2020

Changing Concepts of Merit in China's Education System: An Oral Historical Research of Teachers in Key Schools

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LOYOLA UNIVERSITY CHICAGO

CHANGING CONCEPTS OF MERIT IN CHINA’S EDUCATION SYSTEM:
AN ORAL HISTORICAL RESEARCH OF TEACHERS IN KEY SCHOOLS

A DISSERTATION SUBMITTED TO
THE FACULTY OF THE GRADUATE SCHOOL
IN CANDIDACY FOR THE DEGREE OF
DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

PROGRAM IN CULTURAL AND EDUCATIONAL POLICY STUDIES

BY
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CHICAGO, IL
DECEMBER 2020
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Figure 1. Photograph from Confucius Temple Elementary School in Nanjing
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<thead>
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<th>Abbreviation</th>
<th>Description</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>CCP</td>
<td>Chinese Communist Party</td>
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<tr>
<td>CYL</td>
<td>Communist Youth League</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>GAOKAO</td>
<td>College Entrance Exam in China</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NFLS</td>
<td>Nanjing Foreign Language School</td>
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<td>YPC</td>
<td>Young Pioneers of China</td>
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ABSTRACT

This study examines teachers’ views of meritocracy and how their conceptions and views influence their everyday practices in schools with regard to producing, recognizing, and awarding individual merit in China’s key schools. This study uses a qualitative methodology, especially oral history interviews. It shows that the meaning of merit has changed over time, depending on cultural and institutional contexts during China’s transition from Mao’s age to the present. Thirteen teachers, who have been working in the education system of China since the early 1980s, and who have worked as teachers in China’s key (magnet/elite) schools (including higher education institutions), were selected as participants for this study. Teachers are the actors who recognize and produce individual merit in students’ daily work. They generally believed in the idea of educational meritocracy and did their best to help students move forward in the education system. During the transition from 1978 to the present, teachers witnessed the changes in the concepts of merit in Chinese society, the importance of socialist values such as altruism and unconditional public service has faded away from the education system. Instead, The exam and student evaluation system constitutes a “scientific” method to produce and recognize individual merit. Institutionalized standards and quantitative evaluations were used in schools to measure and award merit. The evaluativeness in the school system consecrated students' precocity and charismatic values in the name of merit.
CHAPTER ONE
INTRODUCTION

Meritocracy is a widely accepted ideology in modern societies. Meritocracy is a system in which benefits are allocated based on a person’s ability and effort. Academic institutions, commercial agencies, and government organizations all over the world often declare that they are meritocratic during the admission or promotion process. However, elitism justified by the practice of meritocracy has made the idea controversial. Many recent studies (Lemann, 2000; Dench, 2006; Liu, 2011; McNamee & Miller, 2013; Hayes, 2013; Guinier, 2015; Imbroscio, 2015; Mijs, 2015; Markovits, 2019) have challenged the idea of meritocracy and the widely held belief in “the American dream” associated with it. Critics argue that meritocracy is used by the upper class in society to justify and reproduce its desert of priorities, which is harmful to the principle of justice for the whole population. Among other things, the core word merit is the most controversial part of the debate. Although some people believe merit relates only to individual talent and effort, others think merit is associated with undeserved priorities or merely luck. Therefore, it cannot be used as the primary standard to choose people for the desired good.

Meritocracy and the related challenge of elitism are perplexing issues in the Chinese context. Meritocracy stands in the middle between left and right. It is both a challenge and a support for social mobility. For many Chinese families who suffered under radical social changes during the socialist movement and the Cultural Revolution, meritocracy is a legitimate way of climbing the social ladder without abruptly changing the social order. They believe strict
examinations are not only the best way to select capable people but also, by far, the most
efficient way to facilitate social justice. On the other side, the elite class of the country,
especially those who hold state power, can use their social capital and network to reproduce their
priority under the name of meritocracy. Without political transparency and with severe press
censorship, the discourse of meritocracy heavily favors those previously advantaged groups, thus
hindering social mobility.

This dissertation scrutinizes the meaning of *merit* in different social settings. Notably,
this study focuses on meritocracy in mainland China. China has a long history of practicing
meritocracy through imperial exams. On the other hand, it is still a “socialist country” according
to its political ideology. At the same time, capitalism has developed in China in recent decades
and created the world’s second-largest economy. Unlike in many other countries, where elite
families have a long tradition of accumulation of wealth and power, a significant number of
China’s elite class returned or rose to power after the end of the Cultural Revolution in 1977.
What is the content of merit in China? How is merit recognized and produced in the Chinese
education system? Through analysis of Chinese history from 1978 to the present, the main
argument presented by this dissertation is that meritocracy is an ideology for governance. The
meaning of merit has changed over time and is influenced by the power relations in a particular
society. The standards for being part of the elite class are also contextual and have evolved over
time. Not only does it intend to warn against the danger of using meritocracy as a way to
perpetuate existing inequality, but this study also views merit as an ever-changing concept and
seeks to introduce a more pluralistic approach to understand it.

This study used oral historical interviews as the primary research method. This approach
provides information about changes over time during China’s transition from Mao’s age to the
present. Teachers who have worked in China’s educational institutions from 1977 to the present are the participants for this study. Since teachers are the actors who recognize and produce individual merit in their daily work, it is essential to understand how changing historical and cultural contexts shaped their perception of meritocracy. Specifically, this study examines how beliefs in meritocracy have changed in mainland China from 1977 to the present, from the perspective of school teachers and educators in educational institutions, and how their conceptions and views of meritocracy influence their everyday practices in schools for producing, recognizing, and awarding individual merit.

Statement of Problem

Recent studies in comparative education have found an increasing educational desire among students from upper- and middle-class families, and a mushrooming of private supplementary tutoring (“shadow education”) all over the world (Bray, 1999, 2009, 2010; Bray & Lykins, 2012; Buchmann, 2002; Kim & Lee, 2004; Stevenson & Baker, 1992), especially in regions with Confucian cultural traditions, like China, Korea, Singapore, and Japan. In those Eastern Asian countries, the desire to consider shadow education is even stronger (Fukuzawa & LeTendre, 2001; Kim & Lee, 2004; Rosegaard, 2006). With this increasingly intense educational desire, many Chinese parents choose to provide their kids with additional lessons after regular school hours and even on the weekends. With the input of a large amount of money and time into private tutoring, parents are not only seeking high scores on their children’s school reports. They also want their children to develop skills and abilities to win the meritocratic competition both in school and in the future job market.

To understand the reason for this phenomenon, many of the previous studies investigated factors that influence participation in shadow education. The micro-level factors often include
student achievement (Southgate, 2009), home location (Bray, 1999, 2009; Bray & Lykins, 2012; Buchmann, 2002), and family socioeconomic status (Baker et al., 2001; Southgate, 2009). Macro-level factors include a deficient public education system (Kim & Lee, 2004; Baker et al., 2001; Southgate, 2009), relatively low salary, and weak monitoring of teachers in the public system (Bray, 1999, 2003; Buchmann, 2002; Silova et al., 2006), and linkage between high-stakes testing education degree and position in the job market (Baker et al., 2001; Fukuzawa & LeTendre, 2001; Kim & Lee, 2004; Rosegaard, 2006). Nations in the transition to a market economy, especially from socialism, are usually found to have higher percentages of students using shadow education (Bray, 1999; Dang & Rogers, 2008; Silova et al., 2006).

Scholars have also considered Confucian cultural traditions as a potential macro-level factor for private tutoring. East Asian countries and regions with Confucian traditions such as South Korea, Japan, China, Hong Kong, Taiwan, and Singapore are documented as the “most shadow educated” countries (Bray, 2009; Bray & Lykins, 2012; Lee, 2006). However, many previous researchers stopped at the “cultural” and “contextual” factors of the phenomenon, without thoroughly investigating the meaning of the Confucian cultural factor and the “post-socialist context.” We know that Confucian culture may be a factor influencing the educational desire of Chinese parents. Current scholarship seldom answers the question of how this factor was formed and how it has changed through historical development, and in what way it influences educational desire in Chinese society.

No better answers can be found within the education system itself. They relate to the common belief of meritocracy in society as a whole. The discourse regarding meritocracy indicates that effort in education will produce merit, which will be awarded in one’s future life, and those with the most exceptional merit should be the elite of society. An analysis of the
changing content and context of private tutoring in China can shed some light on the changing concept of merit in the school system. What is the merit ideal for schools in China? Is it changing over time? Moreover, what has been done to realize the meritocratic ideal? Exploring the educational system in a broader social context, and in an ever-changing historical background, is the main reason for researching meritocracy in China.

Meritocracy requires that social positions of power and authority be allocated to individuals based on merit rather than other ascribed factors, such as birth or wealth. As argued by Daniel Bell (1972), “meritocracy is in the nature of modern society” (p. 28). Nowadays, governments, companies, and organizations tend to declare that they are meritocratic, which means that job positions and rewards should be open to all, and only those who have demonstrated the ability to fulfill the jobs can make it to the top. In meritocratic practice, the word merit is often used in a broader and vaguer sense to refer to non-ascriptive factors such as hard work and previous achievements. One’s suitability for the job position determined his or her desert of social reward. However, since it is hard to predict whether an individual is suitable for a future job, his or her achievement in the past often become the criteria for our judgments.

Since the popularization of schooling began in the 19th century, for those who are at the beginning of their careers, degrees and credentials earned in the educational system serve as the most popular proxies for future performance. Education-based meritocracy, therefore, becomes a substitute for meritocracy in many societies. Education plays a crucial role in deciding who can gain access to opportunities in modern life. The logic of education-based meritocracy seems indisputable in many aspects of society. According to its definition, merit should be unrelated to ascriptive factors such as birth, gender, or race. In practice, both the production and recognition
processes of merit are likely to be associated with factors such as birth, family, and access to quality education. This fact produces paradoxical beliefs in the concept of meritocracy.

According to a recent study of meritocratic beliefs in the United States (Reynolds & Xian, 2014), many people hold a dual consciousness of meritocracy. People layer beliefs in non-meritocratic elements (such as family and wealth) on top of a belief in the importance of meritocratic elements (such as hard work). About one-fourth of Americans recognized the importance of non-meritocratic elements while simultaneously emphasizing the importance of meritocratic elements. Young, upper-class Whites were most likely to see the United States as a meritocratic country. In contrast, older, lower-class minorities in the United States were more apt to believe that non-meritocratic elements dominate. Women believed more strongly in meritocracy than men did.

Meritocracy is such a perplexing ideology that even those who believe in it also recognize other, non-meritocratic factors at work, but still choose to hold their meritocratic beliefs. In critics’ eyes, meritocracy is associated with power and priority, it is ultimately a myth, and as people awaken, it no longer appeals to some of its former believers. Partially led by the critics of credentialism and elitism, challenges to education-based meritocracy also coexist with surging education desire in modern societies.

A recent international survey on education-based meritocracy found that perceptions and preferences of meritocracy may be affected by national characteristics. For instance, perceived meritocracy is strongly correlated with national GDP and the expansion of the education system in a nation. In the recent academic discourse (Duru-Bellat & Tenret, 2012; Kunovich & Slomczynski, 2007), meritocracy has been associated with modernity and thought to be more
prevalent in “democratic” and “liberal” societies than in “post-communist” or “authoritarian” states.

The quantitative measurement of meritocracy (Duru-Bellat & Tenret, 2012; Kunovich & Slomczynski, 2007) also found significantly lower meritocratic attitudes in former communist countries. However, the survey did not provide data from China, which has both a heritage of communist governance and a century-old tradition of exam-based meritocracy for choosing civil servants. If post-socialist countries tend to have lower levels of meritocracy, we should expect China to be less meritocratic than other capitalist democratic countries. However, if the Chinese people still hold Confucian views and are immersed in exam-based meritocratic cultural traditions, the results will be different from those of previous studies.

The people of China were among the first in the world to use meritocratic selection criteria to recruit government officials (Weber, 1958). With a long tradition of examination-based meritocracy, China has adopted meritocracy as an ideology in many fields of social life (e.g., testing for civil service employees, exclusive usage of exams for college entrance). When the communist party came to power in 1949, egalitarian socialist ideology triumphed over meritocracy from the beginning of the regime to the end of the Cultural Revolution (Liang et al., 2012; Liang et al., 2013). Mass education expanded at the expense of the elite and higher education (Pepper, 1991). After Mao died in 1976, and since the renewed use of the college entrance exam in 1977, power has been restored to professionals and educators. Elite education has become the overriding focus of attention in mainland China (Pepper, pp. 2-3). The transition from a socialist egalitarian-oriented society to a market economy brought a change in the trajectories of China’s social and educational policies.
Though most of the literature on meritocracy focuses on the Western world, recent years have witnessed a growing interest in studying meritocracy and the elite class in China. For instance, Liang et al. (2012) found that the education system of China for the recruitment of educational elites after 1953 was more meritocratic than that of the United States. Through the process, which they termed the “silent revolution,” more students from lower socioeconomic backgrounds entered elite higher education institutions since the socialist reform. Daniel A. Bell (2012, 2013, and 2016) argued that political meritocracy has been, and continues to be, central to China’s political culture. Partly inspired by the “Singapore model,” China’s political system has become more meritocratic since the early 1990s. Thus, China has the potential to avoid the problems inherent in democratic elections and to develop a political meritocracy that lets the meritorious rule. This study disagrees with the conclusions of the studies mentioned above. It argues that first, the meaning of merit is contextual and changes over time; the overall level of the meritocracy of a nation cannot be compared with another. Second, meritocracy is not equal to social mobility since it requires that social rewards be allocated based on individual merit. The discourse and definition of merit may still favor those with power.

Instead of comparing the meritocratic score of China with other countries, this study examines the core word, merit, in China’s education system to see whether the meaning of merit has changed over time during China’s dramatic social change and how merit is defined and cultivated in China’s key schools. This oral history research listens to the stories of teachers who witnessed China’s historical transition after 1977. They had gone through the days when schools were ruled by communist and socialist principles and were relatively isolated from the outside world. Since the beginning of the opening-up policy, the education system in China has
undergone both institutional and ideological changes. The voices of 13 education practitioners will together form a picture of meritocracy in China over the last three decades.

**Conceptual Framework**

In a state with thousands of years of centralized bureaucratic governance, the educational system in China provided an excellent example for analyzing the development of meritocracy as an ideology embodied in the reproduction of privilege by schools. According to the cultural and ideological influences in China’s education system, I identified three types of meritocracy that are currently under debate: the Confucian meritocracy, the socialist meritocracy, and the capitalist meritocracy. Each of these three types supports the legitimacy of governance in its particular social environment, and sometimes more than one type of meritocracy will come into play within a period.

**Three Types of Meritocracy**

First, the earliest form of meritocracy is a Confucian meritocracy. The concept originated in the spring and autumn period of ancient China when it was advocated by the Chinese philosopher Confucius and his disciples. The core of Confucian meritocracy is the need to preserve the social order, which is also thought to be the natural pattern of the universe. The ruler’s role is like a father in a family. He rules according to the natural laws. He should be kind to the society members so that the whole society works in a reciprocal process. In Confucius’s words, there is a good government when the prince is a prince, and the minister is a minister; when the father is a father, and the son is a son (The Analects, Chapter 11). Society will be in harmony only when each individual in society knows his or her position in the natural order, and perform one’s part well.
The Confucian meritocracy ideal has become institutionalized in China through the creation and development of imperial examinations, beginning with the Tang and Sui dynasties. Moreover, even in today’s East Asia, Confucian meritocracy still influences parenting style and relationships between family members for many people. Keeping society stable according to natural law is the mission of Confucian meritocracy. First of all, the power of the ruler is granted by the natural order, and the whole society works as an organism. One of the essential merits of an individual is the ability to follow this arrangement, just as one cannot choose his or her father in a family. One should be loyal and obey his or her father, teacher, and the state ruler. If this does not happen, the whole society will lose its equilibrium and will harm everyone within.

In Western cultural traditions, Plato and Aristotle originated a similar idea, which was also advocated by Machiavelli in The Prince. Plato wrote in The Republic that the military and guardian classes, each of these doing its work in the state, and by adherence to their business on the part of the industrious, is justice, and will render the state just (The Republic, Book IV, p. 67). In other words, people with merit should be chosen and cultivated to act as guardians and managers of society.

The merit ideal of Confucius was symbolized in his description of the Junzi (君子). One does not have to be part of the noble class to be a Junzi, but the virtue of a Junzi is cultivated through learning and self-examination, and it is a Junzi’s responsibility to govern the state well. In Confucian logic, a woman can never become a Junzi. The task to become a Junzi is for men only. When a person’s knowledge is extended, one’s intention will become sincere and his mind rectified. As a result, his personal life will be cultivated. When one’s personal life was cultivated, his family will be regulated, and as a result, his state will be well-governed. When all the states are well-governed, there will be peace and harmony throughout the world (修身, 齊家, 治國, 平
A similar idea also appears in Western literature. In Foucault’s (1991) lecture about
governmentality, he cited La Mothe Le Vayer’s text and summarized three forms of the art of
government: first, the art of self-government; second, the art of properly governing a family; and
finally, the science of ruling the state.

Under the theoretical foundation of Confucious meritocracy, a person’s merit could be
demonstrated by his everyday life principles to keep the natural order and his loyalness to serve
the upper-level rulers. The cultivation and rewarding of merit are usually associated more closely
with moral principles than with other perspectives of individual development. For example,
when the imperial exam first began in China, moral behavior was the only criterion for choosing
civil servants. After development through centuries, at the start of the 20th century, more than
half of the exam materials were still focused on Confucian moral principles.

Confucian meritocracy does not sound like a modern idea, its naturalist justification to let
one person or a group of individuals rule is becoming obsolete in most parts of the world.
However, some ideas in Confucian meritocracy are still prevalent in China. For example, Daniel
Bell and other advocates of modern-day Confucian meritocracy have proposed building
meritocratic politics to compensate for the disadvantage of democratic politics by evaluating the
leaders, not only according to past achievements but also mainly depending on their moral
behaviors according to Confucian principles.

The second type of meritocracy discussed here is a socialist meritocracy. Egalitarian
principles are at the core of socialist meritocracy. As the aim of Confucian meritocracy is to
preserve social order and equilibrium (or so-called harmony), the object of socialist meritocracy
is to establish an equalized society. Thus, behaviors that attempt to achieve fairness are
rewarded, and practices that benefit only individuals are not encouraged.
The social theories of Karl Marx and Frederick Engels are the foundation for socialist meritocracy. Extreme cases of practicing socialist meritocracy happened in socialist countries, in China and other post-socialist countries, during the middle of the 20th century. Leaders in a socialist meritocracy justify their governance by claiming that they can close the gap between classes and equalize the society to a large extent, often by being given higher state power. In the socialist meritocratic ideal, privileges and resources are awarded to the individual who can create the most significant benefit for other social members. In the social practice, China’s communist party declared that the ultimate goal of the socialist society was “to eliminate exploitation and social polarization.” After a furious social campaign to realize the communist party’s goal, today, some people in China still believe that becoming wealthy does not contribute to the common good. Thus, it is considered selfish and dangerous to conduct private business.

The last type is a capitalist meritocracy, at the core of which are social efficiency and profits. Individual merits are rewarded according to market value, contribution to productivity, and, therefore, to the realization of profit (Marris, 2006, p. 159). Since the 1980s, capitalist meritocracy, along with neoliberal theory, has become the most prevalent belief in many parts of the world. With the spread of compulsory education and the development of higher education institutions, education credentials are commonly accepted by gatekeepers to discern and evaluate the most desirable traits in a system.

According to neoliberal discourse, not only is a “kind” of talent valued, but we now live amid the rise of a “global war for talent” (Tannock, 2009). A “global dream of meritocracy” has swept around the global village. According to its “siren,” we are now living in a world where talented people can move around the world without obstacles. Education is the way to success,
and no matter where a person is born, if the individual has talent, he or she will be able to live a beautiful life in the place chosen by his or her own will.

In the educational system, various measurements have been produced to evaluate individual merit. Intelligence discovered and produced by the school system has become the most significant merit that is to be easily demonstrated by the results of assessments and tests. IQ scores and standardized achievement tests were commonly used in education and other selections for social positions. Thus, education has become “both the gatekeeper for the meritocracy and its standard” (Yair, 2007, p. 2955).

After analyzing the three types of meritocracy listed above, we can safely conclude that the most meritorious personal traits in society may differ radically according to different political ideologies, cultural values, and social orders. The disadvantaged group in a society often becomes frustrated by the meritocratic system because of the group’s lack of power to decide the definition and meaning of merit. In conclusion, whether a person has merit or not depends on his or her peers, who are gatekeepers in a particular social context, and their evaluation process of the desert of praise and reward. Education is the typical way to both produce and assesses individual merit. Thus, what is valued and promoted in the educational system is of vital importance to the whole society.

The Concept of Merit

Merit is defined in the Oxford dictionary as “the quality of being particularly good or worthy, especially to deserve praise or reward.” To grasp the meaning of “particularly good or worthy,” first, we must identify who can legitimately evaluate the desert of reward in a particular society. As argued by Stuart Tannock (2009), “we judge individuals and actions to have merit when they produce outcomes that we value in our society” (p. 209). We view the multifaceted
characteristics of a person as valued and inspired in miscellaneous ways. However, only some of those characteristics can be called “intelligence” or “talent.” As argued by Amartya Sen (2000), the ultimately instrumental character of merit depends on the concept of "the good" in the relevant society. While there are many kinds of ability, effort, and achievement, not all of them are deemed to be equally meritorious.

The judgment should depend on the mission of particular social settings. Whether a specific set of talents and capabilities can be deemed desirable in a system is determined by the power relations in the particular social context: who has the power and who can legitimately decide the desert of human quality in society or a field, those who often serve as the “gatekeepers” or “evaluators of merit.” An analysis of the concept of merit should first identify what aspects of human abilities or traits constitute intelligence and talent in a particular social setting. Then, the analysis of merit should go deep into why and how the reward and production of some of the intelligence became institutionalized while other human traits did not. Another critical question is whether the concept of merit is the same for men and women. What are the criteria for masculinity and femininity in different historical periods?

If we look into today’s conception of human intelligence in the United States, a common belief is that individual intelligence can be accurately quantified and measured using a standardized test. Among intelligence tests for children, the WISC-III, the third revision of psychologist David Wechsler’s classic 1949 test for children, still dominates the field worldwide. Although the WISC-III was modeled after Army intelligence tests developed during World War I, no new test can replace its role (Benson, 2003a). The IQ score became synonymous with intelligence in ordinary people’s minds.
With a quantified IQ number for every individual, researchers quickly found the correlation between IQ and genes as well as the socioeconomic status of one’s family. According to Richard Herrnstein and Charles Murray (2010), IQ is substantially heritable. The genetic component of IQ is unlikely to be lower than 40% or higher than 80%. In their famous work, *Bell Curve: Intelligence and Class Structure in American Life*, Herrnstein and Murray (2010) concluded that genes for IQ are becoming more highly correlated with social class. The children of the elite class who have good genes for IQ tend to reproduce the priorities of their family and replicate their parents’ high status because of luck in life’s lottery. Nonetheless, critics quickly protested after the publication of the bell curve. Among them, the fiercest debates point to the measurement of human intelligence in a single linear model.

In response to concerns about the traditional intelligence theory and tests that fail to represent essential aspects of human intelligence, researchers such as Howard Gardner and Robert Sternberg developed new theories and practices to define and measure intelligence. According to Howard Gardner (1983, 1993), human intelligence entails a set of skills instead of just one single general ability. He identified eight intelligence modalities that relate to a person’s unique aptitude or set of capabilities: musical-rhythmic, visual-spatial, verbal-linguistic, logical-mathematical, bodily-kinesthetic, interpersonal, intrapersonal, and naturalistic. He later suggested that existential and moral intelligence may also be added to the theory (Gardner, 1999). The definitions of these intelligence modalities are listed below:

1. Verbal-linguistic intelligence: well-developed verbal skills and sensitivity to the sounds, meanings, and rhythms of words

2. Logical-mathematical intelligence: the ability to think conceptually and abstractly, and the capacity to discern logical and numerical patterns
3. Spatial-visual intelligence: capacity to think in images and pictures, to visualize accurately and abstractly
4. Bodily-kinesthetic intelligence: the ability to control one’s body movements and to handle objects skillfully
5. Musical intelligence: the ability to produce and appreciate rhythm, pitch, and timbre
6. Interpersonal intelligence: capacity to detect and respond appropriately to the moods, motivations, and desires of others
7. Intrapersonal intelligence: capacity to be self-aware and in tune with inner feelings, values, beliefs, and thinking processes
8. Naturalist intelligence: the ability to recognize and categorize plants, animals, and other objects in nature
9. Existential/moral intelligence: sensitivity and capacity to tackle profound questions about human existence, such as What is the meaning of life? Why do we die? How did we get here?

Though there is still no sufficient empirical evidence to support Gardner’s (1999) theory, his work provided a framework for us to understand different kinds of human intelligence that have been recognized and rewarded in the history of schooling, and to analyze which kinds of human intelligence were given more emphasis in a particular historical context.

Recent studies turn to understand the impacts of culture on human intelligence. Different cultures will have different definitions of intelligence. A “smart” child in one culture may not be considered a “smart” child in another. In recent years, researchers (see reviews in Benson, 2003b; Okagaki & Sternberg, 1993; Sternberg, 2005; Sternberg & Grigorenko, 2004; Yang & Sternberg, 1997a, 1997b) have found that people in non-Western cultures (in Africa, Asia, and elsewhere) often have ideas about intelligence that differ fundamentally from those that have
shaped Western intelligence tests. For example, Yang and Sternberg (1997b) found that unlike Western culture, Taiwanese-Chinese conceptions of intelligence placed more emphasis on understanding and relating to others, including knowing when to show and when not to show one's intelligence. They also reviewed ancient Chinese philosophical conceptions of intelligence (1997a) and concluded that the Confucian perspective emphasizes the characteristic of benevolence and of doing what is right. As in the Western notion, the intelligent person spends considerable effort in learning, enjoys learning, and persists in lifelong learning with considerable enthusiasm. In contrast, the Taoist tradition emphasizes the importance of humility, freedom from conventional standards of judgment, and full knowledge of oneself as well as of external conditions.

From the above analysis, human intelligence is partly based on genes and birth. It is not a fixed linear variable that can be accurately measured by current intelligence tests. Instead, it is a complex construct that is profoundly impacted by culture and context. Among different modalities, the kinds of intelligence that were recognized and rewarded institutionally through the process of schooling or tracking by social agencies were tied closely to the power relations of a particular social context. It is the aim of this study to delineate this process in the setting of the Chinese education system during the transition from the post-Mao era to the present.

The Practice of Merit

When Michael Young first introduced the term meritocracy (1970) in his epic work, *The Rise of the Meritocracy*. A formula of merit, as summarized by Young and later paraphrased by Gad Yair (2007), states that merit is the sum of intelligence plus effort: \( M = I + E \) (where \( M \) is merit, \( I \) is intelligence, and \( E \) is effort). This formula demonstrates that merit includes two parts: the concept of merit and the practice to realize merit.
The following analysis will move on to the second element of individual merit—effort. Besides intelligence and talent, which are not entirely under one’s control, an effort has been deemed a factor that can be solely decided and practiced by the subject. Hard work, discipline, and impulse control are commonly accepted practices to demonstrate one’s effort. As shown in the merit formula, \( M = I + E \), Stephen McNamee, and Robert Miller (2013) summarized the meritocracy myth embedded in the image of the American dream: “America is the land of opportunity. If one works hard enough and is talented enough, he can overcome any obstacle and achieve success” (p. 1).

We already have a long history of using psychological tests to measure human intelligence, but a standardized test does not easily measure the degree of hard work. In modern institutions, the standard way to evaluate hard work is as a result of effort rather than as a process of effort. For example, teachers usually do not note the number of hours a student studies at the library or the number of books a student reads. The student’s academic score is the result of an earned score, achieved by his or her effort rather than credit for the behavior of studying.

The key school system in China shared all the features mentioned above in the elite school of French. According to Bourdieu (1998), many elite schools share common characteristics in the process that aims to instill recognition of social competence in individuals. “Retreat from the habitual environment, a break with all family ties, entry into an educational community, the transformation of an entire way of life, ascesis, physical and mental exercise, and repeated testing of the degree of qualification attained” (p. 109). As claimed by Bourdieu, all schools commonly impose ascetic practices to reproduce an elite, starting with an education that is both formal and divorced from real life. This cultural ascesis is public proof of one’s self-control and therefore stands as evidence of one’s right to control others (p. 110).
The subjects and activities for training elite students are formal and not very interesting because they have been reduced to mere intellectual and physical discipline. Bourdieu (1998) used the examples of dead language (such as classical Latin in Europe and Classical Chinese in Japan) and modern mathematics commonly taught in many elite schools (p. 110). This argument can be demonstrated by the study of ancient Chinese prose and complicated mathematics problems in China’s key schools. The difficulty of the mathematics test in the college entrance exam (the Gaokao) has increased dramatically from the restart of the test in 1978 to the present. Nowadays, even college math professors cannot get high scores on the test in the insufficient time allowed by the Gaokao.¹ Such difficult math problems will not appear in practical life, but to get into elite higher education institutions, students in China have to spend years practicing them.

**Recognition of Academic Elites**

In this study, Pierre Bourdieu’s theory of power and practice and the associated ideas of social capital, cultural capital, and symbolic violence were used as tools to analyze the mechanism of reproduction of social hierarchies and the changes in social order and power relations across generations. Foucault’s theory of governmentality and his analysis of discipline and punishment in the school system are also relevant to this study. There is a tendency in Chinese academia toward hesitant usage of the “Western” theory to interpret the phenomena in China, except for the officially accredited Marxist theory. One of the reasons for choosing

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¹Dianjun Wang is a math professor at Tsinghua University, he admitted at an educational conference held in Beijing that his Ph.D. students can only get 80 out of 150 points on the Gaokao math test, and if he did the test, the score could only be lower. As reported by the China Education Think Tank website: http://www.eduthink.com.cn/index.php/article/index/id/4161.html. One of the math teacher participated in the research also said during the interview that “even math professors in colleges cannot complete some of the items in the Gaokao. We once have our younger high school math teachers to do the test, they cannot reach pass score.”
Bourdieu’s and Foucaultian theory as the standpoint of analysis for this study is that most of the phenomena in their works occurred in France and continental Europe, whose centralized state education systems (though with many idiosyncratic features) share much in common with that of China.

According to Bourdieu (1998), educational institutions select people and redistribute them into separate groups. Teachers, as agents in society, act within the structures of socially constituted preference systems, which are linked to objective divisions of social space. Through the practical operation of habitus, strategies of reproduction tend to maintain separations, distances, and relations of social order. Thus, educational institutions tend to preserve power relations and reproduce the existing social structure in society. The reproduction process happens during a teacher’s everyday practice of evaluating students. Students who come from families with sufficient cultural capital most often get awards from their teachers and are consecrated by the educational system for their precocity and charismatic values. Through the ordination process of elite schools, a separate group of people successfully turn their monopoly into nobility. The power and authority of the state nobility, to an increasing degree, is based on academic titles. The educational system, which makes them capable of securing competence and legitimacy, is also where they are granted an ever-increasing role over time.

According to Bourdieu (1998), student achievement in academic subjects that require talent and giftedness, along with possession of significant inherited cultural capital, were most often used by educational institutions to recognize the elite (p. 11). These subjects contrasted with disciplines that primarily require work and study. In the French context, subjects like philosophy, French, and mathematics belonged in the first category, and subjects such as geography, the natural sciences, history, and language were thought to require mainly effort
rather than talent and were thus seldom used by teachers to distinguish students’ achievement. Prizewinners in French and philosophy had traits demonstrated by “personal expression” and “a charismatic representation of the act of writing,” which were closely linked to the family’s cultural capital and recognized by the French educational system as elite (p. 17). The same division of subjects was found in ancient China when Chinese literature and philosophy were used as standards for merit.

However, in the contemporary Chinese context, due to the power of the central government to control ideology, subjects such as philosophy, history, and social science were not the most merited disciplines. Instead, subjects including mathematics, physics, chemistry, and foreign language served the purpose of distinguishing the academic elite in China during the post-Mao period because they promoted economic development and were unrelated to critics of social status. As a substitute for social sciences, moral education and so-called patriotism education, and political education were included in the curriculum. After 1981, moral education became a subject in primary schools, and political education was a subject in middle school (Cleverley, 1985, p. 268).

The Myth of Natural Talent

As cited by Bourdieu (1998), with the development of the undifferentiated pedagogical structure of the “cursus” at the beginning of the 16th century, precocious careers became rarer, and the cursus began to be viewed as an index of superiority and a promise of social success (p. 20). In practice, the ease demonstrated by precocity is usually seen as “natural talent.” That “privilege of ease” is a signal for educators to recognize merit. Nevertheless, as Bourdieu argued (p. 20), precocity is, in fact, just one of the many academic retranslations of cultural privilege.
What we call ease is the privilege of those who, having imperceptibly acquired their culture through a gradual familiarization in the bosom of the family, have academic culture as their native culture and can maintain a familiar rapport with it that implies the unconsciousness of its acquisition. (p. 21)

The above analysis shows the discrepancy of elite culture. To be considered meritorious, one must usually show the “ease” of accomplishment while simultaneously demonstrating that he or she is hardworking and disciplined.

In his ethnographic research of a prestigious high school in New Hampshire, Shamus Khan (2011) found through observation that elite students did not work hard all the time, but “engaged in practical and discursive practices to make it seem as if they did” (p. 32). Almost every conversation he had at the school returned to a discussion of how much work was to be done. He argued that “this meritocracy of hard work and achievement has naturalized socially constituted distinctions; making differences in outcomes appear a product of who people are rather than a product of the conditions of their making” (p. 202). He summarized the meritocratic frame commonly held by those elite students: “The world is yours; all that is required are hard work and talent.” Students, in turn, believe that they work extremely hard and are exceptionally talented. Through his observation, he found that students at elite schools generally do not work hard, although they are adept at performing a kind of business that looks and feels like hard work.

This study will explore the practice of merit along three dimensions: first, the kind of behavior that is encouraged in schools and considered effort by teachers; second, the social structure for confirming human effort in different historical times; and third, the kind of impulses that were to be controlled or considered “bad habits.”
Research Questions

Has the definition of merit changed in the education system of China from 1977 to the present, and if so, how? Moreover, how do Chinese educators’ views of meritocracy influence their everyday practices in schools when it comes to producing, recognizing, and awarding an individual student’s merit?

The following are sub-questions that this research hopes to answer:

1. From the perspective of Chinese educators, what ideal personal traits are usually emphasized in schools? What practices are conducted to cultivate these ideal traits in students?

2. According to the life experiences of Chinese educators, will the personal traits emphasized in schools be rewarded in the students’ later social lives? Does the rewarding of merit change over time?
CHAPTER TWO
LITERATURE REVIEW

The literature review consists of three bodies of scholarship that cross several disciplines (e.g., sociology, history, and psychology). First, the body of literature that establishes the theoretical foundation of meritocracy; the second is the studies that criticize meritocracy; the third, the literature on meritocracy ideal and practice in China, and the role of teachers in developing individual merit.

The Theoretical Foundation of Meritocracy

Michael Young (1970) coined the term “meritocracy” in his 1958 satirical fiction work, *The Rise of Meritocracy*. He critically defined meritocracy as a system where merit equated with intelligence-plus-effort. The possessors of merit are identified at an early age and selected for appropriate intensive education. At the end of his fiction book, Young warned us of the danger of meritocracy, by depicting the chaos that would be caused by it in 2033.

This discourse of “class-stratified meritocracy” has its ground in believers of aristocracy and elitism. Though intelligence may change in later life because of environmental factors, a large part of it is decided by genes from parents, or we could say it is partly by inheritance and partly by chance. The children from the elite class who has good genes for IQ tend to reproduce the priorities of their family and replicate their parents’ high status because of luck in life’s lottery.
Herrnstein and Murray (2010) argued that genes for IQ are becoming more highly correlated with the social class structure in the United States. They provided an average estimate of 60% heritability, which, by extension, means that IQ is about 40% a matter of environment (p. 105). They also found high correlations of IQ among relatives. Though challenged by many further studies, the bell curve became the evidence for meritocracy, by proving that people are becoming stratified according to intelligence, and many social problems can be explained regarding differences in intelligence. One of the prevailing discourse of meritocracy is that birth and genes mostly decide intelligence.

This kind of discourse is named by James R. Flynn (2000) as “class-stratified meritocracy” (p. 56). In other words, genes from the parents are the basis of intelligence. The elite group of the society has good genes so that their offsprings have a high IQ. Therefore, children from elite families will also have success in later life. This discourse is based on the assumption that the dynamic correlate genes with class are social mobility in the absence of inequality and privilege. As defined by Orville Gilbert Brim et al. in 1969, “intelligence is an inherited trait, an inborn capacity that individuals possess to varying degrees.”

In Meritocracy Revisited, Michael Young (1994) iterates his view that according to the meritocratic principles, people in the industrial society can be assigned to different social positions by their achievement rather than by their birth. Social inequality can be justified in this way to avoid too blatant contradiction between classes. “Such a justification is almost always needed in a democratic society which has bowed to equality at least as far as elections are concerned” (p. 88). When meritocratic principles applied to the education system, “With the aid of more or less elaborate systems of testing and examination” (p. 88), the selection at the higher level of educational ladders tracking young people into different social positions, according to
their merit rather than the wealth of their parents. Young concluded in a sentence, “A meritocratic education underpins a meritocratic society.”

However, even if the educational system has rejected the majority of people, they cannot think themselves inferior, they should also be critical to power in society. Also, the individuals who get high positions should not feel deserved to advantage, just because they are in the “lucky sperm club.” In Young’s more recent work (2001), he acknowledges that with the prevalence of meritocracy, “the leaderless masses were partially disfranchised; as time has gone by, more and more of them have disengaged and disaffected to the extent of not even bothering to vote. They no longer have their people to represent them” (p. 17).

Michael Young’s novel showed a picture of when complete meritocracy was implemented. The consequences will be a mass revolution and chaos. Almost at the same time, the female writer, Ayn Rand (1996), who came to the United States at her young age to escape the oppression of Communist Russia, published her famous novel (first published in 1957), *Atlas Shrugged*, which depicts the scenario without meritocracy. In the fiction, many of the society’s most prominent and successful industrialists, which she called the “prime movers,” abandoned their work and disappeared. After that, the whole nation went into turmoil. Though Ayn Rand's work is often viewed as a justification for capitalism rather than for meritocracy, both Young and Rand’s work deal with the core problem of meritocracy, the relationship between the mass, the elite, and the government (which may represent the mass or the elite).

Friedrich von Hayek (1960) wrote about merit, in his classical work, *the Constitution of Liberty*. In the sixth chapter of the book, Hayek states his view on equality, value, and merit. He distinguished merit from “the value of the achievement,” by defining merit as “the attributes of conduct that make it deserving of praise, that is, the moral character of the action and not the
value of the achievement.” He further explained that “the attempt to achieve a valuable result may be highly meritorious, but a complete failure and full success may have been entirely the product of an accident and thus without merit.”

Hayek (1960) is on the opposite side of egalitarianism, who proposes to provide an equal start point for all and to adjust any inequality caused by difference. He is also against the view of meritocracy, which emphasized the distribution of social goods according to merit. Hayek believes that meritocracy is a deprivation of liberty; in a sense, the majority of other members of the society decided the concept of merit, rather than the individual himself/herself. In his words, “the mark of the free man is to be dependent for his livelihood not about other people's views of his merit but solely on what he has to offer them.” Once a state applied meritocratic principles to distribute income, it would become “the opposite of a free society -- a society in which authority decided what the individual was to do and how he was to do it.”

If Hayek rejected meritocracy for the principle of liberty, then John Rawls (1999) rejected meritocracy for the principle of justice. In *A Theory of Justice* (1971), John Rawls (1999) draws on the social contract traditions of Locke, and the categorical imperative of Kant provides “a reasonably systematic alternative” to the utilitarian principles by Bentham and Mill (p. 6). He used a social contract argument to show that justice is a form of fairness: an equal distribution of goods. Rawls asked us to imagine ourselves behind a hypothetical “veil of ignorance,” which denies us all knowledge of our personalities, social statuses, moral characters, wealth, talents, and life plans, and then asks what theory of justice we would choose to govern our society. Rawls claims that the two principles of justice that are chosen behind “a veil of ignorance” could “ensure that no one is advantaged or disadvantaged in the choice of principles by the outcome of natural chance or the contingency of social circumstances” (p.11).
First, each person is to have an equal right to the most extensive scheme of equal fundamental liberties compatible with a similar scheme of liberties for others. Second, social and economic inequalities are to be arranged so that they are both (a) reasonably expected to be to everyone’s advantage, and (b) attached to positions and offices open to all. (p. 53)

The second principle is related to the ideal of meritocracy. Rawls (1999) believed that “a meritocratic society is a danger for the other interpretations of the principles of justice, but not for the democratic conception. For, as we have just seen, the difference principle transforms the aims of the society in fundamental respects” (p. 107). Because “there exists a marked disparity between the upper and lower classes in both means of life and the rights and privileges of organizational authority” (p. 106). “Equality of opportunity means an equal chance to leave the less fortunate behind in the personal quest for influence and social position” (p. 107). Rawls’ “difference principle,” which requires the justification of distribution to the benefit of the most disadvantaged group in society, is a staunch opponent to meritocracy.

In a thesis wrote in 1972, Daniel Bell challenged John Rawls’ view toward meritocracy, by saying that it is hard to define who are the most disadvantaged in society. Bell (1972) argued that individualism is the principle of contemporary modern society. All the inequalities are based on the fact of the difference in the individual level. Nevertheless, in social theory and practice, the most disadvantaged are usually identifiable mainly in group terms. Primarily drawn from functionalist and modernization theories, for Bell and his associates (1972, 2012, 2013), the principle of merit, which means to allow the best to rise to the top through work and effort, is the necessary foundation for a productive and cultivated society. In the more recent work, *The East Asian Challenge for Democracy: Political Meritocracy in Comparative Perspective*, Bell and Li (2013) strongly recommended Singapore’s meritocratic political system. Moreover, Bell (2012)
believes that with a historical tradition of Confucianism, China has a strong base for meritocracy. In some aspects, China is more meritocratic than some of the democratic nations.

Based on the previous theoretical debates on meritocracy, Amartya Sen (2000) pointed out that the significant difficulty of meritocracy came from the internal conflict within the concept of "merit" itself. He argued that merit depends heavily on the idea of "the right" in the relevant society. In her words:

The merit of actions--and (derivatively) that of persons performing actions--cannot be judged independently of the way we understand the nature of a good (or an acceptable) society. It involves at least a temporary "stay." Indeed, examine the nature of this "standstill," which is ethically and politically illuminating, maybe a better way of understanding the place of meritocracy in modern society than seeing it as a part of some categorical Justitia that demands our compliance. (p. 6)

Sen (2000) also challenged the traditional notions of meritocracy that often attach the label of merit to people rather than actions. For example, a person with standardly recognized "talents" or "intelligence" can be seen as a meritorious person, even if he or she were not to use the talents to perform acts with functional consequences. Sen's theory about meritocracy opened a new way to investigate merit in considering the objectives of a particular society and a specific historical context.

Many scholars (Tsay et al., 2003; Brim et al., 1969; Friedland & Alford, 1991; Khan, 2011; Khan & Jerolmack, 2013) have pointed to how our definitions of merit change over time, depending on cultural and institutional contexts. For example, Tsay et al. (2003) analyzed letters of recommendation written for prospective graduate students between the early 1950s and the late 1960s. They find out that the criteria for merit did change over time. During the period, the relative use of moral and social background criteria declined, while the use of personal criteria did not change.
Researchers (Castilla & Benard, 2010; Castilla, 2005) also found that though organizations declared to hold the meritocracy principles, some of the traditionally disadvantaged groups, such as women and minorities, were still treated differently with the same meritocratic performance. Emilio Castilla and Stephen Benard (2010) used data from large organizations in the United States, proved the theoretical argument that when an organizational culture promotes meritocracy, managers in that organization may ironically show more significant bias for men over equally performing women in translating employee performance evaluations into rewards and other crucial career outcomes. Castilla’s (2005) previous studies also show that women and minorities receive less compensation than white men with equal scores on meritocratic performance evaluations.

On the state level, Bukodi and Goldthorpe (2009) took Hungary as a natural experiment, which has gone through the transition from an education-based meritocracy in the socialist governance to liberal capitalism. Their longitudinal data analysis shows that meritocracy is incompatible with the principle of a free-market economy and liberal democracy. The study proved Friedrich von Hayek’s view on meritocracy that a market economy does not reward individuals based on their merits, and it only values what each individual has to offer on the market. Education-based meritocracy has the potential to legitimate inequalities caused by wealth and social status that free-market capitalism generates. In the case of Hungary, the correlation between social origins and educational attainment (OE) declined under the socialism period, but its weakening did not continue during the reform period, and OE increased in the capitalist period. After the reform, with the development of free-market inequality increased, more parents with superior resources had a chance to use them for their children’s educational advantages. Thus, it undermines the idea of meritocracy.
Talib and Fitzgerald (2015) used critical discourse analysis to look at the policy text of Singapore from 2002 to 2012. They found out that, despite the robust discourse of meritocracy that Singapore education promotes, value judgments are continually at work in the policy discourse. For example, the discourse in policy documents often uses: “it is the interest of the Singapore people that talents should get privileged access to knowledge, as it is through this that more opportunities for the rest of the population are created” (p. 15). They conclude that through the metaphor of diversity in policy text, inequality is given legitimacy within a frame of meritocracy.

Some recent work found that belief in meritocracy brings a secure feeling to disadvantaged groups; thus, it might be beneficial to the stability of society. Research in the field of psychology found a correlation between lower levels of self-control and the adoption of meritocratic beliefs. Goode et al. (2014) experiment demonstrated that U.S. citizens’ faith in meritocracy increases under conditions of decreased personal control. They found that a threat to personal control increased participants’ endorsement of meritocracy, and lowered perceptions of control tend to increased feelings of anxiety regarding the future, but the exposure to meritocracy attenuated this effect. McCoy et al. (2013) also found a positive relationship between the belief in meritocracy and ones’ self-esteem and physical health that was mediated by perceived control. Members of low-status groups may benefit from some system-justifying beliefs like the belief in meritocracy, to increase their perception of control over future outcomes.

On the international level, the quantitative measurement of meritocracy by Kunovich and Slomczynski (2007) found that former Communist countries tend to have a lower level of meritocracy than other nations. Duru-Bellat and Tenret (2012) concluded that the perceptions and preferences of merit might be affected by national characteristics. For instance, perceived
meritocracy strongly correlated with the National GDP and the expansion of the education system in a nation. Moreover, it is more prevalent in “democratic” and “liberal” societies than in “post-communist” “authoritarian” states.

**Merit in Ancient China**

China has a long history of meritocratic tradition in the form of a civil service examination (or called “imperial examination”) system that started from 607 AD to 1905. There is a significant amount of literature in the field of Chinese educational history that focused on the history of the imperial exam, the development of Confucianism thoughts, and its influence on Chinese society. It is not practical for this review to cover the whole body of literature from this perspective. The researcher will choose from the literature that is more relevant to the practice of meritocracy in China.

Confucian scholars mainly wrote documents about the earliest schools in China. According to Mencius (孟子 滕文公上), formal schooling in China began during the Xia Dynasty (2070 B.C.-1600 B.C.) and continually developed throughout the Yin and Zhou Dynasties. These schools aimed to let students engage in the ritual of society and understand the basic ethics of human beings. Music education played a critical role in ancient schools, in which lyrics both expressed one’s emotion and conveyed the social ritual and norms. Ancient teachers used physical punishment, such as beatings with a wooden crate to discipline students. The book of rites (礼记 文王世子) recorded different levels of schooling established during the Western Zhou dynasty (1046 B.C.-771 B.C.): the highest level was for educating the prince, and the lowest level was open to students in the villages.
The government ran all schools, which dominated available teaching resources, such as books and musical instruments. Schoolteachers were also officials who worked for the state. Different courses started in various seasons. Swordsmanship, dancing, string music, and poem recitation were taught in the spring and summer. Ritual and reading began in autumn and winter. According to Howard Gardner's structure of intelligence (1983), a large part of this curriculum contributed to the development of bodily-kinesthetic, verbal-linguistic, and musical intelligence. However, the schooling system’s ultimate aim was to cultivate moral intelligence. Learning to dance and to compose music was a way to understand and implement the ritual. Verbal-linguistic intelligence was cultivated through reading the ancient book that recorded the history of previous emperors. Teachers told stories from earlier dynasties, analyzing the rulers’ virtue and evil, to show their students how to be sons in the family and ministers of the king.

The ancient school also evaluated and tracked students in higher education institutions. The standards for the evaluation included excellent moral character, good executive abilities, and eloquence. The local elite chose the best students in the village and recommended the extraordinary ones to be government officials. Once approved, the students’ entire home village was tax-exempt.

Unlike boys, girls were not allowed to go to school; female teachers taught them at home. Compared with education for boys, the content for teaching girls was more practically related to everyday life. It included silkworm breeding, weaving, making clothes, and preparing tea and wine. Girls were not able to leave the house after the age of 10 years, and if they had to leave, they were required to cover their faces. The merit ideal for girls during the Zhou dynasty was obedience, a sweet temper, and discipline.
After the fall of the Zhou Empire, central governance made room for the newly developed feudal landlord. To increase their competence in political and military competitions against other states, wealthy landlords applied meritocratic policies to attract talented people. The selection system was derived from the election ritual of the primitive tribes and became the dominant way to appoint talented people to rule positions. During the subsequent warring states period (475 B.C.-221 B.C.), many feudal landlords attracted hundreds of persons with different kinds of abilities to help them fortify their states. The criteria for talent were so broad at that time that even the man who used his stealing skills to save his lord’s life was highly rewarded (司马迁，史记孟尝君列传). Other rewarded skills included strategic planning or even assassination.

With the dissemination of teaching resources once owned only by the central government, schools that had been opened by the central government gradually lost power and influence (Xiong, 1989, p. 40). Private teaching burgeoned with the development of the economic status of feudal landlords in many of the vassal states. Confucius was a prominent private teacher at that time with 3,000 disciples. The content of education focused on what Confucius termed the “six arts,” which included ritual (礼), music (乐), archery (射), chariot-driving (御), calligraphy (书), and mathematics (术).

Modern historical sources largely confirm that the “six arts” demonstrated the elitist educational ideal before and during Confucius’s time (as cited by Lee, 2000, p. 172). “The purpose of ‘six arts’ education was to create a human being capable of balancing the aristocratic life skills with a personality of internal peace and harmony” (p. 172). Confucius used the “Six Classics,” as textbooks: The Book of Poetry, Book of History, Book of Change, Book of Rites, Book of Music, and Spring and Autumn Annals. However, the traditional aristocratic education
of archery, chariot-driving, and mathematics was replaced mainly by humanist education. The pluralistic content of merit in previous dynasties gradually narrowed to a focus on verbal-linguistic and moral intelligence in the Confucian tradition. A grand ceremony was held at the beginning of each semester to show respect for the teachers and to let the students anticipate becoming government officials in the future. At the ceremony, teachers held rulers in their hands for punishing students as a way to remind students to follow the discipline of the school.

Qin was among the vassal states during the Warring States period, but the primary way to get ahead in the Qin social hierarchy was through a military exploit. Even for sons of aristocratic families, the only way one could keep his position was by performing during the war. After the unification of China by the Qin state in 221 B.C., to unify political thought and silence dissent regarding his governance, the First Emperor of Qin burned thousands of classical writings. He had many Confucian scholars buried alive (Sima & Watson, 1993a). However, the official appointment of scholars to the erudite position of bo-shi (博士, equivalent to “Ph.D.” or “doctor” in the modern Chinese language) was also initiated by the First Emperor of Qin. The government highly rewarded bo-shi, who was broadly knowledgeable, learned persons familiar with the history and proper rites. The government officially forbade private teaching. After the book burning, only works related to medicine, divination, and agriculture remained.

The public school system (Xue-shi, 学室) was open only to princes and sons of government officials. The educational content was mainly literacy textbooks as well as laws and decrees of the state. Graduates of Xue-shi underwent a period of internship. If the students demonstrated their abilities during the internship, they were appointed to government positions. There were other criteria for entering the cadre positions in Qin, including recommendation and
examination. The recommendation system required legal responsibility for references. If the recommended person were not qualified, the person who provided the reference would receive punishment by law. The examination system under the Qin dynasty required candidates to be able to master six different styles of calligraphy.

The Han dynasty continued to appoint bo-shi, but the system underwent significant changes when Emperor Wu (179 B.C.-157 B.C.) ordered the establishment of a school (124 B.C.). He ordered the erudite to limit themselves to the teaching of the five sanctioned Confucian classics (Book of Poetry, Book of History, Book of Change, Book of Rites, and Spring and Autumn Annals). The number of erudite appointed to office decreased from 70 to only seven (Lee, 2000, p. 47). After this change, Confucianism became the nation’s ideology (p. 48). The Five Classics were used as textbooks in schools until the end of the 19th century. The process of recruiting bo-shi was first through the recommendation of government officials. Scholars who were famous in the academic field went through the recommendation system to become bo-shi without taking any tests. However, during the Eastern Han period (A.D. 25-A.D. 220), the appointment of bo-shi required the candidate to pass examinations.

Moreover, the local official who made the recommendation had to provide a guarantee of the candidate’s moral behavior. General regulations for the qualification of the erudite were that he must “comprehend the past and the present, and be knowledgeable about the nation’s policy.” One of the responsibilities of the bo-shi was to teach at the official higher education institution, the Tai-Xue (太学), or the Imperial University. The Tai-Xue campus was in the capital city of Chang-an (长安, now the city of Xi’an in Shanxi Province). Also, there was a market for shopping and a place for supervision and punishment within the Tai-Xue. Private schools were
popular in the Han Dynasty, especially for primary education. Besides literacy, education focused on recitation and calligraphy. A child was considered very intelligent if he could recite the Analects of Confucius before the age of nine. If the child could not recite much from the textbooks or did not show improvement in writing characters, he received severe physical punishment.

Though schooling was prevalent during the Han dynasty, the most common way to climb the social ladder was through the official recommendatory system, called the Cha-Ju system (察举制). The recommendation system was first used by Emperor Liu in 196 B.C. to attract merited people (贤士大夫), which at that time referred to individuals who had military abilities (Wang & Xu, 2002, p. 1). The Cha-Ju system developed into an annual event when Emperor Wu declared his criteria for merit—talent, virtue, integrity, and sincere devotion to the emperor (贤良方正直言极谏之士).

After the state adopted policies that paid supreme tribute to Confucianism, the Confucian model of education became the standard in local schools. The role of teachers was to transmit literacy and understanding of the Confucian classics. Merited people were recommended by the local official in a county once every year. If the population in a county was small, the event was held once every two years. There were strict criteria for the recommendation of candidates, including family background, age, profession, gender, and—most importantly—moral behavior. For example, merchants, women, offspring of corrupt officials, and people above 40 years of age could not get recommendations (Wang & Xu, 2002). There were different subjects in the recommendation system, including filial piety, honesty, integrity, familiarity with classical
literature, and knowledge of legal principles. Each candidate was recommended for each of these subjects at the local level.

Moreover, the emperor retested all candidates using written examinations. The format of the tests questioned about political issues. At the end of the Han dynasty, the seemingly flexible recommendation system had become very corrupt. The dominant bureaucratic class recommended not a single candidate from the lower social class, and the emperor’s system of governance could no longer be considered meritocratic.

During the Three Kingdoms and the Southern and Northern Dynasties, a significant portion of the population migrated from their homeland to escape the violence of war. Thus, no person from home could be familiar with a candidate to recommend them. As a result, a new recommendation system that ranked talent in nine categories (the “nine-rank system,” 九品中正制) established to replace the old Cha-Ju system. The emperor set up criteria for the new nine-rank system, including accountability and stewardship (忠恪匪躬), filial piety and politeness (孝敬尽礼), friendliness to one’s siblings (友于兄弟), integrity and work ethic (洁身劳谦), honesty and responsiveness (信义可复), and learning for one’s own sake (学以为己; Qian, 2001).

Despite the emperor’s best intentions, under the practice of the nine-rank system, only the rich and powerful were selected (Wang & Xu, 2002). As compensation for the disadvantages of the Cha-Ju and nine-rank systems, the Ke-Ju exam (the “imperial” examination) started during the Sui Dynasty.

The imperial examination (Ke-Ju exam, 科举考试) was to select the best candidates according to their merit, to recruit them for the state's bureaucracy. The scores on the standardized test measured the candidates’ suitability for the official positions. Most scholars
(Chen, 1934, p. 1) agree that the standardized, imperial civil service examinations did not take place until the Sui dynasty. However, the Sui dynasty was short-lived; the Ke-Ju system did not reach maturity until the succeeding Tang dynasty (Fairbank, 1973). In A.D. 693, China’s first and only empress, Wu Zetian, greatly expanded the civil service examination system (Paludan, 2009). Subjects on the imperial exam during the Tang dynasty included poetry composition, recitation of Confucian classics, answers to political questions of the time, and for the military subjects, archery and horsemanship.

A candidate did not have to test on every subject, and those who achieved good scores in one subject had the opportunity to assume official positions. For example, people who were good at writing poetry were appreciated and greatly rewarded with higher social status by the noble class during the Tang dynasty. This tradition still influences the curriculum in China today; every student must recite an ancient Chinese poem, especially the poem written by a famous writer from the Tang dynasty. Andrew Kipnis (2011) stated that students were required to memorize Tang poetry. During a school, the session entitled “creative class” in his ethnography of the Zouping district, and the local schoolteacher justified his selection of class material by arguing that “nothing raised the students’ quality as Tang poem” (p. 72).

After its development during the Tang dynasty, the imperial examination became a significant way to procure an official government position during the Song dynasty (A.D. 960-A.D. 1279; Yu & Xiong, 2000). Teachers were drawn from among the candidates who passed only the preliminary examinations and were disqualified from progressing further (Jackson & Hayhoe, 1979). Many individuals moved from a lower social status to prominent positions through success in the imperial examination, including Wang Anshi, who became prime minister of the country. Due to the deficit in the government’s budget, Wang Anshi proposed reforming
the imperial exam system to make it more practical for economic growth. Tests in law, military affairs, medicine, and mathematics, were added to the system in A.D. 1104 (Mote, 2003).

However, the old bureaucratic class, who had achieved their social positions in the old exam system, strongly resisted reform. Official elites led by brothers Cheng Yi and Cheng Hao (1032 B.C.-1085 B.C.) devised new arguments called “Way Learning (道学)” (Elman, 2013, p. 15). They are deeply connected to form political opposition to Wang’s initiatives by “shifting the rhetoric from favoring an activist, political economy to returning to a conservative moral agenda” (p. 15). Zhu Xi’s interpretations of the Four Classics became the orthodox Neo-Confucianism that dominated later dynasties. Way Learning was the dominant influence in China’s education system until the Western modernization penetrated Chinese society during the early 19th century. The Cheng brothers’ work and Zhu Xi’s commentaries on the Confucian classics formed the core of China’s curriculum during the Yuan, Ming, and Qing Dynasties. Benjamin Elman summarized the ethical teaching of Way Learning: “First, the moral cultivation of literatus was the basis for self-awakening. Second, family and lineage accord derived from improving individual character, and last, the moral cultivation of officials would yield enlightened statecraft” (p. 15).

**Social Mobility under the Civil Examination System**

A classical education based on nontechnical classical moral and political theory was the main feature of a selection of elites in China during the late imperial stage (Elman, 2000, p. 126). The primary way to achieve Way Learning was through reading the Confucian classics and meditating to cultivate one’s self-awakening. During the Ming and Qing dynasties, the Four Books and Five Classics were the subjects of mandatory study for taking the imperial exams. Only Zhu Xi’s versions of these nine books with his commentaries could be used as official texts
to prepare for the exam. Elite education based on the Classics was taken as an essential way of governance by imperial rulers (p. 128). Also, the Chinese gentry viewed the Ke-Ju exam based on classical education as the most accurate measure of their merit. They believed that ancient wisdom properly cultivated men as leaders and prepared them to wield political power (p. 128).

Teachers played the role of a strict father in traditional Chinese schools. Though teachers received relatively low pay and lived in poor conditions, their influence on society was paramount (Purcell, 1936, p. 17), and both parents and students treated them with respect (Huang, 1986, p. 615). After the candidates had become government officials, any political discussion characterized by reference to the Confucian classics, and a person could not be one of the literati or even understand the policy text without having memorized these texts. At the beginning level of the education system, children had to memorize the Chinese characters of the “Three Character Classics” and the “Hundred Family Surnames.” They then went on to memorize the other classics.

The literate elite class, which became government officials through the imperial exam, therefore, shared a common culture and set of values. As noted by Suzanne Pepper (2000), the influence of the examination ultimately pervaded the whole society (p. 46). Through the mechanisms for bestowing local elite status and choosing government officials according to the exam, the Confucian tradition of merit was to legitimize imperial hegemony over administrative appointments. Confucian learning, imperial power, and bureaucratic authority were bound together in a mutually sustaining relationship that dominates Chinese intellectual life until the examination was abolished in 1905, and the 1911 revolution overthrow the imperial system (p. 47).
There is a debate in the literature about whether the imperial exam created social mobility for those who came from disadvantaged family backgrounds. The classical research by Ho Ping-ti (1964) used a quantitative method to investigate the family backgrounds of achievers who took civil service exams. He concluded that during the Ming Dynasty, 50% of achievers came from an ordinary background. The ratio declined to 37.2% during the Qing dynasty. Those achievers were able to climb up the social ladder and become part of the official elite class. Ho argued, "Confucian social ideology at once justified social inequality and upheld the principle that social status should be determined by individual merit" (p. 86). The effect of the institutionalized examination system on social mobility became more and more apparent after the mid-Tang period. During the last thousand years, there gradually arose a long series of proverbs and myths based on the Confucian meritocratic ideology (p. 86).

However, some researchers (Elman, 2000) do not agree with Ho Ping-ti, who described the Ke-Ju exam as the “ladder of success” for students from low-income families in imperial China. For example, Elman argued that classical education had become “the sine qua non for social and political prestige in national and local affairs” (p. 128). As indicated by Hilary Beattie’s (2009) research in Deng-Cheng County of Anhui province, most of the people who received official appointments after achieving high scores on the exam were from local elite literati and merchant families. Using newly available data sources, Elman (2000) concluded that entry into officialdom was still the prerogative of a slim minority of degree candidates (p. 26). Thus, the Ke-Ju exam was not a system designed to increase social mobility. Instead, it was a way of governance by the emperor and the elite class to preserve the status quo of the society.

Chung-Li Chang (2011) described a particular social group called the “gentry” in imperial China during the 19th century, which had recognized political and economic privileges.
The gentry as an elite group was not only the primary source of government officials at that time, but also provided extensive social services such as litigation, education, healthcare, and public infrastructure construction in their hometowns. As recognized political forces in these towns, most of the gentry were involved in organizing local militants against bandits when local governments were shorthanded. They were also in charge of public services like fundraising for local charity facilities, spreading Confucian beliefs, and documenting local histories. The degree statuses of the gentry, called Shengyuan, Ju-ren, and Jin-shi, were acquired by achieving top ranks in three levels of examination organized by the imperial government. Only those who passed the lower-level exam could obtain the status and qualify to attend the next level. As the level of the exam went up, the status of the gentry rose higher. The government chose talent from the pool and assigned those selected to local administrative official positions. The entry exam was open to males only.

Moreover, men whose parents held “inferior” jobs by the standard of that time, such as drama singers, servants with no freedom, and fishermen who lived on boats, were excluded from taking the exam in the very first round. Men who attended the first-round exam needed a written statement from an existing gentry member to prove that their family history was evident. It was common for sons of wealthy families to bypass the first-round exam by donating to the government. The government set the quota for successful candidates to get a qualification. Only a tiny percentage of candidates could enter the next level of the exam.

The exam is held once every three years. Some 32% to 37% of the entry-level gentry (Shenyuan) was acquired by donation rather than by exam. Regarding the content of the imperial review, the author found that Confucian classics dominated throughout the 19th century. At the same time, government management issues as a subject were common in the early years of the
Qing dynasty. The examinees were required to write prose within a strict format to state some selected Confucian beliefs, which mainly tested their literature and writing skills. Though the idea of reform was raised in the mid-1900s, the official trial to discontinue the old content and form of the exam did not happen until 1898, more than half a century after imperial China confronted the United Kingdom in the First Opium War.

In another book, *The Income of the Chinese Gentry*, Chang (1981) calculated and estimated the income of the gentry group. He found that this elite group lived far better lives than common laborers in imperial China even when they were not designated as government officials. He repeatedly stated that their elite status was mainly formed and defined by the results of the examinations organized by the imperial government, rather than by their ownership or heritage of the family property, such as farmland and stores. Via analyzing the life histories of the gentry group, Chang assumed that the imperial China of the 19\textsuperscript{th} century did not seem lacking in social mobility.

**Start of Modern Education in the Republic of China**

In the late 19\textsuperscript{th} century, Western works, including Darwinist works, were introduced into China. Many of these translated works brought new ideas to traditional Chinese intellectuals. For instance, Thomas Henry Huxley’s *Evolution and Ethics* was translated by Yan Fu in 1897, and the translator incorporated Herbert Spencer’s social Darwinism in the latter part of the book (Huxley & Yan, 2002). The idea of competition differs from traditional Confucian ethics of social harmony.

Many intellectuals influenced by Western thoughts sought government reform. During the early 20\textsuperscript{th} century (the late Qing period), a military invasion by other industrialized countries awakened the Chinese society to give up the old imperial examination system and acquire
knowledge regarding science and useful technologies from Western countries. China introduced and mimicked the Japanese model of schooling. New schools were built to teach the modernized curriculum, and the imperial exam was abolished in 1905. Nevertheless, the Confucian classics still held a prominent position in the education system until 1916, when mathematics, history, geography, and science were added (Jackson & Hayhoe, 1979, p. 220).

This sudden change in the meritocratic system created chaos among the old literati. However, with the fall of the Qing dynasty in 1911, its value system underwent an even more abrupt change. Dr. Sun Yat-sen, the founder of the newly risen Republic of China, developed an institution called the Examination Yuan. As one of the five independent organizations of government, the Examination Yuan was in charge of both the civil service exam and the evaluation of government officials. In 1912, the Republic of China declared its mission for education, which focused on moral and ethical education and used practical learning and national and civic education as well as aesthetic education to achieve that goal (注重道德教育，以實利教育、軍國民教育輔之,更以美感教育完成其道德).

The government also provided scholarships for students to study abroad. The written test was used to decide who could receive a government scholarship. Most of the overseas students went to Japan, the United States, and Europe to study at higher education institutions. Many of them returned to China afterward to assume official government positions.

To fulfill an invitation from his Chinese students, John Dewey visited China from 1919 to 1921. He witnessed the student movement against the Versailles Treaty on 4 May 1919 and decided to stay in China to introduce his philosophical ideas to interested Chinese intellectuals.
Reform was implemented in 1922 to mimic the American educational model (Jackson & Hayhoe, 1979, p. 220).

However, after the Kuomintang Nationalist Government came to power, it adopted centralized nationalist administrative structures rather than a democratic way of governing as in the United States. Schools, curricula, textbooks, and teachers came under strict government control (Jackson & Hayhoe, 1979, p. 220). For example, former Prime Minister Sun Yat-sen’s testament had to be remembered and recited in every school (He & Wen, 2008). According to Jackson and Hayhoe (1979), the teacher’s role during that time was that of a “model patriot,” serving the nation by training its youth.

During the Sino-Japanese War (1931-1937), many schools and universities had to escape to the southwestern part of China to avoid being stopped by Japanese invaders. Teachers and students insisted on instruction and learning despite great hardship while they traveled and lived in that area during the war. In enemy-occupied areas, students were forced to learn the Japanese language (He & Wen, 2008). After World War II, in 1947, the Kuomintang administration revived the Examination Yuan after the defeat of Japan. This system of examinations continues to the present in Taiwan, as does the regime itself, since the loss of the mainland to the Communist Party of China in 1949.

**Nation-Building and Equality of Education**

Strengthening of state power through the nation-building process in the educational system is always the theme in post-socialist China. As argued by Irving Epstein (1991), “the post-Mao era is a period where the power of the state has been reasserted as the ideological legitimacy of Maoism” (p. xviii). Andrew Kipnis’ (2012) research warned that the focus of scholarly work on globalization had masked the importance of Chinese nation-building to
contemporary social change. The consolidation of an education system that is deliberately planned to produce party-loving and patriotic human subjects is one of the aspects of the nation-building process. The Chinese central government has viewed the standardized curriculum and exam system as a tool to build a unified, patriotic, and party-loving national culture. “Exemplary governing,” what Borge Bakken (2000) called “exemplarity,” was reinforced in the Chinese education system, public merit models molded by the central government for young people to study and imitate.

Lisa Hoffman’s (2010) ethnographic research of “talent exchange” centers in the city of Dalian also found a disadvantage for rural migrant workers seeking jobs in the city. Moreover, she discovered that higher-education graduates and young professionals in China had grown accustomed to the market-oriented job market, as opposed to the allocation system in socialist China. She used the term “patriotic professionalism” to describe young professionals in China who actively engaged in self-focused career development while at the same time keeping the nation in mind. Moreover, she concluded that neoliberalism in China was “about the figuring of the state, rather than the retreat of the state and the end of governance” (Hoffman, 2010). As a result of patriotic education and propaganda beginning in kindergarten, it is no surprise that young professionals in China will always keep the nation in mind when talking about their careers to researchers from Western countries, especially when state power is so hegemonic. Talent exchange centers and job fairs in the universities are the open sides of the job market in China. However, many others find jobs and obtain prominent social positions through personal connections, authoritative family backgrounds, kinship, and nepotism. Mayfair Yang (1989) and Andrew Kipnis (1991) provide an excellent description of how guanxi (“relationship”) works in urban and rural Chinese contexts.
Elites Dualism and Meritocracy in Contemporary China

Zheng Yongnian (2013) described how China had transformed since 1978 under the rule of China's Communist Party (CCP), which was profoundly influenced by Chiang Kai-shek's Nationalist Party and the Soviet nomenklatura system (the political party system used in the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe). The writer stated that although Mao's social experiment only lasted from 1949-1978, the political system he established has survived. “Two essential principles” of the system, he wrote, are “Party control of the government and Party management of cadres.” To make this system work better, Deng, Mao’s successor, changed the cadre recruitment criteria to bring more technocrats to replace the revolutionary cadres, which Deng declared were more “revolutionized, better educated, more professionally competent and younger.” Technocracy, with some degree of meritocracy, is the leading status of governance for post-socialist China.

The combination of expertise and CCP membership was said to be the route to power for young people. In Stanley Rosen’s (1991) research of political education before the 1989 Beijing demonstrations, he noted that the CCP’s political control over the school system had relaxed during the period before the 1989 Tiananmen Square movement, which created an environment in which ideas were relatively open to discussion. Moreover, party membership was not a prerequisite for upward mobility, and young people had a variety of options to achieve success. He cited from the Chinese press the three ways to pursue a successful career in China: the black, the gold, and the red. The black way was to leave China to study abroad to earn a black graduation cap and gown. The gold way was the pursuit of wealth in business. The red way was to join the CCP and becoming a government official. He mentioned that in reality, many people joined the CCP after achieving business success to protect their wealth from extortion by local
cadres. With economic development, beginning in the 1980s, the party itself realized that attracting the “expert” had become more important than attracting the “red.”

The need for both “expert” and “red” professionals to sustain the governance of the CCP has created elite dualism in China. Research by Walder et al. (2000) using life history data from a nationally representative 1996 survey of urban Chinese adults revealed a dual career path for professionals and administrators. The conclusion was that in China, the enforcement of meritocratic principles had not been permitted to interfere with the principles of party loyalty and vice versa. The regime had created two-segmented “markets” for elites, in which educational credentials were vital for the attainment of elite professions. In contrast, political credentials were crucial for the achievement of elite administrative positions. Party membership was never a criterion for the achievement of professional positions, and a college education did not become a standard for administrative positions until the post-Mao period.

Xiaowei Zang (2004) studied the elite formation in China during the reform era. He pointed out that “the political elite is a central element of Chinese politics because it monopolizes resources, information, and power” (p. 1). He defined “elite dualism” as “a segmented bureaucratic labor market in which two distinctive career paths are established to evaluate and screen candidates for top posts in the Chinese government system and the hierarchy of the CCP respectively” (p. 1). Zang analyzed data of 1,588 political leaders in China and made the following conclusions: all candidates for elite positions were screened for human capital and political credentials. Nevertheless, those on paths to government positions were screened more vigorously for human capital, whereas those on paths to the CCP hierarchy were evaluated more vigorously for political loyalty. CCP seniority (as demonstrated by when the candidates joined the CCP or began to work for the CCP) played a more significant role in career advancement in
the CCP hierarchy than in the government system. University education degrees increased mobility rates in general for both career paths, but for those in the government system, they were of particular importance. The government system was more likely to co-opt intellectuals and professionals than the CCP hierarchy.

Recent research by Gregory Clark (2014) used family surnames to trace the social mobility of elite groups and found that social mobility rates in China under the communist social movement were just as low as in countries that had not experienced such social turmoil. The elite in the Qing Dynasty was still overrepresented at the top of Chinese society. Despite Mao’s efforts, “class enemies” are firmly entrenched within the current Communist government of China. This conclusion resonates with a study by Robert Walder and Songhua Hu (2009), who classified people as descendants of the old elites, landlords, and businesspeople before 1949 or descendants of the old poor, those whose forebears were tenants and workers before 1949. They concluded that the descendants of the old elites had to pursue professional careers instead of politics after 1949 because they were targets of discrimination by the Communist Party. However, they maintained advantages in educational attainment. Once discrimination officially ended after the Cultural Revolution, they performed much better in all occupations compared to the descendants of the old poor.

Although the existing research on elite dualism is based on data from leadership positions at the provincial level, the structure of governance of public institutions in China is similar to the top-to-the primary-level organizations. For example, public schools have a CCP secretary and principal. The principal position is on the career path of the government system, while the secretary is in the CCP system. The existing literature has concluded that meritocratic principles are applied more vigorously for those who seek to take government positions. At the same time,
loyalty to the party is more important for the CCP system. This segregated labor market is one of the features of post-socialist China, and it has a substantial impact on many aspects of social life as well as educational institutions.
CHAPTER THREE

RESEARCH METHODS

Why Oral History?

Oral history interviews were used as the principal methodology to achieve the goal of this study. Oral history allows the author to go through the range of time to gather details about changes in concepts and practices of merit. Further, it provides the life experiences of the teachers during the surging tide of the social transition beginning in 1977, which can help us understand their views of meritocracy and its relationship to their daily education practices. This session discusses the following questions: What is oral history as a data collection method? Compared with other research methods, why is oral history best suited to answer the research questions?

Oral history is now a multidisciplinary method used in many social science research fields. The Oral History Association has provided a general definition in its *Principles and Best Practices* (2009): “Oral history refers both to a method of recording and preserving oral testimony and to the product of that process.” Based on their understanding of the field, various authors have provided different definitions for the term oral history. Barbara Sommer and Mary Kay Quinlan (2002) argued in their book that the product of oral history is “primary-source material. It is created in an interview setting with a witness to or a participant in an event or a way of life to preserve the information and making it available to others.” This study uses the definition provided by Lynn Abrams (2010), which refers to oral history as “the process of
conducting and recording interviews with people to elicit information from them about the past” and “the product of that interview, the narrative account of past events” (p. 2). According to the definition, “oral history refers to both the practice of conducting interviews and all the subsequent stages of transcription and interpretation” (p. 3).

As argued by Patricia Leavy (2011), oral history as a research method of collecting narratives from individuals draws on the tenets of an oral tradition, in which stories are passed down through generations. This long history can be traced back to the beginning of Western culture when ancient Greek historians Herodotus and Thucydides used information from oral interviews in their works. Beginning in the Zhou dynasty of China (1122-256 B.C.E.), the emperor appointed official historians to record the sayings of people (Sharpless, 2006). In the Warring States period (475-221 B.C.E.), *The Analects*, the most critical work among the Confucian classics, was written by Confucius’s disciples to record their oral communication with their teacher.

Despite the long tradition of oral history practices, oral history began to be used as a modern technique for historical documentation only after tape-recording machines were invented. Columbia University historian Allan Nevins’ recording of persons significant in American life was commonly recognized as the beginning of this practice (North American Oral History Association, quoted in Thomson, 1998, p. 581). Nevins earnestly believed that to preserve the experience and story of elite people is imperative. In his words,

> the immense mass of information about the more recent American past ... which might come fresh and direct from men once prominent in politics, in business, in the professions, and other fields; information that every obituary column shows to be perishing. (quoted in Charlton et al., 2006, p. 21)

Thus, according to Nevins, oral history should focus on prominent people.
This notion was challenged and named the “great white men” school of oral history by later scholars (such as Gary Okihiro). In opposition to the elite oral history recorded in the 1950s and 1960s, oral historians began interviewing non-elites, ordinary people, which they described as history “from the bottom up” (Larson, 2006). Both schools have their advocates, and the elite/non-elite dichotomy is still one of the most controversial methodologies issues in the field. Nowadays, as Larson argued, most of those currently practicing elite oral history does not feel that it needs to be recorded to the exclusion of non-elite oral history, and they recognize that there is room for both types of interviewing. This study will be a hybrid of the two schools. All the interviewees are educators; some were chosen from among elementary school teachers, while others were selected from among professors at higher education institutions. Some of the potential interviewees are famous among Chinese educators, while others are ordinary schoolteachers, little known to outsiders of their everyday lives.

The epistemological and ontological foundations of oral history research often differ from those of quantitative research, which is based on the positivist understanding of social realities. As opposed to a linear model or hypothesis testing protocol, oral history research focuses on the meaning-making process of the interviewees. It also differs from conventional historical research. As Alessandro Portelli (2005) argued, one thing that makes oral history different is that while more conventional history is primarily interested in what happened, why it happened, how it happened, and who was responsible, oral history also asks another question: What does it mean? This study aims to understand teachers’ views of merit and how they make meaning in their everyday education practice to produce, recognize and award individual merit against the backdrop of dramatic social change in China from 1977 onward. As Leavy (2011) argued, oral history is based on a conception of research as a process rather than an event. The
practice of oral history assumes that meaning is not “waiting out there” to be discovered, but rather that meaning is generated during the interaction between the researcher and the interviewee (p. 7).

Neither the quantitative method nor conventional historical research could serve the research aim better than oral history. However, what about qualitative interviews? What is the difference between qualitative interviews and oral history? According to the Oral History Association’s *Principles and Best Practices* (2009), the most significant difference between the two is in the depth of the interviews. Oral history interviews typically span several interview sessions with one participant, with sufficient time allowed for the narrators to give their stories to the fullness that they desire. Oral history interviews seek an in-depth account of personal experience and reflections. The content of these interviews is grounded in reflections on the past, as opposed to commentary on purely contemporary events. As Alessandro Portelli (2005) stated, oral history is a work of relationships; in the first place, a relationship between the past and the present, an effort to establish, through memory and narrative, what the past means to the present; then, a relationship between the interviewer and the interviewee, and between the oral form of the narrative and the written or audiovisual form of the historian's product.

Oral history interviews also differ from interviews used in ethnography and folklore (Ritchie, 2003, 2011). Donald A. Ritchie (2003) provided an example:

An oral historian would most likely interview a husband and wife separately, seeking to identify the unique perspective of each spouse. A folklorist, being as interested in the way a story is told as in its substance, would interview the couple together to observe the interplay as one begins a story and the other finishes it.

In this study, each participant was individually interviewed by the researcher several times, allowing the participants sufficient time to reflect on their life experiences and changes in their values about education and individual merit. The following sessions deal with details of
Participants and Sampling

The study was carried out in Nanjing from June to November 2016. Nanjing is an urban city near the eastern coastal area of China. Since Nanjing is located between the Northern and Southern parts of China, it demonstrates the cultural traits of both regions. Besides, unlike Shanghai and Beijing, Nanjing has an education system that is similar to the majority of cities in China, with no particular priorities in terms of access to higher education (residents in cities such as Beijing and Shanghai may enjoy advantages such as lower admission scores or special local quotas when applying to universities in China).

A list of teachers who began teaching in 1978 was obtained from a file of such persons available through the Nanjing local school administration bureau. Nanjing Education Bureau Gulou District was the first place the researcher visited to obtain the contact information of potential participants. Gulou District has the most considerable number of key schools in Nanjing. An email and a short phone message were sent to each of the potential participants, outlining the purpose of the study. The researcher contacted each person who returned the email or short message, indicating an interest in participating in the research. Personal networks and snowball sampling were used to locate the participants of this study. Pre-interview phone calls, emails, messages, and online chatting were used before the formal interview to make appointments and to build rapport between the researcher and interviewees. Oral history interviews were carried out with 13 teachers who have been working in the education system since the start of the opening-up policy in 1977.
Pre-Interview Preparation

When a phone number was provided, phone contact was made with each of the potential interviewees. This form of communication offered an additional opportunity to explain the purpose of the study and to confirm the time, day, and place for conducting the tape-recorded oral history interview. During the phone conversation, the interviewer and interviewee discussed the necessity of the interviewee signing consent forms. Consent forms provided legal security for both the interviewee and the interviewer. The interviewer, in the consent form, promised to use the material obtained from the taped interview only for research purposes, instruction, publication, or other related academic purposes.

According to the requirements of the Principles and Best Practices of the Oral History Association (2009), after securing the narrator’s agreement to be interviewed, the interviewer scheduled an unrecorded meeting. This pre-interview session allowed an exchange of information between the interviewer and the narrator regarding possible questions/topics, reasons for conducting the interview, the process involved, and the need for informed consent and legal release forms. During the pre-interview discussion, the researcher needed to ensure that the interviewee acknowledged the purposes and procedures of the interview and the anticipated use of the research product. The necessity of signing consent forms by the interviewee and the interviewer was also discussed. Each participant was required to sign a consent form before the start of his or her first interview. The consent form explained that confidentiality would be granted, that participation was voluntary, and that the interview could stop at any time. Also, participants could choose to have their names revealed or substituted with pseudonyms. The researcher ensured that narrators understood the extent of their rights to the interview and the request that those rights be yielded to a repository or other party, including for potential
distribution electronically or online, as well as their right to restrict the use of the material. Participants were told that their recording(s) would remain confidential until they permitted otherwise through a signed legal release.

All the interviews were audiotaped using a Livescribe Pulse smartpen, and the participants were informed that they could ask the researcher to stop recording at any time or speak off the record. Before the interview, the interviewer became familiar with the equipment and knowledgeable about its function. To prepare to ask informed questions, the interviewer conducted background research on each person, topic, and the broader context using both primary and secondary sources. The documentary analysis includes examination papers, national and local education policies, textbooks, curriculum plans, and documents of classroom architecture. Most of the analysis was done before the interview so that the researcher could better understand each interviewee’s life experiences. Also, the document analysis serves as triangulation to the oral history interview. With permission from participants, the researcher also observed the classrooms and workplaces where participants worked.

Before the interview, the interviewer sent the questions that were to be asked to all the interviewees through email. An accompanying letter informed the participant that the recorded interview would involve asking and answering all of the listed questions, hopefully within the two-hour time frame.

**Interview and Questions to be Asked**

The interview sites included participants' offices or other locations quiet enough for audio recording and within a comfortable distance for participants to travel. The participants chose the locations where there were minimal background noises and possible distractions. The length of each interview session was 60-120 minutes. The number of interview sessions was decided by
whether the interview covered the questions. If the first interview session did not cover the life story and content of this research, a second session was held. The researcher discussed details of continuing sessions with the participants after the first interview.

The interviewees were told that the recorder could and would be stopped by the interviewer at any time, for example, when an interviewee (a) had a question about how to answer one of the items on the interview instrument, (b) needed time to think through an answer, (c) needed a rest break, or (d) was interrupted either by the telephone ringing or by a person entering the interview area.

Moreover, the interviewees were permitted the opportunity to bring up other relevant subject matter before or during the interview. The interviewer encouraged interviewees to respond to questions in their style and language and to address issues that reflected their concerns. The researcher thoroughly explored all appropriate areas of inquiry with interviewees and declined to be satisfied with superficial responses.

One of the difficulties of this research was to discern themes of meritocracy from the narratives of the teachers’ personal life experiences through historical events. To achieve the study goal, the researcher first asked basic descriptive questions to give the participants more space to tell their life stories and then asked more structured questions to encourage the participants to focus on their understanding of meritocracy. Since all the participants were both educators and students who had attended schools in socialist China, talking about thoughts related to talent, merit, and later reward would naturally reflect their careers and social lives. The following questions served as a guide for the conversation between the interviewer and the narrator. However, all questions were subject to change during the interviewing process. Based on the background information of individual interviewees obtained before the interview, more
questions were added to the list below:

1. When did you begin teaching as a career? What was the motivation behind your choice to be an educator?
2. When and where did you receive your education? What do you think is the most critical ability/knowledge/value that you acquired through your education?
3. Can you walk me through a typical day at your job? What aspect of your job do you think you should put more emphasis on?
4. What are the essential characteristics, personalities, or traits that you believe your students should cultivate through school life? Why do you think so? And has your belief changed over time?
5. During your career, did you notice any changes in parents’ and students’ expectations for a school education or your job as a teacher?
6. During your career, did you notice any changes in the government or school requirements for your job as a teacher?
7. In your opinion, what kind of student can be called an “ideal” student, and what qualification of students do you view most highly in your teaching experiences? Have these often highly viewed qualifications changed throughout your career? If so, what are the reasons for those changes?
8. In your opinion, what student characteristics do you not appreciate and want to prevent in your teaching practice?
9. Did you observe any changes in how student performance was evaluated during your teaching career? If so, how did these changes in standards influence your teaching methods?
10. According to your standards of success, do you know any students who became “very
successful” in their adult lives? If so, who are they? Are there any common characteristics among those “successful” students while they were in school? Did you observe any gap or linkage between a “successful person” and a “good student” in the education system?

11. What are the most important features/qualifications that you believe should be required for people to attain top social positions? Why do you think so?

12. What are your expectations for a male student to be a “good person” and or a “successful man”? Are these expectations differ from those for a girl to be a “successful woman”? Why do you think so? Moreover, do you think those opinions have changed your life?

13. Is there anything you wish to add to our conversation today?

Transcription and Archive Process

Immediately followed the interview, the recordings were replayed by the interviewers to see if any clarification was needed from the narrator. This reviewing procedure helped ensure that all names, dates, and place names were correct before transcription by a trained transcribing typist. The recording was then delivered to the professional typist to prepare in transcript form. A photocopy of the completed transcript was sent to each interviewee. If minor corrections were to be made by the interviewee to the typescript, it was returned to the interviewer with the suggested changes noted. The transcribing typist then made typing corrections or modifications. If no corrections were necessary, the interviewee kept the photocopy of the completed typescript as a permanent copy of the interview. All interviews were transcribed verbatim in Chinese, and parts of the transcription were translated into English during the writing process. When the research was completed, and after the interviewees had signed the release form, the original transcripts of this study were archived in the Nanjing Library and made available to the public.
Coding and Data Analysis

The transcripts of the interviews were the main body of analysis. They were triangulated by other materials, such as exam papers, policy documents, and newspapers—those sources of information integrated into a chronological sequence—coding based on the sequential events and common categories in the transcripts. Firstly, the interviewer became familiar with all the materials at hand, while at the same time jotting down analytic memos during the process. Those analytic memos served as a bridge from coding to the final write-up (Leavy, 2011).
CHAPTER FOUR
THE MERIT IDEAL AND ROLE MODELS

This paper examines the concept of merit in the Chinese meritocracy through oral history interviews focused on the merit ideals from the teacher’s perspective. During the interviews, teachers were asked to describe their views of the character of the ideal student.

Academic Performance

Not surprisingly, good study habits and excellent academic performance are the top criteria mentioned by most teachers. They singled out good study habits, although they understood that many other factors might influence students’ academic performance. For example, many teachers described how parents’ views and behaviors influence their children’s performance in schools. Nevertheless, almost all the teachers believed that studying hard, and effectively, is students’ top priority and that they must fulfill this obligation. Moreover, teachers felt that if students cannot succeed academically, it indicates they may not be effective in their jobs in the future. To be a student is considered an occupation for the child; to do the job well is the criterion that characterizes the ideal individual.

Mr. Li is a math teacher at Senior Middle School Affiliated to Nanjing Normal University. He provided an example of an ideal student, who studied well when in school, and later became a high-level general in the Chinese army. This student was in Mr. Li’s high school class during 1965-1968. Though their study was interrupted by the Cultural Revolution in 1966, according to Mr. Li, many students in the class later became very successful.
One of my students, who is now a general in the army, cares about his classmates. Moreover, when my wife got sick, he asked people to send gifts to us. He has already achieved very high status, but he still respects teachers. Every time he goes to Nanjing, he gets all of his classmates together to celebrate. He is very good at his profession. I know this because he liked to study when he was in school. That is why the study is so vital for a student. Because as a student, studying is your business, and if you cannot study well, you probably cannot work well anywhere in the future. (Oral historical interview, October 9, 2016)

Mr. Li gave another example of an excellent female student who graduated from high school in 1984.

She later came to study Chemistry in the United States. She is now around fifty years old. When she came back to communicate with us, she said she was among the top 50 scholars in her field of study, and she is a professor with tenure. (Oral historical interview, October 9, 2016)

Narrators often mentioned, “Studying well (学习好),” “good study habits (良好的学习习惯),” and “efficiency of learning (学习效率)” as the most critical factors in being a good student. Below is Ms. Zhang’s description of an ideal student. She is a history teacher at Nanjing’s top senior middle school. She believes self-discipline and high efficiency of learning are the most critical standard for high school students. She discussed her standard for nowadays students:

I think a good student is one who “acts as a student”—those who actually can get their work done, i.e., they study diligently and work hard no matter what their current level is. Different people have different abilities. Their cognitive skills also vary. I believe a student needs to form good study habits. I will declare my requirements when I see my new students for the first time at the beginning of their first semester in high school. First is self-discipline, which includes all the rules and regulations. The second is the efficiency of learning. You need to learn fifteen courses in the first year. If you do not care about efficiency, you cannot correctly learn even one course. (Oral historical interview, August 23, 2016)

Teachers in China often introduce a “study method” to the students or let the role model students introduce their study methods to others. They believe this is critical to improving one’s
efficiency of learning. In many teachers’ views, progress in the academic record is due to an improved “study method,” better work habits, or proper educational interventions rather than superior human intelligence, talent, or family background. In other words, Chinese educators tend to believe that efforts in schools benefit the overall development of an individual and could later be transferred to better social positions. Merit, as indicated by one’s academic performance, can be created through students’ effort.

The basics of a study method often consist of three parts: previewing lessons for the next school day, listening carefully and actively to the teachers during class, and reviewing lessons learned before doing homework. The study method is emphasized by the headteacher of the class from elementary school to middle school. Teachers and parents believe students must form a habit of following the three steps. When a student achieves high academic scores, he or she is often asked by the teachers to introduce his or her experience or creative development of the primary method, such as how to jot down and organize notes, how to distribute study time on each step, and so forth.

Students have to be industrious to fulfill the study method and maintain a good academic score. In practice, the three steps of the study method are usually burdensome for students to fulfill, especially when they already have large amounts of homework to do every day. In the preview step, students’ self-study or skim the textbook before the school day and note questions that they cannot understand by themselves. In the second step, students listen to the teachers during class and use another structure for shorthand, which leaves one-third of the notebook blank for later thoughts. At the same time, students pay attention to the points that they could not understand during the preview step. If those questions were not answered during the class, students are expected to talk to their teachers after class. In the last step, students read through all
the notes and textbook chapters that were mentioned during the school day and write down their own opinions in the part of the notebook that was intentionally left blank. After the review step, students begin working on their homework.

With the growing awareness of the importance of education, competitions on the quality of education also increased. In recent years, many teachers have felt the weight of increasing parental expectations for their children, especially regarding academic scores. Ms. Yang, who teaches at Nanjing Confucius Temple Elementary School, said changes were also taking place in teaching methods. The curriculum and textbook were the core of classroom study. Experienced teachers had an excellent acquisition of the content of the textbook. They were good at teaching existing knowledge. The traditional teaching method was summed up by Ms. Yang, as the “one textbook and one chalk” method. The teacher taught according to the public curriculum, which has listed out all the knowledge points and skills required by the exams.

My previous teaching method can be summed up in one word: “one textbook and one chalk.” I had a conscious idea about how to teach and what to teach. After many years of teaching, I was so familiar with the curriculum that I could explain every key point without looking at the textbook. The mission was to equip the students with a solid foundation of knowledge. (Oral historical interview, October 31, 2016)

Starting from the New Curriculum Reform (新课程改革) in 2001, teachers could not teach just according to the textbook. They should also teach students how to learn and to discover knowledge by themselves. As a result, the public curriculum no longer limited the contents to be covered in the exam. Students have to learn content that may not be covered by the school syllabus to get higher scores in the exam. Ms. Yang criticized current exam requirements for students, which include too many items (about 30%) based on extracurricular information.
Now that we have started to use multimedia and PowerPoint, especially since the new curriculum reform, the whole teaching concept is cross-disciplined and multi-faceted. I once told students that they would have no problems as long as they could follow me in class and understand all the key points I taught. However, now, even if a student can grasp all the knowledge in the textbook, he or she can only get 70 points (out of 100) because the other 30 points are entirely extracurricular. (Oral historical interview, October 31, 2016)

The prevalence of private tutoring in Nanjing since the late 1990s potentially helped those students who can afford tutors to fulfill the gap that required extracurricular learning. A student’s academic performance as individual merit was increasingly influenced by his or her family resources.

**Integrity and Morality**

In addition to academic performance, many teachers also mentioned integrity and willingness to help others as important personal traits for ideal students. During the transition from 1978 to the present, though the basic moral requirements and principles for students remain the same, teachers’ views on meritocracy had gone through some changes.

From the end of the 1970s to the beginning of the 1980s, the school education focused on the egalitarian principles of the whole society, especially the ethos of the working class, soldiers, and farmers. According to Ms. Wang Weizhonog, who worked as a politics teacher at Nanjing Foreign Language School during the time, it was imperative for students to “build awareness of populism (平民意识), a consciousness of egalitarianism (平等意识),” and to “care about people that are suffering (关心人间疾苦)”. Ms. Wang often led her students to visit the countryside to learn from farmers or factories to learn from workers. Those activities were often carried out in a physically challenging environment, with the purpose to chasten students’ volition (磨炼意志).

I felt that the social ethos (风气) at that time was pure and simple. Everyone voluntarily and sincerely tried to learn from workers, farmers, and the PLA (People's Liberation
Army of China). All the people were willing to eat bitterness (bear hardships, 吃苦), and to build a strong will through exercises (锻炼意志). We cannot learn these character from the textbooks. Nowadays, kids drenched in honey water (泡在蜜水中). They do not even know what the hardship is. They heard stories of the Chinese Red Army, just like hearing stories from the book of Arabian Nights (天方夜谭).

Many interviewed teachers noticed a trend from socialist altruism to present-day individualism. They compared present-day students with their students in the 1980s, said that previous students had more natural and straightforward personalities and cared about others. They think the changes may be due to the single-child policy. For example, Ms. Zhang Li pointed out that many children now are the only child of the family. They have been pampered and spoiled at home since infancy. “In that case, if a kid can put the self-centered thinking away to help and care for others, I think it is better for their character” (Zhang L., personal communication, August 23, 2016).

Professor Tong Qiang described students and teachers in the 1980s as “more traditional (更传统)” than students today. According to Professor Tong, “the traditional Chinese culture deems success as the inner peace of one’s mind. One confirms his or her value based on his or her mental status rather than getting success from the outside environment” (Personal communication, September 21, 2016). “As Chinese people, we appreciate those who do things steadily and modestly. Like the goal in Taoism philosophy, to discard all desires and worries from one's mind and be calm (清净, 无为, 沉静).” “I find many young people today are so fragile and anxious when they were confronting some crisis, and when they had to deal with their emotions and their heart.” “I think those traditional cultures would help today’s students” (Personal communication, September 21, 2016). Professor Tong mentioned an example when one of his students asked his parents to come to the university and meet him, for a discussion
about raising the score of their son on one of the courses that were taught and rated by Professor Tong.

Many teachers said they had a closer relationship with students back in the 1980s. They recalled that the schedules in schools were more flexible at that time; they could have more time to communicate with their students. Mr. Li Jun cherished the days when he taught in a village school in the 1980s when the school schedule was not as intense as it is today (the comparison of school schedules is in Chapter Six). Students could arrange their activities after school. Students learned how to connect with people as they enjoyed leisure time with their classmates and teachers. Mr. Li felt that education at the time helps students find their interests, which is a better way to develop the students’ overall Suzhi.

Many of my former students are in their 40s now. When we had a chance to get together, we found life before was extremely frugal, especially for kids from farmers’ families. One of my students had the highest English score when in school. He then majored in English at Tianjin University and went to a university in New York. Now he is teaching in Macau. When he came back to the village, he met several times with his classmates. We chatted about school life back then. (Oral historical interview, September 14, 2016)

Students at that time did not know what learning meant for their future. They studied out of their genuine interests. Schools did not have exact requirements for academic performance. The only requirement was that teachers should treat students well. At that time, we had regular after-school leisure time. The facility was not very good, but we were delighted to be doing sports or other hobbies. Some students did not get into prestigious colleges, and they went into business instead. It turned out to be great. That is real suzhi education from my perspective. It is hard to find pure learning motivation nowadays. Parents and students now are more utilitarian and sophisticated. (Oral historical interview, September 14, 2016)

Some teachers noted an overemphasis on students’ academic records and an oversight of education necessary to develop a student’s personality and character. They were concerned about the overemphasis of students’ academic scores, which leads to ignoring other forms of education crucial to students’ overall character and honesty. Since the end of the Cultural Revolution, the interviewed teachers have witnessed a massive transition from political and moral censorship for
every student to “exam-centered” school education, in which only the Gaokao score matters. Many teachers spoke about their disagreement with the education ideas of today’s parents, who ask about scores for every exam and compare them with those of other students in their child’s class. In this environment of competition, students’ overall development is sometimes ignored in their families and schools.

In the conversations with teachers, some mentioned the popular discourse that deems millennials in China “exquisite egoists (精致的利己主义者).” The word is used to describe young people who are smart and sophisticated, good at obtaining the resources they need to climb the social ladder. At the same time, they are self-centered and indifferent. They do not care about other people or society as a whole. The exquisite egoist discourse was started by Qian Liquin (2017), a Chinese literature professor at Peking University, who said in 2013 at a non-public symposium in Beijing,

universities in China, including top universities, are cultivating students who are sophisticated and crooked (老奸巨猾) even at only 20 years old. They are intelligent, worldly, and good at acting and flattering. They are apt at using the current system to achieve their goals. Once these persons gain access to power and status, there will be more harm (to society) than that caused by corrupt government officials.

The speech became viral on the internet after someone released it on social media.

Many interviewed teachers have heard about the “exquisite egoists” discourse. They also noticed a trend from socialist altruism to present-day individualism. As an English teacher in Nanjing’s top senior middle school, Mr. Li Jun was familiar noticed some phenomena that would evidence Professor Qian Liquin’s observation. However, he stated that it was not as severe as the situation described by Professor Qian. “The changes were due to the social environment, not only the students or the schools,” said Mr. Li. Exam-based education pushed students to take any measures necessary to achieve a high grade.
Some colleges require a high GPA in high school, so in recent years students would purposely try to establish a closer relationship with teachers to get higher grades, which did not happen before. It is not the fault of the current students. Times have changed, and students have to do this now. Education now has too many exams. Exams do not care much about the integrity of a person. I know many students who get excellent grades, but I am not sure if they do things the right way. I am sure some kids are only out for themselves. I feel they do not care about other people at all. It is hard to convince me that they can do anything significant for their school or the organization they serve, not to mention for their country. I think this is due to the broader environment and is not only a failure of school education. (Oral historical interview, September 14, 2016)

Professor Tong Qiang also found today students showed less “pure curiosity for further knowledge” (纯粹的求知欲) compared with previous students. Their curiosity was hidden by the prevalent functionalism (功能化) and utilitarianism (功利化). According to the observation by Professor Tong, current students were different from their previous generations in “their ways of doing things, their thoughts, and their behavior patterns.”

For instance, students chose this course because there is academic credit for completing it. The first thing they consider is credit. Why do they take the exams? Because the exam would be useful for them in a future time. (Oral historical interview, September 21, 2016)

According to Professor Tong, one of the reasons for the changes is that today’s students are undergone higher pressure from the outer environment, especially from the job market (Personal communication, September 21, 2016). Compared with students in the 1980s, who do not have to worry about finding jobs after graduation, today’s students bear more anxiety about their career.

Students in the 1980s would not think about other things. They sincerely believed that they only need to study well in schools. It is different from current students. The priority for students today is to find a job after graduation, which is considerable pressure for them. They always think about finding a job during all the years in schools. (Oral historical interview, September 21, 2016)

Professor Tong believes the changes in students reflects the changes in the social structures (社会结构) and the requirement of the society (社会需求). Compared with the old
days, today’s society needs more and more professional technicians. With the specified division of the different academic fields, to cultivate a person who has a good sense of humanities is a complicated thing.

People feel that all the problems would be solved once the technical problems were fixed. That is why today’s schools and universities are cultivating an increasing number of specialized technicians. (Oral historical interview, September 21, 2016)

Interviewed teachers found character traits of being honest, being willing to help others, and being true to oneself are essential personal traits in an ideal student. Especially in nowadays circumstances, those traits are precious and hard to be seen in their students. Mr. Yu Xuchu, a senior Chinese language teacher at Nanjing Jinling High School, summed up four attributes that he believed to be essential in an ideal student: first, the pursuit of noble goals; second, individuality; third, independence of opinion; and fourth, responsibility. However, he said too few students could ever meet the four standards. When he met new students for the first time, he would say, “Since today you are beginning to be a young man rather than a teenager, you should have new requirements for yourself.” At the same time, he would write four words on the blackboard in the classroom: “pursuit of truth, eagerness to learn, pragmatism, and honesty (求真, 好学, 务实, 守信).” He would then explain to the students that “this means not stopping at empty talk; try to do what you believe is right and always be trustworthy” (Yu, Oral historical interview, September 2, 2016).

Through the transition from 1978 to the present, socialist egalitarian moral principles were weakened by merit ideals that focus on individuals, such as “to be true for one’s real self,” “to learn according to one’s interests.” At the same time, many interviewed teachers also observed the overemphasis on self-advancement in today’s students, as depicted by the “exquisite egoists” discourse. Traditional selfless devotion has been replaced by self-awakening
Discipline and Obedience

Discipline and obedience were emphasized in every school in Nanjing. However, compared with the student manual or code of conduct in the United States, the rules and regulations in China’s schools are usually obscure, making them difficult for students to follow. Students and parents can find only basic principles rather than clear written procedures for the consequences of misbehavior. During my research in Nanjing, high school teacher Mr. Wang shared with me a student portfolio book, which replaced the old student report card (this recorded only academic scores) after the New Curriculum Reform in 2012. The portfolio recorded family background, academic scores, physical and health data, and extracurricular activities for each student. “The national rule for elementary and middle school students” was printed on the title page of the portfolio.

1. Love the motherland, love the people, and love the Chinese Communist Party.
2. Abide by the laws and regulations, strengthen legal consciousness, follow the school rules and regulations, and obey social ethics.
3. Love science, study hard, think diligently, and ask questions. Be willing to explore. Actively participate in social practices and beneficial activities.
4. Love your life, keep safe, exercise, and pay attention to hygiene.
6. Take part in labor, thrift, and simplicity, doing anything for yourself that you can do.
7. Show filial piety to parents, respect teachers, and be polite to others.
8. Love the team, unite as classmates, help each other, and care for others.
9. Be honest and trustworthy, a person of integrity. Learn quickly from your mistakes and be conscientious.

10. Love nature and protect the environment.

In these merit principles, political rightness is rule number one, the highest priority. Discipline and obedience are second. Studying hard and loving science (not humanities but may include some social sciences) is in third place. Physical health is in fourth. As rule number one, patriotic behaviors like loving the country and the Communist Party are an official requirement rather than a choice for every Chinese student. However, there is no specific explanation of what kind of behaviors or conduct are considered a violation of the requirement.

In the conversations with teachers, examples of punishment after breaking rule number one happened before or during the Cultural Revolution. Professor Ouyang recalled a memorable experience in 1957 when he was publicly criticized for providing instruction to a “rightist” student.

It was during lunchtime at the teachers’ dining hall. I heard the public radio was reading public critics against me. My full name was on that announcement, which was written by a student. He challenged me because I instructed the “rightist” student, whose last name is Tang. He wrote in the critics, “where is your standpoint, Mr. Ouyang?” I was astonished when I heard the critics, and I was not afraid. I think it’s not a problem with his standpoint. Tang is a student. I am a teacher, teach him is my job, no matter what his political position is. (Ouyang, Oral historical interview, October 12, 2016)

Many students were defined as the “rightist” during the Anti-rightist Campaign led by Mao Zedong from 1957 to 1959. According to Professor Ouyang, the school had the authority that categorizes students into rightists, though teachers were reluctant to do so.

Many students and teachers were defined as rightists during the time. Our principal did not want to destroy their lives by putting them into the rightist category. Once you were defined as right-wing, you will be sent to the labor camp. The situation in Beijing was much worse. Many people had to receive reform because of their behaviors. (Ouyang, Oral historical interview, October 12, 2016)
The main reason for being categorized as the “rightist” was those students and teachers challenged the communist party by giving suggestions during the Hundred Flowers Campaign. At first, people were encouraged by the authority to express their ideas and critics to the government. As “flowers of every kind need to blossom.” Those who spoke out during the campaign were categorized as the “rightist” and received severe punishments. Professor Ouyang recalled the situation at the time.

In 1956, Chairman Mao hoped everyone to advise the Party (the CCP). The so-called free airing of views. Many people raised critical views. So he cannot stand it. Both students and teachers were caught after them speaking out criticism. There was even a quota for how many people must be categorized as the rightist, those rightist students cannot graduate, and they received serious consequences after that. (Ouyang, Oral historical interview, October 12, 2016)

Consequences of those “misbehaviors” varied with the historical context but were generally decided by the school authorities or the local governing agencies of the Party. According to Professor Ouyang, during the Cultural Revolution, every teacher was required to submit their background information. “Especially for those who had attended the Nationalist Party, and who went back to China from foreign countries, special investigation groups were formed to look into those cases. Some teachers even got hit by the investigation group members.” After 1978, those cases decreased.

However, official or tacit propaganda promoting socialist principles and values were still prevalent in every aspect of school life. Parents and teachers are aware of the existence of rule number one. They do their best to prevent students from suffering the consequences of breaking the rule. In his two-year observation of a typical college in China’s southwestern town Fulin, Peter Hessler noted that students might not fully understand those metaphysical words as “socialistic successors,” descendants of a twisted history with a socialist character. However,
those who grew up in such an environment internalized the rules, which warned them in the back of their minds when certain lines were being crossed. Teachers that I interviewed were educated and worked in the system; automatically, they would signal out during the conversation whenever self-censorship began to take effect. However, almost every teacher that I interviewed agreed that the test score is the most critical thing that dominates every aspect of school life. Political education, which includes role-model-learning activities, anniversaries, and commemorations, constitutes only a tiny percentage of students’ time in school, but every educator knows its importance.

Apart from rule number one, changes have taken place in recent decades in students' and parents’ attitudes toward following school regulations and obeying authority. Many teachers have noticed the changes in parents’ expectations for their children’s behavior in schools. In the 1980s and 1990s, discipline and obedience were emphasized in schools, and students were often required to act uniformly. For example, they were instructed to wear the young pioneer red scarf and the school uniform every day, to cut their hair in the same short style, and to sit up straight in the same manner when in the classroom. Most people followed those norms and did not express their opinions about these school regulations. Ms. Yang Yijing found that nowadays, parents want their kids to be more outgoing, active, and free-minded. Thus, they take a more “democratic” approach to educating their kids (Yang, Oral historical interview, October 20, 2016). As narrated by Principal Yang,

When I started to work as a teacher in the 1980s, many parents did not have very high suzhi. They trusted the teacher, and if the teacher said yes, they never said no. Also, they did not have many requirements for teachers. However, this has changed now. Many parents have a pretty clear idea of how to educate their children. For example, some parents tell me they feel the teachers oppress their children. They do not want their kids to sit still all the time in school. They want their kids to be educated in a “Western democratic” way. They say their kids call parents by their first names at home, which
indicates an equal relationship between child and parents. (Yang, Oral historical interview, October 20, 2016)

Parents’ “Western-style” educational ideas have challenged the norm in school education. For instance, elementary schools and even some preschools in China often have specific requirements for children’s sitting position. As I observed in two elementary schools in Nanjing, students are expected to sit upright, with their arms crossed in front of their chests. When they need to talk in the classroom, they must raise their hands and wait for the teachers to notice their requests. This sitting position is said to beneficial for the children’s physical development, and more importantly, it allows the teacher to manage the class more efficiently, with every student’s movements in the teacher’s eyes. I was an elementary student in Nanjing during the beginning of the 1990s. I noticed the requirement for classroom discipline did not change much in today’s schools. This sitting position is not natural, so it requires much training at the beginning of first grade. The teacher will often reward the student who sits straight quickly with their arms crossed on the table. As narrated by Ms. Bai Jing, Oral praise, such as “Zun Shou Ji Lv” (遵守纪律, keep ruly and disciplined), will be given to the student. To stay disciplined also is often used as criteria for the student excellence contest every year.

I often praise students who can keep ruly and disciplined (遵守纪律), and those who listen carefully to the teachers in the classrooms. I also appraise students who actively participated in group activities and those who like to help others. In addition to verbal praise, we have point cards to record the rewards. Students will collect stamps on the card when they got to progress. (Bai, Oral historical interview, October 20, 2016)

However, interviewed teachers who worked in elementary schools have found in recent years, an increasing number of parents have begun to challenge their preference for students who behave according to the school norms. Teachers are finding it more difficult than before to keep order in the classroom. Some students even lie on the ground in the classroom. When a small
group of students tries to “break the discipline,” it is harder for the other 50 students to keep silent and listen to the teachers. Many parents obtain information about education in Western countries, where students are not required to sit in one position. These parents have begun to challenge the school’s requirements for students in Nanjing. As Ms. Yang said:

Many parents talked to me that they do not want their kids to sit according to the rule. We required students to hold their arms and sit straight during the class. Some parents felt that they advocated the “western democratic style (西方民主式的).” They disagree with us on their kids’ education. They said they want democracy. Their children just call them by names when in their families. (Oral historical interview, October 20, 2016)

In Principal Yang’s opinion, there is propaganda in China’s mass media about how democratic the Western classroom is. With the high student-to-teacher ratio in China’s public schools, keeping a foundation of order is ever more critical. In Yang’s words:

For those parents, democracy is just a name, a symbol, but they did not know the more profound meaning for the whole society. An equal relationship between the children and their parents should embody in many respects. Their kids know no rules and discipline; they do not show respect to their teachers and people who are older than them. They do not follow the rules in public spaces, and their parents will not allow our teachers to take control.

At least kids in Western countries still know they should not interrupt others. It is imperative to follow the order in public spaces. There is no conflict between democracy and social order. (Oral historical interview, October 20, 2016)
Choose a Specialty

Except for the requirement of comprehensive Suzhi (综合素质), many teachers mentioned that having a specialty is becoming increasingly important for today’s competition in education, especially for students who want to attend elite universities. As William Deresiewicz (2014) argued in his book, Excellent Sheep—The Miseducation of the American Elite and the Way to a Meaningful Life, the admission standards and criteria of elite universities in developed countries have had a worldwide influence (p. 25). Students in China and India prepare for these qualifications in the same way as their U.S. peers. All key schools in Nanjing have admissions policies that favor students with unique abilities, such as athletes, musicians, and performing artists. Wang Weizhong has been a senior teacher in charge of the college recommendation process for many years at Nanjing Foreign Language School (NFLS). Ms. Wang introduced many excellent students who have entered elite universities inside and outside of China. All of them are both versatile and unique in some aspects. Moreover, they all successfully found a proper way to get their specialty quantified or exposed for consideration as merit.

Liqian Chen is our first graduate admitted to Yale University. She has an excellent academic score and is an outstanding athlete in aerobics. The first graduate admitted by Harvard, FeiFei Yi, is a student leader in class and has performed considerable volunteer work.

Luobin Xia, who has also gotten into Yale University, has sent her paper cuttings to the president of the International Olympic Committee, Mr. Rogge, who visited Nanjing during the Youth Olympic Games. She cut out a side view of Mr. Rogge’s figure in only a few minutes using a traditional Chinese paper-cutting technique. Mr. Rogge was so amazed by her talent. We asked Xia how she learned it. Said her grandma taught her when in third grade. Alongside her ability in paper-cutting, her English is excellent, and she has a logical mind for math and science subjects. When the media came to interview her, one of her consultants, who helped her prepare her college application, said this girl has a high standard of integrity, and she is very Chinese.

Besides these, some students once founded a redology society, in which they study the classic Chinese novel Dream of the Red Chamber together. In another case, we have students who are interested in psychology. Nevertheless, that is not all—of course,
we also have groups interested in soccer, volleyball, basketball, choir, music, and photography, and so forth. (Oral historical interview, August 19, 2016)

Ms. Wang gave me several examples of the importance of a specialty. There is also a technique to make a hobby or ability so unique that it can be noticed as a specialty: First, schools and parents encourage students to participate in events or competitions that are international or famous, such as the Olympic Games, the world fair, or other international competitions. Second, they use those ethnic or special tags to make the merit appealing and unique. Many teachers witnessed a renaissance of traditional Chinese culture in the field of education after the year 2000. “What belongs to a nation also belongs to the world (民族的就是世界的)” became a famous saying, demonstrating a growing national pride and awareness of cultural identity following the economic development in China. An increasing number of parents send their children to learn traditional rituals, classic literature, ancient musical instruments, or Chinese folk culture.

During my visit to Nanjing Confucius Temple Elementary School, I noticed a picture on the wall near the school gate, a poster of students who participated in the school’s “national music group (国乐团).” The group has received many rewards for its performance, themed “The Book of Rites (礼记),” and has even performed in Vienna and Taiwan. Each student gave a brief introduction of his or her accomplishments and mottos. For example, “the chime bell player, who came from “the second-grade Young Pioneer group (about 7 to 8 years old),” is a versatile boy. He has used his free time to pass the fourth level of piano playing, the third level of hard-tipped pen calligraphy writing, and the third level of percussion music playing.” Every student has won several awards, such as a “three-merit student” or the top prize in a competition broadcasted on television. The motto of the fourth-grade Chinese dulcimer player (written next to her
accomplishments) is “make the unremitting effort, and you will achieve ultimate success.” Their specialty playing ancient Chinese musical instruments is quantified and displayed in front of their school entrance. Those students are considered role models for other students to learn from and mimic.

Figure 1. Photograph from Confucius Temple Elementary School in Nanjing
Role Models

The use of models and exemplars is one of the salient features of China’s education system. As argued by Wu Jinting (2016), “governing by exemplarity” is necessary for China’s education system to consolidate social order and ideological control. The exam-based meritocracy also intensifies it in China. Many teachers I interviewed spoke about their role models and the examples they followed in their everyday practices to cultivate student merit. Role models are another facet of a teacher’s views of the merit ideal. The analysis of exemplarity from teachers’ perspectives helps delineate the changes in the content of merit in China’s education system.

Nanjing’s schools frequently held Role model learning activities. Monday morning is the meeting day for all public school students. This tradition continues from the first day of entering school to the end of high school. Some universities also hold similar activities, but these are not as regular as in primary and secondary education. During my visit to Nanjing’s elementary schools, the Monday morning ceremony tradition continued in the same form as when I attended school in the 1990s. Students dressed in the school uniform and gathered together on the school playground to watch the selected excellent students raise the national flag.

According to Ms. Yang Yijing, her school held a flag-raising ceremony every Monday. Students were required to wear school uniforms on Mondays, Wednesdays, and Fridays. For elementary school students, schools can only offer one set of uniforms, so they need sometime during a week for the laundry. Therefore, school uniforms were not required on Tuesdays and Thursdays (Personal communications, October 20, 2016).

Headteachers of each class must also be present at the meeting, standing next to the queue of students and overseeing student behavior. Teachers usually pay more attention to, for
example, naughty boys who move from side to side or chat with other children in the queue. Those small movements would quickly cause a drop in the discipline score for the entire class. A competition is held between the classes for the best discipline and meeting attendance. Student leaders who wear a particular symbol on their arms monitor rated each class according to the discipline criteria. For example, they check whether all students are wearing proper clothes, whether they stand up straight, whether they listen carefully to the speaker, whether all the students in a class attend the meeting, and so forth.

From the lower grades in elementary schools, a small percentage of students are selected as model students. They enjoy the priority of joining the Young Pioneer group earlier or being elected as a leader in the group. A few of them could be awarded the opportunity to raise the national flag in the Monday morning ceremony. Students who become young pioneers wear a red scarf, which may not look aesthetically pleasing by today’s fashion standards. The scarf has to be tied in a special kind of bow, displayed on the front of the student’s chest.

Those who are elected student leaders wear different symbols on their sleeves, showing their various rankings in the Young Pioneer group. When the national anthem starts, the Young Pioneer students wave their right hands above their heads to show respect to the national flag. Other students who have not yet joined the group are not allowed to move their right hands. The ritual for them is to keep still and stare at the raising national flag. For a student, it is a high honor to become a student leader for the Young Pioneers or to be the one who raises the national flag. These students’ glory and power to evaluate others are made public during this school ceremony.

After the flag-raising ceremony, there is usually a speech by the selected model student, who enumerates the achievements that justify his or her honor of raising the national flag. Then
the school leaders address the mission and principle that both faculty and students should follow. After that, the faculty advisor for the Young Pioneers steers the talk to some fixed themes according to the school calendar.

Role model learning activities are still routine in school education. Memories of socialist role models also appear in public propaganda. At the time of the interview, Principal Yang told me about the recent activity schedule for elementary school students.

We arranged our activities according to the season. For example, September 10 is Teacher’s Day, when we teach our students to respect the teachers, and October 17 is the Double Ninth Festival when students learn how to pay respect to seniors. October 13 is the anniversary of the establishment of the Young Pioneers Organization. During the Monday morning meeting, they will give a speech on the history of the organization. The student will sing the song “The Cowboy, Wang Erxiao” and remember his contribution to the country as a Young Pioneer. (Yang, Oral historical interview, October 20, 2016)

Socialist Role Models

It is a tradition to introduce stories of socialist role models in the name of patriotic education. Both students and their headteachers remained standing still on the school playground during these speeches. For example, the beginning of March is the anniversary of Lei Feng. Students learned the story of Lei Feng, who was a military hero who received a commendation from Mao Zedong for his selflessness in helping others. Lei Feng died in 1962, at the age of 21. These chosen exemplars also appeared often in textbooks and public media. During Lei Feng’s life as a soldier, he never deployed to any warfare, nor did he complete any heroic deeds. He became a role model for his volunteer work with seniors and his selfless donations to the poor. After the speech about Lei Feng on March Mondays, schools would usually arrange student activities such as visiting nearby nursing homes or fundraising for the needy.

Like Lei Feng, Wang Erxiao’s story is also well known in China. He was a 13-year-old cowboy who sacrificed his life to save his village. The story happened in 1942 during the Second
World War against Japan. In the story, Wang Erxiao led a group of lost invading Japanese soldiers into an ambush set by the defending Chinese army. His actions protected the whole village from destruction by the Japanese invaders, but he sacrificed his own life when a Japanese soldier brutally killed him with a bayonet. The sadness of the story of Wang Erxiao rises to the maximum as students sing “The Cowboy, Wang Erxiao.” The students emotionally sympathize with the loss of a young life of a similar age to their own.

As a student in Nanjing’s schools during the 1990s, I am so familiar with stories of socialist role models such as Lei Feng and Wang Erxiao, and I never questioned the validity of those stories when I was young. However, I also did not feel the emotion carried by those sad stories and songs. Almost every socialist role model died at an early age by sacrificing themselves to protect the people, but to me, they were like ancient wax statues that lived far away from school life. I learned about Lei Feng and read his diary when I was in school in Nanjing during the 1990s. I found it somewhat astonishing to learn from the teachers I interviewed that schools still hold the same activities to learn from Lei Feng nowadays.

Recent years have witnessed changes in learning about socialist role models. The humanitarian aspect of their devotion to socialist development is becoming increasingly important nowadays. Unlike Lei Feng, another nationally well-known socialist role model in the 1980s and 1990s was Lai Ning. This 14-year-old schoolboy who died fighting a forest fire in 1988 has lost his presence in the current education system. Parents can no longer be persuaded to teach their kids to sacrifice their lives to protect the public good. Lai Ning has been celebrated as a “revolutionary martyr (革命烈士)” by the government for his sacrifice to protect public properties in the town.
Today’s educator devotes attention to teaching children how to protect themselves during a crisis. After the year 2000, some discourse on the Internet started to question the facts beneath the haloes of those revolution-age role models. Why were there always photos of Lei Feng’s work with seniors in the 1960s (cameras were not common among Chinese families until the 1990s)? Regarding the story of Lai Ning, why were there no adult firefighters present to extinguish the forest fire instead of a teenager? In recent years, many parents and educators have challenged the promotion of altruism at the price of one’s life, especially the life of a youth. Those role models remain a part of school activities and ideological propaganda but have gradually faded away from social media and undergone scrutiny in private discussions.

Interviewed teachers also observed the changes in the role models used in the schools, and the shifting focus from the socialist moral ideal onto the student’s life and well-being. In the 1980s, schools advocate the character of “being ready to help others for a just cause (见义勇为).” Now, those words were not emphasized in daily education. As Ms. Yang Yijing said:

During the 1980s, we learned from Lei Feng and Lai Ning. Now, we gradually realized that the life of the only-child is critical. You must first protect your own life. Now we do not emphasize sacrificing one’s life to do things like those role models. We no longer encouraged our children to be little heroes who are “ready to help others for a just cause.” Now we told our students that your own life and safety are much more important than anything else. Now we advocated our students to be healthy, outgoing, and to develop in an all-around way (全面发展). (Yang, Oral historical interview, October 20, 2016)

Current Role Models

Besides historical anniversaries and traditional role-model learning activities, in recent years, schools have done their best to add new content to merit education. For example, Principal Yang invites parents who are firefighters and military members to introduce their careers to the students. Also, when the fruits in the school’s garden ripen, she asks a gardener to talk about
plants. These activities indicate a trend toward a more diversified value system in school education.

During regular school hours, exemplary students are more often used as role models to motivate their peers. Almost all the interviewed grade school teachers said they often praise the excellent students in a class and ask other students to learn from them. During my visit to interview Ms. Zhang at Nanjing Foreign Language School (NFLS), she invited four of her previous students to advise current students about how to prepare themselves for the Gaokao. These four students have all successfully enrolled in China’s top universities. They talked about their experiences in high school and the high-stakes selection at the end of the third year. Ms. Zhang was chatting with one of her previous students using WeChat when I arrived at her office. She showed me the transcript between herself and the student, which included a draft of the student’s speech. The student sent this draft to Ms. Zhang and asked for her opinion about how to improve his speech. Ms. Zhang said the student is an example of an ideal student because of his careful preparation in everything he does:

I asked four recent graduates to give a speech to lower graders. One of them sent me through WeChat an abstract of his speech before he spoke. His speech consisted of three parts: his experience in high school, his psychological adjustment to college, and his plans. He then planned to speak about time allocation for both academic study and extracurricular activities. He is a very earnest kid. He sent me the abstract before he came and asked me if it was feasible. He takes everything seriously. I think he has a terrific personality. I guess no matter how you work or study if you have a character like this, you will be outstanding at many things. (Oral historical interview, August 23, 2016)

After the four speakers arrived, Ms. Zhang introduced them to me in her office. Ms. Zhang is now the headteacher for a new class that just began their first year in high school. Ms. Zhang’s new students had just returned to the classroom from military training on the school’s sports field. In the middle of a summer day, the outside temperature was above one hundred
Fahrenheit, and the speech session by the alumni students served as a relaxing time for the new students to recover from the physically challenging troop parade rehearsal. I was invited to listen to the session. I asked for verbal permission to record their speeches.

I sat in the back row of the classroom as an observer, trying not to make any intervention to influence others. The new students had just returned from the sports field and looked tired and sweaty. I noticed a small percentage of students worked on their homework or extracurricular exam papers as they listened to the speech. They had extraordinary multitasking skills. One student wrote in their exercise book while also nodding head or making a sound when they found the statement interesting. It was before the start of the semester, and the school did not yet have any homework for the new students. The exercises they were doing may have come from private tutoring outside of school. Ms. Zhang noticed that as well, but she did not do anything to prevent those students from doing their tasks.

Ms. Zhang gave a brief introduction to the boy who had prepared his speech draft before he spoke. He had matriculated at Peking University’s (often rated as the number one university in China) foreign language department and had been excused from taking the college entrance exam (the Gaokao). He is a typical excellent student who has achieved the highest dream for many Gaokao takers. Here I transcribe his speech and give a brief analysis. For convenience, I have used the pseudonym Zhao Lin to represent this student.

First, Zhao Lin spoke about the transition from junior middle school to the key high school he attended, similar to NFLS. In 2016, only 53.8% of Nanjing’s junior middle school students could attend high school. The others went on to vocational education. Among those who went to high school, less than 30% spent their three years in a traditionally recognized key high school. The percentage who entered top schools like NFLS was even smaller. After the fierce
competition of the high school entrance exam, many new students wanted to take a breath during their first year of high school. Zhao warned them about the danger of resting.

When you start high school, everyone is at the same starting line no matter what your past looks like. Our school emphasizes self-motivated learning. If you are satisfied with your current level of achievement, do not release yourself. Because once you relax, it might seem challenging to tighten up again, and your good status might be lost. (Zhao, personal communication, August 23, 2016)

Unlike other key middle schools in Nanjing, NFLS places greater emphasis on student self-motivation. The school has a relatively flexible schedule. Students can devote more time to developing their specialties. Before 2003, NFLS enrolled only students from its junior middle school. Since 2003, students from other junior middle schools can also earn the right to enroll in NFLS high school by scoring high on the citywide public senior middle school entrance examinations (also called “the middle exam,” 中考). NFLS also holds an additional English test to screen out a select number of students to attend the school using public funding.

Role models from among student peers or alumni are often used to motivate current students. Since more than 95% of NFLS graduates will continue studying at a good university, some new students want to relax after taking the middle exam. Lack of motivation in the first year of high school is a common phenomenon. However, entering NFLS introduces the students to another level of competition. For the first two years of high school, NFLS employs the same curriculum as other public schools in Nanjing. The difference is that a large percentage of NFLS students need to prepare for either recommendation to top universities in China or application to elite universities in Western countries.

For the aim of letting the students have enough time to accomplish all these things, the curriculum pace in the first two years of high school is dramatically accelerated. By halfway through the second year, NFLS students must complete all the required curriculum of public high
school. At the same time, they must choose their college admission strategies. Zhao Lin listed three directions that most NFLS students choose after graduation. He recommended that new students make a plan as soon as possible.

Everyone should cherish the opportunity to get into such a prestigious school. The best way to grasp the opportunity is to plan well before you start. Generally, we have three paths after graduation: The first is to study abroad, including the regular college application and expressway college programs.

The second is to be recommended to top universities in China via the high school recommendation system (without taking the Gaokao), which includes three types: recommended for exceptional foreign language abilities, winners in academic competitions, or through the program our school worked with, the University of Science and Technology of China.

The third path is to take the Gaokao and be admitted to a university in China based on your test score. (Zhao, personal communication, August 23, 2016)

For NFLS students, taking the Gaokao is often the last choice. Most students first apply to universities outside China or try to secure recommendations to Chinese universities without taking the Gaokao. Compared with regular high school students in Nanjing, the resources for those choices are relatively easy for NFLS students to obtain. Their senior classmates served as role models for them to mimic and helped them plan their futures. Zhao reminded those who decide to stay in China that their Gaokao testing skills are still critical.

I hope all of you can talk to your parents and teachers to collect information and analyze your strengths and personality. This way, you can find the path you are trying to follow and begin preparing it in your first year of high school. If you have questions while choosing among those tracks, you can buy some collections that talk about studying abroad or going to college via school recommendation. You can also talk to your senior classmates and teachers.

For those of you who want to stay in the country, I want to remind you: please do not stop working on your Gaokao. It is becoming even harder to enroll in college via recommendation. (Zhao, personal communication, August 23, 2016)

To ensure rich resumes for students who did not wish to take the Gaokao. NFLS held more extracurricular activities than other high schools in Nanjing. The student speaker described his experiences with those activities.
There are lots of activities and festivals in our schools, such as foreign language festivals, sports meetings, and art festivals. I believe it is good to actively participate in these events because you can relax your body and spirit and improve your overall ability and suzhi. If you achieve excellent results on some occasions, it could have a practical effect on your college application. (Zhao, personal communication, August 23, 2016)

Under the current college application criteria, extracurricular activities serve the purpose of highlighting a student’s merit. Taking leadership roles or receiving some form of rewards and certificates in those activities is essential for students attempting to build rich resumes. Earning awards in sports or athletics is an especially excellent way to avoid being viewed as a “nerd” or to show one’s versatility.

I did not participate in a lot of extracurricular activities. Though I did participate in some school festivals, I was not part of events like the student union election or numerous elective courses. The proudest experiences in my three years of high school include, first, leading the class soccer team to the championship; second, performing a drama at the People’s Great Hall during the school art festival; and third, acting in a drama at the school foreign language festival. (Zhao, Personal communication, August 23, 2016)

Ms. Zhang stopped Zhao Lin and provided additional information:

Our class performed both dramas in the theater and won first prize. We played Empresses in the Palace in English. Zhao Lin played an essential role in the play. All the boys played the eunuch, but a girl in our class played the emperor. (Zhang L., personal communication, August 23, 2016)

Empresses in the Palace (后宫·甄嬛传) is a popular TV drama in China centered on the schemes between Emperor Yongzheng’s concubines in the imperial harem during the Qing Dynasty. The plot places much emphasis on the fighting and intrigue between the women in the palace. NFLS students performed the drama in English. When talking about extracurricular experiences, both students and teachers underline the awards students received for these activities, such as first prize in the school language festival or the championship of a school sports game, rather than their feelings and efforts in achieving those awards.
Students learn to distinguish which experiences have “practical effects” on a college application. If an activity or experience does not result in an award and produce a record on the resume, it may not be “effective” for one’s future. Thus it loses the merit to be mentioned. The student speaker introduced his principle for time management in school: Always prioritize study over activities.

There is a principle for your participation in these activities: your coursework study cannot be influenced. If there is any conflict between the two, you should not be hesitant to make your studies the top priority. After all, we are all just students, and learning is our most important task.

I still remember that during my sophomore year, I was very into soccer, and I would play every day during the noon break, wasting midday self-learning time. As a result, I could not focus during the first class in the afternoon. When Ms. Zhang discovered this situation, she urged me to correct it. I stopped playing soccer, and I feel her reminder helped me immensely. (Zhao, personal communication, August 23, 2016)

Parents and teachers often advise students to abandon activities that are not “useful (没)” or are “time-consuming (浪费时间).” It is common for teachers in Nanjing to stop students from playing sports, which they think will consume too much energy and influence the students’ academic study. However, playing soccer during the midday school break is usually not considered too exhausting. Schools often do not allow high school students to play many sports because they think it will use energy that should be devoted to academic study. Zhao Lin emphasized the overall academic score in his speech.

Last but not least, I would like to talk about the mentality that we should have toward studying. That is, not only should we have dreams, but also, we should act down-to-earth. When I was in the ninth grade, I was not as good as I am now. I ranked just 20th in my class and below 200th in my grade for the worst performance. My score for the high school entrance exam was also only so-so. However, through my effort, I rose to become top-ranked during my freshman year. I consolidated my position during my sophomore and senior years to get a little bit of achievement today.

For example, I was good at history, but not so good at physics. So, in the first year, I would spend less time studying history and more time on physics. You have to take more
time on the weak subject and consolidate your good and not-as-good scores. In this way, you will not have glaring weaknesses. (Zhao, personal communication, August 23, 2016)

In China, the exam system and college admissions focus on the total score in every subject. Key school students in China are not allowed to have a “glaring weakness” in any tested subject. It is often much harder to achieve additional points in the strong subject than to avoid losing basic points in the weak subject. As a result, students must spend a large percentage of their time working on subjects in which they are initially weaker. Almost all students participate in remedial courses in some subjects.

The student must make continuous efforts in subjects they are not interested in, which does require much persistence. Therefore, parents and teachers usually emphasize a student’s effort and perseverance rather than his or her intelligence or talents. Zhao Lin also attributes his success to persistence and hard work.

To improve efficiency in a certain period is critical. You need to study hard and resist interference from modern technologies like TV, your PC, and your smartphone. Some of my classmates suffered sharp declines in their test scores because they were very active in WeChat groups and other social media. I believe it interfered with their concentration in school. Your time in high school is limited, so efficiency is crucial.

You must believe that our school as a platform can provide you with everything you need to achieve success. The latter mentality, as I mentioned, is to be down-to-earth and know how to stick to your goal. The most critical part is persistence (坚持); many people work hard, but not many persist in working hard. So only those who endure can succeed. Finally, I wish all of you great success in the next three years in our school. (Zhao, personal communication, August 23, 2016)

After the speech, Zhao Lin and the other invited speakers left the classroom. All of them were recommended for free admission to top universities in China through the foreign language school program, which offers them no freedom to choose their major in college. They enrolled in German and Korean language departments, which are not currently popular majors for entering
the job market after graduation. They discussed the possibility of changing their majors to law or business after they registered in college.

**Role Models for Teachers**

Role model learning activities are not only for the students. Teachers participated in role model learning when they were students in normal schools, also when they were in their workplace. Teachers According to the daily schedule of interviewed teachers, elementary and middle schools in Nanjing regularly held “political and theoretical learning sessions (政治理论学习)” for teachers. Besides the official role model learning activities, during the interview, teachers also talked about people that they admire and respect from the bottom of their hearts. Those conversations revealed examples of merit ideals from the perspective of teachers. Their feelings toward those role models may be personal but still was influenced by the social and historical environment. Compared with role models that were promoted by the government, teachers’ emotions, and experiences of their role models may have a more substantial impact on their everyday practices in schools.

Many participant teachers in this study had similar educational experiences. They mainly graduated from three primary normal schools in Nanjing: the Nanjing Xiaozhuang Normal College, Nanjing Normal University, and Jiangsu Second Normal University. A large percentage of teachers graduated from Xiaoazhuang Normal College and pursued further study at one of the other two institutions. Many teachers retrospected on their education in Xiaoazhuang Normal as the place where their basic knowledge and values formed.

The school was established in 1927 by renowned educator Tao Xingzhi, who was active at the beginning of the 20th century and was a student of John Dewey at Columbia University.
Tao introduced Dewey’s progressive education ideas to China and started educational experiments in Nanjing’s suburbs. Tao’s work and life appeared in the curriculum of educational history, which was a required course for every normal school student who wanted to become a teacher. When I was an undergraduate student at Central China Normal University, Tao Xingzhi was the subject of a large portion of a chapter in my Chinese education history course. Through those courses and anniversary ceremonies, nearly every educator in China knew about Tao and his selfless devotion to education.

Ms. Yang Xiufeng is a math teacher at Confucius Temple Elementary School. As a student at Xiaozhuang Normal from 1969 to 1972, she expressed her respect for Tao Xingzhi and introduced her life as a normal school student.

That is an unforgettable experience. Since we entered Xiaozhuang Normal, during that age, starting from the first day, we were taught according to the motto: “Come in bringing a true heart, and leave without taking a blade of grass.” Educator Tao Xingzhi said so. The school prepared you for selfless service. At first, I did not understand why we should be like that. However, that is the mission of Xiaozhuang Normal. The school taught us this idea from the beginning to the end: Your job, as a teacher, is to dedicate yourself.

The second thing the school taught us was to comply with the Communist Party's education policy. This idea penetrated all the courses. It is like the philosophy of the curriculum. (Oral historical interview, October 31, 2016)

Those who choose teaching as a vocation receive considerable respect in Chinese society, not only because the income from teaching is stable, but also because the moral standard for teachers is relatively high. Selfless, unconditional devotion and service are requirements for teachers. There are many familiar metaphors about teachers that exemplify the degree of respect given to the teaching vocation. For example, teachers are candles, enlightening others by burning themselves; teachers are diligent gardeners, cultivating the flowers of our motherland.
Based on socialist, altruistic moral principles, the coursework and training in teacher preparation programs place less emphasis on teachers’ personal development or ambitions. Teachers’ obligations come from upper-level agencies, which require teachers to devote themselves to fulfilling the educational goals of the nation or the Communist Party. According to Ms. Yang’s experience, normal school students received comprehensive training in all aspects, from instruction skills to basketball playing, to get everyone ready for any position in schools. At the same time, teachers were expected to endure any hardship in life.

Xiaozhuang Normal provided rigorous training in the necessary skills of a good teacher. We were instructed to follow the education policy of the Communist Party, master good calligraphy, speak standard Mandarin, and achieve decent mastery of the piano. We got three solid years of training about the essential skills to be an elementary teacher who can teach all courses in a school. We learned how to play football and basketball even as girls because you never knew; one day, you might become a physical education teacher. Male teachers learned how to play the piano as well since they could become music teachers. You got to learn everything. We had a morning study and an after-school night study. You were told that you were going to be a teacher, so knowing all the necessary knowledge and following the Party's ideology was a necessity.

At that time, we learned enthusiastically, and we were self-conscious. Life was austere. Meals at Xiaozhuang Normal were very plain. That is, in the morning, we ate only porridge and one piece of steamed bread, and only one small dish of vegetables for lunch and dinner. Life was hard, and we were encouraged to be self-reliant. We supported the school by producing our food. The campus had many fields for growing plants to feed ourselves. All of us were like boarding school students. We grew plants in the middle of the class break and after school hours in the afternoon. It was like a military camp. That was the education we got. (Oral historical interview, October 31, 2016)

In my interaction with Ms. Yang, I noticed her admiration for Tao Xingzhi and her nostalgia toward the Xiaozhuang Normal school, where many local teachers shared the same feelings.

The required altruism for teachers is embodied in the introduction and acclamation of Tao Xingzhi’s merit. Martin Schoenhals (1993), during his ethnographic study in November 1988, attended a conference at Northeast University that was entirely focused on Tao. Schoenhals was surprised that the conference presenters took turns extolling Tao himself rather
than talking about any aspect of Tao’s life and works. Speakers at the conference listed all the
famous people who had studied either with Tao or in the schools he has established. Finally, they
concluded that Tao was indeed a great man, even greater than Confucius himself. However, Tao
was not as famous internationally as he deserved to be, so the conference participants should do
their best to propagandize him. One of the paper sessions was focused primarily on how to
accomplish this.

From Schoenhals’s observation, we see that propaganda and research based on Tao
Xingzhi’s merit was not only an academic activity, but also created a field in which material and
symbolic relations are produced by actors who are connected by their mentor-student
relationships, expertise, or institutions. In this field, Tao’s merit is compared with that of others.
In the conference participants’ view, according to the meritocratic rules, Tao’s fame should be
equal to his merit. There is a publicly funded academic organization that focuses exclusively on
researching Tao Xingzhi in Beijing. The organization was established in 1985 and had 23
provincial-level branches.

Compared with Tao, another education activist, James Yen (晏阳初), was not very well
known among teachers in China. Yen graduated from Princeton University and devoted himself
to China’s mass education movement during the same historical period as Tao Xingzhi. Despite
Yen’s accomplished literacy movement in Ting Hsien and his success in persuading the
American Congress to sponsor rural education in China, his work was halted by the Communist
Party because of his political inclination toward the United States, and he was forced to leave
China in 1950. Compared with Tao Xingzhi, Yen was almost neglected among Chinese
educators. Since the opening-up policy, though there has been a slight revival of academic
research of Yen’s work, he has been relatively unknown among schoolteachers. Even for
historical persons, being considered a merit ideal in China depends not only on a person’s work and accomplishments but also on his or her relationship with power. Role models are created through propaganda and acclamation by agents who share an interest in conducting those activities to raise a person to prominence.

Besides historical figures, some interviewed teachers listed current successful persons and business people as role models for society—many mentioned the creator of the Alibaba Group, Jack Ma. Ma was once an English teacher in a normal school and is now highly influential in China. The teachers acclaimed Ma’s entrepreneurship and his continuous effort to provide convenient services to ordinary people. Another teacher mentioned a graduate from their senior high school who serves as a translator for current Chairman Xi.

Chapter Summary

This chapter aims to answer the first part of research question one: from the perspective of Chinese educators, what ideal personal traits are usually emphasized in schools? The interviewed teachers described merit ideals and role models at schools in Nanjing. From the analysis, merit includes both ability and morality. In Nanjing’s key schools, the ability is often demonstrated by the students’ academic record, study habits, versatility, and specialty. Results of exams and academic records in schools became more and more critical during the transition from the socialist stage to the present.

Though the academic study is not the only criterion teachers use to evaluate students, it is considered a student’s primary job. Devoting most of their time and energy to academic study is an obligation for key school students in Nanjing. The study habits and discipline required to improve one’s study method is viewed as the most crucial factor in academic scores. The ability to study well is not only a justification for a student’s rewards and position in school but is also
viewed by parents and teachers as an indication of the student’s future success in his or her job. Some teachers criticized the current exam-centered education system for emphasizing test scores over students’ overall development, but they also felt a lack of resources to change the status quo.

In recent years, the influence of Western education, especially the application criteria of elite universities in developed countries like the United States, Canada, Great Britain, and Austria, has motivated key schools in Nanjing to focus their efforts on developing students’ talent in specialties. An increasing number of educators have put away the merit ideal of the well-rounded person and turned to discover each individual’s specialty. This change has translated into demonstrating versatility by playing a musical instrument or participating in performance art, athletics, or other extracurricular activities, especially for students who do not prepare to take the Gaokao and instead take the traditional meritocratic route in China.

For the morality part of the merit ideal, people who experienced education in socialist China still valued unconditional altruism and devotion to the public interest, while burgeoning individualism and personal liberty have made some of these socialist principles obsolete. Sometimes, there are conflicts between the two value systems. For instance, in the “exquisite egoist” discourse, senior citizens sometimes blame the younger generation for their selfishness and indifference to the public agenda. The uniformity and discipline required by socialist education principles suffer from increasing dissent in school settings when parents are influenced by “democratic ideas” no longer want their children to be forced to sit still in the same position or wear identical clothing. This change is also embodied in people’s attitudes toward socialist role models.
CHAPTER V
EVALUATION AND REWARD

Evaluation is a critical aspect of school life in Nanjing. Both students and teachers are often evaluated every day in different settings. For example, students are evaluated using quizzes, tests, schoolwide or citywide exams, and all kinds of competitions and activities. Teacher evaluation is usually carried out by upper administration or by parents, including with the accountability system, comparison with other teachers. Praise or rewards are the outcomes of the evaluation. Who has the power to evaluate others, and which kind of merit is most often rewarded? These are essential questions for the inquiry into Chinese meritocracy.

This chapter first looked into teachers’ methods of evaluation and reward in their daily classroom practices. Then I traced the changes to the most used reward in Nanjing’s schools--the “three-merit student” reward. The chapter ends with an extensive document analysis on the Handbook for Students and Parents in Nanjing Foreign Language School (NFLS). This handbook lists out the method for a comprehensive evaluation of each student that is held once every semester; it also includes students’ behaviors that will get punished by the school. An analysis of the text on the handbook provided a detailed example of how evaluation, reward, and punishment were used in schools.

Evaluation and Reward in Classroom

During the interviews, I asked teachers how they usually evaluate or praise students. Many participants agreed that evaluation happened every day in the classroom. Students were
often evaluated by their Biao xian (表现, behavior, and performance) in schools. Ms. Bai Jing is the dean and a Chinese teacher at an elementary school. She has many years of experience teaching lower grade pupils. She told me during the interview that she would praise students who sit up straight and listen to the teachers carefully or raise their hands to express themselves and answer questions during class and those whose handwriting was nice and neat. She would prepare material rewards for young kids, such as small flowers, paper stars, stickers, or other small gifts. Sometimes she made those rewards herself. When students became higher graders (above fourth grade), the teacher would give verbal praise rather than giving out material items.

According to Ms. Bai, parents paid much attention to the rewards and test scores their kids got in schools. They would ask students questions like “How many stars or flowers did you collect today?” when picking up their children from school. Some parents would chat with other parents to compare the number of rewards their children received. After the new curriculum reform in 1999, elementary schools were no longer allowed to announce students’ test scores publicly, and a four-scale ranking system instead of an exact test score was indicated on report cards for parents. However, many interviewed teachers said that test papers were still being rated on a 100-point score system. These scores are translated to a four-scale ranking only when they show on the report card.

Almost all the students ranked higher than a B on the report card. Nevertheless, parents are still eager to know their child’s exact score so they can compare their children with their classmates in school, and as an estimate to predict their kids’ performance when applying for middle school. As a result, test scores were distributed among parents through social network applications such as WeChat or QQ. Student achievement was often symbolized, and students were compared according to their test scores.
With the virility of social network software in recent years, many teachers spent extra time outside of their working hours, replying to parental inquiries, which interfered with teachers’ personal lives. Social network applications such as WeChat or QQ were often used by parents to connect with the teachers. The specialized educational software was also used by the school to connect teachers and parents. For example, Ms. Yang in Confucious Elementary school said that she replied to the Wechat group every day. The school also used another system called “Yi Xian Tong (一线通, one line connect).” She often received messages from parents to request test scores and other tasks that the parents considered helpful for their kids. Parents also required the teacher to fulfill their demands to compare test scores between other schools and other classes.

I felt that parents in the 1970s and 1980s did not participate in their kid's schoolwork. They were calm, and everything was in a natural status. From the 1990s, parents had increasing demands for teachers. They often talked to me through Wechat, like “other school had this lesson and quiz, why did you not let the students do it?” Some parents will print out the test paper from Nanjing’s top one elementary school and send it to me. They required the whole class to do the test and paid all the printing fee for fifty students. They also contacted me on WeChat that, “my son could not understand one of the tested items, please advise him tomorrow.” (Oral historical interview, October 31, 2016)

Many teachers enumerated institutionalized ways of rewarding excellent students rather than their own methods of praising students. Many followed the schools’ criteria or quantified methods for praising students. Ms. Bai’s school has a reward card system in which students collect stamps as they progress on test scores. They can also receive rewards for disciplined behavior or for helping other classmates at school. According to Ms. Bai, to reward high academic scores, class town hall meetings are held to elect “learning pacesetters (学习标兵).” Elected students get a congratulatory card, and the result of the election is also announced at the parents’ meeting. Students are thrilled to receive these awards. Parents are also proud of their
children when they receive the honor in front of other parents. If a student has consistently high scores on previous exams, he or she will be excused from taking mid-term exams. Teachers will allow those students to play while other kids are taking the exam.

Schools in Nanjing hold many activities that offer the student an award or certification. Many interviewed teachers found an increasing trend of students' rewards in recent years. The prevalence of awards a student may receive in an elementary school is surprising. According to Ms. Yang, I interviewed at HouBiaoYing Elementary School. There are calligraphy contests, English contests, Chinese poem recitation contests, and so forth. Different sports also provide students with a certificate. For example, the rope-skipping match includes both short rope and long rope events, each with a championship. The school is also famous for its roller-skating exercise. Almost every child in the school knows how to roller skate. The school roller-skating games include several programs, for example, one in which the children skate under a pole.

The winners of each contest receive certificates showing their merit in those specialties. During the hard-tipped pen calligraphy contest, the school invites judges to pick the student who wrote the best. In the “reading star” contest, students who read the highest number of books in one semester got a certificate. In the English contest, students recite English stories. Their pronunciations and stage performances are the evaluation criteria. “Some kids can tell a story in English as lively as they can in Chinese, and of course, they could get a certificate,” said Ms. Yang, the principal of HouBiaoYing Elementary (Oral historical interview, October 20, 2016).

All the rewards and certificates a student earns are recorded in their data portfolio and their school report card. There are also contests at higher levels—for example, the city-level Chinese painting competition and even a provincial level calligraphy contest. Some students win many certificates from these competitions. According to Ms. Yang, those rewards are useful for
students when they prepare to enter junior middle school. Because excellent schools want to choose the best students, they pick students based on the rewards recorded on their report cards.

Renaming the “Three-Merit” Student

Among all the awards in Nanjing’s schools, the award for “three-merit students” has the longest history, and is still a regular competition in every school. From elementary school to high school, the selection of three-merit students and excellent students is held annually. Three-merit is directly translated to “excelling morally, academically, and physically (德智体全面发展).” It indicates the merit standard for a Chinese student.

Awards for three-merit students started in 1954 after Mao Zedong’s speech requiring young people to do well in the three aspects. In the 1950s and 1960s, the award focused on moral excellence, manifested by “political performance” and family background. It was the opposite of today’s situation; students from higher socioeconomic backgrounds families often enjoyed higher priority in the education system. At that time, if a student were born into the family of a landlord, capitalist, or even a wealthy farmer, his or her evaluation in school would probably be influenced. Academic and physical excellence did not receive enough attention. During the Cultural Revolution, three-merit students were criticized for their focus on one field and their lack of proper political awareness. Instead, these students were required to “have horns on their head and thorns on their body (头上长角, 身上长刺),” which is a metaphor for having bravado to challenge authority and school regulations.

The selection of three-merit students halted in many places during the Cultural Revolution. After it resumed in 1982, the three-merit rewards took on a more practical meaning for students’ further education. For many years, those who received the three-merit student
award have enjoyed more significant opportunities to achieve the next level of study. There are three-merit students at different levels: class level, school level, district level, city level, and province level. All levels provide benefits for students’ future opportunities. For example, city-level three-merit students usually receive additional points when taking the high school entrance examination. The provincial-level award can provide extra points on the Gaokao. On this highly competitive test, even a one-point difference can give the student priority over thousands of other test-takers.

The evaluation and reward of three-merit students have become a battlefield for aspiring students and parents to fight against their classmates. Their weapons, which involve the family’s social, cultural, and economic capital, are sometimes not restricted by school factors. Since 2004, the president of China’s education society, Professor Gu Mingyuan, has publicly criticized the way schools reward three-merit students. He recommends abolishing the system. Gu has pointed out that the evaluation of three-merit students has become focused on only one merit—an excellent study record—and that students who get the reward have more opportunity for school choice, which is unfair to the majority of other students.

Ms. Zhang Li works in Nanjing’s top high school, NFLS, which enrolls students from the most powerful families in the city. She spoke about how excellent students are selected for merit-based rewards and how she managed to be fair in her evaluation standards.

Our school has strict rules about how students are selected. The standards include scores on exams and many other things. It is a quantitative standard. If teachers can be fair and praise students reasonably, it is excellent. The teacher should not rely on his or her preferences, but it is tough because all teachers have some students that they like the most, and some students have higher EQ (emotional intelligence). They are popular wherever they go. However, I think the teacher should do her best to be fair. (Oral

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The award’s name has changed to other titles, such as “star students (星级学子)” or “top-ten students (十佳学生)” to avoid disputes about the evaluation of three-merit students. Many schools in Nanjing changed it to emphasize students’ particular abilities or one aspect of merit rather than a comprehensive view of Suzhi. Ms. Zhang described the change in her high school.

In 2005, our school made a title adjustment for the traditional competition for the three-merit student. We call it being a “star student” now to showcase students who do exceptionally well in one aspect. The praise is not only limited to virtue, intelligence, and sport. We also add attributes like civic literacy, which includes daily manners. (Oral historical interview, August 23, 2016)

Like the accountability system for schools, a quantified evaluation system was also used to reward students. This method created a seemingly fair and scientific way to evaluate students to prevent teachers from using their personal preferences. Ms. Bai described how the winner of the merit-based award was selected in her elementary school:

We have a strict system for choosing three-merit students, including credit for participating in activities, rewards for various kinds of competitions, and credit for earning a certificate. Moreover, we also include a faculty vote and a student body vote. All these things are quantified together. After the quantification, each student will get a final score. All the candidates are ranked according to their scores. (Oral historical interview, October 20, 2016)

At Hou Biaoying Elementary School, the traditional reward for three-merit students has been renamed Star of the School District. However, according to Principal Yang, the criteria and evaluation procedure to award “stars” is still similar to that of three-merit students. There are three procedures. The first round is the vote from classmates. Because the children may not yet have the wisdom to choose the right candidate, they may vote for their friends or for student leaders who do not criticize them. The second round is a vote from teachers.
The last round involves accounting for certifications for every activity both in school and outside of school so that they can be quantified. Teachers believe this is made a “relatively objective and fair competition by listing out all the certification the child has received,” including all certificates at the school and school district levels, and rewards from other competitors at the provincial or national levels. The students should also have straight As on their academic records, no matter what subjects. As described by Principal Yang at HouBiaoYing Elementary School, for example, the student should have earned As in Chinese, math, English, music, physical education, and art. So if he or she also earned the star of the school district or three-merit student award above the school level, he or she could likely enroll in a key middle school.

**Evaluation Standards in Practice**

The organized activity of evaluation is an indispensable part of the school calendar. Almost all schools hold formal events in the classroom to let students evaluate each other or be evaluated by the teacher. According to the *Handbook for Students and Parents* for Nanjing Foreign Language School (NFLS), the comprehensive evaluation of students’ *suzhi* is held once every semester. The result of the assessment is recorded in the student portfolio and uploaded to the online file system by the headteacher of the class.

The evaluation of students’ comprehensive *Suzhi* includes six aspects: moral character, citizen *suzhi*, communication and cooperation, learning ability, sports and health, and aesthetics, and expression. One can earn the “star student” designation on just one aspect of merit. The handbook lists details about how each element of merit is proved and quantified by comparable standards.

**The Evaluation of Moral Character**
The handbook describes the general standard for the assessment of student moral character:

Love the country, love the people, have a passion for labor (热爱劳动), like science, and love socialism. Obey the rule and law, be honest, maintain public morality and ethics (维护公德) and concern for collectivity (关心集体), protect the environment, and be kind to people.

A grade for this standard is either passing or failing. A student can be designated a Star of Moral Character if he or she performs the following deeds:

1. Earn As on all comprehensive suzhi evaluations from teachers.
2. Win a three-merit student or single-aspect model student award above the school level.
3. Be selected secretary of a model Communist Youth League branch (优秀团支部的支部书记).
4. Be elected president of an excellent student union at the municipal level.
5. Be the class monitor of an excellent class that has won the school-level class reward in the past year. (NFLS, 2016)

Students and teachers at NFLS have already grown accustomed to the idea that loving socialism is considered morality, although more than half of its students will leave China and continue to study in Western countries. However, what matters more to them is how these hollow slogan-like moral principles translate to the practice of awarding student merit. It is ironic that to become a star in a particular merit category such as moral character, one still must first earn a three-merit student or other rewards to prove one’s overall suzhi. Other standards emphasize the importance of becoming a student leader, either in the student union or in a class, or for the Communist Youth League. The logic behind this evaluation standard assumes that student leaders have better moral character than other students who are not leaders.

The Citizen Suzhi Standard
Citizen Suzhi is listed as the second aspect of the student evaluation manual. It was newly added to the student handbook and was differentiated from the moral character part after the state government’s previous attempt to build civil society. “People” instead of “citizens” were used in discourse before the opening-up policy and the ensuing globalization process. In previous discourse, only those who loved the country loved socialism, and loved the Chinese Communist Party could be called “people”; others were categorized as “enemies” of socialism. While “citizen” is from the Western cultural tradition, all human beings who have Chinese nationality according to the law can be called “citizens.” The citizen Suzhi standard is as follows:

Be self-confident, have self-esteem, and strive toward self-improvement, self-discipline, and diligence. Be responsible for your actions, actively participate in social service for the public good, and be accountable to the public. (NFLS, 2016)

Students who earn As on all comprehensive evaluations from teachers and students and also perform outstanding deeds can be designated Stars of Citizen Suzhi. The following criteria are used to judge students as having performed outstanding deeds:

1. Individuals who have been awarded for practice and service for social good, and

2. Individuals whose class received an award for their social practices and service above the school level. (NFLS, 2016)

The above standard requires the student or student group to complete voluntary jobs or participate in community service outside of regular school hours. According to the interviewed teachers, public service often includes talking with seniors in a nursing home or helping with kids in the local charity house. In China, most charity organizations are part of government agencies that receive public funding. They usually do not accept an individual request for volunteer work. Notably, with a stressful school schedule, it is challenging for high school
juniors to contact an organization, and to arrange a charitable activity by themselves. In practice, these social service opportunities are arranged by parents or relatives rather than by the students.

Though the reward for students’ willingness to serve the public seems both necessary and reasonable, those activities are usually organized in a way that will help with the student’s resume but is not time-consuming enough to influence the student’s academic performance. Students from families of lower socioeconomic status often lack awareness of social service opportunities or do not have the social connections to arrange them. Evaluation and rewards based on those standards serve as an excellent example of how a family’s social and cultural capital translates to its offspring’s merit. Students who lack resources to gain that capital cannot produce such forms of merit.

**Merit in Communication and Cooperation**

The third aspect of student evaluation focuses on communication and cooperation. The student handbook requires students to

- Be able to set a goal with others and make efforts to reach the goal while respecting and trying to understand the argument in different circumstances. Be able to evaluate and constrain one’s behaviors. Be prepared to use various approaches to communicate and cooperate with others.

The grade for this standard is either passing or failing. Students who earn As on all comprehensive evaluations from teachers and students with outstanding deeds can be designated Stars of Communication and Cooperation. (NFLS, 2016)

The following conditions can be regarded as outstanding deeds in this aspect:

1. Student leaders who exhibit excellent work performance and who pass the semester evaluation; leaders include the members of the school Communist Youth League Committee, heads of each grade, monitors of each class, class commissaries in charge of studies, discipline inspectors, and auditors for general affairs.
2. National flag-raising group members and awarded student counselors automatically earn the Communications and Cooperation award. (NFLS, 2016)

As under previous standards, teachers have the power to evaluate the student and to choose stars from among ordinary students. The demonstration of this aspect of merit is again student leadership, and student monitors such as discipline inspectors, who have the power to rate and evaluate others, can win the Star of Communication and Cooperation award. Student leadership is the theme for the next session. Here I did not expand on the topic.

**The Learning Competency**

Learning competency is the most crucial aspect of merit for student evaluation. However, it is listed fourth in the handbook. Unlike the previous three standards, in which students receive only a passing or failing score, the grade for this standard is A, B, C, or D. The requirements are as follows:

Demonstrate desire and interest in academic study, using various approaches to improve learning. Have a habit of introspection regarding the learning process and result. Competently complete lab work in physics, chemistry, and biology. Be prepared to independently analyze and solve problems using knowledge and experience gained in school. Possess preliminary research and innovation abilities. (NFLS, 2016)

Only students who receive a grade of A can win the Star of Learning Competency award. The standards of an A student are

Love study, and have a full spirit while learning. Possess excellent learning habits and the spirit to “study assiduously (刻苦钻研)” and “make perfection more perfect (精益求精).” Show excellent performance in all subjects, with a grade of over 80 out of 100 points, except in physical education, music, and art. (NFLS, 2016)

Unlike with the previous standard, student learning competency can be directly quantified by the student’s academic score on the coursework. Physical education, music, and art courses are called “subsidiary subjects (副课),” and are viewed as times when students can relax a little
bit. In practice, the time for those subsidiary courses is often occupied by principal course
teachers, especially when the date of a large-scale exam is approaching. Training for professional
athletes takes place in a different system outside of regular schools. Besides public schools, other
agencies offer programs for music and art specialties.

In addition to the above-quantified standard, students who meet one of the following
conditions can also be graded A, and given awards:
1. Show significant achievement in the explorative study area; gain recognition from society and
authorities above the municipal level.
2. Complete a small innovative, and creative project that earns rewards from professional
associations or events held by a provincial or municipal organization.
3. Publish a thesis or literature works in academic journals, newspapers, or magazines run by the
provincial organization.
4. Be awarded as an outstanding reporter at school.
5. Win higher than the third prize at competitions held by provincial education authorities, higher
than the second prize at the games organized by municipal authorities, and first prize at races
conducted by the school.
6. Be awarded an Outstanding Learner title at school.
7. Fulfill another condition that the student submits, and the school approves that.

All of the above standards relate to other forms of reward that students can earn in the
academic sphere. As Martin Schoenhals (1993) found in his ethnography research, parents in
China are especially eager to guide their children to fame. The above standards can be used as a
list to guide student families to cultivate talents that can be recognized by the rewarding merit system.

Some of the standards do require help from the student’s family. For example, without background knowledge from their families, it is tough for students to get their research or innovation awarded above the municipal level. The standard even encourages middle school students to publish in academic journals. In practice, it is not rare for parents to write and publish articles under their children’s names. In Nanjing, various academic races are held by government authorities every year. Students sacrifice their leisure time at an early age to participate in cram schools focused on these competitions. It is common for NFLS students to have long lists of prizes earned in these events. Top prizes in competitions are stepping stones for students to enter elite schools.

The handbook also listed out the criteria for choosing excellent students specialized in sports and art. Awards for sports and art competitions had supplementary effects on college admission. From 1983 to 2018, students who were awarded national-level athletic titles could earn additional points toward their Gaokao scores or be enrolled without taking the exam. However, due to corruption in the admissions process, many national-level athletes were found to have never participated in any sports games or even not to know how to play sports at all. Hence, the Chinese government canceled the policy in 2018.

**Natural Talents and Precocity**

To advance in the next step of the education system used to be a “natural process,” said Ms. Yang in Nanjing Confucius Elementary school. The compulsory education act was passed in April 1986 and required all students to complete at least nine years of elementary school and junior middle school education. The aim of nearly one hundred percent compulsory education
was reached in 1994\(^2\). With the development of the key school system in the 1990s, competition and school choice became prevalent among students and parents in Nanjing. The main form of evaluation was a municipal level exam for all the students. Students were admitted according to their scores and rankings on the exam. The whole process was managed by the city-level education administrations. From the end of the 1990s, key schools were given the authority to use their standard to choose students. Different schools had various percentages of students that they could enroll in according to their criteria.

In recent years, most of the evaluation standards used in Nanjing’s key schools involve competitions and certificates that prove one’s ability. To enroll in key schools at every stage, students need to show advantages that distinguish them as above average. The easiest way to create an advantage in the competitions is to study the knowledge before other students learn it in schools. In practice, the privilege of ease of winning over others demonstrated by precocity is usually seen as “natural talent,” which gave a signal for educators to recognize merit. Nevertheless, as argued by Bourdieu (1998), precocity is just one of the many academic retranslations of cultural privilege (p. 20).

As cited by Bourdieu (1998), with the development of the undifferentiated pedagogical structure of the cursus at the beginning of the 16\(^{th}\) century, precocious careers became rarer (p. 20). They began to appear as an index of superiority and a promise of social success. The evaluations in key schools tend to award those who show an advantage at an early age. The interview of Ms. Yang Xiufeng, who taught math at Nanjing Confucius Temple Elementary School, showed how “natural talent” in math was created and rewarded.

For kids who are about to graduate from elementary school, some families take early action to buy an apartment in the key middle school district, which guarantees their kids access to the key school. However, key schools will try to find those exceptional students. There are “Olympic” math contests in Nanjing every year, and the newspaper called *Elementary School Math* holds a competition testing students with tough math questions. If our students do well in those contests, they will be admitted to key schools for sure. In some cases, several key schools even compete for one student.

As a result, I have to teach Olympic math during regular school hours. Although it is not in the national curriculum, it is vital for good students who want to get into key schools. I use about 20% of classroom teaching time for those out-of-curriculum materials. (Oral historical interview, October 31, 2016)

The out-of-school advantages produce precocity, masquerading as the natural talent to draw more considerable attention from educators, thus elevating its possessor to even higher priority. Many cram schools in Nanjing teach students two to three grade levels above the public school curriculum. Ms. Yang Xiufeng acknowledged that the myth of private tutoring to create math talent is all about studying ahead in the regular textbook. She still recommended that students participate in private tutoring because she did not want students who did not have the advantage of private tutoring to feel left behind in school.

We recommend that our students attend after-school programs beginning in second grade, while some families start Olympic math programs in kindergarten.

The so-called Olympic math is information beyond the textbook. Also, some practical knowledge will be added to math questions to embody the close relationship to practice, which is required by the education reform. For example, “how many cuts are needed to separate a rope into four parts?” is an examination question for students in the first grade of elementary school. If this question were to test a child in kindergarten, it would be called Olympic math. (Oral historical interview, October 31, 2016)

That kind of private tutoring was named *shadow education* by many scholars in the field of comparative education, such as David Baker and Mark Bray (Baker et al., 2001; Baker & LeTendre, 2005; Bray, 1999, 2003, 2009, 2010), to broadly refer to the phenomenon of paid private supplementary tutoring that addresses subjects already covered in schools—mathematics, reading, science, foreign language, and other examinable subjects. This kind of practice can be
carried out either on an informal one-to-one or small-group basis or in a large formal classroom setting. The private tutoring agencies profited from parents’ anxiety to push their kids forward and fear of “losing the competition at the starting line.” Below is Ms. Yang’s analysis of how the test system and shadow education create social anxiety:

It is the parent’s anxiety that influences the kids. After private tutoring, students will feel at ease when studying the textbook. Nevertheless, this will cause anxiety in parents who do not let their kids participate in tutoring. Some of them become very worried and hurry to join the after-school programs without considering their kids’ suitability for the program. As a teacher, if my Liang Xin (Virtuous heart) were taken away, I would encourage all the kids to take private tutoring. It would make my job simpler, students could work out difficult test questions, and the average score of my class would increase. Of course, I hope that will happen. However, with my Liang Xin in hand, I think this is a bizarre phenomenon. The test system, the Gaokao, is causing the problem. Without this test system, who would want their kids to suffer for high scores? What we do for education today is just mental fast food or fast food of knowledge. (Oral historical interview, October 31, 2016)

The term shadow education was first used by Marimuthu et al. (1991) to describe the phenomenon of private tutoring in Malaysia. Its name is based partly on its shadowy practice. In some parts of the world, it is considered a kind of educational corruption (Buchmann, 2002; Bray, 2003; Dawson, 2010; Silova et al., 2006; Silova & UNESCO, 2009). Shadow education in these countries developed in the hidden marketplace, where public school teachers secretly earn income from one-on-one or group tutoring. On the other hand, the name comes from the shadowy nature of this phenomenon. The content of shadow education often directly mimics that of formal educational curricula, and it is used to increase students’ mastery of academic subjects in schools (Bray, 1999; Buchmann, 2002; Kim & Lee, 2004; Stevenson & Baker, 1992).

Shadow education developed rapidly in China over the previous two decades. According to the 2004 Urban Household Education and Employment survey in China, tutoring was received by 73.8% of primary, 65.6% of lower secondary, and 53.5% of upper secondary students (as
cited in Bray, 2009). In Nanjing, shadow education was first conducted by teachers in their own homes beginning in the 1990s. According to Ms. Yang Xiu Feng at Nanjing Confucius Elementary School, their school started to hold private lessons in the 1990s to give advanced math classes to the kids. The reason was that elementary schools did not put students into groups according to their abilities; some of the parents need such classes. Teachers also held free remedial classes in their homes at that time.

After years of development, many private tutoring agencies grow into franchised learning centers, which become burgeoning assets in which international capitalists invest. For example, Ms. Yang Xiu Feng was invited to teach at the TAL Education Group, but she refused to do so. TAL is a private education agency focused on tutoring elementary school students. It was founded in 2003 and went public on the New York stock exchange in 2011.

There is an agency called “Tomorrow Advanced Life (TAL).” They had classes every day in the evening. They required the parents to sit at the back of the classroom and listen to the lesson together with their kids. If their kids cannot understand the lesson, the parents had to teach them. I called this a “weird circle (怪圈).” They once invited me to teach there. I said I did not want to earn money like this; it felt strange. (Oral historical interview, October 31, 2016)

According to Ms. Yang’s observation, from Grade 1 to Grade 3 of elementary school, about one-third of students participate in private tutoring, most of them aiming to increase performance in academic subjects such as Olympic math and Olympic English. About one in five students use private tutoring for remedial reasons, to catch up with other students. The rest of the mid-level students are still more passive during this stage, not attending private tutoring. Nevertheless, among fourth and fifth graders, two-thirds of students are in Olympic math or English programs. For the last year of elementary school (sixth grade), almost everyone joins
cram schools. Many students work too hard, participating in classes all day long and all year round.

At the time of these interviews, among all the school subjects, most of the teachers agreed that math is the most popular subject studied in private education agencies. Math is so important that it is often used by teachers to distinguish students. According to one of the interviewed teachers, Mr. Wang Shuiming, math has the highest priority among all the subjects because “math created a huge difference in students' scores on college entrance exams, which distinguish and differentiate outstanding students from one another” (Wang S., personal communication, date). Even within the disciplines that are tested, there is a ranking according to each subject’s importance to the college entrance exam. The “three main subjects,” math, Chinese, and English, occupy most of the time in the curriculum. In contrast, other subjects, such as geography, history, and the arts, are relegated to subordinate roles. Though the policy for the exam changes every year in Jiangsu province, the emphasis on math has never changed.

Unlike what Bourdieu (1998) said in the French context, subjects like geography, the natural sciences, history, and language are not emphasized because those subjects are thought to require mainly effort rather than talent. In the Chinese context, testing for math is stressed in the Gaokao because most people believe it is a fair competition, involving only one’s natural talent and effort in schools. Because of the seeming objectivity of the math test, it is used in the education system to distinguish outstanding students from the majority. In elementary schools, math is tested at different stages as students move on to the next level of schooling. Math also occupies much of these students' after-school hours. Many teachers think that unlike Chinese and English, a math score is an objective reflection of a student’s abilities, which are seldom influenced by students’ family backgrounds. There is a famous saying among Chinese teachers
and parents about educating their kids: “Learn math, physics, and chemistry well, and you will not be afraid anywhere in the world.” These three subjects are the key to the outside world for Chinese students, and math is the foundation for learning physics and chemistry.

**Student and Leadership**

Leadership roles in school organizations were often used as incentives to award excellent students at schools in Nanjing. The whole system, from joining the Young Pioneers to joining the Communist Youth League (CYL) and finally becoming a Party member, is a hierarchical institution for managing and governing students. The system not only reveals the socialist character of China’s schools but also constitutes a merit-based evaluation system from elementary school to higher education. According to Principal Yang Yi Jing, a student position in the YPC group, was reported on the student report card, and a leadership role would give the student some advantage when entering the next level of study. An excellent young pioneer reward above the district-level would benefit students’ application to the key schools.

The Young Pioneers of China (YPC) established in 1949 for children aged 6 to 14 to learn communist traditions and carry out socialist activities. By appearance, YPC is like the scouting organization in the Western world. However, its closest counterpart is the organization of Young Pioneers in the Soviet Union. During the Cultural Revolution (1966-1976), the YPC was dismantled and replaced by the Little Red Guards to attack the “Four Olds,” traditional institutions of Chinese society (old customs, old culture, old habits, and old ideas). YPC restarted in 1978 after the end of the Cultural Revolution.

Every elementary student is encouraged to join the Young Pioneer Organization once they enter school. However, only a select few successfully join the organization in first grade. Others participate in the group later, in second or third grade, depending on their performance in
school. After fourth grade, almost every student is a Young Pioneer. During my visit to Nanjing Hou BiaoYing Elementary School, the ceremony to join the YPC followed the Monday morning gathering on the school playground. The teacher who hosted the ceremony recited the slogan of YPC: “To struggle for the cause of Communism: Be prepared!” The new YPC members replied loudly, “Always be prepared!” The Young Pioneers saluted with their right arm raised above their heads.

Three leadership roles are filled from among those who join the Young Pioneers: the small group leader, the medium group leader, and the group chief. There are usually fewer than five group chiefs in an elementary school. They work together with a teacher, who is chosen to be the group counselor, to arrange activities for the Young Pioneer Organization. Each class usually has eight medium group leaders. The positions for the eight student leaders mimic the organizational structure of the Chinese Communist Party: Class Monitor, Vice Class Monitor, Commissary of Literature and Art, Commissary of Propaganda, Commissary of Organization, Commissary of Study, Commissary of Discipline, Commissary of Labor, Commissary of General Affairs, and Commissary of Sports.

Each position is in charge of some management work for the class, which created feelings of priority for leading students, among others. For example, the Commissary of Discipline records the misbehavior of students and reports to the teachers; the Commissary of Propaganda makes a “blackboard newsletter” in the rear of the classroom; the Commissary of Labor monitors the after-school cleaning inside the classroom and a common area assigned to the class. According to the interviewed teacher, the class size for elementary schools in Nanjing is now 45-50. The rest of the students are also assigned to small groups, each with a small group leader who helps monitor the behavior of 5-8 students.
The criteria for choosing student leaders vary between schools and have changed over time. In socialist China, students from military or “revolutionary” family backgrounds had a better chance of being elected student leaders. After the Cultural Revolution, the main criterion was a student’s academic score. Alternatively, teachers could assign some students to positions. After the sixth grade, every student is a Young Pioneer member, but only a few join the Communist Youth League (CYL) in the first year of middle school. Students select leaders for the organization.

In recent years, it has been common to hold democratic elections for leadership positions. The key school in Nanjing understand that a charismatic personality and public speaking skills were essential traits for a future leader. Students give speeches and campaign to get elected, which indicates a trend toward democratic education in China. During her interview, Ms. Wang detailed how student union leaders were chosen at NFLS:

We have a student union election, which is a top-rated event among students. Our former principal initiated it. When it started, we had 19 classes, around 690 students. Now we have over 4,000 students. Students who are interested in running register for the position for which they want to run, such as Minister of Liaison, Minister of Sports, etc. If four students run for Minister of Sports at the same time, there is competition. Those candidates need to go to each class to introduce themselves. Each candidate gives a one-minute speech to outline his or her campaign. Election events are scheduled at fixed times and locations. Candidates can also go to each classroom to describe their goals and outlines.

After the campaign, all students get to vote eventually. From the start of the election to election day, only one week passes. We called it “election week.” In our latest election, the most exciting thing happened during the election for the Minister of Art. There was only four votes’ difference between the winner and the loser. The election and the vote helped students understand what democracy and voting are, how they should express themselves, and what public service is. In general, the election process is viral among students. (Oral historical interview, August 19, 2016)

For high school students, a small percentage of student Communist Party members are chosen from each class. Student leadership roles with political implications are given as rewards
for merit to students in a different stage of their education. Sometimes this creates competition and conflicts among students attempting to earn these positions. Ms. Li at Nanjing Foreign Language School told me about the experience of bribery by an excellent student who wanted to be the only Party member in high school. The student finally obtained the party membership, but then went on to study in the United States.

**Criticism and Punishment**

During the interviews, many teachers expressed the belief that punishment is a necessary auxiliary means of education. It aims to maintain the school’s regular order and also prevent students’ undesirable tendencies. While schools should try to stick to positive education such as praise, students who seriously break the rules should be punished according to the seriousness of the mistake. Ms. Zhang at NFLS described the kinds of situations in which she would criticize a student:

Students will be criticized if they did not meet the expectations for behavior, language, and habits, for example, confronting teachers with language, bullying classmates, or mocking classmates based on body shape or appearance. If a student insults his or her teacher aggressively, I will criticize him or her for sure. (Oral historical interview, August 23, 2016)

However, all the teachers interviewed said that they would never criticize a student for his or her performance on academic scores. They agreed about the difference in each person’s ability. They would blame students for not making enough effort, but would not criticize them for the test result. As Ms. Zhang said,

Regarding academic performance, I think everyone is different. I would not criticize a student just because of academic scores. However, if he or she did not finish homework or pay attention in class, I would. There is plenty of homework for high school courses. Students are expected to record every requirement of homework. I cannot act as an elementary school teacher to tell them how to take notes in each class. Some kids do not have a good habit of doing that. I will criticize them for this. (Oral historical interview, August 23, 2016)
Like Ms. Zhang, some interviewed teachers expressed compassion and tolerance for students who cheat on exams. They would follow the school’s decisions for punishing the students but will usually not report to higher-level agencies if they find a student cheating during the exam because they do not want the students to face serious consequences.

Some students do not comply with the rules during the exam. I would give a warning and criticize. Some students try to cheat on the exam. I understand that they want to achieve more without more considerable effort. I would warn and educate them, but not turn them into the school. Some teachers would not be as nice. If the cheating student is reported to the school, he or she will get no results for the exam. (Oral historical interview, August 23, 2016)

Five kinds of punishments are used in schools in Nanjing. The following list ranks them from minor to severe: warning, serious warning, demerit recording, probation, and expulsion. All punishment must be recorded in the “rewards and punishments” column of the grade book for that year. Any punishment more severe than “demerit recording” will be recorded in the student’s registration card. If the punishment is not removed before graduation, the record will remain in the graduate registration form.

After the student violates the rules, the headteacher of the class and manager of the grade will speak to the student individually to ensure understanding of the violation details. Then they will ask the student to write a self-criticism letter. After the teacher in charge verifies the message, he or she will sign it and then report the issue to the student affairs office. After the student affairs office reviews the submission, they will propose solutions to deal with it and later report to the principal’s office. If the principal’s office approves the punishment, the decision will be shown publicly at the school for three days. After the student receives the penalty, the headteacher of the class will notify the student's parents about the student’s performance and the
reason for the punishment. The teacher will work with the parents to educate and counsel the student for correction and improvement.

The detailed punishment rules of NFLS are listed in the student handbook. A student with the following behavior will be given a corresponding punishment according to the circumstances.

1. Being truant six class hours at one time or absent from a total of 10 class hours in one semester without notice. Being late or leaving early three times will be counted as an absence of one class hour.
2. Violating the rules while attending class, such as quarreling noisily, not listening to teacher instructions, or disturbing the class to the extent that the teacher cannot continue the regular lecture.
3. Cheating on the exam will be lead to a Serious Warning punishment.
4. Fighting or swearing.
5. Smoking on campus.
6. Deliberately damaging public property will lead to a Serious Warning punishment.
7. Theft.
8. Improper intimate behavior corrupting school morality and discipline.
9. Gambling or gambling in disguised forms that hurt other students.
10. Involvement in illegal activities incurring penalization from the police department.
11. Other severe violations of the school rules.
12. Any student who repeatedly violates the rules after a severe disciplinary action will receive more substantial punishment.
According to the interviewed teachers, many schools in Nanjing also have strict rules forbidding students from using cell phones and other electronic devices in the school building. Students are not allowed to make phone calls, listen to music, or play games; even charging their cell phones is forbidden. The headteacher of the class will confiscate the cell phone and will only return it after the student writes a self-criticism letter.

In the self-criticism letter, students write about the experience of their mistake, the reason for their punishment, and the measures they will take to improve in the future. The letter is usually displayed in the classroom or posted for viewing by other students. In this way, the student who made a mistake will feel ashamed or “lose face (丢脸),” which serves as punishment for his or her behavior. Other students can learn from the mistake and are required to help their classmates improve.

**Chapter Summary**

This chapter attempted to answer Part 2 of Research Question 1: What practices are conducted by teachers and schools in Nanjing to cultivate ideal traits in students? Accurately, what kind of behaviors and practices receive rewards and approbation from teachers and schools? The question was answered both from the perspective of teachers and by the institutions of the education system. On a personal level, teachers often praise students who make progress in their academic study, students who try to help other classmates, and students who actively participate in classroom discussions. However, beyond the personal level, most of the rewards in the education system have been institutionalized. Most awards and punishments in Nanjing’s key schools have specific restrictions to limit their usage.

Though most of the teachers I interviewed did not challenge the way students are evaluated and think the results of the evaluations are relatively fair and scientific, many
expressed concerns about the current evaluation system, which places too much emphasis on students’ academic performance while ignoring students’ overall character and integrity. To compensate for this, teachers create their ways of encouraging students. Mr. Wang Shuiming said that when he was just starting as a teacher, he would praise students with higher academic records, but now he prefers to encourage those who help other classmates.

When I began my teaching career, I would praise students with excellent academic performance. As time has gone on, I have begun to praise introverted, quiet students who lack confidence. Also, I praise students who have potential but do not work hard enough. I also honor the exceptional kids who embody a model, a benchmark for other kids. Different teachers have different ways of worshiping. However, the praise should come from the bottom of the heart. If I had to criticize a student, I would do it secretly, and I find this way, has a better effect. When I was a new teacher, I would praise and criticize students according to my instincts, and my emotions often influenced me. Now I have had many experiences. I think before I praise or criticize—that is the difference between a new teacher and a veteran teacher. (Oral historical interview, November 3, 2016)

Evaluation in schools has developed into a quantitative system that gauges almost every aspect of a student’s merit. From an early age, students acknowledge that high scores on a quiz translate to more generous praise from teachers, and teachers’ approval translates to the three-merit student award. Students learn to accumulate these credentials and grow accustomed to being recognized by those awarding certificates in their portfolios or resumes. The key school system, selecting students with numerous credentials, has created a new battlefield for them to compete in the acquisition of certificates.
CHAPTER SIX
DAILY ACTIVITY IN SCHOOL

This chapter compares school daily activities and schedules in 1989, 2005, and 2016. Daily arrangement in schools partly shows teachers’ everyday practices in schools to produce student merit. The comparison shows no significant changes in the structure of school daily instructions and activities. However, the hours in city schools had become longer from the end of the 1990s to the present. Students had less time to do sports and other activities besides academic study. School in the countryside had the most intense schedule among the three, which shows a different strategy for preparing students for the Gaokao.

The following session is a comparison of three daily schedules in different schools in China at different times. The first is Martin Schoenhals’ (1993) vivid description of the school day in key school Third Affiliated in Northeastern China in 1988. Schoenhals worked there as an English teacher of high school students. The research was carried out just before the Beijing Tiananmen Massacre of June 4, 1989.

The second daily schedule is based on my interview with Mr. Wang Shuiming in Nanjing No. 9 Middle School in 2016, where I spent a day witnessing school activities. Mr. Wang also provided a detailed description of his work schedule as a high school chemistry teacher. The Third Affiliated, where Schoenhals researched in 1988, was an elite school in the northeast of the city, and a large portion of its student body came from high-status and educated backgrounds. It
is an excellent counterpart to the key schools I visited in Nanjing, which allowed me to compare the differences in daily activities between key schools in 1988 and today.

The third schedule is from Andrew Kipnis (2011), an anthropological researcher at a school in Zouping, Shandong Province, in 2005-2006. It is a county school that adopted a boot-camp-like schedule and differs from the other two city schools because it is located in a rural area. All three schedules are for public high school students. The comparison partly shows the changes in school intensity in three-time points: 1989, 2005, and 2016.

Start of the Day

In 1989, the first school session began at 7:40 a.m. at Third Affiliated Middle School. Each class period lasted for 40 minutes, with a 10-minute break between periods. There were five class periods in the morning.

In 2005, students in Zouping awoke at 6:00 a.m. and had only 10 minutes to dress and use the toilet. From 6:10 to 6:30, students were assigned to complete morning chores, cleaning particular halls or corridors in the school’s common areas. After the duty of labor, students had breakfast from 6:30 to 7:00 a.m. The morning reading session took place in the classroom from 7:05 to 7:30 a.m.

In 2016, students in Nanjing were required to sit down in the classroom and start their morning reading at 7:10 a.m. The length of each class period and the number of class periods did not change. There were five class sessions in the morning, and each session lasted 40 minutes. Classes began at 7:40 a.m. Students stayed in the same classroom all day, while teachers came in and out for different courses. A bell signaled the beginning of the next class period. Students stopped talking and returned to the classroom. They left the classroom only for physical
education, chemistry or physics experiments, or art and music classes that required special equipment not available in each classroom.

**Physical Exercises**

In 1989, after the third school class period in the morning, all students left their classrooms and lined up in evenly spaced rows and columns on the school’s athletic fields for morning exercises. Students performed physical movements as directed in rhythm with music from radio broadcasting for about 20 minutes.

In 2005, according to Andrew Kipnis’ observation, students in Zouping had the same routine for exercises. The difference from 1989 was that they switched the simple and military drill-like motion to an aerobics dance routine performed to an up-tempo version of the American folk song “Oh, Susanna.”

In 2016, the musical exercises were changed to running workouts in Nanjing because some students did not complete the physical movements carefully as described by the teacher I interviewed, Wang Shuiming from the Nanjing No. 9 Middle School.

After the second school session, it is time for running exercises. Each time, there is only one class running on the sports field, and the other classes follow them until all the classes finish the exercises. It would be chaos if we had all the classes running at the same time. (Oral historical interview, November 3, 2016)

**Eye Exercises**

For all three schools in 1989, 2005, and 2016, after the fourth class period in the morning, students began eye exercises in unison according to the broadcasting music in their classrooms, which consisted of four sessions of different motions for students to rub and massage muscles around their eyes with their fingers. In 2016, headteachers were required to be present in the classroom to monitor students doing eye exercises. The exercises aimed to prevent students from
becoming nearsighted due to the intensity of study. However, according to China’s official news agency, the percentage of nearsighted students in elementary and middle schools rose every year, reaching 80% in 2017, while the rate in the United States is only 10%.¹

**Lunchtime**

In 1989, half the students bought lunch at school, and a half went home for lunch. After having lunch prepared by the school kitchen at noon, the students could study, play ball, or take naps until class resumed at 2:00 p.m. In 2005 and 2016, all students had lunch at the school dining hall at about 11:30 a.m. At the school in Nanjing, due to the lack of space for all the students to have lunch together, each grade took turns entering the dining hall.

In 2005, students in Zouping customarily took short naps in their dormitories from 12:15 to 1:40 p.m. All students were required to stay in bed during this time, but they could read instead of sleeping if they wished.

In 2016, after lunch, students in Nanjing began to enter the classroom. Between 12:30 p.m. and 1:00 p.m., there was a midday training session. Most of the time, this mid-day exercise was for training in math. Four of the five days in the week, there were math exercises. This practice took about half an hour. There were published books focused on this midday exercise, which consisted of small items that could be finished within 30 minutes. The task-focused only on necessary knowledge rather than difficult questions. The teacher usually did not teach every item of the midday exercise, but students were required to complete the training simply to familiarize themselves with the knowledge. After the midday exercise, about 1:00 p.m., it was

time for a midday nap. Every student had to rest (prone on their desk in the classroom) for 40 minutes until class restarted at 1:50 p.m.

**Afternoon Sessions**

In 1988 and 2005, the class resumed at about 2:00 p.m. There were two class periods during the afternoon and about an hour of extracurricular activities, including calligraphy, Russian language classes, oral English drill, astronomy, and sports. Students in Third Affiliated who lived off-campus went home at about 5:00 p.m. School in Zouping was a boarding school. After the activity period, students had dinner from 5:20 to 6:00 p.m. Evening sessions began at 6:10 p.m.

In 2016, the school in Nanjing had three class periods in the afternoon. The first class period began at 1:50 p.m. Just as in the morning. There was an eye exercise at the beginning of the second class session in the afternoon. Also, between the second and third class sessions, there was a musical gymnastics group class during the break. If it was raining or for other reasons, students sometimes practiced gymnastics in the classroom. After all the class sessions ended, students took turns eating dinner in the school dining hall beginning at about 5:40 p.m. The dinner period ended at 6:15 p.m., and evening self-study started. All students were required to return to the classroom for homework or self-study.

**Evening Sessions**

In 1988, schools did not offer evening sessions for students. Students typically did their homework at home.

In 2005, students in Zouping returned to the classroom and met with their headteacher at 6:10 p.m. From 6:10 to 6:30 p.m. They had a discussion session about a news story or issues arising in school life. Sometimes, teachers lectured about how the students should focus and
study harder. From 6:30 to 9:15 p.m., students did homework quietly in their classroom, and then returned to the dormitory for sleep. Lights-out time was 9:40 p.m.

In 2016, there was no discussion session. Every senior middle school student was required to stay at school for self-study sessions from 6:15 to 9:00 p.m. The first part, from 6:15 to 6:30 p.m., was for students to read the textbook, mainly for English or Chinese language studies. At 6:30 p.m. the evening study session began, and at least one teacher was required to be present in the classroom to answer questions. From 7:40 to 7:50 p.m., there was a 10-minute break. After the rest, self-study continued until 9:00 P.M., when non-resident students went home. There was another self-study session from 9:00 to 10:00 p.m. for resident students. They returned to their dormitory after 10:00 p.m.

As recalled by Mr. Wang previously, only the third-grade students were required to participate in the evening sessions. Not all students had to stay at school. Staying at school in the evening was voluntary before 2004, but now all students must participate in self-study at night.

Intensive school life was not only hard for the students but also difficult for their teachers. For the first grade of high school, every teacher stayed at school during the evening at least once a week. As a headteacher of a class, Mr. Wang had to remain in school during the evening twice a week. The workday was very long. Mr. Wang arrived at the school at 7:00 a.m. and could not leave until 9:00 p.m. In 1989, the school week ran from Monday through Saturday. At that time, all businesses in China ran from Monday through Saturday, so students had the same schedule as their parents. The long weekend, with both Saturday and Sunday off, started in 1995. In 2005, high school students in Zouping were allowed to visit home on only one Sunday a month. Changing from the schedule in 1999 allowed students to return home on Sunday every
week. In 2016, the No. 9 Middle School usually ran from Monday through Saturday. Occasionally, students also had extra lessons on Sunday.

**Chapter Summary**

From the schedule comparisons of the three schools in 1989, 2005, and 2016, it is apparent that the structure of daily activities in schools has changed little from the end of the 1980s to the present. In the city schools, the length of school time has prolonged over that period. However, the county school in 2005 had the most extended school hours among the three. We can tell that the school schedule was not so intense before the 1990s, which resonated with teachers’ observation that schools were in the “normal and natural status” at that time. After the 1990s, schools increased hours and intensity to win the competition in the Gaokao. For the length of the semester, in 1989, the school was in session from September 1 to June 31. Students rested on weekends. In 2016, the school gave extra classes over the summer (from July to August).

From the school schedule, we could tell that study for the Gaokao was the center for all three high schools. In recent years, the schools were operated based on the assumption that the longer the students staying at schools, the better academic scores they could achieve. According to Mr. Wang Shui Ming, longer school hours provided students more time to review the knowledge learned rather than accepting new information, which results in a better result in the Gaokao. In 2004, schools in Nanjing finished the curriculum in the third year of high school, while county schools completed it in the second year. As a result, students in Nanjing only had half a year to review and practice the lessons learned, while their counterparts in the northern part of the province had the whole year to review. From 2004 to the present, many key schools in Nanjing tried to mimic the schedule of those county schools in rural areas.
The extended school hours have made both students and teachers feel exhausted. However, students justify the intensity of study by prioritizing the importance of the Gaokao, the most crucial moment in a student’s life. Time in a key school was meticulously allocated for each session according to the previous experience of preparing for the Gaokao. Students did not have much leisure time for themselves. Uniformity and discipline were emphasized in daily activities. According to Mr. Wang, at first, teachers in Nanjing did not agree with the prolonged school hours, but only the upper-level educational agencies had the power to decide it. In his word:

As long as the supervisors in the education sector agreed on the prolonged hours, we, as teachers, could only accept the arrangement of the schools. You know, as a teacher in China, we had public service jobs, the salary came from the state. Of course, we could only listen to our units. (Oral historical interview, November 3, 2016)
CHAPTER SEVEN

CHANGING SIGNIFICANCE OF THE GAOKAO

The Gaokao is the National Higher Education Examination in mainland China. In the Chinese language, the two characters (高考) mean “the high exam.” Most high school students take the Gaokao after graduation at the age of 18. The two-day exam is the most crucial moment of their lives, and to a great extent, decides their careers and futures. However, not only does the Gaokao take two days to complete, but it is also a system that determines all significant activity in China’s schools. Before the Gaokao, students have to take hundreds of practice tests and pass the middle exam (中考), which selects students to enter high school. Those who do not do well on the middle exam are tracked to vocational education.

The Gaokao exam system was established in 1952. After the abeyance caused by the Cultural Revolution from 1966, it resumed in 1978 and continues to take the central role in China’s education system. In recent years, with the growing number of people who choose to study abroad, and the increasing higher education enrollment rate, the significance of the Gaokao has changed. For some students, the Gaokao has become one of the many choices, while the majority of students still considered it as the most critical experience during school life.

The analysis of the changing significance of the Gaokao aims at answering the second research question: according to the life experiences of Chinese educators, will the personal traits emphasized in schools be rewarded in the students’ later social lives? Does the rewarding of
merit change over time? Interviewed teachers witnessed the Shifting focus on the college admission policies from an individual’s family class backgrounds and revolutionary zeal during the Cultural Revolution to one’s academic achievement represented by the test scores. Many intellectuals and students from the educated family background who has endured adversities during the Cultural Revolution had a chance to regain their advantages by taking the Gaokao and entering top universities. The exam system not only regulates the field of education but also governs people's beliefs about merit, about how society defines the successful and elite. Strengthening state power through the nation-building process in the educational system is always the theme in the process.

The Establishment of the Gaokao and the Socialist Transformation: 1949-1957

Before 1949, there was no unified admission policy for colleges in the whole country. Every university had an admissions committee to decide enrollment policies. Students would take the test for each university they wanted to attend. After the new Chinese government was established in 1949, it took over all the higher education institutions in Nanjing from Chiang Kai-shek’s Kuomintang government, including the central university, whose name changed to Nanjing University. One unified admissions committee was formed in 1950 to control the college entrance exam for 13 universities in Shanghai, Nanjing, and the surrounding areas. The Gaokao, the first unified national tertiary education entrance exam, began in 1952. After the exam, students must complete a wish list of their desired university and major. Admission was based on the willingness of the student, represented by the wish list and his or her scores on the exam.

The new government found there were too many humanities and science programs, and also a few engineering programs in higher education, which could not provide enough talent for
socialist construction. A nationwide reform to combine and adjust education institutions began. Many private and missionary universities in Nanjing, including Ginling College (Jinling Women’s College), were cut off from their primary sponsorship from the western counties. Learning from the Soviet Union became the dominant theme of educational policies. The model of institutions in the Soviet Union was borrowed to reform universities in China. For example, there were seven schools and 42 programs at Nanjing University before 1949, but after the adjustment, only 13 programs remained. Many universities removed social science programs.

One of the participants in this study, Prof. Ouyang, took the Gaokao and was admitted by the physics department of Nanjing University in 1953. He put Nanjing University on top of his wish list, partly because his father was an alumnus in the agriculture department of the former central university. His experience of the Gaokao was that it was easy. He knew he was admitted after seeing his name in the local newspaper. “The enrollment rate at that time was high. The Gaokao at that time was not a very difficult test; it has become harder and harder since then” (Ouyang, personal communication, October 12, 2016).

On the national level, only about 90,000 people took the Gaokao in 1953, and higher education institutions admitted 77.78% of the participants. Test subjects include Chinese, math, foreign language (English or Russian), physics, chemistry, politics, history, geography, and biology.

Communist ideology influenced many of the test items. For example, the last question on the history exam asks the student to compare the “bourgeoisie” French Revolution and the “socialist” October Revolution of Russia in 1917. The standard key to this question reads as follows:
The French Revolution emancipated people from feudal autocracy while at the same time putting people into the fetters of bourgeoisie democracy. However, the socialist revolution of Russia smashed any forms of fetters, and people were free from any forms of exploitation.¹

The Gaokao has never been only about the academic grade. Political screening of candidates in the form of health checks or investigations into birth origin has been continuously used to ensure only “safe” students get into college. Nonetheless, the importance of such political screening has changed over time. According to Song Changkun’s (2009) research on the Gaokao examination right before the Cultural Revolution, there were no political standards for students taking the Gaokao in 1952. Anyone willing to “serve the people” was able to participate in the Gaokao and enroll in a higher education institution.

According to Song Changkun (2009), the political censorship began in 1953, when three types of candidates were forbidden to take the Gaokao: criminals sentenced to public surveillance; anti-revolutionary saboteurs; and people who had been expelled by the state’s enterprise, a government organization, or the army. In 1954, censorship became stricter. Candidate backgrounds were investigated and reviewed by the local police. In 1955, in addition to the standards mentioned above, new criteria were added, excluding anyone whose political background and history were too complicated to determine or considered morally wrong, or whose words or actions were reactionary. Compared with the standards of 1952, the criteria became abstract, and political censorship influenced a more substantial number of people after 1955.

¹Translated from the 1953 Gaokao test paper, displayed as an artifact in Nanjing Imperial Examination Museum on September 26, 2018.
Socialist Education under Mao’s Leadership (1958-1965)

At the beginning of the People's Republic of China, universities could hold their exams to choose candidates for admission until 1952, when the central government administered the first unified college entrance exam. As stated by Fei Hsiao-Tung (费孝通, 1946), one of the critical objectives of the socialist revolution was to replace the political and economic power of the old ruling elite with its foundations in the imperial gentry. Under the agrarian reform of 1946-1953, 43% of the farmland was seized from the landlord class. About 800,000 landlords were executed during the process (Clark, 2014, p. 168).

These policy changes influenced schools in Nanjing. According to Chen Nailin and Zhou Xinguo (2007), after 1952, elementary and middle schools in Nanjing began to criticize John Dewey’s educational theory, which had been introduced by his student Hu Shi during the New Culture Movement in 1919 (pp. 612-613). At the same time, Pedagogy by I. A. Kairov became the essential work for educators to study and practice.

From 1949 to 1959, the education system in the Soviet Union was the primary model for China to mimic and transfer. The curriculum, the textbooks, and the experts all came from the Soviet Union. Russian became the most learned second language in China. The minister of education also reorganized all the previous higher education institutions according to the division of departments for the different academic fields in the Soviet Union, which placed greater emphasis on science and technology majors and refrained from the development of social science and humanity subjects (Hu, 2009). The following political rectification movements dramatically influenced the education system: the anti-rightist movement, the Great Leap Forward, and the Cultural Revolution. The Gaokao stopped for ten years, from 1966 to 1976.
In socialist China, “teachers were strongly criticized for their bourgeois attitudes, emphasis on high academic standards, and aloofness from the laboring people” (Jackson & Hayhoe, 1979, p. 221). Professionals such as teachers and doctors were depicted as “hidden ghosts and demons” (牛鬼蛇神), that is, potentially dangerous to the socialist society as pointed out by Irving Epstein (1991), “Marxism, which invited a transfer of loyalty from the authority of Confucian culture to the leadership of the Chinese state, now redefined to encapsulate the former” (p. xvii).

During the Cultural Revolution (1966-1976), Mao tried to restructure the entire education system based on the anti-elitist, work-oriented norms that had been applied in Yan’an to the rural sector alone (Pepper, 1990). School education was either stopped or dominated by Mao’s book. “Red Guards,” who were the vanguard of promoting “proletarian culture” by destroying the old heritage (including Confucianism), became the models for young people. Teachers no longer controlled enrollment but had to teach students chosen mainly for their families’ class backgrounds and revolutionary zeal (Jackson & Hayhoe, 1979, p. 221).

Enduring significant trauma during the Cultural Revolution, in city schools, a large number of teachers committed suicide from 1966-1975. Many of these teachers had been denounced and beaten up by the “Red Guards” (Shi, 2013; Tang, 2006). According to Jackson and Hayhoe (1979), teachers were experts on correct ideological thinking in the Soviet model, and they were the guardians of academic standards, who controlled enrollment in tertiary education through a selective examination system. This identity created resentment of teachers among students who were not considered as academically suitable for higher education. Later in the Cultural Revolution, many teachers suffered retaliation both physically and psychologically.
In rural areas, 60% to 70% of primary school teachers were paid from local funds, while the state government paid the balance (Cleverley, 1985, p. 256). The salary paid to teachers ranked slightly above the average income level of other workers in the production brigade. Rural teachers got work points for teaching, and also shared in the distribution of the joint surplus of the commune (p. 256). Political qualification and social connections mainly decided admission to universities during the Cultural Revolution, and only those without the taint of bourgeois background were admitted (Clark, 2014, p. 169).

**A Restart of the Gaokao**

The Cultural Revolution witnessed another round of overturning of power once held by the old elite class. An essential research topic is whether Mao’s social movement created rapid social mobility in China during and after the Cultural Revolution. Using panel data from 4,730 urban residents drawn from 20 cities in China, Zhou Xueguang (2000) examined changes in income determinants between the pre-reform and reform eras. He found that during Mao’s era (1949-1977), there was a general trend of equalization of income in urban China, along with the declining importance of education and occupation. Across three years under this regime (1960, 1965, and 1975), there was also a trend of decreasing gender inequality.

After the death of Mao Zedong in 1976, Deng Xiaoping returned to political power. He ended both the social revolution and the radical education reform of the Cultural Revolution. As social order was gradually restored, the College Entrance Examination, also known as the Gaokao, resumed in November and December 1977 for the first time since it had been officially abolished in 1966. Of the 5.7 million people who participated in the exam, only 217,000 gained admission to higher educational institutions. The 3.8% enrollment rate was the lowest in the history of the exam.
An editorial titled “Practice is the Sole Criteria for Testing Truth” was published in CCP Newspaper on May 11, 1978 (Xinhua News Agency, 2008), marking the decline of the orthodoxy of Maoist principles. From then on, the field of education experienced an upsurge of discussion of the problems caused by the Cultural Revolution. These were featured in an editorial by Guo Luoji (1979) in a national education research journal. As a rectification of the radical policies of the Cultural Revolution, two aphorisms, “seek truth from facts (实事求是)” and “emancipate the mind(解放思想)” became popular in 1978. Many of the interviewed teachers remembered the nationwide discussion of the two aphorisms.

Critics of the deficiencies of the Great Leap Forward and the Cultural Revolution started to appear in the press. In his key speech at the 1978 conference of the Communist Party, Deng Xiaoping set a goal for China to reach the level of other industrialized nations by the year 2000. He noted that:

In realizing this goal, every possible form of education must be utilized to train workers for this task. Higher standards should set for the quality of education in both science and culture. The political and social status of teachers at all levels must be raised. (Policy and Regulation Department of National Education Commission of China, 1992)

The Constitution of 1982 replaced the description of “dictatorship of the proletariat (无产阶级专政)” with the “people’s democratic dictatorship (人民民主专政).” China started to reopen its doors to the outside world.

In August 1977, Deng Xiaoping proposed ending the recommendation system of the Cultural Revolution and resuming the Gaokao to enroll high school students instead of factory workers in colleges. Almost anyone who was a high school graduate or educated youth and who was sent to the countryside was eligible to take the Gaokao. Based on the belief that science and
technology are the keys to economic success in Western countries, China’s education system was reconstructed to produce talent that would promote economic development (Pepper, 1990, p. 187). Political censorship at that time-shifted focus on students’ performance rather than their family origin.

In the winter of 1977, 5.7 million people took the Gaokao. Each province administered the test, and in most of the provinces, five subjects were tested, including Chinese, politics, math, history, and geography (tested in one exam paper). Though the content of the test seems very easy for today’s students, because of the turmoil of the Cultural Revolution, the exam in 1977 was the most competitive in Gaokao history. Only 272,971 students were admitted to higher education institutions; the enrollment rate was only 4.8%. Many students simply answered the test questions by guessing. Especially in math, many left blank spaces on the test paper. The writing portion of the Chinese test, which asked students to “say something to the Communist Party from the bottom of the heart,” was the most crucial section. For top scorers on the Gaokao in 1977, it was a turning point.

**Life-Changing Experiences for the Gaokao Taker**

Since there were no eligible college graduates for ten years, many test-takers in 1977 were given leadership roles in critical social positions in their later life. One participant of this research, Mr. Qin Yongfa, was an English teacher in a county school in 1977. He proudly introduced some of his students who were admitted to college after taking the newly reinstated Gaokao. One student earned her Ph.D. after further study and went to live in New Zealand. Another student is now a university professor.

As an English major, Mr. Qin graduated from Jiangsu Normal University in 1968, which was under the control of the military at the time. He was assigned to teach in a village school
named Canal Middle School immediately after graduation. Before his teaching work began, he was sent to work in a rural area, re-educating poor and lower-middle-class peasants. However, he spent less than half a month working in the field because of his writing ability. The commune propaganda team needed him to work in the “Criticize Confucius” movement. After two years of “re-education,” he began to teach in the village school in 1971. He described the situation in the classroom before the Gaokao resumed, and his efforts to help two students prepare for the exam.

They did not study at all. Academic study was of no use at that time, especially for those of us who teach a foreign language. Most of the students did not wish to learn. The textbook was just a simple translation of *Quotations From Chairman Mao Zedong*. They only learned how to say “long live Chairman Mao” in English. However, I had two students who were from intellectual families. I gave special attention to them. Moreover, I took them with me when I moved to teach in a county school. I taught extra lessons to help them review before the Gaokao. The normal university admitted them after the exam. (Oral historical interview, November 1, 2016)

For most of the educated elite, the restart of the Gaokao was a life-changing event that paved their way to a meritocratic future. Mr. Qin shared his views on the exam:

I have always believed that China will make it back to the right lane. Education and technology are the lifeblood of a nation. Education is a must; I never gave up educating and motivating students for their academic study, even during the Cultural Revolution. (Oral historical interview, November 1, 2016)

The socioeconomic status of teachers is closely linked to their society’s opinion of educational meritocracy, and the degree of educational meritocracy embraced by Chinese society is reflected in the changing significance of the Gaokao. At the end of the 1970s, the Cultural Revolution still affected people’s career choices. For those outside the intellectual groups, the road after the Gaokao was not so bright and was not as attractive to them as a working-class position in a factory. When people believe in social mobility through education, knowledge, and college degrees are cherished by the majority, and the social and political status of teachers increases.
Gaokao preparation was not as sophisticated as it is today. There were only limited resources about how to prepare for the Gaokao, and the test exercises were not made available to every candidate. Unlike the first resumed Gaokao in 1977, which was organized at the provincial level, the 1978 Gaokao was the first nationwide exam after the Cultural Revolution. The competition was encouraged among students, classes, teachers, and schools (Jackson & Hayhoe, 1979, p. 224). One participant of this research, Mr. Wang Shuiming, took the Gaokao in 1978. Mr. Wang worked in a rural village while preparing for the Gaokao. His elementary school had only five grades, and the middle school was four years (two years of junior middle school and two years of high school). He said that when he took the Gaokao in 1978, he did not have a clear idea about the exam. As a result, the school he named on his wish list did not admit him. He was assigned to a nearby normal school (Wang S., personal communication, November 3, 2016).

Like many young people at the end of the 1970s, Mr. Wang wanted to be a worker rather than a teacher. “Factories provided not only a higher salary but also better welfare,” he remembered. When it turned to the beginning of the 1980s, because of the transition from a planned economy to a market-oriented economy, storekeeper became the most coveted job position, even better than a factory worker.

Working at a store was the best, even better than working in the factories. At that time, the store was not just a store. It was called a “supply and marketing cooperative (供销合作社).” People who worked there controlled the merchandise in their inventory. All the necessities for a living had come through a planned economy. However, after the transition to the market economy, we did not have to buy things from the supply and marketing cooperative. We could get them from other places. So the status of the people who worked in the stores went down. (Oral historical interview, November 3, 2016)

From 1979 to 1983, the enrollment rate for Gaokao candidates increased, but the number of people who took the Gaokao decreased. Because of the planned economy before the opening-up policy, high school and college graduates were assigned to work positions by the government.
Many participants who began working as teachers at the end of the 1970s said they chose to be teachers mainly because there were free meals and living allowances for normal school students. They began working in schools immediately after graduation, which helped provide allowances to their families. Nevertheless, the welfare and living conditions for teachers were not as good as for factory workers then.

Jobs in large state-owned enterprises, which were called “iron rice bowls (铁饭碗),” were the ideal jobs for young people at that time. Ms. Yang Xiufeng summarized the three paths for young people at the end of the 1970s and the beginning of the 1980s. The first choice was to become a worker. Some students could be assigned to factories after graduation. Those whose parents had worked in factories could inherit their parents’ positions, which was an enviable priority at that time. The second choice was to take the Gaokao and pursue further study in college. In their interviews, many of the participant teachers did not feel the first choice at that time was a good one. In retrospect, becoming a worker was considered a golden route for most of the young people at that time. As Ms. Yang stated,

the best students in the class went to the factories. Student leaders of my class all went to work in the factory. At that time, everyone felt jealous of them. You know, besides high wages and benefits, many factories also provided free showers and good food. Then, besides high salaries, the factory also paid more if you worked overtime, but teachers received no money for working overtime. However, today, we all feel it was not the right choice. (Oral historical interview, October 31, 2016)

In the reform era, China’s income system has undergone tremendous changes. In the early 1980s, the government experimented with decentralization in the allocation of resources in state-owned firms, especially in wage policies. Managers in firms had the discretion to decide bonuses outside the state-determined wage system. These changes were reflected in the patterns
of income determinants in 1984, at a time when public school teachers and employees in government and public organizations, on average, earned lower wages than other workers.

However, as a socialist legacy, college students were guaranteed employment after graduation. Social benefits for young people during this period were decided mainly by which state-owned enterprise they were assigned to and whether they could secure an “iron bowl” job upon graduation. Those social realities led to the demoralization of students. Many rural primary school students dropped out of school to work in the cities, and many college students neglected to attend classes. This phenomenon was deemed an “educational crisis” in the late 1980s. Details about the reasons for and realities of this crisis can be found in Heidi Ross’ (1991) research.

The market economy started to change the contour of the production and redistribution processes established by the planned economy system (Nee & Opper, 2012). In rural areas, the work points system of Mao’s age was replaced by the household contract system of responsibility, whereby households contracted with production brigades to supply predetermined quantities of produce in return for private ownership of the surplus. Individual peasants with specialized skills, access to raw materials, and funds were permitted to run small workshops and schools (Cleverley, 1985, p. 256).

With the economic development came a shortage of labor in the countryside during the 1980s. One participant of this study, Mr. Zhang Yulin, remembered the “household contract reform (家庭联产承包责任制改革)” that influenced his family in 1982. After only one year of policy implementation, tremendous changes had taken place in his hometown in Jiangsu Province. Farm production and farmer income increased rapidly. Within a short period in the early 1980s, the income and living standard for farmers in the countryside became even better than for workers in the cities (Zhang Y., personal communication, September 28, 2016).
The one-child policy began in 1979 to control the sheer size of China’s population; it forced couples to have no more than one child (Kane & Choi, 1999). The plan successfully curbed population growth in the cities, but people in rural areas were more hesitant to comply with this policy. Many parents needed their children to do farm work and saw little value in schooling beyond basic literacy. Over 35% of rural children failed to complete five years of primary school. The higher the level of achievement rose in the education system, the lower the proportion of rural children (Cleverley, 1985, p. 257). The number of schools also dropped with declining birth rates. Many schools reduced the number of classes. Teacher workloads were lessened accordingly (p. 259). The birth rate was highest among the illiterate population, and people with tertiary education had the lowest percentage of multiple births.

After the Gaokao and its related high-stakes testing system had taken the central role in admission to tertiary education, the link between test scores in the education system and social rewards later in life grew closer. Higher education credentials became more and more important in people’s lives. Mr. Wang Shuiming observed the changed attitudes toward teachers and education after the Gaokao became the essential meritocratic upward channel for young people at the end of the 1980s.

As I remember, the social and political statuses of teachers were relatively low. There were repercussions from the Cultural Revolution that influenced the social status of teachers. In the village, teachers were called the “stinky old ninth.” People showed no respect for knowledge. However, after the revival of the college entrance exam, my students began to go to colleges, and the status of teachers also improved. Not only was there an improvement in teacher income, but mainly from the political perspective, parents gradually began to show more respect to teachers. So I felt a sense of accomplishment about my job. (Oral historical interview, November 3, 2016)

Unlike many families in rural areas, Mr. Zhang Yulin’s parents supported his education. He took the Gaokao for the first time in 1980, then prepared and took the Gaokao twice over the
following two years. Finally, he was admitted to the math department of Nanjing University. In 1982, the college enrollment rate was less than 20%. Only a small percentage of candidates could get into colleges in their first year of taking the Gaokao, so many students chose to take it twice or even three times. In Jiangsu province, the enrollment rate was calculated based on the number of people who had already passed a pretest, which was also very competitive.

Mr. Zhang was born to a family with four siblings in a rural area. His family saw his education as an investment. Once Mr. Zhang got into college, all his tuition and living costs were covered by the state. Moreover, he was assigned to a work position immediately after graduation, so his parents did not have to worry about their son economically. Like many parents at that time, Mr. Zhang’s family paid little attention to how he did in school. His study and preparation for the Gaokao at the village school would have had to stop at any time, said Mr. Zhang, if his family could no longer support him. Test preparation materials were very scarce at that time. He finished only one book of exercises for each subject.

Mr. Zhang recalled his college years. Unlike today’s Gaokao, universities in Beijing enrolled the highest scorers. When Mr. Zhang took the Gaokao, most candidates wanted to choose universities near their homes and in the same province. Math, astrology, and physics were the ideal majors for science-tracked students. Math majors who could not do well academically would have a chance to be transferred to the newly established computer science program. During his college years, Mr. Zhang spent much more time studying English than any other subject. Because English was not a tested subject on the Gaokao, the village schools did not have qualified teachers to teach English well. Nanjing University divided students into three classes according to their English ability. Mr. Zhang was in the middle-level class. After graduation from university, most students who had majored in math were assigned to different
levels of schools to teach. Mr. Zhang was assigned to teach at a vocational school in the city of Yangzhou (Oral historical interview, September 28, 2016).

**Education Reform in the 1980s and the Key School System**

From 1985 to 1989, the government adopted a series of wage increases that were reflected in increased returns to cadre, teachers, and professional status (Zhou, 2000). In May 1985, Deng Xiaoping made a speech at the national education working conference. In the speech, Deng emphasized that “the power and the strength of the economic development of a nation, is more and more determined by the Suzhi of the labor force, and it also depends on the number and quality of intellectuals” (as cited in Xu & Yu, 2014, p. 330).

The reform gave more autonomy to local schools and provided more resources for the development of vocational education. A landmark policy of China’s educational reform—the decision of the CPC central committee on the reform of the educational system (中共中央关于教育体制改革的决定)—was written by the reform committee, led by the then-CCP leaders Hu Yaobang and Zhao Ziyang. After the mass education campaign in the 1980s, Nanjing successfully achieved the goal of providing nine years of compulsory schooling for almost every student in 1994. In 1998, 91% of students entered high schools (Chen & Zhou, 2007).

In the elitist line of education reform, the government initiated a series of policies to establish the key school system from primary to tertiary education. Key schools were given more government funding and had priority in selecting students. Students enrolled in key schools usually performed better on the Gaokao. Suzanne Pepper (1990) analyzed China’s education reform in the 1980s from a historical perspective and highlighted the “two-line struggle,”

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demonstrated by conflicts between elite education and equality of education for the masses that has characterized the history of educational reform in China since the early 20th century.

During the 1980s, the contradiction between the elite and the masses, city and countryside, coastal areas and inland, is still manifested in education debates. However, inner-Party rivalries made speaking about them risky in the 1980s (pp. 187-188). As a substitute for social sciences, moral education, “patriotic education,” and “political education” were included in the curriculum. From 1981 on, moral education became a subject in primary schools, and political education was taught in middle schools (Cleverley, 1985, p. 268). All humanities- and social science-tracked students had to take the politics test on the Gaokao.

By the second half of the 1980s, the two-tracked economic reform had triggered income disparity and dramatic inflation. Many of the interviewed teachers recalled waiting in line for a long time to buy a television, which cost about 40 times their monthly salary. Even with the money, they still needed to form a connection (Guanxi, 关系) with factory leaders or cadre members who controlled the supply to get a television. The difference in living standards was enlarged between the cities and rural areas and between ordinary workers and those who had power, which was partly responsible for the June Fourth Incident in 1989.

At the same time, in the public sphere, the central government began urging citizens to “free up” their capacities to confront dynamic conditions in all areas of life (Zhang & Ong, 2008, p. 7). Guidance and support provided by the state significantly decreased. People were encouraged by this discourse to rely on themselves as opposed to how they had relied on the state in the socialist era (p. 8). Even for teachers, who worked in the public sector, after the accountability reform, their performance was quantified by students’ scores on academic tests and closely linked to their wages. Achieving higher exam scores became the only aim for
teachers and students in China. Besides extended school days, teachers soon learned that additional weekend hours in the privatized educational institutions and teaching at home would dramatically increase their incomes. “Shadow education,” including cram schools and supplementary tutoring, became widespread in urban China (Bray & Lykins, 2012).

In Stanley Rosen’s (1991) research of political education before the 1989 Beijing demonstrations, he noted that CCP’s political control over the school system had relaxed for a period before the 1989 Tiananmen Square movement, creating an environment in which ideas were relatively open to discussion. Moreover, Party membership was not a prerequisite for upward mobility, meaning young people had a variety of options to achieve success. He cited the Chinese press to name three ways to pursue a successful career in China: the black, the gold, and the red. The black way was to leave China to study abroad to earn a black graduation cap and gown. The gold way was to pursue wealth in business. The red way refers to joining the CCP and becoming a government official. He mentioned that many people joined the CCP after achieving business success to protect their wealth from extortion by local cadres. To achieve economic development in the 1980s, the Party itself realized that attracting the “expert” had become more important than attracting the “red.” Gaokao, as a gateway to the professional class, became more critical in people’s lives.

The Tiananmen Square protests of 1989 abruptly stopped the attempted decentralization-oriented education reform, including the previously announced further student finance and job assignment reform in 1988. In conjunction with the fall of the communist regime in Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union, the CCP felt profound anxiety over its political power (Liu, 2016, p. 82). Education policies after the 1989 movement focused more on ideological control and stability. Policies promoting liberty and academic autonomy were changed by measures to
maintain societal stability. The newly formed Principal Accountability System was soon modified as “the principal accountability under the leadership of the party committee (党领导下的校长负责制).” The secretary of the CCP committee, rather than the principal, took the reins of the central leadership in schools. Political and thought education consumed more credit hours, and a protracted military training session became mandatory for both high school and first-year college students.

**The Popularization of Higher Education**

The fruits of reform suffered a severe setback after the 1989 Tiananmen Square movement. However, the reforms of the 1980s brought some degree of autonomy to China’s universities. Ruth Hayhoe (1992) argues that these reform measures can be seen in contrast to the early 20th century when Cai Yuanpei successfully melded aspects of China’s academy traditions with the characteristic of academic freedom he admired in German universities. In early 1992, then-Premier Deng Xiaoping made an inspection tour of southern China, and his speeches signaled a new political climate in which to continue reform and the development of the privatized economy.

In the 1992 policy documents, education was defined as a tertiary industry in the national economy, which means that the development of education was also viewed as a part of reform toward a market-oriented economy. After a series of 1950s-era recovery policies in the late 1970s and early 1980s, Chinese higher education surged forward in development after 1990. Although the policy of enrollment expansion was not well-known until 1999, the data provided by the Ministry of Education showed that the real expansion started in 1990. Enrollment of
undergraduates increased by 50% from 1990 to 1995, while the gross enrollment rate almost tripled, from 3.5% in 1990 to 9.8% in 1998.

Martin Trow’s (1974) three stages of classification of higher education is well known to Chinese scholars and policymakers. Martin defined the development of higher education by the gross enrollment rate: less than 15% is an elite stage, 15%-50% is a mass stage, and greater than 50% is a universal stage. According to Zhang Xiulan, Hu Xiaojiang, and Qu Zhiyong’s research (2011), in 2006, higher education institutions enrolled 5.46 million students, five times as many as in 1978 (1,083,600). There were 1,867 colleges and universities in 2006, three times as many as in 1978 (598). Yang Dongping (2011) stated that the Decision by the Communist Party's state council was to increase the rate from 9% to 15% by 2012. However, it took only three years for colleges at various levels to meet this goal. Yang claimed the faster-than-expected expansion was powered by local governments, which could economically benefit from new college campus construction, and universities, which could get quick money from loans and increase tuition. The gross enrollment rate of higher education institutions reached 22% in 2006 and 37.5% in 2014.

From 1994-1997, amid growing enrollment, higher education institutions no longer provided free tuition and living allowances to admitted students. Students who earned relatively higher Gaokao scores in their provinces could enjoy discounted tuition because they were admitted: “within the plan (计划内招生).” Military and normal school students could get a small monthly scholarship deposited directly into their accounts. For students who were out of the plan, tuition was much higher, and no other form of economic assistance was available.

Despite increased enrollment in higher education, the number of admissions to key universities remains a small percentage of the student population in China. The Gaokao has become a necessity for every student rather than a selective engine for a few elites. The public
funding policy in China, also determines how much a family will pay for a “name-brand” education. Students admitted by elite universities with public funding pay below-average tuition for their studies.

**The Paradox of the Gaokao and the Suzhi**

The Gaokao, as a measurement of student merit, focused mainly on the academic and cognitive abilities, omitted other aspects of overall student development. Potential harm to students’ health and future development caused by "exam-oriented education" has brought condemnation. Chai and Cheng (2011) summarized five documents published by the ministry of education from 1983-1993. These documents regulated specific things like class hours, homework, sleeping hours, and student test score rankings in an attempt to alleviate the burden on students.

Experts and policymakers started to rethink the possibilities to reform the current “exam-oriented education (应试教育)” and to develop a new system of Suzhi education, the well-rounded and quality-oriented education, which benefits the whole nation and the society. The Chinese word *suzhi* has a similar meaning to *merit*, but with nuanced differences. The word *Suzhi* means inner quality or essence. When referring to a person, it means the overall fundamental characters and traits of an individual that was developed based on natural endowment through the interaction of education and environment.

*Suzhi* first appeared in the 1985 policy text during the prevalence of the human capital theory: “the power and the strength of the economic development of a nation, is increasingly determined by the *suzhi* of the labor force, and it also depends on the number and quality of intellectuals.” “In a large nation like China with a population over one billion, if education were improved, our many human resources would give us a huge advantage to which no other
countries could compare” (as cited in Xu & Yu, 2014, p. 330). Later, the concept of
suzhi education was officially used in government education reform documents in 1993 and 1999
(Xu, 2012, pp. 536-538).

The most salient difference between Suzhi and Merit is that Suzhi emphasizes the
potential of human development, while merit focused on the existing achievement of an
individual. According to Andrew Kipnis (2011), Suzhi implies a type of quality that entails the
potential for yet further development. The human traits denoted by suzhi are not only deserving
of praise and award but are also the most worthy of “human resource investment.” Thus, the
suzhi discourse pronounces people who are low in suzhi as “deserving less income, power, and
social status” (Wu, 2012, p. 117). For example, “peasants-turned-migrant-workers are deemed to
be of low suzhi because of their lack of education, sheer numbers, and a potential threat to the
social order” (p. 117).

In the 1990s, with the growing awareness of the importance of education, the pressure on
students to prepare for the exam intensified. Students’ school life was oriented by the Gaokao.
Content and activities that do not appear on the exam are commonly ignored by students,
teachers, and families. The pressure caused by exam-oriented education was so enormous that
many students even committed suicide at a young age (Cheng, 2013).

As a cure for exam-oriented education, Nanjing suzhi educational campaigns began in
2000. The local education authorities took real measures to implement suzhi education reform.
The policy (关于在小学减轻学生过重负担的紧急通知, 2000) aimed to improve the quality of
the population by requiring local schools to alleviate student pressure during the education
process, shorten school hours, and build more libraries and museums for students to explore. A
student who won an award in sports or art or won a specialized academic competition, such as
the national Olympic Chemistry Competition, could get additional points or be recommended for admission to a key university.

However, the suzhi education campaign and subsequent policy have turned extra-curriculum education into another battlefield. During the campaign, many key schools provided additional admission quotas for students with talents and skills, such as playing sports, playing musical instruments, and painting. As a result, aggressive parents sent their kids to art classes after their math and English cram schools to increase their suzhi. The Suzhi classes were not provided by local schools, especially in rural areas.

On the other side of the coin, suzhi education is mainly an education policy that influences only schools in large cities, which operated under the eye of the education administration agencies. In rural village schools or county schools, suzhi education is just another hollow buzzword created by education experts, who do not know much about local schools. Schools and parents know that only their score on the Gaokao matters and the only way to achieve a high score on the Gaokao is by studying harder on the tested subjects.

As one of the implementations of the Suzhi education reform, schools in Nanjing are not allowed to provide extra classes or prolong school hours for academic activities. Education administration agencies located in large cities often visited schools to determine whether extra lessons are being given, however, in remote areas of the province, especially county schools in rural areas, extra lessons to prepare for the Gaokao are given to all students on weekends and during every vacation. One of the interviewed teachers, Mr. Wang Shuiming, a chemistry teacher at No. Nine Middle School spoke about his experience during the suzhi reform process.

In 2004, suzhi education reform was taking place in Nanjing. No after-school lessons were allowed in our school district. Especially on the weekend, no school is authorized to provide extra lessons. Our School is right under the eye of the provincial authority of
education. The government office building is very close to our school. As I remember it, whenever we wanted to teach extra lessons, someone would bring a camera here to report to the government agency. (Oral historical interview, November 3, 2016)

This discrepancy caused the difference in Gaokao scores between Nanjing students and other students in Jiangsu province. Village and county schools in the northern part of the province which is located far from the education authorities could avoid the “suzhi education supervision,” which surpassed Nanjing students in the Gaokao. Mr. Wang recalled the situation before the Gaokao of 2004 when Nanjing students had no chance to take extra lessons to prepare for the exam.

In 2003, when the students were in their second year of high school, an epidemic of SARS (Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome) began. People could not get together because of the possible contagion. Many Friday afternoons, we had students stay home, not to mention Saturdays. So in 2004, there was a limited time for students in Nanjing to study and prepare for the exam. We did not achieve a good score on the Gaokao that year.

At the same time, from 2002 to 2004, education in the northern part of Jiangsu province started to improve. It was better than in Nanjing. After the college entrance exam, all the cities in the province are ranked. Nanjing was always ranked last. Therefore, the education authority in the city of Nanjing began to take measures to change the situation. Parents also demanded reform for education in Nanjing. (Oral historical interview, November 3, 2016)

After the Gaokao of 2004, thousands of parents in Nanjing marched onto the street, with banners about “pain of the Gaokao,” asking for a change in the education policy that created the disadvantage for Nanjing students. It started with an article published by a special-level senior teacher (特级教师) at No. Eleven Middle School (a high school affiliated with Nanjing University) titled “The Pain of the College Entrance Exam in Nanjing.” The article is an
introspection on education in Nanjing, and the city’s admission rate to regular colleges and universities was the lowest ever that year.³

After the event, education administration agencies began to rethink the *suzhi* education policy. However, they refused to acknowledge the “pain of the Gaokao” for students in Nanjing because students had other chances to go beyond the Gaokao. For example, Nanjing students were selected by key universities before the Gaokao without taking the exam. To get a higher score on the Gaokao, many parents in Nanjing transferred their children to the county schools in the remote area of the province.⁴

After 2004, many schools in Nanjing took measures to learn from county schools and improve their Gaokao performance. According to Mr. Wang Shuiming, another key school in the district, the Number 13 Middle School was the first Nanjing school to start copy “the county school paradigm (*县中模式*).” Student performance did improve after the school adopted the paradigm.

The No. 13 Middle School hired a principal from the northern part of Jiangsu province, introducing what we called the “county school paradigm.” It added remedial lessons in addition to normal school hours and self-study in the evenings. At first, teachers at No. 13 did not like the paradigm. After all, it required many extra working hours for teachers. However, teachers are state-hired staff who must follow the arrangements set by the institutions. They could only accept it as what the school had decided to do. (Oral historical interview, November 3, 2016)

As a teacher who worked in a county school from 1992 to 1997, Mr. Wang explained the characters of the “county school paradigm” that is “high intensity, extended school time and

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using as much time as possible.” The aim is to finish the high school curriculum as soon as possible so that students could use the last year of high school to review the lessons and prepare for the test. By contrast, students in Nanjing only have one semester for the reviewing.

As I understand it, they (students in county schools) take more time for academic study than students in Nanjing do. For example, they do not have summer vacation; they take extra classes all summer; of course, they also on Saturdays, and evenings self-study, just like this. In 2004, our curriculum was to teach new lessons until the first semester of the third year. Nevertheless, for students in the northern part of the province, all required curriculum was finished by the second year of high school. They had the entire third year of high school to review the lessons and prepare for the Gaokao. Where did this time come from? From the extra time outside of regular school hours. We only had a few months to review and prepare for the exam, but they had the whole year to review. So from that time on, we took a lesson from those schools: high intensity, extended school time and using as much time as possible. (Oral historical interview, November 3, 2016)

Under the pressure of competition in the Gaokao, the Suzhi education reform lose the battlefield to the “county school paradigm.” Many key schools in Nanjing applied the paradigm. Teachers and students gradually get used to the intense schedule, and it has become the new norm for high schools.

There are many levels of competition for student academic scores: between schools, between cities, and between classes. After we adopted the paradigm of extended school hours, gradually, people felt it was normal. That is not to say that no one complains about it. However, we do not have a better solution. From 2004 to 2009, students took extra classes like crazy. Not only during summer and winter vacations, but all Saturdays were also used to take extra lessons. (Oral historical interview, November 3, 2016)

**New Curriculum Reform and Changes in the Gaokao**

Despite the changes in local schools, on the official level, suzhi education was set as the primary goal and was a hot topic among education administrators, teachers, and researchers. The New Curriculum Reform began in 2001. As required by the reform, academic learning should relate to practice and help solve real problems in everyday life. In search of a more well-rounded way to measure student suzhi, some provinces began to administer their own Gaokao instead of
using the unified national test paper. Jiangsu was among the most pioneering provinces taking on the experiment of Gaokao reform. The form of and subjects on the Gaokao changed almost every year.

From 1994 to 1999, students in Jiangsu used the national test paper. Test items were the same all over China (Huo, 2018). However, the required score for each higher education institution differed between provinces. The form of the exam was called “3+2,” in which the three stood for Chinese, English, and math, the required subjects for all students. For the additional two subjects, students who wished to pursue humanities and social science majors in college would take the tests in geography and history. Students who wanted to study science and engineering would take physics and biology—with the rankings based on the total scores for the five subjects (Huo, 2018). Second-year high school students would choose either humanities or science track, which would partly decide their future careers.

According to Mr. Wang Shuiming, who is a headteacher and helped his students to choose the subjects for the Gaokao, many students chose according to their academic performance in math. Those who had higher math scores were more likely to become science students. Even for those who had graduated from high school many years before, this dichotomy still applied: students were quickly tagged as either humanities-tracked or science-tracked. There were many stereotypes regarding both types of students. For example, not being good at math (implying the student is not smart enough), only talking but not doing, and lacking hard skills that could lead to a job were common stereotypes for humanities-tracked students. Stereotypes for science-tracked students included lacking excellent communication skills, being inflexible when solving problems, focusing on only a very narrow perspective of things, and so forth.
To bridge the gap between different subjects and compensate for the dichotomy of humanities and science at students’ early age, the Gaokao changed to “3+x” in 2001 and “3+X” in 2002. The uppercased X denotes a new form of test that combines different subjects into one test paper. To solve the test problems, the student uses knowledge from different disciplines. Jiangsu is among the first provinces to experiment with testing new forms of the Gaokao (Ho, 2018). The humanities and science dichotomy still applied in 2001, when the lowercased x stood for a “small combination” of history, geography, and politics for humanities-tracked students, and physics, chemistry, and biology for science-tracked students. Although teachers and students still needed time to adjust to the new form of the Gaokao, “the big combination,” which tested six subjects in one test paper, was adopted in Jiangsu. The 2002 Gaokao was the first one in which students did not choose to be humanities- or science-tracked during high school (Ho, 2018). According to interviewed teachers, many students and teachers considered the 2002 Gaokao as the hardest of all. Amid overwhelming opposition, the “big combination” lasted only for one year.

Another significant change to the Gaokao in Jiangsu happened the following year. In 2003, the Gaokao took the form “3+1+1,” which meant that besides the three core subjects, students could choose to test in any two subjects from geography, history, politics, physics, chemistry, and biology. This policy remained in place for only five years, because students tend to choose easy subjects that give a higher total score, hard subjects such as physics and chemistry were not popular tested subjects (Ho, 2018).

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In 2008, computer science first appeared as the Gaokao subject. According to Ms. Zhang Li, the 2008 reform required students to take a comprehensive test for all ten subjects in the second year of high school, called the “small Gaokao” by teachers and parents. If the student failed the small Gaokao, he or she would not be eligible to take the Gaokao at the end of high school. During the small Gaokao, students received a ranking rather than a specific score for selected subjects (excluding math, English, and Chinese). At the real Gaokao, both the score for the three core subjects and the ranking for the small Gaokao would be taken into consideration for college admission.

The Gaokao policy has dramatically influenced students’ choice of subjects. According to Mr. Wang, a chemistry teacher at No. 9 Middle School in Nanjing, many high schools now hire a separate math teacher for every class, whose job is to teach math to only one class of students (about 50 students per class). That means students have at least half a day of math lessons every day, including Saturday (high schools take only Sunday off each week). When math was given top priority, subordinate subjects, even subjects such as chemistry, which is the foundation for many medical and science majors, were overlooked. After the Gaokao reform in 2008, chemistry scores were not factored into the total score. Instead, students received only a ranking for those subordinate subjects. Science-tracked students who wanted to major in STEM and other natural science fields were required to earn at least a B (above 50%) on two subjects, choosing from chemistry, physics, and biology.

Many students chose to give up subjects of personal interest to achieve higher scores on the Gaokao. After the first year of high school, students were assigned to different classes according to their choices. Altogether there are 15 different choices for the tested subjects. Chemistry and physics were considered more difficult subjects in which to earn high scores on
the Gaokao, and many popular college science programs required a ranking for physics. To perform better on the exam, most students chose physics and biology as a combination. Even for students who were initially interested in chemistry, physics, and chemistry combination classes were canceled by many schools. As a result, some chemistry teachers no longer had enough lessons to teach.

At the time of these interviews, a new policy changing the Gaokao in 2018 to a “3+3” format was published on the local news. Even the most experienced teachers found it hard to keep pace with Gaokao reform in Jiangsu. Mr. Yu Xuchu is a Chinese teacher with the highest vocational position title who had participated in writing the Gaokao test for many years. He showed his concern for the ever-changing Gaokao policy in Jiangsu:

The Gaokao in Jiangsu has changed five times in 10 years. It will change again to the 3+3 form in 2018. During the small Gaokao in the second year of high school, students have to take the test in every subject except math, English, and Chinese. Before the small Gaokao, all the lessons on math, English, and Chinese stop to provide more time to review other tested subjects. After the small Gaokao, math, English, and Chinese classes occupy all the school time. Sometimes, students have eight class sessions in a single day on Chinese. This is not a good education. This is breaking out of the regular order of schooling. (Oral historical interview, September 2, 2016)

Jiangsu is the pioneer province to apply the New Curriculum and the Suzhi education reform. The changing format of the Gaokao is an experiment to find a better measurement for student suzhi. In practice, students and parents found it is hard to catch up with those changes. Mr. Yu has heard lots of complaints from the local schools. As a non-CCP member, he also took political actions to raise the issue. Nevertheless, it seems no effort could hinder the reform from the central government.

The example shows that government policy has created severe consequences. In my opinion, the education authorities do not respect objective routines and just like tinkering with the Gaokao. We should keep a test format for at least five or six years. It has
changed every two to three years, which causes much trouble for local schools. Schools work hard to alter their curriculum according to the Gaokao.

Other provinces have also changed their Gaokao policies, but not as much as Jiangsu. As a province with a sound economy and education, Jiangsu has always been the first to experiment. I have been to many schools, including schools in Nanjing and also schools in the northern part of Jiangsu. They have often asked me to raise a proposal to the government authorities. As a member of the provincial CPPCC [Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference], I made a motion during the meeting. However, they may not take it seriously. (Oral historical interview, September 2, 2016)

**Nonmeritocratic Factors in the Education System**

The belief that students who enter key schools have a better chance of attending a good university is widely accepted. After the Popularization of Higher Education policy, the majority of students in Nanjing’s top high schools could safely enroll in colleges. Furthermore, many have a better chance to go to prestigious universities in China and abroad. In contrast, a tiny percentage of students in non-key schools could enroll in those universities. Therefore, the competition in college admission was largely transferred to lower levels of education. According to the interviewed teachers, the city-wide senior middle school entrance exam became even more critical than the Gaokao. Some families are willing to pay extra fees to get their children into key schools when they do not excel in the competitive entrance exam.

School choice is called *Zexiao* (择校) in Chinese. Chai Chunqing and Cheng Gang (2011) claimed this phenomenon emerged during the late 1980s and became quite common after the mid-1990s in secondary schools in China. “In the mid-1990s,” the authors wrote, “a dual-track system was adopted in some cities: many schools accepted those who passed the admission scores, state-supported students, and those who did not pass, self-supported students, as well as the temporary students” (p. 136).

The Chinese Ministry of Education's regulatory documents in 1996 and 1997 set a cap on *Ze xiao* fees (择校费) and minimum scores of admitted students, even for students whose
families wanted to pay extra fees, which legalized Ze xiao. The fee collected from school choice was 30%-50% of urban family education expenses. In some provinces, more than half of the school's income came from Ze xiao charges (Zhang et al., 2011).

The competition to enter key high schools in Nanjing started as soon as the parents chose a kindergarten for their children. According to the popular desire to “win at the starting line” among parents who want to enroll their kids in the best secondary schools, such as Nanjing Foreign Language School (NFLS), registration for a key elementary school is the first battle in the long campaign for a good education. It is also the first step to entering the elite education system in China. In 1997, school-choice fees were legalized by the Ministry of Education in China.7

However, even when the parents wished to pay the fee, not all would be accepted by key schools. Guanxi [personal or social connection], a form of social capital, is also necessary. The most selective key schools still require an above-average test score from the student despite collecting extra tuition for their admission. According to Ms. Yang, in addition to monetary sponsorship, guanxi was also used by parents to help their children enroll in key schools.

Not everyone with money can get into a school. To put it simply, in addition to money, guanxi [relationship/connections]8 is also necessary to the school-choice process. Take my school as an example: to keep the school running, we have to have a good relationship with the local government, the tax department, the electric power department, and the policy office, etc. If leaders of those agencies want us to enroll their kids, how can we reject them? On the second level, school leadership and the education authorities have their guanxi; they have to solve problems for those in their circle with kinship or other connections. On the third level, faculties in the school also have their

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children or their friends and relatives to help. Altogether, there is a large number of students to be enrolled by school choice. (Oral historical interview, October 31, 2016)

In recent years, school choice has become more closely related to the real estate market. Since the Commercial Housing System Reform in the 1990s, amid rapidly rising real estate prices, ownership of properties near key schools is now the most direct way to accomplish school choice. Below is a recounting of changes in school choice policies by Ms. Yang Xiufeng, who has been working in a key elementary school for more than thirty years.

When I was young, school registration was decided entirely by the 庑户口 (户口) system (the household registration system). Kids went to the school where their 庑户口 was located. If your family’s 庑户口 was in school district A, you could not enroll your kid in a school in District B, but now the majority of people tend to have school choice. For example, in the school where I teach, 90% of students were enrolled based on their school choice, and only 10% were recruited from the local community. Schools were allowed to charge school-choice fees by the policy documents.

In my classroom, there are “primitive students (unselected ones)” who enrolled directly from the local community. I want most of them to have a solid foundation of basic knowledge. Nevertheless, as a teacher, I want at least 20% of my students to perform exceptionally on the next exam. If they can get a very high score, the average score for my class will also rise. (Oral historical interview, October 31, 2016)

The household registration system (庑户口, 户口) is an essential measure of governance in China. People who buy or rent a property in a large city do not necessarily have the 庑户口 for their kids to attend schools. In the system, students are supposed to enroll in the schools closest to where their 庑户口 is located rather than where their parents are currently living. Families who formerly lived in the city can change their 庑户口 by owning property in a new school district for some time. The transition process is not straightforward since different cities and school districts have different policies regarding school choice.

In the case of Nanjing, students could enter the school, only when their family own the property for a while. Those who rent or if their house ownership is not long enough could not enroll their kids in the school district. Almost all the traditionally well-known key schools are
located in two small districts of the city, where the area is less than five percent of the whole city. Properties near key schools are valued much higher than those in other common communities in the market. For example, when I was in Nanjing, the average price for old condos in Nanjing’s most popular school district was about $1300 per square foot, and it increased every year while the average income for a Nanjing citizen was $9700 a year.  

The rise of real estate prices was a popular topic when I researched in China, especially in private conversations. Many teachers talked about their views on the rising real estate market in Nanjing. According to Ms. Yang, some wealthy families purchased several condos in different school districts of the city so that they could choose the best schools for their kids. Without a property tax system, real estate prices for the best school districts have skyrocketed in recent years and grown out of control in large cities. Many impoverished families who once lived in the old school districts were forced to move out to the suburbs by the demolition projects.

To achieve equality of education, in 2003, the education ministry of Nanjing began using a lottery system to assign elementary students to different public junior middle schools. However, to enter the most popular key schools, students who won the lottery still had to pass an exam before enrollment. According to Li Xifan and He Yu's (2011) research on the admission policy of Nanjing Foreign Language School, the school used the three-tier admission procedure. The first tier enrolled 42.4% of students through the open process (公开录取)--after taking the lottery and the exam organized by the school. In the second tier, 20% of students were selected according to their achievements and specialties demonstrated by rewards in various competitions. They did not take the lottery and exam. They signed the contract with the school

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before the open enrollment process (提前签约). In the third tier, the rest 34.7% of students were enrolled using the expanded quotas (扩招名额). According to the policy, each family paid two thousand dollars “out-of-plan” fee to the state and a hefty amount sponsorship fee to the school. Li Xifan and He Yu also surveyed the occupation of fathers of enrolled students. The result shows that 82.3% of fathers were leaders in their workplace. Sixty-six percent (65.8%) of fathers worked in the public sectors, including government agencies and state-owned enterprises. Only 23.3% of fathers worked in private sectors, including private businesses and foreign companies.

Liu Ye’s (2013) research in East China found that generally speaking, family socioeconomic status does not have a substantial impact on students’ performance on the Gaokao. However, the parental educational level and socio-demographic factors still do. Thus, the gap between students from high-income families in the city and rural students born to low-income families has widened. The promotion of suzhi education is an example of how meritocratic social policy, somewhat wrapped up in appearances, implies discrimination against the most disadvantaged in society.

**Another Way Out**

To avoid these unpredictable changes and alleviate pressure on students caused by the Gaokao, a growing number of upper-middle-class families chose to send their kids abroad for education. Participants in the Gaokao in Jiangsu province continually decreased, from 527,000 in 2010 to 330,000 in 2018 (Ho, 2018). With the expansion of higher education, almost every student could enroll in a college. More than half of the candidates could gain admission to regular undergraduate programs (others went to vocational college). However, in 2015 only about 9% of students in Jiangsu could get into a key university. The rate was about 24% for
students in Beijing, 21% for students in Shanghai, and 15% for inner Mongolian students.\textsuperscript{10} Compared with other large cities in China, students in Nanjing had a lower chance of being accepted by their dream universities.

An increasing number of students began applying to universities outside China. According to Ms. Zhang Li, a history teacher at Nanjing Foreign Language School (NFLS), the growing trend of studying abroad started at the beginning of the new millennium. At first, it was limited to a few students from elite families who were admitted to Ivy League universities. NFLS, as a public school, at first did not help students with these applications. Instead, it punished students who communicated with foreign colleges using school time.

In 2000, many elite families in Nanjing started to aim for universities in the United States. First, it was arranged by the parents. At first, our school did not take action to help parents and students apply to foreign universities. In 2003, we had a student who was admitted to Oxford, and a few others got into Ivy League universities in the United States. Nevertheless, the number was not significant. Before 2005, there were still only a few students going abroad to study in foreign countries. (Oral historical interview, August 23, 2016)

As narrated by Ms. Zhang, More students started to apply to foreign universities after several graduates got scholarships.

After 2005, there was rapid growth every year. I was the head-teacher for a third-year high school class in 2005. One of the students in my class applied to a foreign university and got a full scholarship. He has a good family background. His parents both worked at high positions in Nanjing. At that time, there were no study-abroad agencies. He prepared his application materials and communicated with the schools all by himself. However, he was punished by our school because he did not obey the school rules. Due to the time-zone difference, he communicated with colleges outside of China at midnight, which prevented him from being on time for school activities. Our school publicly criticized the student, but the fact that he got a full scholarship influenced many of his classmates. (Oral historical interview, August 23, 2016)

However, after 2005, as more and more students chose universities outside of China, the school had to change its curriculum to accommodate students’ needs. Ms. Zhang witnessed the rapidly growing rate of foreign college application after 2005. With the rapid growth after 2005, over half of our students now choose to study abroad. Our school has begun to change the curriculum to suit their needs. The aim of our school has switched to preparing students for prestigious, elite universities, whether they are in China or foreign countries. (Oral historical interview, August 23, 2016)

Zhang Li also talked about why students and parents prefer universities in the United States. Most of the parents agreed that China has an efficient education system, especially before college, and prepares students with a solid foundation for further study. However, education in China does not emphasize character and individuality, and its exam system puts too much stress on young people. Families send their kids abroad to enjoy a free and open environment and to enjoy more choices in their lives.

With the growing knowledge and understanding of Western countries, many parents found a difference in education between China and the United States. Gradually, they reached a common perception that primary and secondary schools in China are strict, which prepares Chinese students with a good knowledge background. However, it does not give enough attention to the cultivation of personal integrity and character, especially for the development of individuality. Most families have only one child. Parents want their children to grow up healthy without the burden of Gaokao. So they send their kids to study in the United States, where they believe a liberal education and numerous choices are provided. (Oral historical interview, August 23, 2016)

Nanjing Foreign Language School was initially a “name-brand” middle school specializing in language education. In recent years, NFLS has surpassed other key schools in Nanjing in the number of its students admitted to elite universities around the world. Altogether, ten language schools like NFLS were established in China in the 1960s to provide talent for international communications. Compared with regular public schools, these language schools
enjoyed many policy benefits. They were allowed to set their standards of admission, which
often selected the best students in a city.

Except for the city-wide high school entrance exam, NFLS uses its own “language test
system” to select students in the sixth grade. According to Ms. Zhang, the English test
includes math questions.

The state government had regulations that prevent the school from testing other subjects
other than English. Therefore, the whole test paper includes only English words, without
number. Many Olympic math questions and knowledge in other disciplines were
represented by shapes, pictures, or names of animals. For example, in a cage, chickens,
and rabbits add up to thirty-five heads and ninety-four feet. Please count the number of
chickens and rabbits. If the kid does not have an Olympic math brain, he indeed cannot
figure this out. (Oral historical interview, August 23, 2016)

Language schools could recommend their students to the foreign language departments of
top universities in China without taking the Gaokao. Ms. Zhang talked about the differences
between NFLS and other high schools in Nanjing:

Our school is different from other high schools in Nanjing. We encouraged our students
to make plans as soon as possible. As a head-teacher for a class, I will continually talk to
my students to form their plans immediately when they enter high school. However, if the
parents and students do not have their plans, they can still follow the steps of the school
curriculum.

The curriculum for the ten required subjects of high school is the same for all first
and second graders, after the small Gaokao in the second year. Each student will follow a
different track according to their plan. There are three choices: first is to study abroad in a
foreign university, second is to be recommended for free admission to a domestic
university, and the third is to take the Gaokao. After the second year of high school,
students will have a clear mind about which way to choose. (Oral historical interview,
August 23, 2016)

Currently, only a small percentage of students enrolled at NFLS will participate in
China's college entrance exam. Thus, teachers in the last year of high school have outnumbered
students who will stay at the school to prepare for the Gaokao. It is common for three teachers to
teach only one student. However, in other key schools in Nanjing, only a small number of
students plan to study abroad, and these schools’ aim is still to prepare for the Gaokao in China.

Students who choose to go abroad usually come from families with higher income and
social status. With the help of their parents, those students can escape from the controlling exam
system in China. However, they have to find resources outside of the school system to fulfill
their ambition to enroll in elite universities in Western countries. Ms. Wang Weizhong is a
politics teacher at NFLS. She mentioned during her interview that some parents tried hard to
send their teenagers to Africa for volunteer experiences. Their goal was to add a unique item to
the student’s resume in hopes of catching the eye of admissions officers from elite universities in
Western countries (Oral historical interview, August 19, 2016).

The trend created a new level of meritocracy, cultivating a need for all-around global
competence, featured in skyrocketing SAT/TOEFL scores and high-profile resumes sculpted
from kindergarten. After 2010, other key schools in Nanjing began to offer international
programs to prepare students to apply to universities outside of China. Mr. Yu Xuchu talked
about his experiences teaching Chinese to students enrolled in international programs at Nanjing
Jinling High School.

I do not use the regular textbook for students in the international class. I teach them the
traditional Chinese cultures, such as the *Analects of Confucius* and the *Works of Mencius*.
I also teach grammar and writing. I told my students, “After you go to the United States,
you will find that some people from Japan, Korea, or Taiwan may have a better
knowledge of Chinese than yourself. Do not forget that you are Chinese. You still need to
know the traditional culture. I teach very slowly, and often have classroom discussions
with the students. (Oral historical interview, September 2, 2016)

Compared with regular class teaching, Mr. Yu loved to teach students in international
programs. Without the stress of the Gaokao, students had time to read classic Chinese literature
and discuss it in the classroom. In contrast, regular public school students could only do test
preparation exercises and listen to lectures. It was also stressful for teachers to condense all the
data into a 45-minute lecture.

It is entirely different from teaching a regular class. In a Chinese course for a regular high
school student, the teacher primarily lectures for the entire class session. Because there
are too many things to teach and to prepare for the exam, even if the teacher wants to
hold a class discussion, he or she will not dare to do so. Time is limited for the regular
class. Students spend a lot of time on test preparation exercises. So it is a pleasure for me
to teach in international programs. We have more free time to communicate with each
other in a relatively relaxed environment. (Oral historical interview, September 2, 2016)

Chapter Summary

The Gaokao, which gained increasing significance during the transition from Socialist
China to the present, has been used as a meritocratic tool for governance. The Gaokao has been
the principal tool for the evaluation of merit in the education system since its resumption in
1978. This has shifted the focus from an individual’s family class background and revolutionary
zeal during the Cultural Revolution to one’s academic achievement represented by the Gaokao.
Many intellectuals and students from the educated family background who has endured
adversities during the Cultural Revolution had a chance to regained their advantages by taking
the Gaokao and entering top universities. The link between test scores in the Gaokao and social
rewards later in life grew close.

Strengthening state power through the nation-building process in the educational system
is always the theme in the process. As argued by Irving Epstein (1991), “the post-Mao era is a
period where the power of the state has reasserted the ideological legitimacy of Maoism” (p.
xvii). Andrew Kipnis’ (2012) research warned that the focus of scholarly work on globalization
had masked the importance of Chinese nation-building to contemporary social change. The
consolidation of an education system that is deliberately planned to produce Party-loving and
patriotic human subjects is one aspect of the nation-building process. Liu Ye (2066) argues that
to realize the goal of “development and stability,” a patriotic orientation, a renaissance of traditional values, and a belief in meritocracy were used as tools to replace communist and egalitarian ideologies. The Chinese central government used the standardized curriculum and the Gaokao-oriented exam system as a tool to build a unified, patriotic, and Party-loving national culture.

The exam system not only regulates the field of education but also governs people's beliefs about merit, about how society defines the successful and elite. Many teachers I interviewed used the metaphor that the college entrance exam is the "baton" that conducts the whole education orchestra. Not only do high schools in Nanjing prepare for the exam, but many elementary schools also aim to send more students to key secondary schools, where students have a better chance of performing well on the Gaokao. Though many teachers still believe schools should provide an excellent education to everyone, regardless of student performance on exams, they reluctantly accept that students' exam scores are the most important aspect of a school's prestige and parents' expectations for education. As analyzed by Wu Jinting (2016), high-stakes exams work to distinguish students by score and channel them into different academic or occupational prospects. This system creates an imagined meritocracy, in which the successful become models for others to emulate, and links individual achievement to collective cultural desires. From elementary school to high school, as well as after-school lessons, the exam system, as a "baton," controls almost every aspect of learning in Nanjing.

Both society and the government has acknowledged the harm of the exam centered education. Suzhi education and the new curriculum reform were measures to change the narrow focus on the test score. Students’ overall development demonstrated by the extra-curriculum activities, art performances, and sports games, volunteer jobs were documented and evaluated.
The government also tried to reform the Gaokao so that it can select students who got the highest suzhi, rather than a two-day exam that determines students’ future life. However, none of those measures has changed the dominant role of the Gaokao system in tracking students into different institutions and social positions. Many people still believe the Gaokao is the most meritocratic way that is applicable to select the future elite.

In recent years, the possibilities of studying abroad have changed the hegemonic role of the Gaokao in Nanjing’s education system. A growing number of families choose to apply for universities outside of the country. This phenomenon has created conflicts when parents and students have to choose evaluation and knowledge systems between China and Western countries. Families with higher social, economic status could provide their children with more choices and advantages, especially after the mushroom of private-sector education in Nanjing. In recent years, almost all the key public schools in Nanjing has established for-profit subdivisions or private campuses that have higher autonomy in admissions and teacher hiring. The rapidly growing real estate price within the best school districts also differentiated students according to their families’ economic status. The meritocratic nature of the Gaokao has been challenged by the widening gap in education resources for students from various family backgrounds.
CHAPTER EIGHT

CONCLUSION

Teachers are the actors who recognize and produce individual merit in their daily work. Their perception of meritocracy has been shaped by changing historical and cultural contexts in China’s transition from socialism to the opening-up era and back to authoritarian governance. Most of the teachers I interviewed agreed that they have benefited from their advancement in the education system during the historical period from 1978 to the present. Thus, they generally believed in the idea of educational meritocracy and did their best to help students move forward in the education system. Most of the teachers found a positive relationship between students’ academic performance in schools and their future success. When I asked them to provide examples of successful people among their former students, many interviewed teachers introduced former students who achieved excellent academic scores during their school years.

However, regarding the perceived meritocracy, almost all the teachers said there was inequality in Chinese society that cannot be explained by meritocratic principles. Some teachers mentioned that corruption is a big problem for the country, which provides powerful and wealthy people with priorities. They did witness the imperfection of the current education system, but teachers felt that the majority of people in Chinese society still believe in meritocracy and believe that making an effort to advance in the current system is the best choice they can make. Referring to their choices in the education system and their careers, many teachers used words like “I had to ...” and “I had no choice but to ...” or “because of my family, I had to ...”
Similar words were also used to describe their students, such as “they have to work hard on ...” or “their only choice is to ....” Many teachers felt their lives were partly decided by the Gaokao, the degrees they held, or the schools they worked in. Therefore, for their students to have a better life or more choices, they needed to work hard to advance in the education system.

From 1978 to the present, schools in Nanjing increasingly used institutionalized standards and quantitative evaluations to measure and award merit. The exam and student evaluation system constitutes a “scientific” method to produce and recognize individual merit. From kindergarten to higher education institutions, key schools in Nanjing had an established and comprehensive system of evaluating students and teachers, which centered on academic performance measured by exams and competitions. During the transition from 1978 to the present, the key school system in Nanjing became increasingly institutionalized in the way it selected students and redistributed them into separate groups. Teachers, as agents in the system, acted within the structures of socially constituted preference systems. Many interviewed teachers worked as facilitators to help students move forward in the selection.

Elite families in the city tended to keep their priorities and social status by investing in their children’s education. From 1978 to the present, the marketization of the education system provided increasing choices for private sessions in public schools, shadow education, or international education opportunities to powerful and wealthy families, to give more opportunities in the educational system to create merit in their kids and ensure that merit was recognized. The seemingly meritocratic examinations and the admissions and selection processes within the system were closely related to one’s socioeconomic background and cultural capital. The educational system consecrated students' precocity and charismatic values in the name of
merit. Reciprocally, key schools that initially enjoyed more public resources were glorified by the number of their students who were admitted to the next level of elite schools.

Exam-centered education and the quantified evaluation used in key schools have narrowed the concept of merit to a specific social space, which limits variety in the pursuit of merit. Thus, it has exacerbated the social Darwinist nature of meritocracy and the existing tendency toward competition in Chinese society. In Martin Schoenhals’s (1993) ethnographic research of China’s key schools in 1989, he found a salient feature of Chinese culture that he named “the evaluativeness of the Chinese.” He described the widespread role that evaluation plays in China. “Who is good and who is not good is an issue of great interest in China” (p. 37). Schoenhals concluded that in China, one’s social status is based on other persons’ witnesses and acknowledgment of his or her merit. People tend to compare and discuss what is right, bad, and the best. This phenomenon was prevalent during my research in China. In Nanjing’s key schools, it was so extreme that it created anxiety and restlessness among students, who “had no choice” but to keep struggling along the narrow road toward upper-level elite schools.

Recent research on the concept of merit by Joseph Kett (2013) distinguishes two types of merit, the essential merit, and the institutional merit as defined by Kett; the essential merit “resting on an individual’s visible and notable achievements or performances” (p. 3), that reflect one’s intrinsic merit. Thomas Jefferson has referred to as a “natural aristocracy” of “talented and virtuous men, who would be chosen by an electorate enlightened by the progress of education and science” (p. 5). To demonstrate one’s essential merit, one has to contribute to the public good, to fight on a battlefield, or to make publicly acknowledged contributions. David Labaree (2019) pointed out that the essential merit is the “premodern form” merit that was open to men
from an aristocratic background. By contrast, institutional merit is the new democratic form of merit, “which arose in the mid-nineteenth century after the emergence of universal public schooling” (p. 1). According to Joseph Kett (2013), the evidence of institutional merit includes peer-reviewed scientific articles, diplomas from educational institutions, etc. Through the development of public schooling, institutional merit became open to people who were not in the gentry class or from noble families. As argued by David Labaree (2019), institutional merit “arose from a system that governed an entire population within a school” (p. 3).

Through the creation and development of imperial examinations, China has a long history for the development of institutional merit. Moreover, China has a long tradition to institutionalize the rewarding of essential merit. In other words, in the Chinese tradition, the essential merit, such as one’s moral character and inner psychological traits, can also be quantified and compared. For example, the ChaJu system, which is the prototype of the imperial exam during the Han dynasty (206 BCE–220 CE), is a rewarding system of one’s essential merit based on the recommendation of local officials. The Jiu Ping Zhong Zheng system (九品中正制), “the institution of nine administrative grades and the Impartial,” started in the Wei Dynasty is a more systematic evaluation of one’s essential merit. The local officials collected documents about the public opinion and compiled a file about each candidate (with short phrases such as “his virtues are lofty, his skills scarce, etc.), and send it to the Ministry of Personnel (Libu 吏部), which appointed the candidates to a position (Blistein, 2019, p. 583). The imperial exam developed based on the tradition, using a written exam to evaluate one’s essential merit.

During the Ming and Qing Dynasties, the ledgers of merit and demerit (功过格) became famous as a morality book to help people quantify and evaluate their essential merit. According
to Cynthia J. Brokaw (2014), the book “consisted of lists of good and bad deeds, each assigned a
certain number of merit and demerit points. The ledgers offered the hope of divine reward to
users “good” enough to accumulate a substantial sum of merits” (p. 3). These traditions partly
explained “the evaluativeness of the Chinese” found by Martin Schoenhals (1993), and shed light
on the current education system in China. For example, in the policy document about the first
mission for the Gaokao is to lead the Suzhi education, to establish one’s moral character. The
evaluation has not only been designed as a measure of a student’s acquisition of knowledge in the current
curriculum or an academic aptitude test but also viewed as an evaluation of one’s essential merit.

The concept of essential merit has also changed in different historical and social contexts.
Amartya Sen (2000) found that the ultimately instrumental character of merit depends on the
concept of “the good” in the relevant society. While there are many kinds of ability, effort, and
achievement, not all are deemed equally meritorious. For example, during the transition from
1978 to the present, the concept of “the good” in the socialist period, including altruism and
unconditional public service, changed over time. Although these socialist merit principles
somehow resonate with the moral standards for the elite in Western cultures and frequently
appear in textbooks and public propaganda, their importance has faded away in the education
system.

Future research on the concept of merit in China could focus on the transition period
when the modern schooling system obsoleted the imperial exam system at the beginning of the
20th century. During the time, abrupt changes had happened to the evaluation and examination

12019高考大纲 2019高考考试说明 高考大纲解读—中国教育在线. (n.d.).
http://www.eol.cn/e_html/gk/dagang/
system. Conflicts between the Chinese traditional and the Western way of evaluation and rewarding are the salient features of the transition period.

To better understand the current merit system in China, the following directions are recommended for future researchers on the subject: the content analysis of the Gaokao exam papers and textbooks to discern the changing focus of merit in China’s education system; classroom observations and ethnographic studies focused on teachers’ practices to recognize and reward student merit. The international comparisons would find more results on the research questions. Further studies are needed to answer questions like whether the concept of merit is the same for men and women, what are the criteria for masculinity and femininity in different historical periods.
APPENDIX A

LIST OF PARTICIPANTS
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Brief intro</th>
<th>Time of interview</th>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>anonymity</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Wang Weizhong 王卫忠</td>
<td>As a retired political science teacher in Nanjing Foreign Language School (南京市外国语学校), Wang Weizhong started teaching after Graduation from the junior middle school of Nanjing Foreign Language School at the age of 15. Working in the same school for 50 years, taken roles as a political science teacher, counselor of the Young Pioneer Group, an administrator in charge of exam-free. She got her Master of Education degree from Nanjing Normal University through on-the-job training programs for teachers.</td>
<td>8/11,8/19</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>no</td>
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<tr>
<td>Zhang Li 张丽</td>
<td>As a history teacher in Nanjing Foreign Language School (南京市外国语学校), Zhang Li graduated from a normal school in Nanjing and started teaching in No.8 middles school, which is not a key school. Transfer to work as a high school history teacher and headteacher (the teacher who in charge of a class) at Nanjing Foreign Language School. Her son studied at a master's program at Columbia University in New York at the time of the interview.</td>
<td>8/23</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yu Xuchu 喻旭初</td>
<td>As a Retired Chinese teacher in Nanjing Jinling Senior Middle School (南京市金陵中学), Yu Xuchu is one of the top-grade teachers in Jiangsu Province. He participated in the test making of the College Entrance Exam for many years, specialized in the writing part. He has been working as a Chinese teacher in Nanjing Jinling School for 51 years. From 2008 to 2014, teach the Chinese language in the school’s international program for students who want to enroll in universities in the United States.</td>
<td>9/2</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>no</td>
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<tr>
<td>Li Jun 李俊</td>
<td>As an English Teacher in Nanjing Foreign Language School (南京市外国语学校), Li Jun graduated from the Secondary Vocational School program at Nanjing Xiaozhuang Normal School. He worked in three schools, first in a rural village middle school of Tangshan, second in the middles school of Jiangning County, and the last one in the top key school, Nanjing Foreign Language school. He continued self-study throughout his career and got his master's degree from Nanjing Normal University in his forties.</td>
<td>9/14</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>no</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tong Qiang 童强</td>
<td>As a professor and Vice-dean of Art Institute of Nanjing University（南大艺术研究院），Tong Qiang studied in the B.A., M.A., and Ph.D. program at Nanjing University. He specialized in Chinese Ancient culture and theory, Space philosophy, and art theory. Teach common core courses for undergraduates at Nanjing University.</td>
<td>9/21</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>no</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Zhang Yulin 张玉林</td>
<td>As a professor in School of Economics and management, Southeast University（东南大学管理学院), Zhang Yulin got a high score in the college entrance exam from</td>
<td>9/28</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>no</td>
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<tr>
<td>Name</td>
<td>Description</td>
<td>Gender</td>
<td>Year</td>
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<tr>
<td>Li Yun 李云</td>
<td>As a retired Math teacher in Senior Middle School Affiliated to Nanjing Normal University (南京师范大学附属中学), Li Yun is among the top-grade Math teachers in Jiangsu Province. He has authored many books about Math education. He has been working in the same school for 50 years.</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>10/9</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ouyang Rongbai 欧阳容百</td>
<td>As a retired Professor in the School of Physics of Nanjing University(南京大学物理系), Ouyang Rongbai studied in the B.A. program in physics at Nanjing University from 1953-1957. He started to work as a lecturer at Nanjing University after graduation, and he worked as a physics professor and provost of Nanjing University in the 1980s. His son went to study in the United States and now permanently lives in Boston.</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>10/12</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yang Yijing 杨毅静</td>
<td>As a Principal and English teacher in Nanjing Houbiaoying Elementary School (南京后标营小学), Yang Yijing graduated from the Secondary Vocational School program at Nanjing Xiaozhuang Normal School. Worked in more than five elementary schools in Nanjing, first as a teacher, then became a vice-principal after the public election of leadership positions. She continued self-study throughout her career and got a master's degree from Nanjing Normal University.</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>10/20</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bai Jing 白静</td>
<td>Bai Jing is the provost and Chinese teacher in an Elementary School (南京后标营小学).</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>10/20</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yang Xiufeng 杨绣凤</td>
<td>As a retired Math teacher in Nanjing Confucius Temple Elementary School (南京夫子庙小学), Yang Xiufeng graduated from the Secondary Vocational School program at Nanjing Xiaozhuang Normal School and got a junior college degree in Chinese education. She worked as a Chinese teacher in No. 32 middle schools, and then a dance teacher in Nanjing's small red flower troupe. Finally, a math teacher in the key elementary school, Nanjing Confucius Temple Elementary School.</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>10/31</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Qin Yongfa 秦永法</td>
<td>As a retired English teacher in Nanjing No.3 Middle school (南京市第三中学), Qin Yongfa graduated from Jiangsu Normal University, majored in English. He was sent down to the rural area to work with the peasants after graduation in 1968. He started to teach Math at the village middle school and then worked in the local education bureau. He went to work as an interpreter in Africa to sell furniture from China to Sudan, then came back to China to work at the Commodity Inspection and Testing Bureau in 1990. He transferred to teach English at No. 3 middle school.</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>11/1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Name</td>
<td>Role</td>
<td>Gender</td>
<td>Nationality</td>
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<tr>
<td>Wang Shuiming 王水明</td>
<td>As a Chemistry teacher in Nanjing No.9 middle school (南京市第九中学), Wang Shuiming graduated from the Normal school in Zhenjiang, then worked as a Chemistry teacher in a village high school. Because of his top teaching quality, selected to work in the country high school and finally to work in the key school in Nanjing. Now is the headteacher for high school students.</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>no</td>
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</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In 2004, He worked as a principal in the first private key middle school in the city of Huai’an.
APPENDIX B

CONSENT TO PARTICIPATE IN RESEARCH
参与研究同意书

研究项目名称: 中国教育制度中的精英主义: 对当代中国重点学校教师的口述史研究
Project Title: Meritocracy in China’s Education System: An Oral Historical Research of Teachers in Contemporary China’s Key Schools

研究者: 陈瑶, 美国芝加哥罗耀拉大学文化与教育政策专业博士生
Researcher: Yao Chen (Doctoral Student of Cultural and Educational Policy Studies at Loyola University Chicago)

研究指导者: 诺亚.叟比, 美国芝加哥罗耀拉大学文化与教育政策专业教授
Faculty Sponsor: Noah Sobe (Professor of Cultural and Educational Policy Studies at Loyola University Chicago)

简介:
您将参与的研究课题, 是美国芝加哥罗耀拉大学博士生陈瑶的毕业论文研究。您被要求加入研究的原因是您自从 1977 年开始, 就曾在中国的教育体系里工作过。研究过程中, 我将了解您的人生经历, 您对于精英主义的理解, 以及您在职业生涯中培养学生特长和素养的过程。

Introduction:
You are being asked to take part in a research study being conducted by Yao Chen, who is working on her dissertation study at Loyola University Chicago. You are being asked to participate because you have worked in the education system of China since 1977. I would like to talk to you to learn more about your life experience and your views on education-based meritocracy, as well as your practices during your career to cultivate merit into students.

研究目的:
这项研究旨在了解中国教师对于精英主义的理解, 以及他们如何在学校工作中践行他们的理念, 以及在中国重点学校中识别和表彰个人特长和素养的过程。

Purpose:
The purpose of this study is to learn about teachers’ views on meritocracy and how their conceptions and views on meritocracy result in their everyday practices in schools for producing, recognizing, and awarding individual merit in contemporary China’s key schools.

如果您同意参与此研究:
- 在第一次正式访谈前, 会有一个 15-30 分钟的不录音的环节, 介绍研究的概要和过程。
- 每次访谈时间是 60 分钟到 90 分钟。根据访谈的完成情况, 您可能被访问不止一次。
- 访谈内容涉及您的家庭背景, 教育经历, 您的职业生涯, 您关于精英主义的理解, 以及您在学校的日常工作
- 访谈内容会被录音, 并且录音之后会被转录成文字资料。在转录完成后, 在使用文字稿前, 会首先交由您核对和修改。
If you participate in this project:
• There will be a non-recorded pre-interview session before the first interview, lasting approximately from 15 minutes to 30 minutes. General information and procedures about the research will be introduced during the pre-interview session.
• Your interview will last approximately from 60 minutes to 90 minutes. You may be interviewed more than once, depending on whether the first interview could cover all the content of this study.
• You will be asked questions about your background, your education, your career, your thoughts on meritocracy, and your work at schools.
• Your interview will be audiotaped. A transcript will be made from the tape. You will be allowed to review and edit the transcript before its further use.
Please read this form carefully and ask any questions you may have before deciding whether to participate in the study.

风险/利益:
参加本研究的风险是:您有可能会发现,别人的观点和对历史事件的理解跟您不同。除了日常生活经历以外, 本研究不会带来其他可以预见的风险。参与本研究不会为您带来直接的利益, 但您有可能会为帮助保存中国教师的历史做出了贡献。

If you participate in this project, you may find that people disagree with some of their opinions or their interpretations of historical events. There are no foreseeable risks beyond those experienced in everyday life. There are no direct benefits to you from participation. You may have the satisfaction of knowing that you are helping to preserve the history of the teachers in China.

自愿参与:
参加本研究完全是出于自愿的。如果您不想要参与研究，不是一定要参加。即使您同意参与，您也可以随时提出问题，拒绝提供一些资料信息，或者随时退出研究。如果您不想用您的真名参与研究，我们会用假名代替您的真实姓名。您的个人联系信息，包括地址电话等不会被泄漏。

Voluntary Participation:
Participation in this study is voluntary. If you do not want to be in this study, you do not have to participate. Even if you decide to participate, you are free not to answer any question, to decline to provide any documents requested, or to withdraw from participation at any time. If you do not want to be identified by name, we will assign you a pseudonym. Your contact information, such as address and telephone, will not be disclosed to the public.

研究资料的处置: 
您将同意将本研究的原始录音和文字资料交由南京图书馆保存。在交由馆藏前，您会签署相关协议。本研究的文字资料会被研究者，教师或者其他公众获取。基于这些资料的研究结果可能会被公开发表。这些资料也有可能会对公众展示。
Deposit of materials:

You will agree to have the final edited transcript and the original audiotape of the interview stored at the Nanjing library. You will have to sign a release form before this can be done. The transcript will be available for use by researchers, teachers, or other members of the public. Your results may be displayed publicly or published. The materials may also be used for public display or publication.

联系人和相关问题:
您如果对本研究有任何问题，可以随时联系研究者：
陈瑶
电话：86-15335152846(中国); 1-312-927-0501 (美国)
电子邮箱: YCHEN5@luc.edu

Contacts and Questions:
If you have questions about this research study, please feel free to contact
Yao Chen
Tel: 86-15335152846（China）; 1-(312)-927-0501(U.S.A.)
Email: YCHEN5@luc.edu

是____ 否_____ 我同意以真实姓名参与本次研究
是____ 否______我同意在研究结束后，将访谈录音交由南京图书馆保存，我知道在此之前
我会另外签一份同意协定

Yes____  No_____ I consent to the use of my name.
Yes____  No_____ I consent to the deposit of the audiotape in the Nanjing Library, and I
understand that I will have to sign their Release Form.

如您对于自己作为研究参与者的权益有任何问题，可以联系芝加哥罗耀拉大学的研究服务处，电话 1-(773) 508-2689。
If you have questions about your rights as a research participant, you may contact the Loyola University Office of Research Services at 1-(773) 508-2689

同意声明:
我已经阅读和理解了本文件的内容，研究者鼓励我提出问题，并且已经对我的问题做出了解答。我同意参与本次研究，我得到了这份同意书的复印件。

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Statement of Consent:
I have read the contents of this consent form, and I understand it. I have been encouraged to ask
cquestions, and I have received answers to my questions. I give my consent to participate in this
study. I have received (or will receive) a copy of this consent form.

Signature

Date

Phone number

Email
REFERENCE LIST


Trow, M. A. (1974). *Problems in the transition from elite to mass higher education*. Graduate School of Public Policy, University of California.


Dr. Chen was born in Yi Chun, a small city in the inner land area of China. Her family moved to Nanjing, a larger city near the coastal area of China when she was three years old. Before attending Loyola University Chicago, she attended Central China Normal University in the city of Wuhan, China. Where he earned a Bachelor of Arts in Education in 2006, and a second Bachelor of Arts degree in English. From 2006 to 2009, she also attended the Beijing Normal University, where he received a Master of Arts in Comparative Education. She moved to Chicago in 2009 to pursue her Ph.D. degree at Loyola University Chicago.

While at Loyola, Dr. Chen worked as a graduate assistant for the comparative and international education course archive project and helped with data management job for the Illinois School-based Problem Solving and Intervention Resources Project. She also worked as a voluntary tutor in Rogers Park Community Center. Dr. Chen taught courses for undergraduate students on Chinese Language and Culture at North Park University in Chicago from 2012 to 2015.