process, Sunny High IAP students are provided with access to their needed information, resources, and opportunities. Therefore, not only is advantage produced in this process, but also the identities of students and the school are reconstructed. This process contributes to the making of privileged and empowered individuals (van Zanten, 2015). By experiencing a differentiated schooling, students distinguish themselves from other Chinese counterparts. They perceive themselves as competitive individuals who will own high-value educational credentials and who will become elites with international perspectives and managerial or entrepreneurial dispositions. The structurally differentiated school knowledge and pedagogic practices contribute to the production of these particular elite subjectivities. In the process of constructing these curriculum and pedagogies for the needs of the socially elite students, the school enhances its own neoliberal positions and instrumental identities.

In addition, the evidence is sufficient to argue that U.S. college admissions criteria serve as evaluative rules that shape curricular reorganization and regulate pedagogic activities at Sunny High IAP.<sup>65</sup> The controlling role of these evaluative principles in social selection and exclusion deserves further investigation (Gibson, 2001; Au, 2009; Wong, 2015).

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<sup>65</sup> I argue that U.S. college application as a pedagogic device. It is composed of distributive rules, recontextualizing rules, and evaluative rules. Here, I only mentioned the impact of the evaluative rules on the school curriculum and pedagogy. But I understand that my argument of U.S. college application as a pedagogic device may deserve an in-depth analysis in a separate paper.

## Chapter 6: The Educational Consulting Industry: Informal Schooling, Privilege, and Power

*Following Miaomiao and Linglong, we head off to the Pole Star School where these two young female students have their VIP TOEFL classes.<sup>66</sup> It is Saturday morning. The city transportation is not too bad. We take a bus and then the subway. After switching two lines, we finally arrive our destination stop. It takes us about one hour from the Sunny High International Division to the Pole Star School. Linglong mentions that during the busy hours on weekdays, they have to spend two hours one-way for their TOEFL classes. It is a very exhausting commute...*

*On the way to the exit to the Greenfield Plaza where the Pole Star School is located, there are overwhelmingly colorful advertisements on study-abroad related educational companies. Their brand slogans are inspiring, such as “Elite English, Elite Learning” and “Every Student Can Be Hand in Hand with A World-Class University.” The public display boards on the Greenfield Plaza are filled with advertisements of several study-abroad consulting companies. One of them is called Robin Education. The company’s well-designed posters deliver some key information about “Elite Plans” and “iPlanning” for 15- to 18-year-old students who will study in U.S. colleges. Their educational services, called the “Solution Project for Studying in USA,” cover academic planning, test preparation, and extracurricular activity planning. One of their eye-catching programs is the “2013 U.S. Ivy University Summer Schools – Direct Pathway to Top 10 U.S. Universities.” The company’s track record is impressive. The posters highlight the achievement of the company: “Over 30% of our customers admitted to TOP 10 U.S. Universities; over 80% to Top 20 U.S. Universities; Over 90% to Top 30 U.S. Universities.”*

*Surrounding the plaza are many new high-rise buildings. A lot of study-abroad consulting companies rent their offices and classrooms in these buildings, which makes this area the center of the study-abroad market in Moon City. At the main entrance of the Pole Star School, there is a huge HDTV presenting various types of educational training programs and elite educational brands that the company created, such as “Pole Star Global Study Tour [International Summer Camp],” “Pole Star Online Schools,” “You-Can Secondary School Education,” and “Kindergarten of Superstars.” I am very impressed by two contrasting brand slogans pertaining to You-Can Secondary School Education and International Summer Camp. The former is “Making a Dialogue with Life – My Chinese Dream.” The latter is “Dream Shining in World-Class Universities, Youth Blooming at an International Stage – The 25<sup>th</sup> Annual Pole Star Summer Global Education Exhibition Tour (2013).”*

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<sup>66</sup> The Polar Star School is a pseudonym. It is a well-known, established study-abroad training and consulting company in China. The educational company has several branch companies across the country. In this study, I use pseudonyms for the English test training and study-abroad consulting companied that research participants employed and mentioned.

*Miaomiao and Linglong's VIP classroom is upstairs. I follow them to the Pole Star VIP Learning Center. The personalized study center for secondary school students and Horizon Overseas Consulting Co., Ltd. are located in separate floors in this building. These two centers are wholly owned subsidiaries of the Pole Star School. I am not allowed to visit Miaomiao and Linglong's VIP class because I am not a Pole Star customer and don't have a class ticket [pass]. From the glass door of the VIP center, I see some direction signs, including signs for a VIP Classroom, Multimedia Classroom, Lecture Room, and Lounge. I watch these two sweet girls going to their classroom and wonder what their VIP class looks like...*

(Field notes, June 2013)

This chapter focuses on examining how Sunny High IAP students experience and interpret their informal schooling revolving around their preparation for U.S. college application. The chapter is organized by six main types of students' after-school educational activities, including going on international trips, participating in internships, taking English test training classes (such as for the TOEFL and the ACT/SAT), working with study-abroad consulting companies, guiding themselves through Do-It-Yourself (DIY) college applications, and traveling to celebrate their graduations. By describing students' schooling experiences outside the school setting, I emphasize that the privileged Chinese high school students overwhelmingly use their families' capital, particularly economic capital, to buy educational services from English training and study-abroad consulting companies for international college admission. This chapter lays out the educational consulting industry which points out the extent to which education is regarded as a commodity. This chapter contributes to a deep understanding of the practices, effects, and implications of the marketization and privatization of education. I argue that students' neoliberal subjectivities are influenced and shaped by the marketization and privatization of education through the way in which they actively participate in fee-paying extra-curricular activities in order to enhance their preparation for overseas college applications.

### **International Activities**

Many Sunny High IAP students are engaged in international activities organized by their families, travel agencies, and study-abroad consulting companies. Some of them attend international young leaders forums recommended by the school. The various kinds of international travel experiences broaden their visions while they prepare for their college applications abroad.

#### ***Taking International Trips for Fun and Experiencing Overseas Life***

Jiajia is a daughter of a CEO. When I first met her, she was a 10<sup>th</sup> grader. Since she was a child, she had played the violin and taken dance classes. As an adolescent, she fell in love with drawing. Her goal is to attend an elite arts college in the United States. When I interviewed her father Mr. Lin, I found that Jiajia's hobby development and choice of college major resonated with her family's education style. Her parents seldom pushed her to study hard for good test scores. They gave her the choice and freedom to do what she was interested in. This parenting style is exhibited in Mr. Lin's expectation of Jiajia's future – “No matter where she lives in the future, I hope she is happy and that she enjoys her life.” Mr. Lin expects Jiajia to become a loving and caring aristocratic woman. He asserted, ‘Nobility’ is not a derogatory term. To cultivate a nobility takes several generations.” He believes that Jiajia could become an aristocratic woman because his family members are all well educated people going back to his great-grandfather's generation. Jiajia's mother is a housewife. Since Jiajia's childhood, she has traveled abroad with her mother during summer vacations. She has toured France, Italy, Germany, Austria, Egypt, and many Asian countries. She has been to Canada several times. Before she started high school, her father sent her to the United States to stay with his friend's family for one month. He wanted Jiajia to gain first-hand life experience in the country where she would attend college. Mr. Lin emphasized that, “Not many Chinese students have such extensive international tour experiences.”

Ben, a 10<sup>th</sup> grade student, likes diving. He developed this hobby when he first visited South Africa. Ben mentioned that his father, a real estate businessman, planned to bring him to South Africa again for diving during vacations. Compared with Jiajia's and Ben's leisure travel, Liang's travel to the United States is perhaps more purposeful. Liang toured several Asian countries with his parents. Although his parents had traveled to the United States for business several times, he had never visited the country. He joined a travel agency during his summer vacation in the 10<sup>th</sup> grade and toured the west and east coasts of America. The travel agency also brought him to visit several well-known American universities. He gained some sense regarding life in the United States through this international tour, and this familiarization helped him adjust when he transferred to an American public high school in 12<sup>th</sup> grade.

#### ***Attending U.S. University Summer Schools***

In Chapter 5, I have shown some of Sunny High IAP's internationalization characteristics. In addition to put an emphasis on English language learning, hiring international teachers, and advocating bilingual teaching, the school promotes international exchanges. These internationalization strategies are also found in Brazilian private schools in Aguiar and Nogueira's (2012) study. However, in the context of Sunny High IAP, students are often introduced to travel agencies for attending international programs such as the University of California-Berkeley Summer School.

Feng was a member of one of the first groups of students from Sunny High IAP who attended the UC-Berkeley Summer School. This summer school program is organized by a *zhongjie* (中介, "study-abroad consulting") company.<sup>67</sup> Feng spent five weeks at UC-Berkeley

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<sup>67</sup> *Zhongjie* (中介), literally means "mediator." *Zhong* (中) means "middle." *Jie* (介) refers to "mediate." In the study-abroad market, the *zhongjie* companies provide a wide range of educational services. Although some *zhongjie* companies do act as mediators to negotiate between Chinese families and international educational

and took two classes – Astronomy and History. In the past, his English reading speed was slow. But this intensive summer school coursework effectively improved his English. This impressive learning experience motivated him to attend the Yale University summer school in his 11<sup>th</sup> grade. Whereas for his 10<sup>th</sup> grade’s UC-Berkeley Summer School experience Feng relied on the *zhongjie* to handle everything, he applied for the Yale University summer school, registered, and found accommodation nearby Yale by himself. The five-week study at Yale exposed him to some interesting classes such as social welfare. He read *The Communist Manifesto* required by the class. As his mother Mr. Chang noted, as a Chinese communist party member she hadn’t even read *The Communist Manifesto*. Both Mr. Chang and Feng were very satisfied with the summer schools at UC-Berkeley and Yale. Not only were Feng’s English language skills significantly improved, but he also got to know American professors who were willing to write letters of recommendation for his U.S. college applications. In addition, his Do-It-Yourself (DIY) experience of successfully applying to the Yale University summer school increased his confidence in approaching college applications with that same DIY ethic. As Ms. Chang commented,

**Ms. Chang:** While many other parents hire *zhongjie* to help their children with college applications, I invest my money in [American] summer schools.

**SL:** How about the costs of these summer schools?

**Ms. Chang:** The UC-Berkeley one cost ¥80,000 [approximately \$13,000]. The Yale summer school was about ¥100,000 [roughly \$16,000].

**SL:** That’s not cheap.

**Ms. Chang:** Yes. But it is worth the money. Some parents pay about ¥60,000 to ¥100,000 to *zhongjie*. I didn’t. Feng saved the *zhongjie* fees of ¥100,000 for us... No, I actually spent more money than those parents. But I think my investment is worth it.

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institutions, the main type of services that the companies offer are study-abroad consulting services. In this chapter, I frequently adopt the term *zhongjie* to refer to study-abroad consulting companies in order to keep the meanings evoked by the interviewees.

In addition to the summer schools in the United State, Feng participated in a Model United Nations in Singapore. He also went to Hong Kong to take SAT II tests. These two trips cost his family another ¥20,000, or about \$3,000. Clearly, Sunny High IAP students' international travels for learning are expensive. These costs are not affordable for average Chinese families. As a survey conducted by Peking University shows, the average annual family income in 2012 in China was ¥13,000, approximately \$2,100. Specifically, an average family income was about \$2,600 in urban China, whereas it was \$1,600 in rural areas. The maldistribution of wealth has a profound impact on Chinese students' differentiated access to international educational resources and opportunities, as is revealed in Feng's case.

Jing and Qiao were 11<sup>th</sup> graders when I interviewed them. Both of them also attended the UC-Berkeley Summer School at the end of 10<sup>th</sup> grade. They shared with me their negative experiences with the summer school. They mentioned that a white American professor who taught an environment class was biased toward them and other Sunny High IAP students who were in the same camp. The professor showed disrespect to these students and even said in class that these wealthy Chinese high school students should not be present at UC-Berkeley. His attitude and comments annoyed the students. They complained to the *zhongjie* company. But the *zhongjie* responded to them that the company could not do anything about the professor. It was not surprising that the student received low grades in this professor's class. Jing and Qiao emphasized that they would not apply to UC-Berkeley and would not recommend Berkeley to their schoolmates and friends. In this sense, attending international summer schools allows the students to experience U.S. university climates and helps them make college choices in advance. Although my study focuses more on class, this finding suggests that future studies need to pay attention to racial issues when looking at these students' educational experiences at U.S. universities.

### ***Traveling to Take Tests***

Unlike many Sunny High IAP students who have had international trip experiences, Yaya had not traveled abroad. Her father is a sales director for a wine company. Although he grew up in a rural family and didn't attend college, in Yaya's eyes, her father is a successful man. She understands that the cost of attending this fee-paying school and studying abroad is a big expenditure for her family. She appreciates that her father creates these educational opportunities for her. Otherwise, she might have to go back to her hometown to take the *gaokao* because she doesn't have a Moon City *hukou* (household registration). Her father didn't know much about the U.S. college application requirements and procedures. Financial support is what he could provide to Yaya. Yaya has to rely on the school and herself to navigate the preparation for college applications. She took the ACT at school, but she was not satisfied with her test scores. The second ACT test was held in December on campus, but it was going to be too late for her because she had to receive a better ACT score for her college submission before December. She chose to fly to Hong Kong and take the ACT there. Eventually, she only improved slightly on the ACT. As she noted, the whole process of contacting travel agencies for the trip to Hong Kong while simultaneously preparing for the ACT test was very stressful.

As I have mentioned before, the bundle of the GAC curriculum and the ACT test enables the Sunny High International Division to be an ACT test center. The center is only open to Sunny High IAP students. However, the students can only take the test twice at the school: once in May in 11<sup>th</sup> grade and again in December in 12<sup>th</sup> grade. Beyond that, the students have to go outside Mainland China, where the ACT centers are located, to take the test. Students who choose to take the SAT tests for their college applications have to go abroad to take the tests because there are no SAT test centers open to Chinese students in Mainland China. Hong Kong is the nearest place



where the students can go for the SAT and additional ACT tests. Some Sunny High IAP students choose to fly to Thailand, Malaysia, Singapore, South Korea, or other Asian countries for either the SAT or the ACT tests. This is part of high school life for Sunny High IAP students. They usually join a *kaoshi tuan* (考试团, literally “test team”) organized by travel agencies. Their parents don’t have to accompany with them because travel agencies deal with their visa issues, flights, and travel agendas. After finishing their tests, students can take a tour and go shopping in those areas. Weiwei chose to take the SAT test rather than the ACT for his college applications. He flew to Hong Kong several times for the SAT. He mentioned that one of his classmates took the SAT in South Korea. Her family accompanied her and then the whole family toured South Korea for one week.

The various kinds of international activities that Sunny High IAP students participate in distinguish them from their Chinese counterparts who choose a domestic track to Chinese higher education. The students perceive that their international experiences open their minds and allow them to acquire more “practical” knowledge than the “academic” knowledge that school textbooks teach them. These experiences and knowledge enable them to become “flexible” rather than “disciplined” people. Becoming of this particular kind of person is based on the strategic use of their privileged families’ economic capital.

### **Participating in Internships and Contests for the Accumulation of Distinctive Extracurricular Experiences**

As shown in Chapter 5, Sunny High IAP provides students with a wide range of extracurricular activities and community service opportunities. These are the common experiences that all Sunny High IAP students have. In order to make the content of their college essays unique and

attractive to U.S. college admission officers, the students explore internships and participate in contests that can enrich their curricula vitae.

Wenbo was admitted to a top 40 U.S. university. Both of his parents are professors in a top-rated Chinese university. His father received a PhD from a well-known university in England and then returned back to China. He runs a lab in his university. Wenbo is not a high academic achiever like his father. But his parents hope that taking an international track to a world-class university will empower him. With the help of his parents, Wenbo started as an intern in a lab at the university where his parents have worked since he was a 10<sup>th</sup> grader. He put this internship experience in his personal statement for college applications.

When I was conducting this study, Shanshan was in 11<sup>th</sup> grade. I first met her at the school library and we started to chat. She was very interested in urban planning and shared her opinions about Moon City Subway's design problems. She told me that she developed this understanding of the subway issues partly because of her internship experiences in an architecture institute in Moon City. It was her aunt, an architect, who helped her find this intern opportunity.

Both Wenbo's and Shanshan's case reveal the role of family's cultural and social capital in planning and enriching students' extra-curricular experiences. These experiences are accumulated for writing impressive personal statements which have an important impact on the students' college admissions. As Feng's mother commented,

The student [at Sunny High IAP] who is admitted to a top 10 U.S. university, to a large extent, depends on his participation in a charity organization. I heard from other parents that every summer vacation this student went to the charity organization and did volunteer work because his family knows someone in the organization. In addition, he has another activity related to an environmental research project... about a water pollution issue. He attended a contest [on the environmental research topic]. He is the student who plans [for extra-curricular activities] early. I don't know if it is *zhongjie* that helped him to plan these activities or his families. I am not sure. Perhaps, it is his family. This student is different from others. He stands out from other students. The universities that Weiwei [her son] likes and has applied for give admissions to this student [rather than her son].

Feng's mother regretted that she didn't help Feng to get into the competitive extra-curricular activities that the student admitted to a top 10 U.S. college had. The result of her son's college admissions is good, but it is not as successful as that other Sunny High IAP student. She emphasized the importance of planning distinctive extra-curricular experiences early. Her description also shows that international college applications are a competitive market where privileged Chinese students struggle for control over cultural capital valued by U.S. colleges. When it comes to their college applications, the students have to build stronger personal projects than others in order to take good positionings in this field.

### **Taking TOEFL and SAT/ACT Training Classes: Intensive Test Preparation**

In regard to international college applications, test scores on the TOEFL and the ACT/SAT are considered by students, parents, and the school to be "hard" currency. Preparations for these college entrance tests, particularly the TOEFL, are very intensive for all Sunny High IAP students. All of the focal students in my study have attended after-school TOEFL training classes. There are various types of TOEFL classes including: basic; enhancement; and VIP one-to-one, one-to-two, or one-to-three classes. Students can choose any class suitable to them. They can also choose where they go for these classes because there are so many TOEFL training companies in Moon City. Many of these educational companies concentrate on the Greenfield area. The Pole Star School is the biggest and most popular TOEFL training company. Many relatively smaller TOEFL training companies were created by people who used to work at the Pole Star School. The owner of Noah Education that outsourced Sunny High IAP's TOEFL classes was an English training teacher at the Pole Star School for several years. He then left and opened his own business.

Jijia took TOEFL classes with Noah Education. As she and her father noted, the reason they chose Noah Education was that the classes were held on the campus of Sunny High IAP and

this kept Jiajia from a long commute to and from the school to the Greenfield. In addition, the two children of Mr. Lin's friends who attended Sunny High IAP also took the TOEFL classes with Noah Education. They thought that the class quality was fine. When I was conducting my observational study, Noah Education worked with about 30 students like Jiajia at Sunny High IAP. The company took advantage of the opportunity of teaching the TOEFL to Sunny High IAP students in regular classrooms to recruit them for additional fee-paying classes. Some of the students had one-to-one TOEFL classes with the company in the Greenfield where the company rents its office. In my interview with Yifei, she expressed disgust with Noah Education. She said:

My TOEFL learning was not good in 10<sup>th</sup> grade. I didn't like the TOEFL classes that Noah Education taught... Mr. Fu, the owner of Noah Education taught our TOEFL classes. At the beginning, his teaching was fine. He taught us what TOEFL is and what the test structure looks like. This information is useful. Then, he shared his English experience with us, his study and working experience in Canada, and the TOEFL learning experiences of the students whom he helped. This is fine. Later on, we came to realize that he repeatedly told us the same stories. The main theme of his storytelling is how good his English is, how much higher the TOEFL scores have been for the students who he helped, and how successful his teaching is. He advertised his TOEFL training services... Often, I didn't pay attention to his teaching. One day in class I was inattentive. He approached me, saying "Look at your TOEFL score. How poor it is. You will see that one day, you *must ask* me to give you one-to-one lessons." How ridiculous! Why do I have to *ask* him to teach me one-to-one lessons?

Yifei was not the only student who didn't like Noah Education. Some of the study's focal students showed their awareness that the entry of Noah Education into Sunny High IAP is for the maximization of the company's interest by seeking more student customers beyond just teaching regular TOEFL classes. These students often searched for TOEFL classes outside the school.

Miaomiao had tried different kinds of TOEFL classes including basic and enhancement with two different English training companies. She ended up working with the Pole Star School's VIP class. Her VIP class was one-to-two. She shared the class with Linglong, which means that a

TOEFL training teacher taught the class to both her and Linglong. The following interview excerpt reflects what her VIP class looked like:

**SL:** What kind of TOEFL class are you taking now?

**Miaomiao:** One-to-two.

**SL:** What's the name of the class?

**Miaomiao:** TOEFL VIP.

**SL:** What does the VIP mean?

**Miaomiao:** [laugh] Very Important People.

**SL:** Very Important People. VIP customers?

**Miaomiao:** Yes.

**SL:** What does the VIP class look like?

**Miaomiao:** Our [TOEFL] reading class is held in one of the small units in a big office. We go to a separate room for TOEFL listening classes because the room has some equipment for CD playing and listening. The size of the room is like... It can hold about 7 or 8 people. However, when we have VIP [TOEFL listening classes] in that room, there are also some ACT one-to-one and SAT one-to-one classes there. There are also a couple SAT one-to-one classes that are for students attending U.S. high schools... Our instructor usually gives us one-to-two classes in such separate rooms. Then, after we finish our VIP classes, we can go to a self-study room that can hold about 20 people. There are several self-study rooms there.

Miaomiao and Linglong went to Pole Star for their TOEFL VIP classes on Friday and Saturday in the second semester of 11<sup>th</sup> grade. Each class session lasted two hours. They spent the rest of the day in the self-study rooms at Pole Star because they thought that their study efficiency was high there. For example, on Friday, they left the school after lunch for their 2 p.m. TOEFL class. They usually returned to the school at 10 p.m. or 11 p.m. For each TOEFL class, they usually spent three hours both ways to go back and forth from the school to the Greenfield. It was an exhausting commute for them. Miaomiao mentioned that besides the TOEFL VIP classes, she had had other TOEFL and ACT classes. All these classes were held in the Greenfield area. She commented, "The

Greenfield has become the center of various kinds of educational training.” This is reflected in the following interview excerpt:

**SL:** When did you take these classes [other TOEFL and ACT classes]?

**Miaomiao:** Summer and winter vacations and weekends. My former classmates in Anhui came to Moon City during summer vacations for such classes, too. They live in hotels. The hotel expenses are almost as much as my school tuition. Every summer and winter vacation, the hotels near the Greenfield are often out of sale. Hotel prices keep increasing. Most of their customers are the students who come here to take TOEFL and other English training classes.

Miaomiao explained that many students came to Moon City for TOEFL training classes because teachers here are more professional and high-quality. When she discussed her TOEFL and ACT training teachers, she emphasized that few of them have majors in English and many of them major in business, finance, and law. This raises some very interesting question: Who is the main teaching force in the rising English training industry in the Chinese and international education markets? What counts as a good teacher in what kinds of educational fields?<sup>68</sup>Miaomiao and Linglong had autonomy to choose how many classes they need. Pole Star provided them with flexible educational services based on their personal learning needs. However, the classes could not be observed by others—including their parents. Only people who pay for such VIP services can get access to the curriculum and teaching. The company strictly controls this access. This is the common rule that many other TOEFL and ACT/SAT training companies hold. This situation complicates what Bernstein (1977) calls “weak framing” and what he mentions as the combination of “strong classification” and “weak framing.” The students have autonomy to determine the TOEFL teaching pace, but they don’t have power to change and control the TOEFL knowledge.

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<sup>68</sup> These questions are also linked to the presence of international teachers in Sunny High IAP. It deserves an in-depth discussion in a separate paper.

The form of TOEFL training classes looks student-centered, but in nature they are test-driven learning and teaching. I also argue that the companies' caution regarding and worry over being observed is not only because they want to protect their "knowledge patent" but also because they know that their teaching is not more innovative than traditional drill-based Chinese teaching style. This point is further confirmed by what Weiwei described about his one-to-one TOEFL VIP classes.

Weiwei originally attended TOEFL classes at Pole Star. One of the instructors who taught him resigned from Pole Star and created his own company called Little Owl's Learning Company. He rented some places in a building at the Greenfield. According to Weiwei, the owner of Little Owl referred to himself as the principal of his company. Weiwei followed him by leaving Pole Star and enrolling at Little Owl. As a senior customer, Weiwei was provided with a personalized TOEFL study plan by Little Owl. Through most of his 11<sup>th</sup> grade, he spent Tuesdays, Thursdays, Saturdays, and Sunnys at the TOEFL VIP one-to-one classes because he thought that Sunny High IAP didn't provide him with adequate personal help with TOEFL test preparation. He described his learning experience with Little Owl like this:

**Weiwei:** I spent my whole days there [Little Owl]. I usually arrived in Little Owl around 8:30 a.m., 9 a.m., or 9:30 a.m. Returned home around 6 p.m. Basically a whole day.

**SL:** How long did each of your one-to-one classes last?

**Weiwei:** Two hours. After that, there were some teachers at Little Owl observing students do self-study.

**SL:** Is it helpful to your TOEFL learning?

**Weiwei:** Very helpful.

**SL:** For example? How did it [Little Owl] help you?

**Weiwei:** It valued the TOEFL basics. Take the [TOEFL] Listening as an example. The

instructor trained me to master every listening exercise piece. I was taught to listen well to each passage and catch its meaning. Otherwise, I could not move to the next passage. The teaching method that the Little OWL adopts is to let us to dictate every sentence in the TOEFL listening exercise piece. For the first time, the instructor said one sentence in English, I dictated it in Chinese until I finished the whole exercise piece. Then we went to the second-round exercise. He/she said each sentence in English; I dictated it in English. In this way, I went through the TOEFL example piece twice – once in Chinese and another time in English. Then I was trained to follow to read. He/she played the CD of each listening exercise sentence by sentence. I would repeat the exercise sentence by sentence until I was able to retell the whole piece. This technique helped me master every listening exercise piece. This was the outcome that I should reach. This teaching approach effectively improved my TOEFL learning. It was very helpful to me.

**SL:** How much did this teaching method improve your TOEFL scores?

**Weiwei:** My original TOEFL test scores were about 40 to 50. It [this teaching approach] upgraded my score to 80 to 90 [The full score of the TOEFL test is 120 points. Speaking, Listening, Reading, and Writing account for 30 points, respectively.]

Weiwei took the TOEFL test several times. He finally received a TOEFL score above 90, which allowed him to be admitted to a top 50 U.S. university. Each of his one-to-one TOEFL VIP classes cost ¥1,200, which means that he paid \$100/per hour for the English lesson. As he and his mother Ms. Fan mentioned, they paid at least \$10,000 for the TOEFL VIP classes. When I asked them if the school allowed Weiwei to leave a regular course of study to attend his VIP and SAT classes, they responded that it was allowed although the school didn't want students to do so. Indeed, several of the study's focal students mentioned that their parents helped them to negotiate with the school and ask for permission to take test preparation classes outside the school. One of the students explained, "Eventually, the school had to agree with us. After all, the school also hopes that we will gain good test scores and receive admissions from top overseas universities. Our good performances will benefit the school because it can use them to advertise the school when recruiting new students."

When recalling his after-school English classes, Weiwei emphasized that attending such classes allowed him to meet some students like himself. He made some new friends and learned



some new information about international college applications. However, Ms. Fan had hoped he wouldn't study outside the school because she believes that the school climate is relatively pure and the school-based student-teacher relations are sincere. When Weiwei attended the after-school classes, she didn't know what kinds of people he encountered. She was worried that he would be cheated by strangers. But Weiwei wanted to go elsewhere for the TOEFL and SAT classes to improve his U.S. college entrance test scores. He told Mr. Fan that many of his classmates did so. Ms. Fan had to agree with him and paid expensive class fees for the VIP classes and also school tuitions although Weiwei didn't physically study a lot at school in 11<sup>th</sup> grade. Her compromise was based on the desire for Weiwei to get good test scores for overseas college admissions.

Weiwei's case is special but not unique because a few of the focal students in my study had similar informal schooling experiences. Sunny High IAP students often show their paradoxical feeling about their belonging to the school, especially when they compare their informal schooling with English training companies to their formal schooling with classmates and teachers. This point is demonstrated in Baixue's critique about the Pole Star School.

**SL:** Do you think the Pole Star School can be referred to as a school?

**Baixue:** It cannot be referred to as a school because there are no *renqing* [人情, literally "human emotions." In this context, *renqing* means "affective relations"] [between students and the Pole Star School]. All affective relations only exist between students [in the Pole Star School]. For example, I might meet a very good friend there. We can get along well with each other. That's all. But can you refer to Pole Star as a school? [No.] It [Pole Star] doesn't view itself as a school [The company just uses the name of school].

**SL:** But is it called the Pole Star *School*?

**Baixue:** It is the Pole Star *educational training institution*. That's it. That means, I give it money, then it works for me. That's it. In other words, I spend money purchasing their patents. Then, it [the Pole Star School] gives knowledge to me. That's it.

**SL:** As you just mentioned, it is a trading relation and an employment relation. Are you satisfied with this relation?

**Baixue:** From a pure perspective of completing a thing [study-abroad consulting], I would be very satisfied with the institution because it doesn't involve too much *renqing*. However, if we give up going to a high school, we fully rely on attending Polar Star. Then... I think that we... our life is defective.

**SL:** Could you say more about this?

**Baixue:** I won't have the feeling of going together with classmates for a spring field trip. In other words, all classmates come together, laughing, taking pictures, taking graduation pictures, and taking pictures of other memorable moments. If I spend my three-years of high school there [at Pole Star], what a defective life it is.

Baixue emphasizes that if a student doesn't attend collective activities and doesn't have collective memories, his/her EQ (emotional quality) would decrease. What she interpreted implies that a school is a critical space where students interact with other students and teachers and produce affective relations (Lynch, Baker, & Lyons, 2009). However, I argue that market-based social and educational reforms destroy the formation of these affective relations by imposing neoliberal positions on public schools, stimulating the development of for-profit educational companies, and pushing students to consume educational services for their private interests. This imposing process contributes to the construction of students' neoliberal subjectivities. However, people are not puppets. Some privileged Chinese students develop an awareness of what valuable things they lose in the process of preparing for international college applications. But they are involved in a paradox: on the one hand, they strategically utilize their family's capital for achieving their instrumental goals of gaining high test scores for accessing world-class universities; on the other hand, they cannot avoid becoming the victims of neoliberal hegemony.

### **Working with Study-abroad Consulting Companies**

In addition to locating intensive test preparation help from English training companies, the majority of Sunny High IAP students purchase educational services from a variety of study-abroad consulting companies or *zhongjie*. Many anxious students and parents start to talk with the *zhongjie*

when the children are in the 10<sup>th</sup> or 11<sup>th</sup> grade. The *zhongjie* often emphasize that they offer medium- and long-term plans for students, including academic planning, test preparation, extracurricular activities, college and major choices, visa applications, and choosing students' dorms abroad. There is a wide range of the *zhongjie* fees depending on what kinds of educational services and which companies the students choose.

My interviews with Danyang and his parents revealed their experiences with a *zhongjie* called Transnational Bridge Education, a large study-abroad consulting company in China. On the first day he and his parents visited Transnational Bridge, the consultants at the company gave them U.S. university ranking information. They also tested Danyang's English proficiency and discussed which universities might be ideal for him. Then, they attended a workshop about studying abroad through the company. That day the company had invited a recruitment executive from a university within the UC (University of California) system. Danyang got a chance to talk with this executive. Transnational Bridge and the recruiter mentioned to his family that they provide a collaborative college prep program that helps Chinese students to be admitted by that UC university. The second time they came to the company, the consultants introduced some information about overseas college procedures. They showed some examples of students' personal statements for college applications. All materials were written in English. This made Danyang's parents feel overwhelmed because even while they are college-educated people, they are not very familiar with English. They gained a sense that they had to hire a *zhongjie* to help Danyang to navigate the college application process because they didn't have the language ability to help their son. Observing the reaction from Danyang's family, the consultants reiterated how complicated the overseas college applications are and how much time people had to spend on preparing for the process. However, the company could help them deal with this complex procedure and complete

online applications. Danyang's family finally chose Transnational Bridge as their *zhongjie*. They paid about ¥40,000 (about \$6,500) for the systematic consulting services in regard to academic planning, personal statement writing, online application submissions, and visa application.

Danyang and his family's experiences with the *zhongjie* are typical. As a Sunny High IAP parent commented, "Many parents have the feeling that if they don't spend money on hiring a *zhongjie*, they are not sure about the results of their children's international college applications." However, working with a *zhongjie* requires a lot of back-and-forth negotiations. By going through the experiences of working with a *zhongjie*, many focal students and their parents came to realize that the *zhongjie* was not that useful. As Danyang shared:

Later, I found that using a *zhongjie* just wasted money... For some responsible *zhongjie*, what they can do for you is to help you write a personal statement. My mom said that I could write [the personal statement] by myself first. I could look at what the *zhongjie* wrote for me and take the good elements from it. If it was too bad, I could choose not to use it. I had the same *zhongjie* as a student in another class in Sunny High IAP. Moreover, we found that we used the same consultant and that he wrote almost same essays for both of us... He played tricks on us... Then I wrote an essay by myself and asked him to revise it for me. Because I will study biology, he suggested that I add information about some awards related to science. I told him that I didn't have any related awards and that I could not add anything about biology performance into the essay. He said that this was not fine. He then added some content about certain technology I learned in science class. I refused to do it because I was not familiar with the technology... He was not happy. My dad is conservative. He said that after all, the consultant had many years working experience in preparing students for college application. I should listen to his suggestions... Finally, I made some compromise. For the applications to top 10 [U.S.] and top 100 universities, I took the consultant's advice. For the in-between ranked universities, I took his added content out of my essays.

Danyang's complaints about his study-abroad consultant resonate with the differentiated educational services and prices in the study-abroad consulting industry that Baixue pointed out. The choice of *zhongjie* reflects different cultural tastes. Baixue's mother helped her find a *zhongjie* called Ideal Bridge. Baixue said that Ideal Bridge was one of the three best *zhongjie* out of the emerging study-abroad consulting companies in China. She told me that the cost of an average

*zhongjie* was about ¥30,000 (roughly \$5,000) while such *zhongjie* as Ideal Bridge was ¥90,000 (approximately \$15,000). Baixue pointed out that unlike the consultants in the former who are usually Chinese with English proficiency, the consultants at her *zhongjie* and similar elite *zhongjie* are Americans who graduated from top 30 universities and who received elite educations from the United States. She highlighted that students in the class of 2013 at Sunny High IAP who were admitted to good universities all used elite *zhongjie*. Baixue's consultant graduated from Columbia University. She acclaimed him as an advisor because he taught her a learning method rather than just providing her with a good college application result. As she described:

I think that the services that Ideal Bridge and my advisor [her study-abroad consultant] provided are very appropriate. He guided me, but it was me that completed all the things. For example, he guided me through how to fill out application forms, how to send them out, how I should communicate with U.S. universities, and how to confirm with them that they received my applications. He advised me on how to write a personal statement, how to revise it, how to fully showcase my competence, and how to explore an in-depth theme from my experiences. Before I wrote my personal statement, he gave me a book about how American students who attended elite universities wrote their personal statements for college application. He guided me throughout the whole process of college application. Even after the completion of the applications, he taught me how to do follow-up activities, such as how to reply to emails when receiving offers.

Baixue emphasized that the consulting fee of ¥90,000 was worth because she participated in the full process of college application rather than letting a *zhongjie* take her place. In this process, she learned how to write a personalized college essay using American thinking habits.

Comparing Baixue's experiences with her elite *zhongjie* with Danyang's, we can capture the hierarchical status of the study-abroad consulting companies. What Baixue identifies as elite *zhongjie* hire American people who graduated from elite U.S. higher educational institutions and who hold insider information about the college application process. The consulting services that they offer deserve a high price. In contrast, those *zhongjie*, which are comprised of Chinese people who possess English skills but lack the native perspectives and first-hand experiences of U.S.

colleges charge relatively low service fees. In other words, the value of the study-abroad consulting largely depends on the dispositions and value of consultants as human capital. Hence, I argue that the emerging of the study-abroad consulting industry marks some features of neoliberal globalization. Various types of study-abroad consulting companies seem to embrace the role of prompting the internationalization of education. However, in actuality they promote the formation of global capitalism. They are some key players who control the distribution of knowledge regarding international college application. In this process, education is treated as a commodity. Human labor is viewed as a capital that can be sold, bought, and traded for profit making.

Privileged Chinese students' interactions and negotiations with study-abroad consulting companies show their power and the struggles they undergo in their pursuit of international college admissions. Liang, who transferred to an American public high school, pointed out that he and his parents could gain information about the U.S. college application process through the internet and social networking sites just as they acquired the information about finding a U.S. high school. He emphasized that only study-abroad consulting companies possess educational resources and information about American schools. In order to complete the high school transfer from China to the United States, he had to rely on the *zhongjie* by paying consulting fees. He shared his experiences about how he used the *zhongjie* to successfully transfer his former Chinese high school credits to the new school in order to be placed in 12<sup>th</sup> grade in the U.S. high school. In this process, he negotiated with his Chinese *zhongjie* for his requests. Then the Chinese *zhongjie* negotiated with an American *zhongjie* who had a connection with his U.S. high school. Through this complex negotiation process, Liang was able to keep himself from spending an extra year in the American school. This experience taught him how to use power and negotiation strategies to navigate his life in a new environment.

Negotiations with the *zhongjie* are not always easy. More often, a contractual relation restricts the power of privileged Chinese. This is reflected in the story that Ms. Chang shared:

The child of my friend was admitted to the University of Chicago. Their family originally spent ¥100,000 [about \$16,000] and signed a contract with a *zhongjie* [for consulting services about U.S. college admissions]. In the process of applying for the summer school at the University of Chicago, the student found that the *zhongjie* was useless. She completed the application, and the *zhongjie* didn't provide her with much help. After she came back from the summer school, she asked her mom to ask for a refund from the *zhongjie*. However, the *zhongjie* only returned 75% of the service fees – ¥75,000 [or \$12,000]... This student was finally admitted to the University of Chicago. The company knew this and thought that this was a good application result. Then, representatives from the company talked with my friend and asked her if they could say that the company helped this student achieve this college application success and if the company could add this application performance into their advertisement material. The mother agreed and then the company returned her another ¥10,000 [or \$1,600]. The parent told me that that day she had a feeling that she betrayed her child. The truth is that it is the child herself who successfully applied to the university. But the *zhongjie* presented her case as the performance of the company. If not for the refund of ¥10,000, the mother would not have allowed the *zhongjie* to do so.

Ms. Chang highlighted that the story she told provided some background about the track record of many study-abroad consulting companies boasting about their performance. Some focal students and parents in this study experienced similar frustrating experiences with the *zhongjie*. They complained about the hegemonic regulations that the *zhongjie* enact and that they had to agree by signing the contract agreement. All *zhongjie* require families to pay service fees ahead of time. Even if they are not satisfied with the services, they hardly received refunds. The various working and negotiation experiences with study-abroad consulting companies influence how Sunny High IAP students perceive themselves. As Yifei summarized:

**Yifei:** Compared with regular high school students, I think that our students are more mature.

**SL:** Mature?

**Yifei:** Yes! Because we have more interactions with society. We learn more knowledge from a large class – society. We have richer social life experience than them. What we have learned is more miscellaneous than what they've learned. We learn how to communicate

and negotiate with different people. But our disciplinary knowledge is shallow. Many of us cannot concentrate on doing some research work. However, people with different learning styles and dispositions can do different jobs that they are good at. For example, those regular high school students should do research work, while students in international high school curriculum programs should use their [regular high school students'] research to do... to do... like businessman's work... or do some communication work, or similar kinds of work because they [students in international high school curriculum programs] know how to communicate and negotiate with others.

This is a common perception Sunny High IAP students, parents, and teachers have when they distinguish students who attend such international high school programs from those regular Chinese high school students in regard to the future occupations that these two different groups of students will take. Sunny High IAP students envision themselves as professionals, managers, and even entrepreneurs who are good at communication and negotiation. This is the outcome of how differentiating formal and informal educational knowledge constructs different consciousness and how differentiated knowledge sorts students pertaining to future labor divisions. As scholars have underscored, the maldistribution of educational resources and knowledge is very problematic because it sorts children (Anyon, 1980; Apple, 2004; Bernstein, 2000; Willis, 1977). My study further suggests that this sorting process in an era of neoliberal globalization is more problematic in that it remakes students into neoliberal subject-citizens who contribute to the reinforcement of an unequal and unjust society rather than the building of an equal and civic society.

This argument is confirmed by one of my fieldwork observations. In a professional development meeting at the school, I sat with a group of teachers and the school administrator Ms. Zhao. The meeting focused on discussing how to facilitate school curriculum integration and how to promote bilingual instruction at Sunny High IAP. As the discussion shifted to the issue of how to use school alumni resources to help current students, one teacher mentioned that a school alumnus who was studying at a UC university just opened his own study-abroad educational counseling company. He hired some people who had similar high school educational experiences



as him and attempted to recruit customers from current Sunny High IAP students. The scale of his company was small. The main service was to help Chinese students to revise their personal statements by charging relevant service fees. Mr. Zhao heard this news and sighed without any comments.

### **DIY College Application**

The majority of Sunny High IAP students employ study-abroad consulting services provided by for-profit educational companies. However, there are a few students at the school who choose a DIY approach for their college application. Feng and Qiang are two such students.

As previously mentioned, Feng's confidence in being a DIY student is derived from his successful application to the Yale University summer school. In addition to this, his mother's support and help played an important role in this process. Ms. Chang is a senior engineer in a state-owned company. Both she and her husband hold master degrees in engineering. Many of their friends' children are a little older than Feng. They have gone through the international college application process. Ms. Chang has collected and accumulated a lot of information about college application procedures and requirements. Such knowledge has enabled her to provide Feng with timely help and suggestions when needed. Similarly, Qiang's father works in an international company. His mother used to work as an instructor in an English training company. Both of them supported Qiang's DIY choice because they are confident in their knowledge about overseas college application. Qiang mentioned that even if he decided to go with a DIY approach for his applications, he would seek the help from his parents' friends and ask them to revise his college essays. Feng and Qiang's DIY college application experiences highlight the crucial cultural and social capital role that well-educated, privileged Chinese parents as their children apply to international colleges.

### **Celebrating Graduation and Preparing for U.S. College Study**

Upon their graduation from high school, Sunny High IAP students like to travel with their classmates and friends to celebrate their successful overseas college admissions. Yaya with some of her classmates went to the southern China and stayed on the seashore for one week. Feng toured several places in England with his parents. He served as a translator and tour guide for his parents.

His mother proudly commented:

The tour to England was actually to assess my three-year investment in Feng's education. His performance satisfied me. I observed that he was able to use English to communicate well with others. At least, I am not worried about his linguistic ability in his college education abroad.

Like his mother, Feng admitted that he couldn't have gained many of the educational opportunities to develop his leadership that he received at Sunny High IAP if he had attended a regular key Chinese high school. These formal schooling experiences, combined with his participation in international summer schools and other international activities, benefit him and enable him to become a more confident young person. Like Feng, many Sunny High IAP students believe that their unique informal and formal schooling experiences make them become more well-rounded persons with English competence and open-mindedness. They understand that they lack in-depth disciplinary knowledge, which might have negative impacts on their study at overseas colleges. With this awareness, some students strategically use educational training classes to better prepare them for the academic challenges that they are likely to meet in U.S. colleges. Danyang is one such student. He flew to Japan with his best friend. They spent several days there for fun. After returning back to Moon City, he took some AP training classes that his father suggested. In this way, he and his parents hoped that he could make up for the "thin" learning of subject content he received at Sunny High IAP and thus be better prepared for studying within his college major of biology.

## Conclusion

This chapter is an extension of Chapter 5. In Chapter 5, I examine how curriculum and pedagogy inside the school prepare students for U.S. college admissions. Chapter 6 illustrates Sunny High IAP students' after-school educational activities. It highlights that the various kinds of extra-curricular activities are also oriented by preparation for international college application. The chapter points out that students overwhelmingly use English training and study-abroad consulting services. I argue that Sunny High IAP students' informal schooling is classed because all the activities they are engaged with are expensive. This evidence reveals that economic capital plays a crucial role in the production of elite status (Ball, 2015).

The chapter also maps out the fast growth of TOEFL and ACT/SAT training and study-abroad consulting companies. It emphasizes that English linguistic skills are privileged and act as powerful instruments to access the international education field. I contend that the emergence of this educational industry is the outcome of neoliberal globalization and globalization of higher education. In this process, education is seen as a commodity which can be sold and purchased.

As demonstrated in this chapter, all these extra-curricular activities that the socially elite Chinese students pursue, whether it is participating in internship and international summer schools or attending TOEFL and ACT/SAT test preparation classes, intend to support their college application projects. Linking this chapter to what has been discussed in Chapter 5, I underscore that applying to U.S. colleges is a typical event on which the “figure of the human as an ensemble of entrepreneurial and investment capital is evident” (Brown, 2015, p. 36). By strategically mobilize their parents' economic, cultural, and social capital, privileged Chinese students were exposed to differentiated educational experiences with extensive international activities, internships, and for-profit educational training and study-abroad consulting services for

constructing their personal college applications. This process privileges and empowers the students in the way in which they perceive themselves as competent persons who could become professional and managerial elites. I suggest that these neoliberal personalized subjectivities imply the making of neoliberal subject-citizens who may contribute to the reinforcement of an unequal and unjust society rather than the building of one that is equal and civic.

## Chapter 7: Conclusion and Implications

*I consistently maintain that let some people and regions first become rich, but the key principle is for common prosperity. Some regions develop more quickly and spur other regions, which is a shortcut to accelerate [our social] development and achieve common prosperity.*

(Deng Xiaoping, 1986<sup>69</sup>)

*In fact, our generation is like the Beat Generation in the United States. We have some similarities with them... I think every generation has to experience its own age. Our generation was born and lives in the Age of the Reform and Opening Up. My dad has discussed with me about why we use the phrases “Mao Zedong Thought” [emphasis] and “Deng Xiaoping Theory” [emphasis]. “Theory” cannot be referred to as “thought” in that a theory needs to be verified further. Several decades later, if you reflect on Deng Xiaoping Theory, you may find that it stimulates people’s material desires, that is, makes some people first become affluent and then lets people compete with each other. As a result, we had the Sanlu [a Chinese dairy products company] toxic milk scandal and other food safety incidents in China. These incidents resulted from people seeking profit. The Reform and Opening Up drives people to live for material desires. When the world is filled with desires [material desires], society becomes restless and people become eager for quick success and instant benefits. Our 1990s generation lives in such a society. Growing up in this social environment, we cannot become people with high social ideals. Many of us indulge in Japanese and European cartoons. As we know, children at a young age are usually curious about everything. However, these things [Western cartoons and toys] fill our lives and make us unable to stop and think about what kind of society our country will become and how we can contribute to the nation. To some extent, these higher concerns are at a far distance from us. In addition, our education system is like this [test-driven teaching and learning]. We are pushed to study, study, and study. But what do we study for?*

(Interview with Baixue, July 2013)

This dissertation is framed by theory, grounded in empirical observation, and directed toward political implications. Drawing on critical theory, I integrate critical curriculum studies with educational policy studies to demonstrate the complexity of socially elite Chinese students’ choices of and subsequent educational experiences with internationally oriented high school programs in China. I argue that the complexity is derived from the involvement, interaction, and

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<sup>69</sup> Deng (1986) reiterates that “Our policy is to let some regions and people first become rich in order to spur other undeveloped regions. Developed regions helping undeveloped ones is an obligation.” This quotation and the one in the main text are from the *News of the Communist Party of China*.

(internal and external) contradictions of multiple social actors and fields surrounding these privileged students' choice of and preparation for U.S. college application. By examining students' educational experiences, from their access to a newly established "public" international high school curriculum program in China to their schooling experiences with curriculum and pedagogy inside and outside the school to their aspirations and imaginations of the future, I argue that under the support of market-based educational reforms, privileged Chinese families utilize the global higher education market, the Chinese education market, and the study-abroad educational consulting market to mobilize their various types of capital for producing a social advantage that can better position their children in the international labor market. Borrowing the languages from Hall (1980, 1985, 1986) and McCarthy and Kenway (2014), I conclude that the process of the production of social advantage is how the elite class and institutions employ local and global forces to re-articulate power and privilege. This re-articulation constructs privileged Chinese students into neoliberal subjects.

The struggles and contradictions that the social actors/fields, such as the Chinese middle-upper and upper classes, key Chinese public high schools, and the Chinese State, encounter and the tensions and conflicts between them imply a neoliberal conjunctural crisis. This conjunctural crisis is reflected not only in the crises of both education and the state but also in the ideological tensions between "possessive individualism" and "socialist collectivism." These tensions and crises go to "the core of the Chinese ideological and social project of building socialism with Chinese characteristics" (Liu & Apple, 2016, p. 13). By revealing and analyzing this neoliberal conjunctural crisis, my study contributes to the critical work of "how a counter-intervention should be made" (Hall & Massey, 2010, p. 65).

Using sociological and anthropological approaches, I link students' formal and informal schooling experiences to large social and educational changes in order to understand their meanings and the implications of their subjective educational experiences. This research approach that focuses on examining the relations between structure and agency is derived from a long tradition of critical qualitative research (Carspecken & Apple, 1992; Carspecken, 1996). Along with the intensification of globalization, researchers have attempted to develop some theories of research method to enrich the crucial approach to study the dialectic relations between globalizing social structure and changing discursive practices. What Weis and Fine (2012, 2013) call "critical bifocality" is one such theory of method. My utilization of "critical bifocality" explores the very linkages and capillaries between the changing social contexts associated with neoliberal globalization and privileged Chinese students' educational experiences by paying attention to both critical educational policy and curriculum studies. For the former, I focus on the study of Chinese and global educational policies in regard to the creation of international high school curriculum programs. For the latter, I concentrate on examining students' educational experiences with these programs that are designed to prepare them to apply to international colleges. This bifocality allows me to both examine the practices, effects, and implications of neoliberal education policies while also developing a deep understanding of social actors' daily lives and struggles. I conclude that my implementation of "critical bifocality" is derived from the synthesis of crucial socio-spatial theory and field analysis from Bourdieu, Bernstein, and Ferrare and Apple (2010).

### **Spatializing Macro-Level Educational Policy and Micro-Level School Choice**

#### **Practices**

Applying a critical socio-spatial lens to the study, Chapter 4 spatializes macro-level educational policy such as market-oriented global education policy, Chinese-Foreign Cooperation

Running School Policy, and Chinese New Curriculum Reform. This study highlights historical, economic, political, cultural, and global factors that contribute to the creation of an international high school curriculum program at a particular time in China. These factors include the Chinese government's insufficient investment in public education, the existing key school system, the class stratification resulting from the maldistribution of socio-economic resources, the formation of Chinese educational markets facilitated by neoliberal educational reforms, China's entry to the WTO, the General Agreement on Trade in Services (GATS), and the 2008 global economic crisis. Oriented by critical curricular questions and using a network analysis of the Sunny High IAP International High School Curriculum Program, I identify various Chinese and international stakeholders involved in the development of this new educational program. By uncovering the power relations between these actors, I argue that neoliberal educational reforms open up space for the private sector to participate in Chinese state education reforms which reinforces the marketization and privatization of education. I contend that the power relations in their social transactions lead to the production of a new neoliberal education space which is reflected in the emergence of international high school curriculum programs in China. This emergent education space indicates that the network-based neoliberal governance intervenes into the Chinese education system. Socially elite Chinese students, key Chinese high schools, and the Chinese state are subject to this neoliberal governance. I argue that the spatialization of macro-level educational policy foregrounds the crucial social actors and institutions at the meso-level which points to the focused areas that my study should more deeply consider.

Thus, in Chapter 4 I also spatialize micro-level educational practices of privileged Chinese families. The empirical evidence in this study points out that the emerging international high school curriculum programs in China provide the children from these Chinese elite families with



a global educational path from the programs through world-class universities and then into the high-level professional positions in the global market (Brown & Lauder, 2009; Lauder, 2007; Weis, Cipollone, & Jenkins, 2014). This international track offers an effective means for privileged Chinese students to not only avoid the fierce competition of the *gaokao* but also to acquire international cultural capital such as high-valued educational credentials, linguistic capital (particularly privileged English), and international dispositions (such as “international perspectives”) that helps secure for themselves elite positions within a globalizing world. Consistent with the arguments from other critical scholars (Nogueira & Aguiar, 2008; van Zanten, 2009; Weenink, 2008), I argue that the rising Chinese middle-upper and upper classes *strategically* utilize international education and cosmopolitan capital to facilitate their children’s social mobility. Such parental choice of education enhances the privatization of education and boosts “possessive individualism” (Apple, 2006). Thus, I contend that this process of reproducing social advantage is problematic because it exacerbates existing educational and social inequality while also fostering the creation of neoliberal subject-citizens who may contribute more to the intensification of current social control rather than to the building of civil society. Both points are further extended and confirmed in Chapter 5 and 6 in regard to privileged Chinese students’ subjective educational experiences once they access international high school curriculum programs.

### **Spatializing Students’ Micro-Level Educational Experiences**

As Robertson (2010) reminds us, education space is “a crucial site, object, instrument and outcome” constituting the complex processes of power, production, and social relations (p. 15). By connecting the high school choices of these privileged students to the network analysis of the international high school program, this research points out that the internationally oriented high school programs are the outcome of the interest convergence of the Chinese elite class, key Chinese

public high school, various kinds of for-profit education companies, and the Chinese state. I conclude that these educational programs represent a neoliberal education space that constitutes a new field of power relations and struggles. This new education space is an intersection of multiple fields including: historical, political, economic, and cultural fields; the fields of social class and gender; the field of elite education; and the field of international education. This education space is also a key site to study the relation between the global and the local (Larsen & Beech, 2014).

Chapter 5 and 6 spatialize students' micro-level educational experiences revolving around their preparation for U.S. college admission. I combine critical curriculum studies from Bernstein and Apple with Bourdieu's theory of practice to examine students' schooling experiences with curriculum and pedagogy inside school as well as their educational experiences with study-abroad educational consulting companies outside school. There are two main reasons why I include these formal and informal schooling experiences in the study. First, the empirical data show that these two kinds of schooling are closely connected in regards to the students' preparation for applying to overseas colleges. The two fields are important spaces in which students are actively engaged. These formal and informal schooling experiences come together to shape the way in which students internalized their privileged status and empowered neoliberal subjectivities. Therefore, the study captures these key spaces across which students' *secondary* habitus is acquired over time through both visible and invisible pedagogies (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992; Wacquant, 2014). Second, this empirically informed combination enables me to explore the connection, interaction, and integration of Bernstein's educational code theory and Bourdieu's theory of practice. My attempt to search for this theoretical integration aims to develop a fuller and more nuanced understanding of the processes of social production in regard to access to and acquisition and internalization of educational knowledge by linking school curriculum and pedagogy to family

educational practices. In doing so, this research project endeavors to examine how formal school knowledge and informal educational knowledge come together to factor into the construction of elite subjectivities and the making of neoliberal elite subjects. This effort is further reflected by my inclusion of micro-level examination of students' choices of high school; their experiences with school curriculum and pedagogy; and their after-school engagement with international activities, U.S. college entrance test preparation classes, and study-abroad consulting companies.

As Chapter 5 demonstrates, Sunny High IAP is noticeably classed. The school curricula and pedagogic practices are structured in order to meet the privileged Chinese students' needs as they prepare to apply to U.S. colleges. Chapter 6 examines Sunny High IAP students' after-school activities. It reveals that students' after-school educational practices are oriented and organized by their preparation for U.S. college admissions. The chapter highlights that students' domestic and international activities are built on the use of their families' economic, cultural, and social capital and the employment of a capital conversion strategy. These differentiated schooling experiences distinguish these students from their Chinese counterparts. They tend to take their differentiated access to educational resources and opportunities for granted. The structurally differentiated educational knowledge shapes their consciousness (Bernstein, 2000; Apple, 2006). Many of them perceive themselves as privileged and empowered individuals with high-valued educational credentials and international dispositions. They envision themselves as taking high-level professional and managerial positions in a global labor market. I argue that this subjective redefinition of elite status highlights the students' neoliberal imaginaries. The competitive individuals that these students perceive themselves as reflect the construction of neoliberal elites. The production of these particular elite subjectivities is shaped by factors including: their educational experiences influenced by the new configuration of elite education, their access to the

fee-paying international high school program, their acquisition of U.S. college-going school knowledge, and their purchase of educational services for college application preparation.

### **Deconstructing the Discourses of “the International” and Internationalization**

This dissertation foregrounds the discourses of “the international” and internationalization through examining how students’ schooling experiences and subjectivities are shaped by the educational processes and practices at the micro-level; institutional transformation at the meso-level; and economic, political, cultural, and global forces at the macro-level. The study deconstructs the discourse of China’s becoming international. I argue that the international discourse, expressed in Chinese educational reforms such as the High School New Curriculum Reform, the Chinese-Foreign Cooperation Running School Policy, and the National Guidelines for Medium- and Long-term Educational Reform and Development (2010-2020), is underpinned by neoliberal ideologies and influenced by neoliberal globalization. The state uses these educational policies to distribute internationally oriented neoliberal consciousness to privileged Chinese students through legitimating a differentiated access to the internalized curriculum/knowledge.

The official discourse of promoting the internationalization of Chinese education and cultivating international proficientiers is recontextualized in local contexts where Chinese educational markets interact with global educational markets. International high school curriculum programs and study-abroad educational counseling companies emerge in this hybrid market in response to the needs of the rising Chinese middle-upper and upper classes. The official recontextualized fields include, but are not limited to, the privileged Chinese social class, emerging international high school curriculum programs in China, the growing study-abroad educational counseling industry in both the Chinese and international contexts, U.S. higher education

institutions, and the Chinese state. These fields develop isomorphic discourses in regard to the international discourse (DiMaggio & Powell, 1983; DiMaggio & Powell, 1991). For instance, parent interviewees express their desire for their children to acquire international visions or perspectives. Sunny High IAP emphasizes the official rhetorical goal of making a contribution to the cultivation of international proficientiers. Various types of study-abroad consulting companies position the role of prompting the internationalization of education. Social actors take the international discourse for granted. These phenomena reflect the hegemony of neoliberalism and neoliberal globalization. My study reveals that in the fields of pedagogic recontextualizing, these social agents utilize their own autonomy to reorder the official discourses about “the international” and internationalization as preparation for overseas college applications. This recontextualization and reordering have profound implications for Chinese education and society in two ways.

First, as this study points out, U.S. college admissions criteria become the evaluative rules to restructure school curriculum and pedagogic practices. The information, resources, and English training and consulting services related to U.S. college admissions are incorporated into an educational industry. Using ethnographic data on students’ formal and informal schooling experiences, this dissertation research documents the process through which the U.S. college admissions’ hegemony is erected. I emphasize that in the context of emerging international high school programs in China, this evaluation is becoming a “crucial apparatuses in social selection and exclusion” (Wong, 2015, p. 1). Connecting the elite subjectivities of the privileged Chinese students with their visions of taking elite social positions, I stress that U.S. college admissions control the “allocation of valuable social positions and educational opportunities” beyond the nation-state (p. 2). The role of U.S. college admissions criteria uncovered in this study indicates the shift from a Chinese meritocracy to an American meritocracy in the field of international high

school curriculum programs. This shift transforms the traditional notions of eliteness and elitism in the Chinese context that are predominantly defined in academic terms and measured by Chinese standardized test scores. The subjective redefinition of elitism by the privileged Chinese students in my study points out that this regulated elitism is “a less progressive form of elitism” (Yang, 2015), an outcome of localized American meritocracy.

The second implication of this recontextualization and reordering is that each social actor/field has its own struggles in the process of recontextualizing official pedagogic discourse. Of course, there are conflicts between these fields. Take the struggles of the privileged Chinese students, Sunny High IAP, and the Chinese State as examples. As Chapter 5 and 6 reveal, Sunny High IAP students regard successfully applying to international colleges as a personal project and accomplishment. They struggle for control over this “entrepreneurial and investment capital” (Brown, 2015, p. 36). In the process of becoming strategic, self-governing, and entrepreneurial empowered selves (Ball, 2012; Ong, 2006), these students resist becoming the *shiyan pin* (experimental products) that the field of international high school programs imposes on them.

Chapter 5 highlights that Sunny High IAP struggles to meet the needs of students going through the U.S. college admissions process while maintaining expressive order and seeking meaningful educational missions. The school encounters the conflicts between pursuing educational purposes and achieving economic goals. The administrators’ and teachers’ confusion about the school missions reflects an ideological crisis about the purpose of education.

The state faces the struggles regarding how to manage the rising Chinese middle-upper and upper classes and meet their social needs while keeping the Communist Party’s socialist egalitarianism alive. On the one hand, the state has selectively adopted neoliberal forms in creating international high school curriculum programs for the children of these privileged groups. On the

other hand, the state encounters increasing pressures from the public debate on these new programs' misuse of public educational resources for the interests of the rich. Since 2014, some deputies to the National People's Congress have raised the contested issue about whether or not Chinese public schools should run these international programs. They suggested that the "public" international high school program should close and leave this educational market for private schools. The state is now struggling with making appropriate educational policies to regulate the emerging international high school curriculum programs. This challenge is interwoven with the recent protests from the Chinese urban middle class which were triggered by the government' effort to expand access to elite Chinese higher education for students from underrepresented regions. The outrage represents the struggle of the Chinese middle class over education. Different from the Chinese middle-upper and upper class' "American Dream," the Chinese middle class and lower social classes hold a "Chinese dream" with the hope that their children can climb the social ladder through a relatively open and egalitarian meritocratic education system.<sup>70</sup> These different educational needs challenge the state's ability to manage class conflicts and to redistribute educational resources and opportunities.

### **The Politics of Educational Reforms and the Interpretation of Students' Needs**

My study also foregrounds the discourse of educational experiments and the discourse of students' needs. As Chapter 4 and 5 show, the Chinese state and Sunny High frame the Sunny High IAP international high school program as an experiment of the Chinese New Curriculum Reform. By legitimating the program in this way, the school and the state utilize the language of

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<sup>70</sup> In the year of 2013, there was a popular Chinese film called "American Dreams in China" (*zhongguo hehuo ren*, 中国合伙人, literally, "Chinese (business) partners"). This film describes the story and challenge of how the creators of the New Oriental School, a well-known English training and study-abroad consulting company in China, open and develop their education business to help Chinese people study abroad and pursue their American Dreams.

experiment to make sense of their neoliberal educational reforms and practices. This strategy is interwoven with the use of the discourse of needs. As the dissertation reveals, the state emphasizes the need for the modernization of the Chinese economy in order to improve China's international competitiveness in the context of a globalizing knowledge-based economy. Thus, the state needs quality human capital, especially international proficienters in order to promote China's economic development. The state needs to reform Chinese education, particularly Chinese curriculum, in order to cultivate needed human capital. There is a need to introduce and learn from the advanced western educational ideas and resources in order to improve the Chinese education system and curriculum. Chinese educational institutions need to be internationalized in order to conduct the learning and importation of progressive western education. These needs claims "tend to be nested, connected to one another in ramified chains of in-order-to relations" (Fraser, 2013, p. 56). The state acts as an "expert" in this "social and institutional logic of processes of need interpretation" (Fraser, 2013, p. 56). The similar logic of interpreting students' needs play out at the levels of privileged Chinese families, key Chinese public high schools, and educational companies.

As Chapter 4 uncovers, the children from socially elite Chinese families need quality education in order to maintain and produce their social advantage. These students need to go to U.S. colleges in order to receive a quality education and, more importantly, western educational credentials and international dispositions that are highly valued by the international and Chinese labor markets. Chapter 5 documents that Sunny High IAP frequently uses the discourse of meeting students' needs to reform the school curriculum and pedagogical practices. The school's needs claim follows this logic: The children of successful Chinese people need to gain U.S. college admissions in order to study abroad. The students need to prepare for their college applications in order to receive international college admissions; they need a high GPA, high school diploma,



good test scores on the TOEFL, ACT/SAT, and AP, as well as extra-curricular activities and college essays in order to prepare for college application; and they need various type of curriculum in order to meet these requirements of international college applications. Therefore, the school has a responsibility to meet the needs of these students by reforming school curriculum and restructuring pedagogic activities.

Chapter 6 illustrates that the study-abroad travel, English training, and educational consulting industry is formed by the same social and institutional logic that processes the interpretation of privileged Chinese students' needs. As Fraser (2013) underscores, we should not only pay attention to the politics of needs by asking whose and what needs are recognized but also focus more on the politics of need interpretation by examining who interprets the needs from what perspective in the light of what interest. As my study reveals, the Chinese state, key Chinese public high schools, and for-profit education companies are the players in the politics of need interpretation. They adopt the neoliberal perspective to interpret the contested needs with in-order-to relations in light of their own interests and the interests of dominant Chinese social groups. These key players use the languages of internationalization, globalization, educational reforms, and curriculum reforms which are "the socially authorized forms of public discourse" for "the self-interpretations and interests of dominant social groups" (Fraser, 2013, p. 56). To paraphrase Fraser's language, I conclude that my analysis here foregrounds the juxtaposition of the discourse of needs with discourses of interests and consumer rights which is one of the distinctive marks of the political culture of socialism with Chinese characteristics.

The empirical evidence in this study suggests that elite social groups' claims about educational reforms and students' needs are problematic because they recognize and represent the needs and interests of dominant social groups. As the dissertation documents, the Chinese state

struggles with meeting the educational needs of different Chinese social groups. Key Chinese high schools face the ideological crisis of meeting the students' private needs and seeking a meaningful school mission. These struggles and crises suggest, as Fraser (2013) highlights, that “justifying some interpretations of social needs as better than others involves balancing procedural and consequentialist considerations. More simply, it involves balancing democracy and equality” (p. 81). Thus, the interpretation of social needs is not just a moral and epistemological issue, but it is also a political issue. This should be recognized in the understanding of the contradictory effects of educational reforms and in the pursuit of problem solving.

### **Implications**

In the field of sociology of education, studies on elite schools and research on international schools are usually separated from each other. My dissertation explores the intersection of these two areas of study. By capturing the interaction between elite education in local contexts and the infiltration of international education in globalizing circumstances, this study points out that emerging international high school curriculum programs imply a new form of elite education.

My dissertation questions and challenges what is traditionally defined as “international schools, international education, and elite education. The literature on international schools has focused more on “traditional” international schools that cater to the privileged students of diplomats, globally mobile expatriates, or higher-class parents (Dolby, 2012; Dolby & Rahman, 2008; Resnik, 2012c). There have been a growing number of locally based international schools that serve the socio-economically advantaged national elites who demand an international education for their children (Brown & Lauder, 2011; Hayden, 2011; Hayden & Thompson, 2008; Resnik, 2008, 2012a). The various forms of international schools manifest that “a highly diversified market in international school education is developing rapidly” (Ball & Nikita, 2014, p. 84). Research on these aspects of international education is very important in terms of

understanding the educational practices of what Ball (2010) calls the global middle class, the global elites, and their various fractions (Kenway & Fahey, 2014).

However, there is a rising form of school-level international education worthy of special attention, which is “the internationalisation of national systems of education” (Hayden, 2011, p. 211). My study pays close attention to this form of international education which is more linked to local and national education systems. I look at how international education filters into the Chinese educational system and how Chinese elite public schools intend to become international. I also consider the relations between these simultaneous top-down and bottom-up movements. By exploring the relations between local and global education systems, I examine new configurations of Chinese elite public schools and their relations to the international education market. The dissertation research contributes to the examination of the possible formation of new global elites coming from members of a national class who “act locally and think globally” (Ball & Nikita, 2014, p. 82).

My study suggests that such exploration requires us to redefine elite groups within new fields of power. Take new economic elites in China as an example. Various factions of this social group might operate in a different field of power surrounding differentiated elite education, for example, nationally oriented and internationally oriented elite education. If certain elite groups in China utilize internationally oriented elite education and international education to maintain their advantage, how should we define these new elites? How should we understand the concomitant new field of power? As a growing literature on elite education has highlighted, globalization makes the study of elites and elite education more theoretically, methodologically, and empirically challenging (e.g. Ball, 2010; Howard & Kenway, 2015; Kenway & Koh, 2015; McCarthy & Kenway, 2014; van Zanten, Ball, & Darchy-Koechlin, 2015). The effects of globalization on elite

education is involved with “the changing dynamics and meanings of privilege and power” (van Zanten, 2015b). Particular attention needs to be paid to how power and privilege are secured through elite education at the multiple intersections of class, gender, ethnicity, race, and nation in the globalizing world (McCarthy & Kenway, 2014a, p. 175). My study contributes to this literature by taking a closer look at the relations between the rising Chinese elite groups and the emerging internationally oriented high school programs in China.

This study also informs the importance of examining the borrowing and learning, the importation and exportation of global education policy in regard to the internationalization of school curriculum. Curriculum always resides at the very heart of education. Curriculum reforms are always a focus of educational reforms (Apple, 2012; Eisner & Vallance, 1974; Flinders & Thornton, 1997; Kliebard, 2004; Zhang & Zhong, 2003; Zhao & Xu, 2002). Along with the intensified impact of globalization on education, the internationalization of curriculum has become an apparent phenomenon. The existing literature pays more attention to the internationalization of curriculum in the higher education sector. Scholars point out that the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) plays a key role in the formation of global education policy and the internationalization of curriculum (e.g. Exley, Braun, & Ball, 2011; Rizvi & Lingard, 2009; Vidovich, 2004).<sup>71</sup> For instance, Rizvi (2007) emphasizes that the OECD frames the discourses of internationalizing the curriculum as the requirements of the global knowledge economy and cultural exchange and intercultural understanding which promotes a neoliberal imaginary and “has led to curricular reforms that are narrow in scope and do not adequately prepare

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<sup>71</sup> The Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (1994) has defined the internationalization of curriculum as “an international orientation in content, aimed at preparing students for performing (professionally/ socially) in an international and multicultural context, and designed for domestic students as well as foreign students” (p. 9, cited by Vidovich, 2004).

students to engage critically with the cultural politics of globalization” (p. 401).<sup>72</sup> My research examines the penetration of school-level international curriculum into the Chinese education system. The findings in this study resonate with critical scholars’ critiques of the role of global education policy. Thus, I suggest that research on the internationalization of curriculum at the school level should go beyond the denationalization of education (Resnik, 2012c; Tarc & Tarc, 2015) and instead pay close attention to the complex impact of global educational policy on local school reforms.

As I have mentioned, emerging international high school curriculum programs established by Chinese public schools are highly contested. Given this controversy, the Moon Municipal Commission of Education has stopped approving more international programs. The government is considering how to deal with existing government-approved “public” international high school curriculum programs. The findings of my research contribute to how we understand the practices, effects, and implications of educational policies as they are manifested in schools and within the lives of students.

In addition, the Chinese government announced in 2015 that new educational reforms would be applied to the *gaokao*—reforms which intend to implement autonomous enrollment of Chinese universities. The practices, effects, and implications of this reform deserve investigation. My research charts the complexity of the newly established international high school curriculum programs. This study reveals how U.S. college admission criteria based on autonomous enrollment regulate and shape school curriculum, pedagogic practices, and students’ consciousness. These findings have implications for the new *gaokao* reform in relation to the effects this reform may have on the worsening of existing educational inequality. The findings from my dissertation

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<sup>72</sup> According to Rossiter (2003), “[t]he neoliberal imaginary seeks to subject all socio-cultural practices to the laws of the market, which are one manifestation, albeit limited, of the logic of capital” (p. 110).

research suggest that the government, policy makers, and researchers should pay attention to who will have more information, access, and opportunities to the autonomous university enrollment, whose interests will be met by this reform, and who will be more excluded in the process of autonomous enrollment and the distribution of interests.

My dissertation also points out some direction for future research. First, given the fact that China is in the process of changing education policy on these international high school curriculum programs, it is important to pay attention to the policy changes and track where these programs go. Second, this study informs the importance of looking at students' educational trajectory. Future research needs to follow up on these students in order to observe at what their college experience in the United States and track what they will do after finishing their college education and what occupations they will pursue. In doing so, we will develop a better understanding of the reproduction of social advantage as well as the remaking of subject-citizens. In addition to class focus, we need to pay attention to gender relationships and sensibilities, race, and ethnicity because transnational spaces change the field of power. It is crucial to look at the educational experiences of privileged Chinese students as they shift from the national (Chinese) field of power to the international (U.S.) field of power. Finally, this study poses an ethical issue about how to educate these socially elite students. This question challenges both Chinese education and U.S. higher education institutions. It deserves further investigation.

### **Closing**

Over the past one hundred years since the Opium Wars, China has been seeking modernization. Many social movements, such as the Westernization Movement (1861-1895), the Wu Hsu Reform (1898), the Chinese Revolution of 1911, and the May Fourth Movement (1919), promoted the process of modernization. Since the foundation of the People's Republic of China in

1949, Chinese people have been advocating to learn from the Soviet Union to then from the West. While democratic ideals have been positioned as the social goal, what has actually been taken up are meritocratic practices that seek to differentiate social groups. History has witnessed Chinese modernization; there has been progress toward democratic modernization and particular development in connection to economic modernization. However, the intervention of neoliberalization has had a profound impact on this modernization process and people's daily lives, in particular, the lives of young Chinese people. As demonstrated in this dissertation, neoliberalism and neoliberal globalization reinforces meritocracy (in particular American meritocracy), leads to regulated elitism, and constructs neoliberal and less progressive elites.

In the 2013 graduation ceremony at Sunny High IAP, a student singer performed “The Song of the Youth League,” which is a well-known Soviet Union song in China and is regarded as The Anthem of the Communist Youth League of Soviet Union.

Hear, the battle's horn sends an alarm!  
 Wear uniform; take up arms,  
 Youth League members, together embark on the journey,  
 Defend the country of one mind.

Goodbye, our dear mom.  
 Please kiss your son.  
 Goodbye, mom! Do not be sorry; do not be sad.  
 Bless us with a safe journey home!

Goodbye, my dear hometown,  
 Victory stars will shine for us!  
 Goodbye, mom! Do not be sorry; do not be sad.  
 Bless us with a safe journey home!

All that we have loved since childhood—  
 Rather it was dead than given to the enemy.  
 Youth League members, together embark on the journey,  
 Defend the country of one mind.

...

This song was created in 1947 to celebrate the victory of the Soviet War against Nazi Germany.

The original theme of the song is to complement the bravery of Youth League members who defeat mighty fascist invaders. However, the particular moment of the graduation ceremony didn't intend to directly resonate with the song's initial political context. The student sang it with affection. His deep, booming, and masculine voice attracted the audience's attention. Some students looked lingeringly at their parents. What the song demonstrated for me in that moment was a cultural disjuncture because the students removed the song from its political meaning. Their lingering looks implied that they really embraced the ostensible meaning of the song and related it to the distance between their home and studying abroad. They may have imagined what leaving home would mean to them and what kinds of challenges they would encounter when going overseas. Linking this scenario to the cheerful moment when the students called – “World, here we come!” I cannot help wondering what their college life in the United States looks like and what kinds of future they will own.



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