

THE POTENTIALS AND PROBLEMS OF DIVERSITY IN CHINESE EDUCATION¹

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ABSTRACT. This paper begins with a discussion of the increasingly diverse and rapidly transforming structures and purposes of Chinese secondary schooling. We examine the diversity of secondary schools, including private and all-girl institutions, as a positive result of the changing needs of particular social groups, providing students and their parents choice, and alternative approaches in teaching and learning. We also focus upon the inequities that accompany such diversification, contrasting differences in schools' learning environments, teacher qualifications, and the alternative futures that schools provide to their students. Our information and conclusions are based on fieldwork conducted in 20 schools during the summer of 1996, as well as visits to other schools in 1995 and 1997.

RÉSUMÉ. Cet article débute par une analyse des structures et des objectifs de plus en plus divers et mouvants de l'enseignement secondaire en Chine. Les auteurs analysent la diversification des écoles secondaires et notamment des écoles privées et des établissements réservés aux filles, conséquence heureuse de l'évolution des besoins de groupes sociaux particuliers et de la nécessité d'offrir aux élèves et à leurs parents divers choix et approches en matière d'enseignement et d'apprentissage. Les auteurs se penchent également sur les inégalités résultant d'une telle diversification en soulignant les écarts qui existent sur le plan des milieux d'apprentissage, des compétences des enseignants et des perspectives d'avenir que les écoles offrent à leurs élèves. Les données et conclusions sont le résultat d'une étude menée dans 20 écoles au cours de l'été 1996, et de visites effectuées dans d'autres écoles en 1995 et 1997.

BACKGROUND TO THE RESEARCH PROJECT

Data for this paper come primarily from a one-year study, conducted in the summer of 1996, of social stratification and equality of educational opportunity in China.² In this project we examine how the economic and social reforms of China's "reform decade" have altered social class and identity, and the purposes and structures of schooling. New social demands linked to new social class identifications, based primarily upon

an individual's differential access to political, economic, and intellectual power, have formed the context for great diversity in Chinese education as well as increased inequality of educational opportunity. Understanding and documenting the ways in which schools are responding to pressures for the distribution, consolidation, and reproduction of political, economic, and intellectual powers is our primary research purpose.

Formal education has served as a powerful social sorting mechanism in post-Mao China. Public education has centered on funneling a small number of students into colleges and universities under centralized government control. Likewise, public education has been rigid, failing to adjust to China's rapidly changing economy. Simultaneously, the developing market economy has aroused great concern that schools meet the diverse needs of the economy at various levels. The development of the private economy and a market system under the framework of socialism have contributed to the establishment of a new hierarchy of power in the political system, as well as power in the market.

To understand the relationship and contribution of formal education to these processes, we studied 20 schools, including public key academic schools, regular non-key high schools, vocational schools, all-girls', and elite and ordinary private schools, in Beijing, Dalian, Shanghai, and Guangxi Autonomous Minority Nationality Region.³ Primarily, we were interested in understanding how these schools responded to the intellectual, economic, and political resources and interests of their students and those students' families. We investigated how schools were shaped as contexts in which the social backgrounds of students were reacted to and converted into academic achievement, perceptions of group identity, and educational and employment opportunities. We observed that market reforms, coupled with the reduced presence of state authority and resources in schools, were simultaneously altering social class formation and education in ways that consolidated the linkages between the two.

In most schools we visited, we talked with school administrators and teachers. Our conversations were focused around five categories of questions: 1) student outcome data and the number and social characteristics of the school's student body (including gender and ethnic make-up, educational and occupational history of parents, recruitment to the school); 2) the social characteristics, educational background, and organization of the teaching staff; 3) conceptions of the school's relative position and prestige in local and regional educational commu-

nities; 4) general and financial administration of the school and its linkages to enterprises or other social and economic units in the local community; and 5) the goals and content of the formal school mission and curriculum.

We also spent time at each school examining the school's formal curricula (statements of purpose, textbooks, teaching plans) and extra-curricular programs; filming and conducting open-ended interviews with teachers about their perceptions of the social purposes of schooling, the class background of their students, their teaching methods, and their own educational and occupational histories. The over-arching questions which guided these activities were: How have the economic and political reforms of the past decade altered schooling and class formation in China? How have these same reforms reshaped schooling in ways that reinforce new patterns of class transformation? How do socio-economic, ethnic, and gender characteristics of students interact with and shape learning conditions in different types of schools to restrict or enhance their access to political, economic, and intellectual power? How does this access ultimately determine who will shape the contours and interests of China's emerging civil society?

UNIFORMITY AND PROBLEMS IN PUBLIC EDUCATION

School policies of China's reform decade embodied a contest between expansion and diversification, reflecting the contradictory goal, evident in educational policy since 1949, of balancing equality of educational opportunity with advanced training for economic development (Ross, 1991). This contest was reinforced by two reforms in secondary education in 1985. The first reform redefined basic schooling by advocating the extension of compulsory education from six to nine years. While the task of making possible for all children the constitutionally-guaranteed right to a junior secondary school education remains daunting in rural and township areas, the great majority of urban students can finish junior secondary school and 80% move on to the senior secondary level.

The second reform of secondary schooling was its diversification at the senior high school level. This reform was designed to redress the narrow purpose of senior schools, which basically defined education as training students to pass the university entrance examination. As only a small number of students could be admitted into universities, the future and employability of the remainder of senior high school graduates had become a major issue. Insufficient vocational schooling, a legacy of the

Cultural Revolution policies to extend a common education to all students, was identified as the “weakest link” in Chinese education. In particular, the “under-development” of vocational training was blamed for a misalignment of schooling with the employment options of youths. By 1990 China had come close to meeting its goal of vocationalizing one-half of its senior secondary schools. Expanding employment opportunities in cities like Shanghai made vocationalization efforts so successful that 60% of senior secondary school pupils were enrolled in vocational programs.

However, despite success stories on the Eastern Coast, China’s public education system, the biggest in the world, serving nearly 200 million students, is yet far from meeting rising demands for education. Although vocational and technical education has developed to divert students into nonacademic tracks, the goals of education for most schools remain that of preparing students for exams. School activities, teaching, programs, study areas, all have to be in line with guides and instructions from state authorities; and classrooms are big, usually with 45 to 70 students.

Uniformity and rigidity in the public school system have been exacerbated by inadequate state educational financial support. In recent years the average annual educational investment is 50 billion yuan, averaging 40 yuan per person, or US \$8.00 (Li Yixian, 1993), and more than 40% of rural students cannot attend secondary schools. Low funding renders schools poorly equipped, teachers under-qualified and under-paid, and school administrators short of funds to organize educational activities, much less innovate. Likewise, while the Compulsory Education Law instituted in 1986 states that education is free for students during the first nine years of schooling, in reality, students have to pay numerous fees, such as examination paper fees, school construction fees, water fees, after-school coaching fees, and on and on. Fees demanded by some schools exceed the annual income of rural parents. In poor rural areas, families may send only one child to school while the remaining children work to support their sibling in school. Despite the fact that the enrollment of school-age children is nearly universal in China, the graduation ratio is around 60% at grade nine nationally.

THE RISE OF PRIVATE SCHOOLS

Lack of seats in secondary schools, lack of state funding, irrelevance of the public school curriculum to (particularly rural) students’ lives and employment opportunities, rigidity and control in the public sector

which inhibit reform, and restricted entrance to quality education (key schools) are among the reasons for the rise of private schools in large numbers in the 1990s. As parents, business leaders, and citizens see clearly that relying on the government will not solve the shortage of educational funding and resources, private education has become a major force in educational reform.

Government policies since the middle of the 1980s have advocated continued diversification and privatization of schooling; greater commitment to vocational training with business linkages; and further devolution of school funding and authority. In 1985, the government promulgated the *Decision of the Central Committee of the Chinese Communist Party on the Reform of the Education System* in which it was affirmed that local authorities should encourage and give guidance to the establishment of schools by state enterprises, organizations, and individuals. In 1987, the *Provisional Regulation on the Establishment of Schools by Societal Forces* contained concrete provisions for the establishment and management of non-governmental schools. The 1993 *Outline of Chinese Educational Reform and Development* further stated that the state adopts a policy of active encouragement, vigorous support, correct guidance, and enhanced management of schools established according to law by social organizations and individual citizens. Thus, state encouragement, as well as the centrality of schooling to social mobility, group identity, and economic development have set the stage for schools being inexorably incorporated into the commodifying hold of market socialism.

It has been widely written that economic reform has helped create the conditions and spaces within Chinese society for more autonomy and pluralism. The market economy injects competition into the employment system, calling for expertise at various levels. These demands, lack of space in the public education system, increasing competition for jobs, all have contributed to the rapid increase of private schools. In 1992 Guangzhou private schools and training classes enrolling 150,000 students were likened to "guerrilla" warriors, exploiting the local environment while providing whatever was needed by the society they served. "Guangzhou private schools filled with students, adopting guerrilla strategies to be short, sharp, and quick" (World of Private Higher Education, 1993). As public schools and universities were awaiting answers from government officers, passing papers up and down the state bureaucracy, private school advertisements were appearing in newspapers and on the streets. Private schools set up foreign language, ac-

counting, fashion design, and interior decoration classes, whenever needs arose. Course schedules ranged from short to long, classes were offered day or night, all depending on the needs of clients. Schools promised to relinquish fees if students were dissatisfied with results. This guarantee of quality outcomes helped some administrators develop and eventually own their own school buildings and equipment.

Nationally, the expansion of private schooling has been breath-taking. By the end of 1993, there were roughly 20,000 non-governmental schools of different types (including kindergartens) across the country. Among them, some 700 were secondary schools enrolling a total of 130,000 students. Ten institutions of higher learning were accredited to award degrees (xueli jiaoyu) by the State Education Commission and duly registered; seven were regular universities enrolling 2,000 students (Zhu Kaixuan, 1994). By 1994, the State Education Commission reported 60,000 private, non-governmental schools and other types of unofficial educational institutions nationwide, including 16,800 kindergartens, 4,030 primary schools, 851 secondary schools, and more than 800 institutions of higher learning (Zhang Zhiyi, 1995). A year later, private schools absorbed 4% of all students in China (Kwong, 1996). Short-term training schools and other institutions for cultural and social learning reached 35,000 in number and enrolled 6.5 million people (Wang Minda, 1996). In 1997, the number of private schools and institutions has been estimated at 70,000, reaching around 7.5% of all public schools.

DIVERSITY AND PLURALITY: FORMS, TYPES, AND PURPOSE

Private schools have greatly diversified educational administration and provision.⁴ Private schools are established with public assistance, jointly by citizens, and solely by individuals. A new school system is also emerging in which public schools are evolving into non-governmental forms. Some private schools are self-financing; others absorb foreign capital in a cooperative effort. In management, non-governmental schools exercise the system of "putting the responsibility on the principals," or the system of "putting the responsibility on the principals under the leadership of the board of trustees." Such schools have the right to enroll students and charge fees on their own, hire teachers, adjust teaching plans, and establish curricula (Zhu Kaixuan, 1994).

Types of schools vary widely. So-called "elite" schools charge high tuition and fees (10,000-20,000 yuan annually) and respond to de-

mands for quality education. These are usually boarding schools which feature comfortable living arrangements, small class size, experienced teachers, English language and computer competency, and extracurricular activities. In contrast, less advantaged private secondary schools in townships and urban areas are designed mainly for students who fail to pass the entrance exam to get accepted into senior high schools. Students enroll in these schools in the hope of having a chance to pass the college entrance examination. In addition, many parents enroll their children in these schools so that the students have a place to stay out of trouble as they are still too young to join the work force. Tuition may range from 1,500 to 4,000 yuan annually. Better vocational-technical private schools generally offer two to three years, and charge a tuition of about 4,000 – 8,000 yuan a year. They provide specific technical skills to students who will be much more employable after graduation. Subjects of study include hotel management, tourism, accounting, secretarial work, commercial English, driving, cooking, and so on. Such schools are usually linked with government organizations or businesses for the students' employment upon graduation.

Rural private primary and secondary schools charge very low fees in contrast (about 300 to 700 yuan every year) and consequently suffer from inadequate teaching equipment and personnel. Nevertheless, such schools are expanding rapidly, and playing a very important role in providing basic education in rural areas. Rural private education is a natural outgrowth of the desperate state of public education: low quality, high fees, lack of teachers, and lack of access to higher levels of schooling. They are primarily established by villagers and parents who are fed up with the fees public schools are charging and who refuse to give up hope on their children's education. Struggling to survive, such schools nevertheless represent a hopeful alternative to public schools.

In recent years, prestigious public schools are also joining the trend to set up "private schools." They use their academic reputations and good facilities to attract students. These "private schools" follow the same curriculum and pace of key public schools, and their students participate in the same matriculation examinations. The establishment of such schools can enlarge enrollment by as much as 1,000 pupils. Parents are attracted to this kind of school, as they know that having one foot in a key school, public or "private," will increase their child's chance for university admission (Xue Jianguo, 1995). In 1996, 12 such schools existed in Hangzhou, with over 20,000 students clamoring to participate in the selection examinations. One student was admitted for every

21 applicants, and prospective students ran to 4-5 schools in one week's time to sit for entrance examinations.

In short, there has been a great diversification in Chinese education, with private schools taking the lead in breaking the uniformity and rigidity of public schools. They are widely diverse in structure, type, client served, and in fact are a clear marker of how, in China, educational practice has far out-stripped educational policy and law.⁵ The reappearance of private education represents "two legs" of development in Chinese education, namely public and private existing side by side.

DIVERSITY, CLASS TRANSFORMATION, AND EQUITY

As we have noted above, diversity in Chinese education is, in part, a reflection of the diverse needs of different sectors of Chinese society. Schools are responding to the demands of different social groups who have tremendously different political, economic, and intellectual resources. The resulting diversity in schooling provides choice and stimulates educational reform. Yet it also reflects and enlarges gaps existing among different classes within Chinese society.

We argue that, increasingly, class identifications in China are based primarily upon an individual's access to political, economic, and intellectual power.⁶ Our usage of "social class" roughly refers to the characteristics commonly accepted to make up socio-economic status (SES). By the same token, we use the term "social stratification" in much the same way sociologists refer to structured inequality. That is, social stratification implies that inequality has been hardened or institutionalized, that there is a system of social relationships that determines social interests and power, and that people come to expect that individuals and groups with certain positions will be able to demand more influence and respect and accumulate a greater share of goods and services. Such inequality may or may not be accepted equally by a majority in the society, but it is recognized as "the way things are" (Kerbo, 1991). Having set these definitions, however, we must stress that concepts such as "class" and "social stratification" are problematic, shifting, and contingent in China, and subject to its specific political economy and on-going social, economic, and cultural transformations.

Class formation and transformation in China

Social classes before China's reform decade were defined according to Marxist-Leninist theories of class and class struggle (Lin, 1991). From

1949 to 1977, most Chinese citizens were categorized into five classes, namely, the "working class," "peasant class," "revolutionary cadres," "intellectuals," and "class enemies." Politically-defined criteria, such as property ownership and political affiliation before 1949, as well as demonstrated loyalty to the communist party, determined one's class category, political treatment, and social and economic well-being. How these class categories were abused in the service of political and personal violence during the Cultural Revolution is exhaustively chronicled in educational and social histories of the era when political, rather than economic or intellectual, power was the hallmark of social privilege (Cleverly, 1985; Hawkins, 1983; Lin, 1991).

After 1978, the equating of social with political power shifted as the needs of economic development, and the encouragement of private ownership, entrepreneurial spirit, and autonomy in the administration of private and public enterprises underscored the advantages of intellectual and economic power (Barnett & Clough, 1986; Kleinberg, 1990). The government reclassified social groups, designating former class enemies (estimated at from 10-15 percent of the Chinese population) as workers or peasants. As the sources of social status changed, whole groups of individuals experienced upward or downward social mobility (Dittmer, 1994; Goldman, 1992). Many rural workers benefited from the responsibility system in agricultural production, which entailed a significant transfer of economic decision-making power from the state to an increasingly autonomous peasantry (White, 1987). Prosperous rural families drew the attention of the media, prompting popular analyses of "the death of the peasant category." Former "class enemies" launched successful enterprises, drawing upon personal relationships and managerial skills they had forged before 1949. University professors found high-paying consulting work outside academe. Journalists and scholars began to refer to a "new middle class" of industrial and commercial entrepreneurs, whose wealth and risk-taking captured the public imagination.

In contrast, workers in deficit-prone, state-run enterprises lost the label of political rectitude and their job security. As powerful government bureaucrats exchanged political favors for economic investments, and the state withdrew its welfare safety net from the most vulnerable members of Chinese society, public and private institutions alike became the breeding grounds for corruption. These concurrent forces eventually motivated some of the fiercest voices of the democracy movement (Rosenbaum, 1992).

The social tensions of the 1980s have continued unabated, rendering people's understanding of their relationships to culture, the state, and the economy increasingly complex and open to public scrutiny (Whyte, 1992; Davis & Harrell, 1993). The separation of political from economic power, as well as the depoliticization of daily life, has been credited for simultaneously enlarging the space for popular initiative and accelerating "the public hunger for autonomous and protected social lives" (Whyte, 1992). In societies characterized by rapidly changing distinctions between public and private identity, class boundaries are remarkably fluid. Nevertheless, we draw tentative conclusions from our study about emerging social groups and (to foreshadow our discussion of secondary schooling) the extent to which these groups rely on and influence formal education.

In brief, a newly rich class includes a tiny, diverse slice of the Chinese population, consisting of corporate managers, real estate and stock market investors, private entrepreneurs, and public figures such as entertainers. Members of this group may or may not be highly educated, although their economic power can buy the means to elite private education (or be invested in proprietary schools), as well as provide indirect access to or membership in a second group, the political power elite. Members of the political power elite rely on government office and connections to secure economic power and access to elite schools. A third group, which we refer to as the latent middle class, is comprised of urban business owners and highly-skilled professionals, consultants, and mid-level government officers whose influence resides in intellectual and economic, rather than political power. We argue that the interests of this group provide the driving force behind current educational innovation and experimentation. A fourth group, the professional salaried class, consists of mid-level state workers and professionals such as teachers. Often highly educated, members of this group lack economic and political power, and rising tuition costs and supplementary fees associated with public and private schools bar all but their most academically talented children from attending elite schools. Members of a fifth intermediate group of semi-skilled workers in cities and suburbs experience some economic stability but are denied access to the means of political and intellectual power, as are members of a sixth group of rural peasants and contract laborers. Like a seventh group of migrating populations and the rural poor, who reside at the margins of economic development, peasants and laborers become the subjects of education only as recipients of state compensatory educational resources.

Market reforms alter the sources of group identity, as people define and redefine themselves in particular social contexts. From this perspective, we see schools as contested institutions in which relationships among class background, educational opportunity, and economic advantage often have interrelated impacts on how Chinese schools have become stratified by differential access to the sources of intellectual, economic, and political power.

Power and diversity: Who has access to what schools

Access to the many types of schools existing in today's China depends on the power parents possess. We illustrate here with an analysis of key public, elite private, all-girls', and public ordinary and vocational secondary schools.

Key public secondary schools in theory uphold through their admission standards a kind of meritocracy, e.g., they are based on examination scores. Key schools are supposedly open to all who have demonstrated academic excellence. However, our visits to key schools show that over 80% of the student bodies comes from government official and intellectual family backgrounds. In the past few years, all key primary and junior secondary schools were ordered to abandon their key school designation; however in teaching quality and equipment, they remain far superior to other schools. A concomitant policy also requires that students attend schools in their residential districts. As key schools are usually located in residential areas for government officials, children from families of government officials are not affected at all. They thus possess a decisive entrance advantage. In addition, children of government officials sometimes gain entrance into key schools not through academic performance but "back doors," or their parents' social connections. The second group of students who benefit from key schools come from intellectual family backgrounds. These children possess intellectual capital which helps them excel. As the children of government officials and intellectuals are the main beneficiaries of the key school system, the policies adopted in the past two decades have favored key schools. Today, these schools still have the privilege of transferring good teachers from other schools to their own. This practice ensures that key school students receive the "best" education possible (Lin, in press), particularly as excellence is equated with successful entrance into high-quality colleges and universities.

Finally, economic power is also playing a key role in access to elite key schools, which take advantage of the social demand to admit students

with lower test results and school grades if parents can bring in business to the school. In some schools, 2-4% of students gained entrance because their parents could bring in business for the school or pay high fees. The fees they pay range from 6,000 to 12,000 yuan a year. Parents also use donations to get favorable treatment for their own child (Wu Jiqing, 1994). Schools with good reputations thus collect a huge amount of fees, causing scholars to complain that justice has failed as money and power provide choices for a small percentage of people, causing widespread dissatisfaction among the majority of parents (Yang Minqing, 1996).

This purposefully stratified nature of public schooling has helped perpetuate the political, economic, and intellectual power of parents based on their social class; admission to key schools means the possibility of attending an institution of higher education or employment upon graduation from high school. In Shanghai in a nationally-recognized key school, 80% of students (50% of whom are female) come from political power elite or intellectual families. All will attend college (nearly three-quarters at key universities). They enjoy fully-equipped science and computer labs (with IBM 486 computers for each student) and ballet and film studios. Their teachers' annual salaries range from 12,000 to 20,000 yuan (compared to an average scale of 5,000 to 7,000 yuan). To support such abundance the school has established an affiliated private school with a 3,000 yuan tuition. Students who fail to gain entrance into elite key schools line up to attend.

As key schools allow government bureaucrats and intellectuals to reproduce their political and intellectual power, elite private schools serve the newly-affluent "middle class" families whose children have either failed to gain entrance into a key school or who seek more "progressive" or more socially-exclusive alternatives to state education. Private schools have emerged as the new symbol of secondary education's exchange value. As noted previously, by 1996 at least 60,000 of China's 960,000 schools were privately owned, including 3,159 full-time primary and secondary schools. About 10% of them were elite private schools.

Elite private schools are open to children whose parents are mainly newly risen entrepreneurs, high-ranking executives of joint, cooperative, or foreign-owned ventures, personnel working abroad, compatriots of Hong Kong, Macao, or Taiwan, the tiny segment of the Chinese people who "became rich first," and intellectuals or government func-

tionaries who care about fostering talent. Of 150 parents of Beijing's Jingshua Elementary School, 20% were government functionaries; 30% were managers of enterprises; 20% were high-ranking employees of foreign enterprises, 15% were personnel of township enterprises; 10% were personnel working abroad; and 5% were individual business people (Zhang Zhiyi, 1995).

The most exclusive private school we visited for this study charged an annual fee of 20,000 yuan for tuition, room, and board (equivalent to the salaries of those highly paid key school teachers referred to above). Moreover, parents have to pay a one-time school construction fee of 20,000 – 50,000 yuan. Some elite private schools in Southern China also demanded more than a quarter million yuan for the “school saving's fund,” with the school using the interest to maintain the daily operation of the school, and the principal amount returned to parents upon the child's graduation. For students who have failed to achieve high enough scores to enter a public key school, this private school represented a “second best chance” to attend college.

Private school administrators do not have the advantage of admitting the best students in their schools, yet they have a strong financial base from which to offer alternative curricula, including orchestra, intensive training in English, computer science, and the arts. They also expand boarding facilities, using custodial provisions to attract and accommodate busy professional or divorced parents. They hire qualified contract teachers with high salaries, and seek to develop a “whole dragon” system of schooling that provides a route to social mobility (from primary school through college) entirely outside the state-run educational system.

We need to stress that the quality and intentions of private schools vary tremendously, with the crassest sort of proprietary schools well-represented. However, at their best, private schools, much more than their public school counterparts, provide sites of innovation in: 1) approaches to teaching; 2) recognition of students' rights; 3) development of artistic technique and creativity; and 4) a depoliticized curriculum. Private schools let talented educators, freed from the constraints of the state teaching outline, put their educational philosophies into practice and make full use of the untapped talents of veteran teachers who have had to retire from the public school system by the age of 50 or 55.

We must also stress that some private schools do also open doors to ordinary citizens in urban and rural areas, charging limited fees and

tuition. Thus, such private schools are not uniformly contributing to increasing levels of educational inequality, precisely because they fill educational gaps left by a state unable or unwilling to provide sufficient schooling for increased (and increasingly diverse) educational demands by the public. Private schools we investigated in Guangxi province were established by rural parents to save on educational expenses. Their local public schools, with add-on fees for textbooks, examination papers, and teachers' bonuses were simply too expensive for their children to attend. Likewise, philanthropic organizations, some organized by wealthy foreign donors, run thousands of schools for China's least advantaged – the children of migrating and isolated minority populations.

Private education development in China is driven, as it is worldwide, not only by the need for increasingly specialized labor, but also by complex interactions between state and class interests. Chinese schools, once tightly linked to national interests, have been gradually reshaped to reflect a combination of interests derived from powerful social groups and “market” forces. Social groups and individuals have usurped social functions of education previously monopolized by the state.

Girl's schools reflect most distinctively the diversity of Chinese school experiences. While they appear to be opening in cities mostly for the daughters of managers, small business owners and members of what we have termed the “latent middle class” who have a fixed job in state agencies but make much more from kickbacks or moonlighting, they also serve poor rural girls who would otherwise have no access to secondary schooling. We visited three all-girls' schools for this project and were informed there were more than 100 all-girl schools and colleges in the country. We were struck by their rapid development, a phenomenon that remains undocumented in the literature. We were also impressed by the diverse constituencies these new schools serve. Single-sex schools for girls have appeared in China in cities as well as in the countryside, in developed as well as in under-developed areas of the country. Offering public, private, academic, and vocational options for girls from advantaged and poor and minority families, the missions and curricula of girls' schools vary dramatically.

The three girls' schools we visited included a key public school, and one public and one private vocational school. Vastly different purposes and ideals motivated education in each of these schools. For example, the principal of the private all-girls' vocational school greatly impressed us, not only because of her profound and proactive philosophical thinking regarding gender and learning, but also because of her skillful manage-

ment of the school. Instead of teaching students “girls’ stuff,” as administrators and teachers in some girls’ schools unabashedly report doing, this school’s required curriculum included martial arts, wrestling, driving, computer literacy, and English – for the purpose of “opening as many routes of employment to young women as possible.” The school admits girls who have been screened out by the admission exam to senior high schools. Their parents pay a medium-high fee (8000 yuan each year) for their girls to study vocational as well as basic academic subjects, in case they hope to go on to universities. The formal and informal curricula were explicitly planned to help girls be confident in their abilities and be more employable in the very competitive job market of today’s China – while also providing them the option of heading toward higher education.

The public key girls’ school shared all of the characteristics of key schools reported above. In addition, it adopted different teaching methods that administrators and teachers felt were “in accordance with girls’ characteristics in learning.” The similarity of these methods with those experimented with in North America were striking, and worthy of further comparative research (Ross, 1993b). The admission rate of graduates from this girls key public school to universities is about 98%. In contrast, the urban public vocational all-girls’ school we visited defined its approach to girls’ education as cultivating the “special characteristics of Eastern women.” We watched its senior secondary school pupils study cosmetology, fashion, and tourism – making beds and pouring drinks with grace and deliberation. The students are trained for popular (and very gender-stereotyped) jobs in the rising service and foreign trade sector in the country. Our disparate experiences in these schools raised questions regarding how class and gender intersect to make schools gateways or barriers to girls’ learning.

In public ordinary and vocational schools, students are mainly from working class or peasant family backgrounds. Less than 3% of graduates from a suburban non-key high school in Beijing we visited will attend college. The remainder (all of whom come from semi-skilled worker and rural working class backgrounds) will be employed in local working class or semi-skilled jobs. The school scrapes by, has tried and failed to enter the market to generate money to raise teacher salaries and buy laboratory equipment (there is none).

Vocational and general ordinary schools, be they urban or rural, have much less political, intellectual, and economic “capital” upon which to draw. They are increasingly disadvantaged as reforms of the last decade

accelerate, perhaps to the point that students in these schools (and their parents) will question their efficacy. We anticipate that the schools we investigate in phase two of this project, which are located in China's Central and Western economic/geographical regions, will struggle most in gaining access to resources, as a result of poorer economic conditions linked to state policies that emphasize concentrated economic development in China's Eastern Coastal Region.

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

In conclusion, how the patterns above influence access to and processes within schools vary widely across social class, with access to the sources of economic, intellectual, and political power highly constrained for lower-working class students. What must emerge from this scenario – increasingly disparate educational purposes and outcomes tightly related to social class background – poses a serious challenge to the future of equality of educational opportunity in China.

Our research informs us that education policy and unintended consequences of economic reform and cultural openness have coincided to increase stratification of secondary schools. Market reforms, coupled with the reduced presence of state authority and resources in schools, are simultaneously altering social class formation and secondary education in ways that consolidate the linkages between the two. As explicitly stratified schools are required to marshal an ever-increasing proportion of funding from local resources, they become more tightly linked to the needs and desires of their constituencies. Prestigious key and private schools, recognized for their ability to prepare carefully selected students for college-level training, are securely positioned to take advantage of local material and cultural resources, much of which comes from the social and professional networks of students' parents. Elite key schools are able to convert the social status of their students into academic attainment and achievement, which, in turn, consolidates graduates' social status and confers further prestige on the schools.

Our fieldwork indicated how regularly extracurricular activities were used by schools as markers (to parents and the community) of exclusivity, prestige, and unique educational mission. Elite public and private schools are proud of this advantage. Courses in computer science and foreign languages have become the two current measures of quality teaching and school resources. In fact, we believe instruction in these areas provides a fairly reliable marker, in the senior secondary school

context, of the richness of a school's material resources, openness to reform in teaching methods, quality of teacher preparation, and ability to prepare students for college entrance examinations.

While elite private schools are considered the second best option for guaranteeing social mobility, they are also the most innovative institutions in the Chinese system. Vocational and rural schools, having much less political, intellectual, and economic "capital" upon which to draw, are increasingly disadvantaged as reforms of the last decade accelerate, perhaps to the point that students in these schools (and their parents) will question the efficacy of education. Girls' education is an interesting development which has important implications for gender equality and improvement of learning and self-perception for girls.

As the establishment and rapid increase of private schools indicates the trend that education in China is increasingly seen as a private good. Yet, seen as attempts by individuals to mobilize local resources, private schools are also a part of China's nascent civil society, and may offer a radical form of equity that is neither economic nor political but cultural, "granting different groups the right to have their own stories told in the space reserved for public discourse, a space that has traditionally been restricted" (Feinberg, 1993, p. 168). The multiple roles played by private schools illustrate that the consequences of simultaneously stratifying and loosening state control of schooling. Pilot interviews with educators and parents indicate grave concerns regarding the potential for social unrest inherent in China's redistribution of economic and social power. We believe that continued commitment by the state to equality of educational opportunity is crucial in this context. Furthermore, we contend that if such a commitment is to be realized in practice, it must first be based upon an understanding of how educational opportunity is being reconstructed within China's schools. Only then can policy makers make "a careful examination of how to redistribute the costs and benefits of education so that there are net gains for the disadvantaged populations, especially rural and poor" (Tsang, 1994, p.305).

Such concerns will guide phase two of our study in which we hope to reveal the overlapping, inter-related forces and systems that shape educational and social stratification, particularly gender, geographical diversity, and to a lesser extent ethnicity. In this era of reform, we are convinced a meaningful framework for analyzing educational and social stratification must be multi-dimensional and grounded in data collected from a diverse range of schools.

NOTES

1. This research was made possible with funding from the Spencer Foundation and the Social Science and Humanities Research Council in Canada.
2. Our conclusions represent the first phase of a three-year research project, in which we will expand our study to include schools in central and western China.
3. In 1995 and 1997, Jing Lin also visited nearly two dozen schools in different places in China.
4. For example, in Shandong province in 1994, of the 1636 private schools of all kinds, 712 were established by private citizens, comprising 43.6%, 217 by social organizations (13.3%), 179 by government agencies and military organizations (11%), 68 by democratic parties (4.2%), 456 by business or collectively-owned businesses (27.9%), 4 by foreign and China corporations (Liu Fengshan, 1995).
5. Shen Yang city in Liaoning province in Northeast China provides a good example. By the end of 1995, the city had 66 private schools and non-governmental schools, including 14 primary schools, 5 combined primary and junior secondary schools, 36 junior secondary schools, 2 "complete" six-year secondary schools, 3 "marshal arts" (gongfu) schools, 1 art school, and 5 senior high schools. Nineteen of these schools were set up by private citizens, 33 were owned by the state but managed by private individuals, 8 were established by corporations, 4 were established by private individuals but supported by the government, and 2 were jointly owned by China and foreign corporations (Guo Ge, 1996).
6. In our larger research project, we examine patterns of social and educational inequality, and access to political, economic, and intellectual power, across the domains of geography, ethnic membership, and gender.

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