

Marketization of Education and School Choice in Kunming:

Parental Usage of Bourdieu's Three Forms of Capital Under Scrutiny

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Abstract

Education is a significant topic in China. The practice of what is known as “school choice” at compulsory education level (*xiaoshengchu*) has attracted attention from all government, media, and academic circle. The purpose of this thesis is to explore practices and perceptions of urban middle-class parents with children who have experienced the academic transition from primary to middle school. The ideology of marketization and Bourdieu’s three forms of capital has been applied in this thesis. By using in-depth interviews and participant observation, this study found that both students and parents are facing tremendous pressure to gain advantages in school-choice competition. To realize this, they have to deal with cultural, social and economic capital to varying degrees.

Acknowledgment

It has been an exciting experience for an Asian girl to study Asia in Sweden. This thesis marks the outcome of two years' time of learning and sharing with all of my classmates and teachers in Lund University. This would be one of the most beautiful memories in my life.

I would like to thank everyone who made this paper possible.

First of all, biggest gratitude to my lovely supervisor Annika who supports my idea and always provides me great advice to finish this thesis.

I would also like to thank the supervisors at Peking University and all the participants for my fieldwork in Kunming. Special thanks goes to two of my friends as the gatekeeper for my participant observations which provided me with substantial valuable information.

Finally, I would like to thank all my classmates, friends, and family for giving me all the help, support, and love.

Mengyao

2014.07.20

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1. Introduction

1.1 Background

Each June, the most important examination for Chinese students - college entrance examination (*gaokao*) - catches everyone's attention in China. At that time, hundreds of comments, critiques, and reflections are presented in the media. A recently popular talk show argued about the *gaokao* phenomenon as following:

*I do not know how important an exam can be,
parents poisoned a pool of frogs to eliminate the noise for their kids;
I do not know how important an exam can be,
a mother concealed the father's death for two months to let her child focus on
preparation of gaokao;
I do not know how important an exam can be,
a student left her bleeding mother alone after a car accident and went to the exam
with tears;
I do not know how important an exam can be,
a mother knelt before the exam proctor begging for letting her child attend the
exam after several minutes late... (Hunan eTV, 2012)*

China's exam-driven education has been a controversial issue for the last three decades. In recent several years, another important examination has attracted only slightly less attention than *gaokao*. The transition of primary school graduates to middle schools, which is called *xiaoshengchu* (小升初) in urban China. As the first biggest examination during Chinese education system, this thesis shows the growing significance of *xiaoshengchu* for all the students and parents in urban China which has enhanced Chinese meritocratic education from an earlier stage.

Xiaoshengchu includes two layers of meaning. One is the compulsory graduation examination for every student of elementary education. After passing the exam, students will be distributed into correspondent middle school without any tuition fees according to their household registration (*hukou* 户口). Another one is for real usage in education, media, and society. It is the school choice examination set by middle schools with high tuition fees regardless of *hukou*. However, in different cities of China, there are different policies for *xiaoshengchu*. For example, *xiaoshengchu* in Beijing and Nanning covers all public middle schools while the examination is only set by non-governmental schools (*minban* schools 民办学校) in cities such as Shanghai and Kunming (Crabb, 2010; Wu, 2014; Feng and Lu, 2013). Therefore, in this thesis, *xiaoshengchu* refers to the latter meaning which involves school-choice examination. In this respect, *xiaoshengchu* is the whole process of school choice including correspondent practices before and after.

Xiaoshengchu nowadays is not only an educational issue but an indicator of a larger social problem which is interrelated with the marketization of public education. Under rapid economic growth and social changes, the decentralization has given more power as well as pressure to local government. This on one side has driven a boom of so-called “newly urban middle class”, but on another side has deepened inequality between urban-rural, rich-poor, and coastal-inland regions (Dong, 2010: 139). On one hand, imbalanced allocation of educational resources makes the quality of schools greatly varied from each other. In order to enter the top middle schools, parents, especially those who belong to urban middle-class, have to send their children to take numerous extra-curriculum classes after school. This enables the exceedingly fast growing extra-curriculum education market, the so called “shadow education” (Bray, 1999). On the other hand, parents invest as much as they can in a seemingly unrelated market to guarantee their children to study in the best schools: the housing market. Many parents choose to rent or buy an apartment near those schools, which makes the extremely high housing price even worse especially for housing market in school-districts.

Due to all those problems, this March, imbalanced allocation of educational resource has received intense discussion on Chinese Two Sessions¹. New policies and regulations were introduced to confine or abolish *xiaoshengchu* in the country particularly in those big cities (People Daily, 2014). In Kunming (capital of Yunnan Province), *xiaoshengchu* is going to be abolished from next year. This year the government makes it as a transition year to allow students to choose two *minban* middle schools for examination which had no limitation before (Guo, 2014). Thus, it presents the significance of this issue and this thesis at this time.

In the same month with the *gaokao*, the *xiaoshengchu* in Kunming took place at the end of June. Sixteen popular *minban* middle schools set up the examination in 2014. The Picture 1 shows the scene in front of Yunnan University Secondary School (YUSS), the best middle school in Kunming, on the day of *xiaoshengchu* in 2013

Picture 1. The scene of *xiaoshengchu* at YUSS in June 2013



Source: Zhou, 2013

¹ The National People's Congress and the Chinese Political Consultative Conference (NPC& CPPCC)

1.2 Research aim

The school choice situation is, in fact, a global issue that became apparent especially during the past two decades. Although it has been broadly discussed, most of the contributions are from and about Western countries (see Chapter 2). Not so much attention has been given to China. There are a number of researchers who study the marketization of public education, educational inequality, and school choice (Wu, 2014; Wang and Gao, 2013; Crabb, 2010) particularly in metropolis like Beijing and Shanghai (Feng and Lu, 2013; Crabb, 2010), but this phenomenon is also prevalent in second-tier cities. Only Xiaoxin Wu (2014) has studied school choice phenomenon in Nanning, and Pingyuan Cheng (2013) did a research on Chinese elementary education with 3000 surveys in Nanjing. Thus, it is worth extending our attention to other places in China to see the phenomenon in a different setting. This thesis aims at understanding *xiaoshengchu* as an extremely important phenomenon and exploring the first-hand knowledge about practice and perception of urban middle-class parents whose children have experienced *xiaoshengchu* in the last four years in Kunming, one of the Chinese typical cities where *xiaoshengchu* dominates the lives of many children, parents, teachers, officials, real estate agents and other stakeholders since more than one decade.

1.3 Research questions

This thesis is guided by the following research questions:

- What parental practices does *xiaoshengchu* lead to?
- What practices of students are the result of *xiaoshengchu*?
- What are the perceptions of parents when they go through the *xiaoshengchu* process or after they went through it?

1.4 Disposition of the thesis

The thesis is structured into five chapters. Chapter 1 introduces the background of the study followed by the purpose of research and research questions. Chapter 2 presents a literature review that is relevant to this thesis on the topic of marketization of public education and Bourdieu's cultural capital both in global and Chinese context. Chapter 3 explains the methodology applied in this thesis. Chapter 4 presents the main findings of my fieldwork in Kunming and the analysis of the data for answering the research questions. The final chapter summarizes the findings and suggests future research on this topic.

2. Theories and Literature Review

In the following I review the previous research and explain my theoretical framework which also directs my method, consisting of ideas about the marketization of education and Bourdieu's three forms of capital.

2.1 Impact marketization on education in the global context

In order to better grasp the importance of school choice as an integral part of the marketization of education, it is insightful to have a brief discussion of this practice in other countries than China. The marketization of public social services such as education and healthcare has become a global trend since the 1970s. In the Global North, market criteria has been adopted for education. Walford and Walsh in Wu (2014) suggested the operation and delivery of such public service was argued for within the framework of effectiveness and accountability for the growing demands of the public within a more vigorous market ideology (Wu, 2014: 6).

In general, during the twentieth century the Global North has witnessed the power of “who you know and where you are from” (Blum et al., 2012: 368). Specifically, “academic capitalism” (increase involvement of academia in the free market²) has entered into all levels of the classroom and redefined the learning and teaching. More critical voices fear that the joy of learning and the creativity of teaching have been taken away by ideology of market (Baltodano, 2012). Consequently, education has been transformed into product that people can buy and sell. Students are believed to lose their critical thinking in favor of specific scores and teachers are believed to lose their professional nature by standardized teaching models (Blum et al., 2012: 368).

² See Park, 2012

Blum et al. proposed that the experience and practice of education has been impacted in a globalized world because education has been repositioned from a state responsibility to an individual responsibility (2012: 370).

The privatization and marketization of education has becoming an increasingly debated topic of great concern for the last three decades in the United States. Nelson et al. (2007), for example, proposed the end of the “public” in public education in America. The privatization process has turned schools into consumer goods and has transformed how schools are defined, how they operate, and in whose interest they ultimately serve (ibid.: 5). Due to the privatization of public education, training of educators and administrators has emerged in the US for charter schools (Baltodano, 2012). The most prominent influence of corporation on education reform is *No Child Left Behind (NCLB)* Act.

NCLB supports standards-based education reform through such methods as annual testing, measurement of academic progress, standardized teacher qualification, and so on. Under *NCLB*, good teaching has been defined as a set of technical skills to make students achieve certain standard through specific curricula and materials, which has reduced the professional nature of teachers (Nelson et al., 2007: 6). As a consequence, the testing industry has become one of the fastest growing industries in America. In addition, the private sector has started to control the education policies and practices including what is learned and how it is learned in school (ibid.: 7). A further consequence is the creation of inequalities through different testing and the ranking of schools (Blum et al., 2012: 494).

In the United Kingdom, policies suggesting a move toward school choice were adopted (Wu, 2014: 7). As a consequence, a “quasi-market” of the school system has been created (Le Grand and Bartlett, 1993). Thus, the students from low-income families but with high achievement can go to elite schools with governmental subsidies (Fitz et al., 1989). In New Zealand, the neo-liberal philosophy of the market

was introduced to education policies in the late 1980s (Wu, 2014: 8). A further neo-liberal approach was adopted in 1991 to promote the freedom of parental choice and autonomous school management, which intensified the inequality between schools (ibid.).

In other countries like Chile, Canada, and Australia, varying forms of school choice exist. Under the impact of the market ideology since the 1980s, some countries have transformed their state schooling systems into a choice-oriented schooling system (Wu, 2014: 9). In those countries, school choice has been designed by the government for encouraging competition with the argument of improving the quality of schools to eliminate the poorly performing ones and promote fairer access to schools, thus the market has more likely been used as a disciplinary mechanism (Ball, 1990: 66; Wu, 2011: 80).

2.2 Marketization of public education in Chinese context

In China, Sa studied on the crucial role of marketization of public education for migrant children. Relying on data from a survey of Rural-Urban Migrant Children's Education in Beijing in 2000, Sa investigated to reveal how commodification of public education shapes educational opportunities of migrant children. The main reason that migrant workers send their children to rural schools were found to be due to economic constraints and other important barriers for families access to public education in Beijing (Sa, 2004: 18). While research mainly focus on the difficulties for migrant children's access to public education (see Chen and Feng, 2013; Tan, 2010; and Liu and Jacob, 2013), few pay attention to the difficulties for urban children to squeeze into the top junior high schools at early age.

Xiaoxin Wu (2014), however, explored the main characteristics of school choice in the Chinese urban middle class context. Compared with the Global North, she finds that the school choice phenomenon has been initiated by parents (rather than the government) and practiced actively also by school and government (Wu, 2011: 80). Mary W. Crabb (2010) also discussed such parental practices is part of a “naturalized consumerist dynamic” under the marketization of education in China. She stated the parental choice for upward and outward mobility as a part of middle-class family culture to secure a modern lifestyle (Crabb, 2010: 387).

2.2.1 Parents

After the opening and reform, China’s economy has grown dramatically resulting in the rapid increase of income especially for urban households. In Yunnan, the annual average wages of staff and workers increased from 800 yuan in 1980 to 38900 yuan in 2012 (Statistical Bureau of Yunnan Province, 2013: 443). On the other hand, the one-child policy has been implemented strictly from the 1980s. Consequently, the only child in the family receives unprecedented care and support. Chinese parents especially young urban parents make substantial investment on children’s intellectual development (Wu, 2014). In this respect, in order to gain a placement in top schools, parents especially those middle class parents who have more resources become the most active participant in school choice process.

In the *xiaoshengchu* market where qualified education has been treated as a product, parents are not the only participants. Wu emphasized the role of schools and government while Crabb listed more specific stakeholders like party officials, directors and staff, education and child experts, and so on. Apart from the importance of parents, schools, and government, the role of informal education (mainly refers to extra-curriculum class) and the real estate is also discussed in this thesis.

2.2.2 School and government

One important concept is that of “key schools” in Chinese educational system (Wu, 2014), which is commonly used in media and daily life. Key schools are a group of well-performing public schools with more highly-qualified teachers, better facilities, more funds, more top-performing students, and higher transition rates to the key schools at the next level (ibid.: 22). In the early 1950s, the key school system was introduced and then implemented in the following years (ibid.). However, the Compulsory Education Law of People’s Republic of China (NPC, 2006) in 1986 prescribed that local government cannot divide schools into key and non-key schools. Wu’s case in Nanning revealed school choice practices under a hidden “key school” system because *xiaoshengchu* in that city involves all public middle schools like Beijing. Even though my case in Kunming is different for that *xiaoshengchu* only refers to *minban* middle schools because most of well-performing middle schools in Kunming are *minban* schools, these schools share the exactly same features with those “key schools” and are commonsensically considered as key schools.

There were some practices of school choice within the public school system, but it was then officially banned in the compulsory education level. After that, the number of well-performing *minban* middle schools started to rise. In fact, majority of well-performing *minban* schools are not purely private but share similar characteristics with the so-called “converted school” (Wu, 2014) which acts as a branch campus of existing public schools.

There are 52 *minban* middle schools in Kunming now and my focus is narrowed onto 16 of them which are the most popular and preferred ones for parents in school choice process. Among these 16 schools, students can only choose 2 of them by attending the *xiaoshengchu* exam this year (Yu, 2014). Among those 16 schools, there are mainly two types of schools. The first type refers to the *minban* school which actually belongs to another previous well-performing public school (Luo *et al.*, 2013). For

example, Baita Middle School (BTMS) is the private branch of Kunming No.10 Middle School (Public). Two schools located next to each other who share the same teachers. The only difference is that BTMS can select students by *xiaoshengchu* examination and charge tuition fees (so-called “school-choice fee” 择校费). The Affiliated High School of Peking University Yunnan Experimental School (BDFZ) belongs to another type of *minban* middle school in Kunming. This type of school receives financial investment from local government or other public schools for developing their infrastructure, but adopt management mechanism of private school (ibid.).

Accordingly, establishing a new *minban* school seems much easier in order to guarantee its reputation. A strong reputation is the most efficient way to attract top students and parents. On the other hand, the *minban* status of those schools allows them to charge high tuition fee and obtain more resources than their public counterparts who can only depend on local government budget (Wu, 2012: 359). For instance, the tuition fee for BTMS is 8000 yuan per year which is similar to the other 15 *minban* schools (BTMS, 2014). Such large amount of money can be used for current and future development of the school, improving the welfare of teachers, and improving school facilities (Wu, 2012: 359). In this respect, those *minban* schools can attract more well-qualified teachers with higher income and admit more well-performing students to achieve better transition rates to the key schools at the next level.

The local government has similar purpose for collecting money as schools in *xiaoshengchu* process. During China’s transformation from a planned economy to a market economy since the 1980s, economic decentralization policies transferred the financial responsibility from central government to local government. This means at compulsory education level, the responsibility of funding lies in the hand of municipal governments (Wu, 2012: 360). China’s direct public expenditure on educational

institutions represented 3.3% of the country's GDP in 2008³ (OECD, 2011). Therefore, the local government has to find other channels to collect resources for education. In this respect, the revenue from school choice fee has become an important funding source for the local government (Wu, 2012: 361). This is why school choice has been criticised in the media and also called for a ban by the central government for a long time, but it has not disappeared yet.

2.2.3 Informal education market

In the *xiaoshengchu* market, extra-curriculum classes play a vital role for students who and whose parents desire to enter well-performing *minban* middle schools, sometimes even over the formal education in schools. Different kinds of extra-curriculum classes include tutoring classes for the current or further curriculum (*buxiban* 补习班), interest-oriented tutoring classes (*xingquban* 兴趣班), classes for prize-winning certificates (*kaojiban* 考级班), and private tutoring at home (*jiajiao* 家教). All of them constitutes the informal education market (so-called shadow education market) all over China (see Crabb, 2010: 390). Some interest-oriented tutoring classes include the prize-winning certificate programmes, it depends on parents whether they want to their children go for it.

In the early twenty-first century, a curriculum reform of the basic education was introduced which simplified the course content and focused more on comprehensive development of students (so-called *suzhi jiaoyu* 素质教育). This reform aimed at reducing students' burden of learning at the primary school level (MOE, 2001). This policy, however, contributed indirectly to the boom of the extra-curriculum class market (Wu, 2014: 48). In fact, what students have learned in primary school is way not enough for passing the *xiaoshengchu* exam which requires large amount of

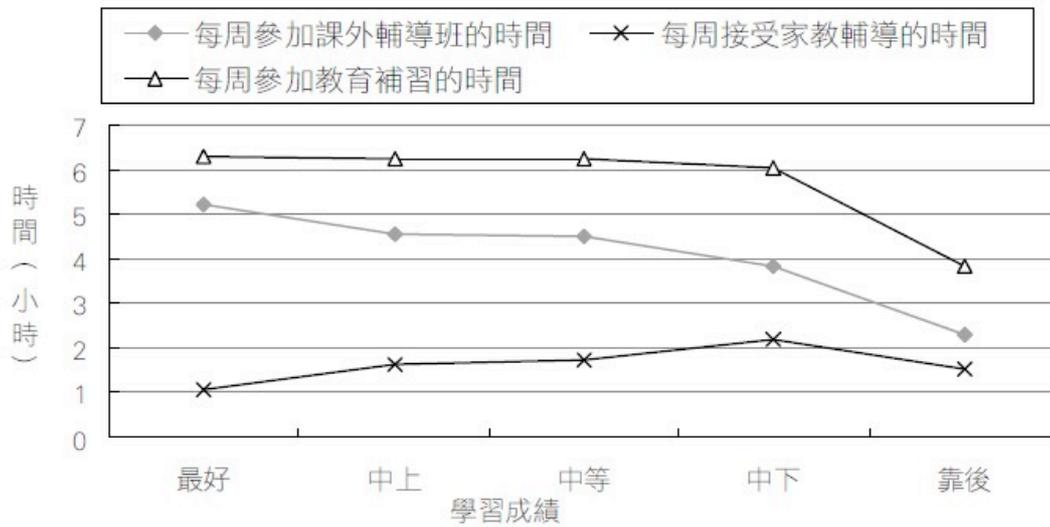
³ The figure was 5.5%, 5.9%, and 7.2% for average EU21 countries, average OECD countries, and the United States respectively (OECD, 2011)

knowledge from middle school's curriculum. In order to enter the desired school via *xiaoshengchu*, students have to take extra-curriculum tutoring to learn the content of further education. Moreover, due to the fierce competition of *xiaoshengchu*, academic ability alone cannot always guarantee a school placement (Wu, 2012: 349). The market has quickly caught this profitable chance to increase the commercial provision of different kinds of after-school classes (Wu, 2014: 43).

Parents take the lead to send their children to extra-curriculum classes (Wu, 2014: 43). Xue and Ding (2009) analyzed this after-school tutoring phenomenon in urban China by using data of the Chinese Urban Household Education and Employment Survey 2004. In the survey, expenditure for education by families included *buxiban*, *jiajiao*, school choice fee and so on. Xue and Ding found that over half of the surveyed students (55.5%) attended extra-curriculum class in 2004 and students in primary school were most likely to attend (73.8%; 2009: 119). The data also showed that primary school students spend 9.54 hours per week on extra-curriculum tutoring and another 1.98 hours per day on homework. This means that urban primary school students need to spend 3.3 hours per day on average on learning after school (ibid., 2009: 121).

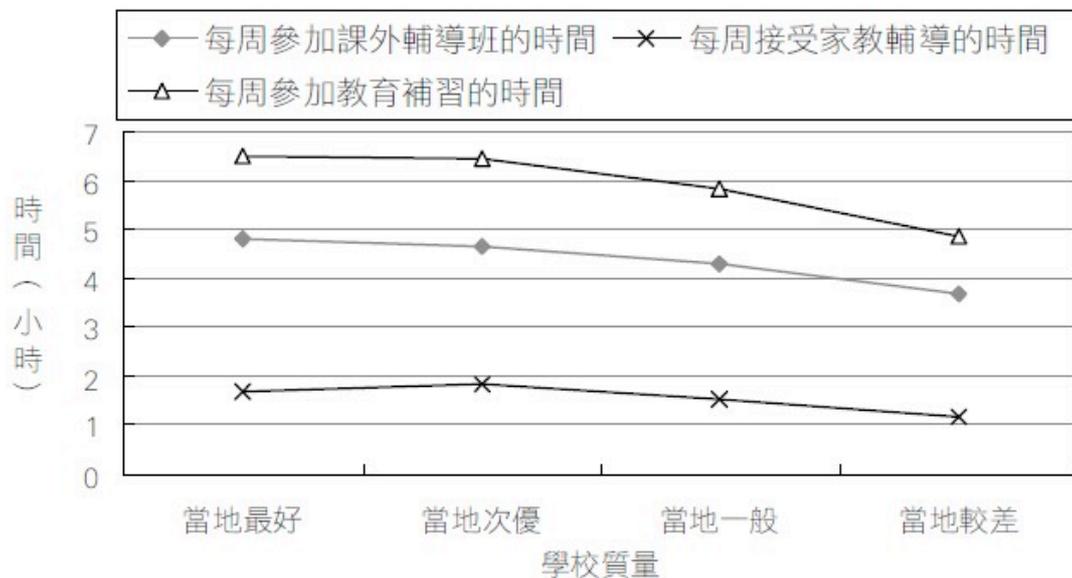
The survey turned out two other findings (see Graph 1 and Graph 2). First, the better the academic performance of students, the longer time of extra-curriculum tutoring they received. Second, students in better-performing schools spend much more time on after-school tutoring than those in less well-performing schools (Xue and Ding, 2009: 121).

Graph 1. Relation between students' academic performance and intensity of *buxiban*



Source: Xue and Ding, 2009: 122

Graph 2. Relation between schools' academic performance and intensity of *buxiban*



Source: Xue and Ding, 2009: 122

Besides *buxiban*, classes aiming at cultivating one's interest and skill are getting popular. Being a special talent student (so-called "special talents" 特长生) often

helps schools to select better students with more criteria (Wu, 2014: 57). In this respect, one needs to provide some kind of certificates or prizes as an evidence which leads to the fever of *kaoji* (graded examination of certain subject). Popular subjects include musical instruments, sports, painting, dancing and so forth. For *kaoji*, a student has to repeatedly practice the same content such as one tune for piano in order to be proficient during the exam.

Private tutoring at home is another dimension of the commercialization of extra-curriculum education. Families usually employ a university student to tutor their children who are low achievers in school and to help these children catch up with others (Wu, 2014: 46). Such practice mainly focuses on the weak subject of students which is common among urban middle-class families (ibid.: 47).

In general, the extra-curriculum education market has been rapidly expanded in the past two decades in China with the boom of private training schools and institutions. According to Li et al. (2010), the entire extra-curriculum education market in 2009 achieved 680 billion yuan which accounted for 2 per cent of China's GDP in that year. In 2006, the first and the most popular extra-curricular education institution in China, *New Oriental Education and Technology Group*, was listed in overseas stock markets followed by another 18 institutions by 2011 (Chen, 2012). The capital from overseas stock market helps those institutions to expand their client base and increase their profit significantly (ibid.).

2.2.4 Housing market

An important feature of the educational market is, perhaps surprisingly, the housing market. The Compulsory Education Law of People's Republic of China (NPC, 2006) regulates students to attend nearby schools based on their *hukou*. In cities like Beijing

and Nanning, buying a house in the school-districts (so-called *xue qu fang* 学区房) near the desired school is a common method to gain access to the school. Accordingly this has become the most reliable way to enter the preferred middle school (Wu, 2014: 96). Purchasing a house in today's China is a significant expense and the houses in well-performing school districts are especially expensive. In Beijing, the price of houses in school-districts near a key school is 20 to 30 per cent higher than non-school-district houses (Qu and Zhang, 2010). A house less than 40 square meters with a "good" location can cost more than 2 millions yuan in Beijing (Lin, 2011).

However, this parental practice only works for primary schools in Kunming because the majority of the preferred middle schools in Kunming are *minban* schools which do not follow the "attending nearby school" policy. In this respect, many parents prefer to rent a house near the school if their children passed the entrance examination, as for those who live far away, the trip to and from the school is highly time-consuming for both students and parents (Wu, 2014: 98).

According to the manager of *Fubang* real estate agency, the availability of housing around 121 Street and *Xuefu* Road in Kunming where YUSS is located is quite limited (Zhang, 2014). The price for renting a house this year costs 30-35 yuan per square meter in this area which is about 20 percent higher than the house in other parts of the city and keeps rising every year. In this district, the price of buying a house is also higher than other areas. A 100 square-meter house can cost 130-140 thousand yuan while the average annual net income of a local citizen is less than 40 thousand yuan (ibid.; Statistical Bureau of Yunnan Province, 2013: 443). Even with such high price, it is still very difficult to find available housing in the district.

For many parents, the size, layout, and price of a house is less important compared to saving time for their children. A report from Kunming Daily shows that a family need to invest approximately 78000 yuan only on accommodation based on the average rent of school-district. This means the family have to spend nearly 100000 yuan on

accommodation and food during three years' study of middle school (Zhang, 2013). *Xiaoshengchu* will be officially banned next year in Kunming and all students will follow the rule of "attending nearby schools" based on their *hukou*. It is thus conceivable to see more intense households competing on housing choice.

Feng and Lu (2013) employed a natural experiment in Shanghai to examine the education-housing relationship. They found that the access to well-qualified education is capitalized into housing prices under the neighborhood-based school admission system. Their result indicated that "when an area has an additional quality school per square kilometer, the housing prices are approximately 15.3% higher" (ibid.: 300). The figure was 17.1% if the additional quality school belongs to those of the best quality (ibid.). Such competition for education resources via housing choice significantly increases the inequality between families with different resources.

In general, there are many active participants in *xiaoshengchu* market in which the parents take the leading role. The marketization of compulsory education makes those well-qualified schools a product which can be bought and sold through different channels.

2.3 Bourdieu's cultural capital

Social scientist Bourdieu, identified three different types of capital in any system dominated by a market mechanism (1986). Economic capital refers to the forms of money and property rights. Cultural capital may take various forms of educational qualifications while social capital exists as social relations and networks between individuals (Bourdieu, 1986: 47). Bourdieu proposed that both cultural capital and social capital can be converted into economic capital on certain conditions (ibid.).

Many previous empirical studies have used Bourdieu's theory to explore the relationship between cultural capital and students' academic achievement, educational transition and final attainment (Wu, 2014; Crabb, 2010). DiMaggio (1982), for example, found a positive correlation between involvement in art, music, and literature of students and their performance in school in America. De Graaf (1986) pointed out that parental cultural resources positively affect children's educational attainment in Netherland. Cultural capital is also often used in education studies in China. Sheng (2012) employed the cultural capital theory to examine in which ways Chinese mothers and fathers are involved in children's schooling and higher education choice. Wang *et al.* (2006) did an exploratory study on reading habits of 400 couples in four cities to examine inequality and social stratification in contemporary urban China. They found those people who read more are usually with academic and managerial occupations.

Wu (2014) also employed Bourdieu's forms of capital in her investigations about China's school-choice market and points out the importance of cultural, social and economic capital for parents to help their children get into the desired school. How different forms of capital applied into market mechanisms of Chinese education is presented in following sections.

2.3.1 Cultural capital

According to Bourdieu, there are three forms of cultural capital: the embodied state, the objectified state and the institutionalized state (1986: 247). The objectified state of cultural capital refers to cultural goods including books, pictures, instruments and so on. The embodied state of cultural capital refers to "the form of long-lasting dispositions of the mind and body" such as cultural awareness or a taste for culture (*ibid.*). In the case of *xiaoshengchu*, extra-curriculum classes which enables students

to perform well in entrance examination can be considered as the embodied cultural capital (Wu, 2014: 42).

For most of students who want to enter those well -performing *minban* middle schools, outstanding academic achievement of formal education in school is not enough to distinguish themselves from other students. Therefore, students took *buxiban* for extra learning of Chinese, mathematics, or both subjects to improve their performance during school-choice examination. However, with the rapid marketization of *buxiban*, academic achievement alone might be not enough under the intensive competition. Therefore, students need to take different types of after-school classes to gain extra cultural capital such as cultivating various interests like painting and dancing, obtaining certificates in contests like in English, and even attending sports and musical instrument classes (eg. *xingquban* and *kaojiban*) for showing a high level of performance (Wu, 2014: 44).

When a student's special skills and talents have been recognized by certain organizations and is then accepted by a school, this student successfully utilizes his/her institutionalized cultural capital (ibid.: 42). Bourdieu proposed that “a certificate of cultural competence which confers on its holder a conventional, constant, legally guaranteed value with respect to culture [...] which separates the last successful candidate from the first unsuccessful one” (1986: 248). Thus, among the three forms of Bourdieu's cultural capital, the embodied and institutionalized state are more closely linked with the current *xiaoshengchu* in China even though the objectified state is also related to by extracurricular books and musical instruments (Wu, 2014: 42).

2.3.2 Social capital

According to different scholars, social capital can be approached from either an

individual (Lin, 2001) or a collective (Bourdieu, 1986) perspective. In spite of this difference, social capital refers to relational resources within one's/group's social network (Wu, 2014: 68). Previous research only focused on creating social capital through school choice (Schneider et al., 1997), but the mobilization of social capital can also help with school choice. Wu's study (2014) found that urban middle-class parents make use of their social capital to obtain advantages for their children in *xiaoshengchu*.

Social capital is important in every society but functions significantly in Chinese culture. This concept has been closely related to another Chinese term "*guanxi*" (Wu, 2014: 4). Bian defined *guanxi* as "a dyadic, particular, and sentimental tie that has the potential of facilitating favor exchanges between the parties connected by the tie" (2006: 312). *Guanxi* starts with the family, the extended family and groups like classmates, neighbors, colleagues, and even people from the same native-place (Crombie, 2011: 16). Therefore, there are two types of *guanxi*: blood-based such as family members and relatives; and social based through social interaction (Wu, 2014: 69).

Even though students' academic performance is counted as the priority in most cases, the influence of *guanxi* cannot be avoided under intensive competition. In this respect, *guanxi* as a form of social capital plays a significant role for those having difficulties to meet the required standard. In addition, not all levels of *guanxi* but the very influential one could be useful because well-performing schools still want to keep their academic reputation and transition rate (ibid.). With the ban of school-choice examination at compulsory education level in more cities in China, social capital is believed to play a more important role for acquiring better educational resources (ibid.: 81).

2.3.3 Economic capital

Economic capital is capital which can be immediately and directly converted into money (Bourdieu, 1986: 247). It is also the most widely used in *xiaoshengchu* process as a market mechanism (Wu, 2014: 4). To be successful for *xiaoshengchu* and enter the desired school, parents need to invest huge sums of money. The first sum of money goes to the so-called choice fee. The requirement of this “donation” ranges from a few thousand to a few hundred thousand yuan (ibid.). In the case of Kunming, the choice fee for *minban* middle school is not a sum of hidden money and each school makes clear price for it. However, this only applies to those students who could achieve the academic requirement of each school. Some students who did not reach the line but met the minimum standard have the opportunity to pay extra fee.

Besides the choice fee, parents also have to invest in other “projects” of the public education marketplace that I discussed earlier (see Section 2.2). Taking extra-curriculum classes and finding a tutor also costs greatly especially with the famous and popular teachers. Such type of classes usually takes place in the evening and on the weekends. This requires parents to send their children to go and return which costs parents’ time and transportation expenses. In addition, the purpose of some of the classes is not only for learning but also to get relevant certificates. Participating at a contest or an examination can also cost.

As I mentioned in Section 2.2.4 concerning the housing issue, parents need to prepare enough funds for renting or buying a house in an appropriate district. Some families may even need different houses for each level of schooling such as one house near primary school and another near the middle school (Wu, 2014: 97). Last but not the least, mobilizing social capital is another expense in China. Usually, valuable gifts, several times of banquet, and even the cash are commonly needed (ibid.: 100).

3. Methodology

3.1 Meta-theoretical choice

In terms of epistemological and ontological consideration, this thesis adopted the viewpoint of interpretivism and constructivism. The author aimed at grasping the subjective meaning of social action (Bryman, 2008: 16). It was my job to “gain access to people’s ‘common-sense thinking’ and hence to interpret their actions and their social world from their point of view” (ibid.). On the other hand, from constructivist perspective, the social objects and meanings are socially constructed and researchers always present their own version of social reality (ibid.: 19). Therefore, the aim of this thesis was not to show a truth but to extend to another perspective on the issue.

3.2 Qualitative Research

This thesis employed a case study design using with method of interviews and participant observations to collect data. I did this qualitative research to understand the social world from the perspective of the parents with regard to their school-choice practices and perceptions.

3.2.1 Case study

This study is a non-experimental case study. Its aim was to study *xiaoshengchu*, the transition of primary school graduates to middle school, in Kunming city. Thus, a selected number of people and institutions in Kunming implicated by the

xiaoshengchu constitute my case. Through researching the experiences and perception of a group of people who have such experience about *xiaoshengchu*, I planed to obtain detailed and intensive analysis of the case. The social phenomena I am interested in is the entry exam to the secondary school and I want to understand it by investigating people who have first-hand experience with it.

Flyvbjerg proposed that the case study is useful for both testing and generating hypotheses (2006: 229). This study contains elements both of induction and deduction. After reviewing the previous research on the marketization of Chinese compulsory education, school choice phenomenon, and Bourdieu's cultural capital in practice in China, it is important to see whether the empirical research I have done can match with previous study and theories. Furthermore, the twelve in-depth interviews belong to an explorative method to obtain more specific new information about people's perception and experiences on *xiaoshengchu*, which lead to further theoretical ideas .

3.3 Method and selection

The primary data for this thesis was collected through in-depth interviews and participant observation from those people who have the most "knowledge" about *xiaoshengchu*. The secondary data consisted of articles, books, statistics, news reports, and articles of relevant law and regulation. In addition to these printed media, visual materials in the form of picture and various internet sources were used to supplement my argument. Flyvbjerg has highly emphasized the value of concrete and context-dependent knowledge (2006: 224). With such in-depth data, one can better generalize on the basis of a single case (ibid.: 228).

3.3.1 Interviews and informal conversations

One part of the primary data comes twelve individual in-depth interviews. Ten of the interviews were conducted with parents since parents are the main participant in *xiaoshengchu* market and I mainly focus on their practices and perceptions. Another two interviews with teachers were conducted to juxtapose the different perceptions. Before conducting in-depth interviews, I conducted seven informal conversations with parents and teachers. All the interviews and informal conversations were conducted either in January or April 2014.

To reach the interviewees I used snowball sampling with two reasons. Firstly, I tried to reach parents by myself either in front of the school gate or out of the private tutoring classroom, but it did not work out because the parents did not want to talk with me as a stranger or they only provided very short answers. Another reason to use snowball sampling was that the parents who did interviews with me would have some knowledge about my research so they could subsequently introduce me to someone who can provide such information. Such purposive sampling (“information-oriented selection”) can maximize the utility of information from small samples as they were selected on the basis of expectations about their information content (Flyvbjerg, 2006: 230).

In-depth interview is an effective way to collect detailed information for clear purpose of researchers (Gubrium and Holstein, 2002: 104). Semi-structured interviews were used in this thesis in order to get access to “various stories or narratives through which people describe their world” (Silverman, 2010: 225). Each interview took about one hour either in respondent’s home, working place, or a coffee shop. All of the interviews were in one-to-one format with each parent or teacher. Each interview lasted approximately one hour. The questions in different interviews were not exactly the same but followed a similar guideline (see Appendix 2), as some amendments were made depending on the role of respondents (parent or teacher) and the grade of

children (primary school or junior high school). Due to the semi-structured feature, I sometimes rolled out a few unprepared questions according to respondents' answer. During the interviews, I generally used "educational credential" and "*guanxi*" to refer to Bourdieu's cultural capital and social capital.

Informal conversation can be regarded as Informal interview or unstructured interviews which is "an essential part of gaining an understanding of a setting and its members' ways of seeing" (Cohen D, 2006). It can also provide the foundation for conducting and developing my in-depth interviews. For informal conversation, I started with two of my friends who have relevant knowledge and then went to a *buxiban* looking for the parents and teachers outside of the classroom. In total, six informal conversations were conducted. Each conversation lasted around 10-20 minutes. For interviews, the first three parents were selected from the author's personal social network while the rest of the interviewees were reached by snowball sampling. Respondents of informal conversation were selected either through snowball sampling as above or outside of the *buxiban* where I conducted participant observation (see Section 3.3.2).

3.3.2 Participant observation

Two participant observations were conducted for collecting information in this thesis. For both of them, I acted as a complete observer who neither structured nor interfered with the occasions (Bryman, 2008: 410). I took written notes during those two participant observations.

The first observation was a closed setting in a classroom of *buxiban*. One of my interviewees' child was taking a *buxiban* for *xiaoshengchu* this year so I took her as the gatekeeper to introduce me to the teacher of that class. I took an overt role with

the teacher explaining my research and the purpose for observation while a convert role was adopted in front of students in that class after gaining the access from the teacher. The time when I conducted this observation was winter holiday (January, 2014) for students so they went to this extra-curriculum class everyday from 8 a.m. to 12 p.m.. I attended for one day's class consisting of two hours' Chinese class and another two hours' mathematics class.

Another observation was conducted on May 5th, 2014 in an office-room of Yunnan University. During that period (May 1st to May 10th, 2014) when students were required to register for *xiaoshengchu* examination online, some parents could have this opportunity (through *guanxi*) to come to this office paying extra money for special offer from YUSS. Even though it was a closed setting between selected parents and staffs, the office was still open for other people. I gained access from a staff of that office and all other staffs understood my role and research but not all the parents appeared on that day.

3.3.3 Analysis and transcribing interviews

Qualitative research often pays attention not only on what people say but also in what way they say it (Bryman, 2008: 451). Therefore, it is important to record or get down the notes for interviews. All the interviews were conducted in Chinese and some of them were in local dialect. To make the text more readable, I translated parts of the interviews that are relevant for this thesis into English. Although only 7 of 12 respondents agreed with recording and one of the remaining five interviews was conducted by telephone, I took notes during all the interviews. Those who did not agree with recording usually spoke slowly to give me more time to transcribe. For analysis, I went through all the transcripts and recordings made after the interviews and then I categorized all the questions into several correspondent themes.

3.4 Reliability and validity

The validity of qualitative researches has long been argued by social scientists. Silverman showed that *validity is another word for truth* which can accurately represent the social reality the one refers to (2010: 275). Reliability refers to the degree of consistency (ibid.). In my thesis, I aimed at providing practices and perceptions from parents' perspective rather than researching objective truth happening in China. Previous studies on the same issue and other secondary data was used to set this research's context and thereby add to its validity.

3.5 Ethic consideration

At the beginning of each interview, the interviewees were introduced to the purpose of this research, my role as a student, and the usage of the interviews. All the informants gave me oral consent to be interviewed and I also received oral consent for the two participant observations. To protect the privacy of the respondents, their real names were not used in this study. In addition, the recordings will not be used for other purposes than this thesis. There was no individual interview with children due to the regulations of Centre for East and South-East Asian Studies at Lund University.

3.6 Limitation and Self-reflection

The number of interviews used in my study was of limited size. However, even though the data is limited, it is still meaningful not only for this thesis but it could be used for comparison of parents' perceptions and practices concerning school choice for other cases in China and beyond. The purposive sampling allowed me only to get information that I expect and not hear "different" voices, but it was more beneficial to

have more similar voices for this thesis.

Some questions were considered as sensitive for some of respondents such as their family income or the utilization of *guanxi*. Therefore, the relevant answers should be critically treated. In addition, my own background as a Chinese woman may have affected the interaction with informants leading to different result if compared to a foreign and/or male researcher. The language I used and the way I explained the academic concepts during interviews may also affect the result.

4. Findings and analysis

4.1 About the respondents

Twelve people, ten parents and two teachers, were interviewed for this thesis. Eight of the parents' offspring passed *xiaoshengchu* in the last four years and another two attended the exam this June. All the interviews were conducted before the *xiaoshengchu* in 2014. The principles for selecting those ten parents followed the purposive sampling mentioned in Section 3.3.1. With additional six people I had informal conversation. Two of them are parents and the rest of four are teachers.

All the respondents for the interviews are mothers except one and all the families are one-child families. For their children, seven of them are girls and three are boys. To refer to the respondents, I used Parent01-10 and Teacher 01 and 02 for interviewees; ICParent01-02 and ICTeacher01-04 for respondents of informal conversation. In addition, I used Participant Observation 01 and 02 to refer to two participant observations I have conducted for this thesis.

4.2 About the schools

Within the educational system in China, students go through the journey from primary school, middle school, high school, to university. Primary school usually takes six years and middle school takes three years. In total, these nine years of study are compulsory China.

By 2014, 52 *minban* middle schools exist in Kunming. This year, sixteen of them are

allowed to set up entrance examination of *xiaoshengchu*, but students can only choose two of them for attending the test (Yu, 2014). These schools are 云大附中(YUSS), 师大实验中学(YNUEMS), 滇池中学(DianChi Middle School, DCMS), 长城中学(ChangCheng Middle School, CCMS), 白塔中学(BaiTa Middle School, BTMS), 农大附中(NDFZ), 北师大昆明附中(BSDFZ), 北大附中云南实验学校(BDFZ), 云子中学(YunZi Middle School, YZMS), 冠益中学(GuanYi Middle School, GYMS), 汇承中学(HuiCheng Middle School, HCMS), 亨德森高新一中(GaoXin Middle School, GXMS), 云南师范大学附属仁泽学校(RenZe Middle School, RZMS), 昆一中度假区分校金岸中学(JinAn Middle School, JAMS), 云南师范大学附属润城学校(RunCheng Middle School, RCMS), 度假区衡水实验中学(HengShui Middle School, HSMS) (ibid.). All of the schools require to examine two subjects, Chinese and Mathematics (few required English before 2013).

Table 1 presents the basic information about school-choice examination of interviewees' children.

Table 1. The basic information about school-choice examination

(Information of their children)	Year of <i>xiaoshengchu</i>	Took the school choice exam of	Name of current middle school
Parent 01	2012	YUSS, YNUEMS, CCMS, BTMS	YUSS
Parent 02	2012	YUSS, YNUEMS, CCMS, BTMS	YUSS
Parent 03	2010	YNUEMS, DCMS	YNUEMS
Parent 04	2013	CCMS, YNUEMS	RZMS
Parent 05	2013	YUSS, YNUEMS, DCMS, CCMS, JAMS	YUSS
Parent 06	2013	YUSS, YNUEMS,	YUSS

		CCMS	
Parent 07	2012	YUSS, YNUEMS, CCMS, BTMS, DCMS	YNUEMS
Parent 08	2014 June	YUSS (Plan to take)	
Parent 09	2014 June	CCMS, NDFZ (Plan to take)	
Parent10	2011	YUSS	Kunming No.12 Middle School

Before the *xiaoshengchu* in 2014, there was no limitation for a student to attend school-choice examinations for *minban* middle school, but not all *minban* schools set up the formal entrance examination. For example, RZMS in 2013 selected students by reviewing their academic achievement in primary school, considering their extra certificates and prizes, and conducting interviews with students instead of having standard school-choice examination (Parent04, 2014). Even though there was no published ranking for schools, parents were certain about the rankings of different schools and explicitly told me. All respondents agreed with that the top five middle schools in Kunming are YUSS, YNUEMS, CCMS, BTMS and DCMS. Similar opinions were also expressed about the second best group of schools.

As I mentioned in Section 2.2.2, the nature of these schools are worthy to research in order to understand why parents prefer to choose these schools instead of free public schools without entrance examination. By studying the websites of those schools, all of these sixteen schools are either a private branch of a previous well-performing public middle school (DCMS, CCMS, BTMS, YZMS, GYMS, HCMS, JAMS, RCMS) or receiving financial investment by the local government or public schools

but work with private management mechanism (the rest of 8). The latter group of schools usually borrows value and experience from well-performing schools in more developed cities in China. Following are some examples of the reason for parents to choose those *minban* middle schools:

Parent09: *As I researched about NDFZ, it was established in last year with favor of average or upper-average students. Based on my son's academic performance, there is no problem for him to pass the examination. NDFZ is not the most preferred school, but it is known as the one which stresses comprehensive development of students not only academic performance. One of the founders and investors of NDFZ is Changle Middle School in Shandong Province which is famous for suzhi jiaoyu. So Changle is trying to spread its value into more cooperators like NDFZ. Thus, my kid will face less pressure from the school.*

Parent07: *School choice actually equals to teacher choice. Qualified teachers is the most important element in competition between schools. These minban schools have their method to attract good teachers and some of them use same teachers with their public partner. They were all excellent public schools so I prefer to trust them more.*

Parent01: *Your classmates or schoolmates are very important. Through school-choice examination, those minban schools select best students among all well-performing students in Kunming (优中选优), but public schools follow "attending nearby schools" policy so the levels of students are mixed (参差不齐). If the classmates are all perform well, it is better for my kid. It's like racing when you have a faster leader.*

Parent03: *Anyone of the most 300 well-performing students from YUSS and YNUEMS must be the top 5 students in public middle schools. The best public*

middle school is Kunming No.2 Middle School, but it cannot be compared with any of the top five minban schools. Besides, not all the students are eligible to enter No.2 Middle School based on hukou system.

ICParent01: My son can get into Kunming No.10 Middle School according to his hukou. It is a very good school like top 5 among public schools, but he still wants to try the examination of YUSS. Many students like him think xiaoshengchu is an opportunity for them to go to the best school (YUSS).

With different reasons to choose those popular *minban* middle schools, each family has their own journey to prepare and pass through the whole *xiaoshengchu* process. To accomplish that, they need to consume different forms of capital to varying degrees.

4.3 Cultural capital

Formal education

Many parents expressed their feeling that *xiaoshengchu* has taken the position of *gaokao* to become the most exhausting academic examination for Chinese families. This examination-driven and competitively-selective atmosphere under an elitist education system has pushed all students into unprecedented pressure from primary school stage. Chinese students are believed that they must study very hard to perform as good as possible in each exam in school.

Parents told me that to be a good student in primary school is not difficult because every kid nowadays is quite smart. Parent01 said “every kid now has similar intellect

but those well-performing students have better habits on study (学习习惯好)". By better habits, she means that those students know how to manage their time who would not watch TV or hang out before finishing their study. She emphasized that students should everyday review all the knowledge learned at school and preview the lessons for the next day. There are some examples about the homework of students from the school during grade 5 to 6:

Parent09: My son could not concentrate when doing homework, so he was very slow. It took him 3 hours to finish all the homework after school. His father would always be with him when doing homework but outside of his room and entered into the room to check sometimes. I told him to go to sleep at 22 everyday, but sometimes he could not finish his homework so he needed to get up earlier to do that. Once there was a special experience in his school asking parents to do the same homework. I tried one called "Self-design (自我设计)" which took me one hour. After that, I understood more about my kid's feeling.

Parent05: The homework for Chinese asked them to copy (抄) almost the whole book. [...] The workload was quite a lot before mid-term and final exams. Either her father or I would be with her to finish the homework (陪着做作业). Before the exam, we would lead her to review (带她复习).

Parent04: My daughter needed to do her homework until 10-11 p.m.. I also needed to spend all the time with her doing homework (盯着做).

Another two parents mentioned the workload delivered by school during summer and winter holidays is too much (Parent04, 2014; Parent10, 2014). Parent10 shared that "my kid was not allowed to register for new semester because he did not finish his homework for holiday, so he spend two whole nights to catch up with little sleep".

According to the description from the parents, to finish the workload of formal education has been already a bit stressful for some children. At the same time, parents also need to invest large amount of time and energy on their children's study. However, there are also some parents who said the homework is not a huge burden for their offspring because their children can finish within shorter time. For instance, Parent06 told me "my daughter could always finish her homework very soon (快手). She did not take a nap in the noon but doing homework, so she usually came back home without any further homework".

Besides "doing" homework with their children, parents also need to drive them to and from school. However, only two parents conducted this practice during primary school stage, but eight of them either need to drive their children to school or move to a new house near the school. This can also tell that school-choice is not a common practice for the transition from kindergarten to primary school under "attending nearby school" policy.

The graduation examination of primary schools is for every student no matter whether they plan to take school-choice examination. According to parents, this exam is not difficult at all and many students can get full score (Parent04, 2014). In sum, without participating school-choice examinations, daily formal education in primary school has not been considered as a huge burden for most of the families. This is also confirmed by Teacher01. She is a Chinese teacher in *JinKangYuan* Primary School in Kunming who has been teaching for 19 years.

Teacher01: Primary school is the stage which cares the most about cultivating characters, team awareness, and management and organizing abilities. [...] The so-called suzhi jiaoyu has been implemented mainly in primary school level. Local government does not allow us to assign too much homework for students due to "burden-reduction" policy (减负). Sometimes, local government comes to school to check the weight of students' backpacks.

Informal Education

Many respondents mentioned “meritocracy” during the interviews and they thought the current Chinese education is an meritocratic journey which forced them to choose better resources for their children. All of the interviewees indicated that the real pressure does not come from the schools. The real “battlefield” is in the *buxiban*. According to Teacher02, a teacher teaching at YUSS and a *buxiban* after school, some famous *buxiban* in Kunming even requires entrance examination to take their classes. Some *buxiban* face pressure from the parents because they must present the numbers of students who passed school-choice examinations (see Picture 3). Thus, there is the first round of selection among *buxiban*. Teacher02 stated that “*Buxiban* like *Xiaoxiucui* (小秀才) demands entrance examination which means only having money cannot guarantee to get into the class in that *buxiban*” (Teacher02, 2014).

As I mentioned before, *xiaoshengchu* test in Kunming requires to examine two subjects, Chinese and Mathematics. Therefore, *buxiban* for *xiaoshengchu* mainly focuses on these two subjects. Among all the interviewees, only one parent (Parent09) did not send her kid to *buxiban* for *xiaoshengchu* examination but rather employed a private English tutor at home. ICParent01 and 02 also send their children to *buxiban* for *xiaoshengchu*. The Table 2 presents the information about *buxiban* the students took in primary school period.

Table 2. The information about the *buxiban* taken by respondents’ children

Information of <i>buxiban</i>	Time	Subject	Purpose
Student01	Grade(G) 5-G6	Chinese	<i>Xiaoshengchu</i>
		Math	

	G1-G4	English	Self-improvement
Student02	2nd semester of G6: 3 times/week+Full Saturday	Chinese	<i>Xiaoshengchu</i>
		Math	
	G5 to 1st semester of G6: once/week	Math	Self-improvement
Student03	G5-G6: 2 times(4 hours)/week + 4hours on Saturday	Math	<i>Xiaoshengchu</i>
Student04	G4-G6	English	<i>Xiaoshengchu (a)</i>
Student05	G6: Full Saturday	Chinese	<i>Xiaoshengchu</i>
		Math	
		English	Self-improvement
Student06	G6: half day at weekend	Chinese	<i>Xiaoshengchu</i>
		Math	
	2nd semester of G5	Math	Self-improvement
Student07	G1-G5	Math	Self-improvement
		English	
	G6	Math	<i>Xiaoshengchu</i>
		English	

Student08	G6: once/week	Chinese	<i>Xiaoshengchu</i>
		Math	
	G4-G5	English	Self-improvement
Student10	G6: once/week	Chinese	<i>Xiaoshengchu</i>
		Math	
	G3-G6	English	Self-improvement

Note: Student(01) is the child for Parent(01).

a: CCMS required English as a subject for school-choice examination, but cancelled it for the exam in 2013 and afterwards.

According to Table 2, all students took certain amount of *buxiban* aimed at *xiaoshengchu*. The majority of them started to go to *buxiban* much earlier than grade 6, but the last year in primary school seems the time for everyone to focus only on school-choice examinations. All parents indicated that all families would receive the “message” for taking *buxiban* around the time at grade 5. Parents told me that some other families started to prepare for *xiaoshengchu* (i.e. attending *buxiban*) from grade 4 (Parent01, 2014; Parent03, 2014; Parent08, 2014). They thought the market mechanism was working efficiently in everyone’s school-life. Students need to go to *buxiban*, but the choice for a specific one is made by their parents. The following examples show how parents found suitable *buxiban* for their children:

Parent01: *From grade 5, her teachers started to emphasize the importance of taking buxiban after school. Besides, the teacher since grade 6 has asked them to arrive at school half an hour earlier than stated school time (8.30) for morning reading (早读). During the noon break, the teacher sometimes would add extra class or tutor them for homework. All of these created a lot of pressure on us. My daughter was one of the top students in her class and our*

goal is YUSS so we must go for buxiban.

Parent03: *When she turned into grade 5, we started to look for suitable buxiban. We asked advice from previous parents who had experience, but the most valuable information came from her teacher. We accepted her teacher's advice.*

Parent08: *The buxiban my son is taking is recommended by his teacher (班主任). Many parents would give priority to recommendation from teacher.*

Parents in this respect need to spend time and energy to collect helpful information and advice from teachers and other parents. For instance, Parent10 attended many public presentation about *buxiban* for *xiaoshengchu*. In the summer holiday at grade 5, She went to three different *buxiban* for auditing and finally chose one from those three for her son (Parent10, 2014). Many of the interviewees stated that they were studying with their kids at the same time but focusing on different fields (“他们学他们的，我们学我们的”) (Parent01, 2014; Parent04, 2014; Parent06, 2014).

Besides the *buxiban* after school either in the evening or on the weekend, most of students also went for *buxiban* during winter and summer holiday (“假期班”). Seven of the interviewees and two parents from informal conversation stated that their children needed to attend *buxiban* in holiday which took from ten days to one month differently for each family. Usually, the *buxiban* their children took also arranged a holiday schedule so they did not need to find a new one for holiday. In addition, more than half of the families needed to drive their children to and from the *buxiban*. Parent03 said that “her buxiban was in the evening and a bit far from home, so we have to drive her otherwise it's too dangerous for a little girl”. According to my observation after the class of the *buxiban* (Participant Observation 01), more than half of students' parents came to pick them up after the class at 12p.m..

The purpose for attending *buxiban* is mainly for academic performance. It is the embodied state of cultural capital which represents what a student knows and can do (Wu, 2014). Parents believe that taking *buxiban* can help their children perform better in school-choice examinations. In addition, all respondents indicated that taking *buxiban* can help their children to enter well-performing schools which have been considered as a type of cultural capital as well. After asking explicitly about the importance of cultural capital, even Parent09 who did not send her son to a *buxiban*, still thinks a better school can bring more cultural capital for her child. In sum, they agree with the idea of Bourdieu’s cultural capital marks high status in society. Bourdieu stated that “differences in cultural capital mark the differences between the classes” (Bourdieu, 1984: 69). Parents think a famous school is a valuable cultural label on one hand which can distinguish their children from others. On the other hand, top school is a great platform and a key for better opportunity at next stage which may help them to gain more capital.

However, *buxiban* is not all about extra-curriculum class as informal education and cultural capital. Another type of class has attracted attention from parents since an earlier stage. Apart from the academic achievement, each family especially urban middle-class families nowadays would like to invest more on interest-oriented and skill-oriented class (*xingquban*) for obtaining more cultural capital for their children (Wu, 2014). More than two thirds of parents and Teacher01 agreed with the idea that “grade 1-4 was the time for cultivating some special skills or interests (培养特长), but when you moved to grade 5 there was no time for children besides study. It is even impossible in middle school”. The Table 3 shows the brief information about the *xingquban* the students have taken.

Table 3. The brief information on *xingquban*

Information of <i>xingquban</i>	Subject	Started from (a)
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Student01	Musical instrument (Violin); Painting; Dancing (Ballet); Host (主持人)	Kindergarten
Student02	Musical instrument; Calligraphy; Dancing; Sports (Swim, Taekwondo)	Kindergarten
Student03	Musical instrument (Cucurbit Flute)	Grade 4
Student04	Musical instrument (Piano)	Grade 1
Student05	Musical instrument (Guitar); Painting; Singing; Lego; Robot	Kindergarten
Student06	Painting; Sports (Badminton)	Kindergarten
Student07	Musical instrument (Guitar)	Grade 3
Student08	Musical instrument (Piano)	Grade 1
Student09	Musical instrument (Piano); Sports (Badminton)	Grade 1
Student10	Sports (Tennis)	Grade 4

Note: a: this indicates the time for the first class, different subjects may start from different time

All interviewees said their children had attended various kinds of *xingquban* out of school. Parent10 told me that she felt regretful she did not send her son to more kinds of *xingquban*. Nevertheless, all of interviewees agreed with Bourdieu (1986) that what their children have learned in *xingquban* is a competence or skill which cannot be separated from their children (“the bearer”). Only a few interviewees have send their children to obtain additional certificates. For instance, Parent04 told me that her daughter has obtained a certificate in piano playing at national level. However, most of the interviewees said that the purpose of sending their children to *xingquban* was not for certificates (“考级”). The following descriptions are how parents explained

their purpose to take children to various kinds of *xingquban*:

Teacher01: *Nowadays, most of families will invest on cultivating certain skills for their children. The competition in China now is super intensive. Every parent wants to make their child to be outstanding. The more the children know, the more capital (资本) they have. In addition, when two students receive the same result of xiaoshengchu exam, the one who has more skills or certificates will win.*

Parent03: *Every kid learns something now so you have to do it, too. My daughter got the certificate for cucurbit flute (葫芦丝) of the highest level at grade 5. They can only learn extra skills at primary school stage, there is no time when they enter the middle school.*

Parent04: *The primary school my daughter went to is quite special. It is a new school with new values, so they require students to go to school on Saturday attending different kinds of *xingquban* (特色课). All the classes are free including dancing, flower arrangement and so on. So we don't need to take more class out of school.*

Parent06: *I will observe her interests first then take her to some classes. If she can keep learning, we will support her. The purpose is to enrich her spare time and take more exercise (锻炼身体).*

Parent08: *It's up to his interests. We encourage him to learn what he likes, but if he wants to give up it's also fine. We don't ask him to learn something for getting certificate (考级), just hope he can have some special skills (一技之长).*

Parent09: *Taking these xingquban is for cultivating quality (培养素质) and ability. I hope he can have more skills and interests in his life (生活情趣多). This is what a child should do (符合孩子天性). With sports, he can become more confident and healthier. The most important thing is he likes to do.*

Based on the answers from those respondents, more parents nowadays consider various kinds of *xingquban* as cultural capital not for passing the school-choice examination but more likely to concern the comprehensive development of their children. Among the interviewees, only two parents mentioned their children have obtained the certificate for musical instrument and Parent07 send her kid to the mathematics competition once in primary school, but they did not think it could help a lot for *xiaoshengchu* test. Even though the institutionalized state of cultural capital by Bourdieu (1986) refers to certain qualifications or credentials, parents think being recognized by the public or mass people can already be considered as “certificates” for their children.

Besides the *xingquban* students have attended out of schools, each parent mentioned some other interests and hobbies of their children which could be done or practiced at home. Many parents stated their children like reading comic books. Some children of my interviewees like writing novels, making handicrafts, and so forth. All parents fully support their children to cultivate their hobbies during their spare time, only one respondent said she sometimes would stop her child reading comic books when it took up too much time (Parent08, 2014). In this respect, parents are not only focused on academic achievement but also start to pay more attention on other development.

In general, the majority of students attended *buxiban* at primary school level and various kinds of *xingquban* for all the families. Despite that few of respondents aimed at certificate-winning, achievement in *xingquban* sometimes could help a student to gain more advantages in *xiaoshengchu* competition. According to my respondents, this is just the beginning which indicates that much more pressure would be faced in

middle school stage. All eight families who participated in *xiaoshengchu* currently are taking *buxiban* for middle school study as well. At this stage, some of them need more *buxiban* for different subjects such as biology (Parent01, 2014) besides Chinese, Mathematics and English.

4.4 Social capital

For the interviewees in my study, less social capital was used compared with cultural capital. This may result from that most of respondents' children are well-performing students who do not need too much help of *guanxi* to enter the desired middle school. In addition, most of parents as urban middle class easily take their social resources as granted such as their friends and colleagues. In spite of this fact, there are still a few examples of exploitation of social capital during school-choice process:

Parent01: Teacher02 is my friend, so I asked her advice when I needed to choose a good buxiban for my daughter. I trusted her as a teacher who should know better information than myself. [...] My daughter is a well-performing student (学习好), so she could pass the entrance examination of YUSS, but my sister's daughter was a very difficult case. I helped a lot to let her go to YUSS (我费很大劲把她弄进去的) in 2010. I had tried hundreds of times to invite the principal of YUSS for dinner and finally succeed. We talked about my niece at dinner and he promised that he would fix it. After my niece entering YUSS, I have tried many times again to invite him for a "thank you" dinner, but never successful so far.

Parent05: We applied five middle schools for school-choice examination (YUSS, YNUEMS, DCMS, CCMS and JAMS), but my daughter only passed the exam of JAMS. Although her result was only several points less than the

standard line, we had to find some guanxi to get her into YUSS. Her father used his guanxi to make her on the list of second admission (补录). The condition for second admission was paying extra tuition fee.

Parent10: My son failed in xiaoshengchu examination of YUSS. I did not want him to have too much pressure in those competitive schools, but the school he should attend according to his hukou is a poor-performing one. So I decided to send him into a much better public middle school. I spent some money to find guanxi (a friend of my friend) to help my son go to Kunming No.12 Middle School, but I did not know the exact procedure how that friend acted. Besides the fixed 20,000 yuan for guanxi, I also spend some money on gifts and dinners for that friend.

The case of Parent10 shows that even for those families who want to enter well-performing public middle schools, special efforts is needed by using social and economic capital. Apart from the above examples, Participant Observation 02 as a closed setting only available for few selected parents is highly related to the exploitation of social capital during *xiaoshengchu* process. I conducted this observation on May 5th during the enrollment period for *xiaoshengchu* examination. This special “event” was organized in an office in Yunnan University, one of the founders and investors of YUSS. I gained access from my friend (ICTeacher04) as the gatekeeper and had an informal conversation with her. According to her explanation, this “event” is not a secret for the public. Every year, there are some quotas (“名额”) for the children of employees in Yunnan University to enter YUSS with lower standard line. Usually besides the employees’ children, there would be still many quotas left so that other parents can take it. Based upon my own observation in the office for about 2 hours and the conversation with ICTeacher04, the following is the main procedure of this “event”:

- (1): This year, this department has certain quota for 10-points reduction (降10分) for entrance examination of YUSS;
- (2): Only those parents who have strong *guanxi* can get the opportunity. Even though many parents may know the head of this department, the number is limited;
- (3): Each student who would take the examination for YUSS (June 28th, 2014) with this “bonus” must pay 20000 yuan at this office during the enrollment period for *xiaoshengchu* exam (May 1st to May 10th, 2014);
- (4): Parents needed to bring many documents about their children like personal information, the academic achievement of grade 5 and grade 6, and all the certificates and prizes;
- (5): When the parent(s) filled the form, they needed to write down who is the introducer;
- (6): If the student could not use this reduction at last (pass the line without reduction or cannot reach the line even with the reduction), they can get this 20000 yuan back.

During the 2 hours, 10 families came to that office and paid 20000 yuan. During 10 days of special enrollment period, 41 families came to this office to pay (ICTeacher04, 2014). ICTeacher04 told me that even though she did not know the detail of those parents' *guanxi*, she was sure that their *guanxi* must be very strong. She described as following:

ICTeacher04: Every year around this time, I see many parents coming here to obtain this quota. Guanxi is the most important element for this chance. The head of our department would receive hundreds of phone calls during this period. Nowadays, each family has some guanxi, but there is different levels of guanxi. Two years ago when two of my cousins' children wanted to enter YUSS, I talked to our “head” (主任). He said he could only give me one quota even for me who works here, so you know how hard this is for other parents.

Each year several thousands of students apply for YUSS, the number of families I

have observed at this locality only accounts for a tip of the iceberg. It can be imagined that the competition for social capital is another battlefield but just for parents. However, according to some of the respondents, this is not the only place that parents can get such bonus for entering into YUSS:

Teacher02: For each of teacher in YUSS, we have a 10-point-reduction quota in every year for our relatives, or the student we recommend to school. For our own children, they can enter YUSS no matter how their performance is at the exam. [...] Last year, the standard line is 132 points (out of 200 points) for YUSS, but I heard one student with 70 points also came to our school who spend about 150,000 yuan and found some guanxi.

ICTeacher04: It is good that parents can get their 20,000 yuan back if their children cannot use the “bonus”. I know some teachers in YUSS, they ask for more than 20,000 yuan for 10-point-reduction but there is no return afterwards.

In general, social capital also plays a very important role in school-choice process especially for those students who cannot reach the line. From the above examples, two types of *guanxi*, blood-based and social based, is used by different parents. All interviewees admitted the significance of social capital in Chinese society, and they all believed that social capital will become more influential when *xiaoshenchu* is abolished from next year.

4.5 Economic capital

In China, there is a saying “money makes the mare go” (“有钱能使鬼推磨”) which indicates the vital role of economic capital for everything. As seen in the section

above, in the case of *xiaoshengchu*, economic capital can be more important than the other two forms of capital. When I asked my interviewees to rank the significance of the three forms of capital for their children, however, all of them chose cultural capital as the most valuable one. Their reasons are more or less the same. For instance, Parent08 said “education (as a form of cultural capital) is the foundation for everything. When you have enough knowledge, you will find the method to gain social capital and economic capital”. Parent09 also agreed with that “real education will bring him to different level of life (境界不一样). Then he can create social capital automatically. When he has both cultural and social capital, he will obtain economic capital”.

However, all of the interviewees agreed with that they were using their own social and economic capital to help their children to receive better cultural capital. Here are some examples to demonstrate the role of economic capital in *xiaoshengchu* process:

Parent03: I think we utilize all of our capital to invest on our child and to help her to gain her own capital in the future. [...] Many families invest all they have to raise the only child (勒紧裤腰带养一个孩子).

Parent04: I must let my kid go to the well-performing schools even if I need to spend a lot of money. Parents make money and cultivate useful guanxi, which is all for their children. Receiving better education can bring them more opportunities to be successful.

Without the economic investment from parents, many children may not be able to get into their desired school. To be more specific, Table 4 below presents the family investment on children in the process of *xiaoshengchu*.

Table 4. Family investment on children for *xiaoshengchu*

Parent	Buxiban (yuan)	Xingqu ban	Private tutor	Transp- ortation (a)	Tuition fee (b)	Social capital	Accomm- odation
P01	> 50,000	> 8,000/ year		Yes	8,000/ year		Rent 36,000/ year
P02	≈15,000			Yes	8,000/ year		Buy
P03	≈ 6,000	≈ 2,000/ year		Yes	7,000/ year		Rent 30,000/ year
P04	≈ 12,000	> 6,000/ year		Yes	7,500/ year + 8800/ Year (c)		Buy
P05	> 7,000	>20,000/ year		No	8,000/ year	Yes	Buy
P06	> 10,000	≈ 7,000/ year		Yes	8,000/ year		
P07	> 12,000	> 2,000/ year		Yes	8,000/ year		
P08	> 10,000	≈ 4,000/ year		Yes			

P09		≈ 8,000/ year	>20,000	Yes			Plan to rent < 36,000/ year
P10	> 25,000	≈20,000/ year		Yes		Yes ≈26,0 00	Rent 20,000/ year

Notes: a: this refers to parents either need to drive their children to school or to extra classes;

b: this is the so-called choice fee for *minban* middle school;

c: Parent04's child went to a private primary school which also need to pay the tuition fee.

Apart from the various numbers in Table 4 and the 20,000 yuan as an extra investment from Participant Observation 02, some of interviewees mentioned even bigger figures for other families.

Parent01: *What I heard about the highest price for entering YUSS was 120,000 yuan in 2012. This price was for those students whose result was far from the standard line.*

Parent04: *I heard about the price of a quota for YNUEMS was 100,000 yuan in the year (2013) when my kid went through xiaoshengchu.*

During the interviews, parents usually had less complains about the investment on cultural capital, but they always had a depressed face when talking about the housing issue. Here are some examples:

Parent01: *When my daughter was admitted to YUSS, our family moved to this house. The rent is 3,600 yuan per month and it's really difficult to find one.*

We needed to start to looking for a house near YUSS more than one year ago and pay all the rent for three years at that time. This means we have to pay more than 10,000 yuan at once one year before she entering YUSS. It was a very tough experience for my family (一把辛酸泪).

Parent02: I looked for some school-district-housing (学区房) for rent, but I couldn't stand such low living condition with expensive price. We got used to live in new apartment (新小区), so we bought a new house which was convenient both for my daughter and me. In spite of this, her father still needed to drive her to school in the morning. [...] No matter whether you rent or buy, it's all for our children (租房买房都是为了孩子).

Parent04: My husband and I work at the same company which is too far from the city center. When we planed to buy this house, we paid special attention on the schools nearby. Haibei Primary School is a well-performing private school, as the resident of this residential quarter (本小区住户) we can go to this school with lower tuition fee. Now, her middle school is 10 minutes by car from our home.

Parent08: I don't want to invest on renting a new house. If my son can pass the examination of YUSS this year, we plan to move to my mother's house which is much closer to YUSS than our home. Maybe when he turns into high school, we need to rent a house near that school.

Parent03: We have been living in a school-district-house (学区房) for more than one year, but her mother and I felt many difficulties (太不方便) to go to the workplace. Therefore, we decided to move back to our house and I drove her to school every early morning.

In Yunnan, the annual average wages of staff and worker was 38,900 yuan in 2012

(Statistical Bureau of Yunnan Province, 2013: 443). It can be seen that the amount those interviewees have invested on their kids can be a huge burden for a family with average income in this province. All of the interviewees said they did not feel any economic pressure to make such investment on their children's education. However, Parent06 stated a phenomenon might be applied for many ordinary Chinese families:

Parent06: Not all the families can afford such substantial investment, but the meaning of "affordable" is different for many Chinese families. Many parents would like to sacrifice everything fore their children even their own basic life conditions. In my opinion, I would not say that they can afford it but they may not think so.

As can be seen in Table 3, parents need to spend their economic capital on various kinds of "products". All of those products are created by/for *xiaoshengchu* market. Those people involved in the informal education market can make profit through diverse types of extra-curriculum classes. Some teachers in popular middle schools can earn extra money for "selling" their quota. Expensive tuition fee and extra choice fee can help schools to develop and local government to ease its financial burden. Moreover, within the public middle school circle, people with enough *guanxi* and ability can gain profit from those parents who want to send their children into better public schools.

4.6 Xiaoshengchu as a market

Xiaoshengchu as a product of marketization of public education in China at the same time has also promoted the process of marketization. Some respondents during interviews stated that the current *xiaoshengchu* in Kunming has formed an industrial

chain including informal education market, housing market, and many other participants. Three pictures below are visual material I have collected during my fieldwork. Picture 2 shows various kinds of exercise-books only for *xiaoshengchu* in a bookstore in Kunming. This type of exercise-book is preferred by teachers in *buxiban* as homework assigning to students.

Picture 2. Exercise-books for *xiaoshengchu* in a bookstore



Source: taken by author, January, 2014

The informal education market is the most booming industry which benefits from *xiaoshengchu*. Among hundreds of different *buxiban* in Kunming, *Jiajiale* is one of the biggest which was chosen by Parent03. On the public buses in Kunming, everyone can watch the advertisement of *Jiajiale*. Picture 3 below presents a billboard of *Jiajiale* out of a “children’s palace (青少年宫)” in Kunming. It indicates its

achievement by showing all the names of students who have passed the school-choice exam of the top middle schools (YUSS, YNUEMS, CCMS, BTMS and DCMS) through the *buxiban* in *Jiajiale*.

Picture 3. The achievement of *Jiajiale* in *xiaoshengchu*, 2014



Source: taken by author, July, 2014

As I have shown, the housing market particularly in school-districts is another rapid growing industry. In particular, the new policy to ban *xiaoshengchu* from next year indicates the growing significance of one's house location. Walking on the street in each corner of Kunming, the advertisement of real estates from promoting their housing by linking with better schools can be found easily. Picture 4 below presents some of examples.

Picture 4. Advertisement of real estate



Source: Taken by author, April, 2014

Consequently, the marketization of *xiaoshengchu* has already penetrated into the whole society. Many of the interviewees approved this phenomenon during interviews:

Parent01: *One day before the xiaoshengchu examination, many families would choose to live in a hotel close to YUSS. To have a room in Yunnan University Hotel (the closest one), you need to book it one month in advance. In the morning of the examination-day, you would witness the paralysis of traffic even though many traffic policemen would also be there.*

Teacher01: *It is hard to say whether these minban schools are real “minban”.*

Some of teachers in YUSS have authorized quotas (有编制) who belong to public institution (事业单位) and paid by local government. One of my friends is teaching in CCMS now but her salary is also paid by government because she still belongs to Kunming No.8 Middle School. So we call these schools as state-owned minban school (国有民办). The purpose to establish such kind of school is only for making profit and this has already become a trend for more public schools.

4.7 Xiaoshengchu as an event

The exam-driven and competitively-selective atmosphere under an elitist education system has pushed thousands of Chinese young students into stressful life. Besides to be a well-performing student in school, students also need to be outstanding in informal education. Therefore, students in China must learn everything one step ahead to be more competitive at the next stage of education which brings them tremendous pressure. Many of the interviewees presented their opinions about this:

Parent01: It is too harsh for students. They have to be the best one among the best students (千军万马过独木桥). In 2012, the acceptance rate of YUSS was 17 to 1, and all of students who applied for YUSS were already well-performing students in Kunming.

Parent02: Students have to focus only on study and neglect many more important things. The so-called quality-education (素质教育) is not successful, it has only produced well-performing students with high grade but low ability (高分低能).

Parent05: They are doing exercise (做题) everyday for every subject. They are

very stressful but I feel they are not learning too much useful stuff. Teachers do not care children's comprehensive ability but only the endless homework and the exam result.

Parent08: The way of learning and teaching is inflexible (死板). Primary school stage should be happy but nowadays the children only have pressure with them. It cannot be compared with my childhood. The current education in China has resulted in many mental problems for children.

According to my own observation, I can also feel the pressure of those young students. I have spent four hours in a *xiaoshengchu buxiban* for Participant Observation 01. The main content for Chinese class is Chinese classic poetry which is supposed to be learned in middle school. Even the teachers of that *buxiban* thought such knowledge could be very difficult to understand for these kids (ICTeacher02, 2014; ICTeacher03, 2014). During the Chinese class, when the teacher was talking about childhood, many students said that they did not have one (“我们没有童年”). In addition, it was obvious that the mathematics class was much more difficult for those students. They were not that active like on Chinese class and some students could not concentrate because they could not understand what the teacher was teaching. Apart from the four hours for class, those poor-performing students still needed to take extra tutoring in the afternoon. That means their whole Saturday would be spent on that *buxiban*.

It can be seen that Chinese meritocratic education delivers a large amount of pressure for students at such an early age. Some students even ask for taking a *buxiban* or extra tutoring initiatively because they did not want to fall behind their classmates (Parent08, 2014; Parent09, 2014). However, scholars like Brown described the current practice of school choice in China has a shift away from “meritocracy of student” to “parentocracy” (1990). This argument is supported by many of my respondents:

Parent01: The whole family needs to cooperate and coordinate with the child

from physical, psychological, and economic perspectives. Everything related to the child is the center for family (围着孩子转), and we must support her unconditionally (举全家之力).

Parent02: It's tough for both the kid and parents. Due to the high social demand, students cannot fight by themselves. Therefore, fathers and mothers have to join the war (拼爹拼妈). All of emotions of the family is on our child (家庭的喜怒哀乐都在孩子身上), so we don't have our own life anymore. Besides, we have to invest our energy and money.

Parent09: I didn't let my son go to any buxiban. I hope he can be happy and can learn knowledge in his whole life not just in school. However, I am very nervous about my choice. I know all the other kids go to buxiban, so I am worried that he may fall behind which will make him losing confidence.

Parent06: Because of the huge population in China, parents need to choose superior resources for their children. Sometimes, I feel that the marketization of Chinese education is attributed to Chinese parents. No parents want to see their kids to lose.

It can be seen that both students and parents in China have to fight hard with the school-choice examination as the form of *xiaoshengchu*. Actually, such practice violates the Compulsory Education Law of the People's Republic of China. The Article 12 of this law stipulates that the school-age children and adolescents shall go to school without taking any examination (NPC, 2006). Besides, the Non-state Education Promotion Law of the People's Republic of China (NPC, 2002) also obeys the principle of "no examination".

Having been criticized for many years, the central government starts again to press the local governments to abolish school-choice examination for compulsory education.

On February 17th this year, a notification emphasizing to make sure that primary school students go to middle school in their neighborhood without special examination was released by the central government (People Daily, 2014). In Kunming, relevant policy was introduced as well in February 2014. Yunnan Provincial Department of Education released that *xiaoshengchu* will be abolished from 2015 (Liu and Guo, 2014). This policy has been recently discussed among all the people in Kunming. The following is the opinions from my interviewees:

Parent01: *I think xiaoshengchu is a good opportunity for children to know themselves. It tells them that “no pain no gain”. Based on the huge population and imbalanced allocation of educational resources, xiaoshengchu is a relatively fair way to distinguish the elites from ordinary people.*

Parent03: *I don't support Chinese education system, it increases the degree of polarization between the rich and poor. However, such exam-driven system (科举制) has been implemented in China for thousands of years and it's the most relatively fair for us.*

Parent06: *As a parent of a well-performing student, we are the beneficiary of xiaoshengchu, but I agree with the ban of xiaoshengchu. There are many students who do not have resources. However, it is not the right time to abolish it now. The result will become “parentocracy” (拼爹) and competition for housing (拼房). The government should abolish xiaoshengchu after reallocating the current educational resources.*

Parent08: *There are some good points about school-choice exam. Children can learn how to face pressure and be prepared for further study. For well-performing students, they can go to better school by their own effort, but the content of the test should be revised. [...] If xiaoshengchu is canceled, it*

will be the show time for parents to find the solutions for their kids(各显神通).

Parent09: It's all the same whether xiaoshengchu will be abolished. The government does not solve the real problem. Parents will always find methods such as buying a house. There won't be many differences. The vulnerable group still has no social resources.

Parent10: I agree with abolishing the xiaoshengchu. At least the children do not have to fight anymore. It is the time only for parents to fight.

In general, most of parents do not support *xiaoshengchu* even though some of them admitted that their children benefited from it due to better academic achievement. In addition, all of the interviewees believe that the cancellation of *xiaoshengchu* will not lead to big differences for current competition. On the contrary, they stressed that parents need make efforts much more on social capital and economic capital in the future.

5. Conclusion

Practices of young students and their parents on school choice have long been debated not only in educational field but also in whole society as a social issue. The majority of students have to take various kinds of extra-curriculum classes for accumulating their cultural capital so that they can have more advantages in *xiaoshengchu* competition. At the level of compulsory education, such intensive competition among students results from the marketization of public education in China. This marketization has been supported and promoted by many important participants including parents, schools, local government and even the housing market.

Parents as the most active participants usually help their children to arrange spare time activities after school. *Buxiban* is the most influential factor for passing the school-choice examination. Therefore, even those parents who strongly object to Chinese exam-driven education cannot refuse to send their children for it since no parents want to see their children to lose. Besides *buxiban*, parents also value different kinds of *xingquban* as another form of cultural capital. They do not see that their investment on *xingquban* is an economic burden at all even though they think it is expensive. Under the Chinese education system, parents want to balance their children's life through cultivating other interests and obtain a more comprehensive development.

Well-performing *minban* middle schools take students' academic performance as the prior criteria, so social capital is mainly used by parents whose children cannot perform well in the examination. If students fail with school-choice exam, the social and economic capital becomes very important for them either to go to well-performing *minban* schools or public schools. Nevertheless, some families with stronger social and economic capital can always find solutions to let their kids get into the desired school.

Apart from the investment on informal education, social capital, and choice fee for school, many families also face another big problem related to their accommodation. The price of housing in China has rapidly increased for the last decade which makes very difficult for Chinese families to buy a house. In addition, the price of school-district-housing could be more expensive. Therefore, only urban middle class may be able to afford such price. Consequently, *xiaoshengchu* in general has expanded the disparity between different classes in China. Although it will be abolished in most of big cities around the country, vulnerable group with less social resources will not benefit more from that.

In general, *xiaoshengchu* in China is characterized by the widespread use of market mechanisms (Wu, 2012: 350). Substantial economic profit has effectively motivated schools and local governments to cooperate with parents to build a big market for school choice (Wu, 2014: 126). Based on this research, the current practice for *xiaoshengchu* is a combination of meritocracy of students and parentocracy of whole families. However, this study can only provide a corner in whole Chinese context. More relevant researches should be done to help with better development of education in China. It would be interesting to see further studies working with young students and to understand their real feelings. As the school-choice process is so frustrating, time and energy-consuming, and utterly important, rumor-creation during the process (like choice fee) would also be an interesting future research. In addition, it would be important to keep studying on this group of people who need to enter middle school without school-choice examination and to compare the result with previous researches.

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Appendix

Appendix 1

In-depth Interview respondents and their children

Parent01: Female, running a company, she was interviewed on 2014-02-16

Student01: Female, Grade 8, Jinkangyuan Primary School, YUSS

Parent02: Female, working for a public institution, she was interviewed on 2014-02-17

Student02: Female, Grade 8, Jinkangyuan Primary School, YUSS

Parent03: Male, working for a state-owned bank, he was interviewed on 2014-04-12

Student03: Female, Grade 10, Nanzhan Primary School, YNUEMS, Kunming No.1
Middle School

Parent04: Female, working for a company, she was interviewed on 2014-04-14

Student04: Female, Grade 7, HaiBei Primary School, Renze Middle School

Parent05: Female, working for a military hospital, she was interviewed on 2014-04-17

Student05: Female, Grade 7, Zongshuying Primary School, YUSS

Parent06: Female, working for government, she was interviewed on 2014-04-27

Student06: Female, Grade 7, Shizhuanfu Primary School, YUSS

Parent07: Female, working for a company, she was interviewed on 2014-04-20

Student07: Female, Grade 8, Chunyuan Primary School, YNUEMS

Parent08: Female, working for a military hospital, she was interviewed on 2014-04-22

Student08: Male, Grade 6, Zongshuying Primary School

Parent09: Female, running a company, she was interviewed on 2014-04-23

Student09: Male, Grade 6, Hongqi Primary School

Parent10: Female, working for a company, she was interviewed on 2014-04-27

Student10: Male, Grade 9, Tuodong Primary School, Kunming No.12 Middle School

Teacher01: Female, Mathematics teacher in YUSS, teaching in a *buxiban*, she was interviewed on 2014-02-14

Teacher02: Female, Chinese teacher in Jinkangyuan Primary School, she was interviewed on 2014-02-17

Informal conversation respondents

ICParent01: Female, had conversation when she was waiting for her son outside of a *buxiban*, had conversation on 2014-01-23

ICParent02: Male, had conversation when he was waiting for his daughter outside of a *buxiban*, had conversation on 2014-01-23

ICTeacher01: Male, History teacher in YUSS, had conversation online, had conversation on 2014-01-15

ICTeacher02: Female, Chinese teacher in a *buxiban*, had conversation outside of a *buxiban*, had conversation on 2014-01-23

ICTeacher03: Female, Chinese teacher in a *buxiban*, had conversation outside of a *buxiban*, had conversation on 2014-02-14

ICTeacher04: Female, teacher in Yunnan University, had conversation in her office,
had conversation on 2014-04-28

Appendix 2

Interview guide

Name of Primary School/就读小学:

Name of Middle School/就读初中:

Year of xiaoshengchu/参加小升初年份:

1. Does the school distinguish key class from regular class (primary/middle school)/
学校是否分重点班（小学、初中）？
2. Does the teacher rank students based on test scores/老师会进行考试排名吗？
3. Have your kid learned Mathematical Olympiad/你孩子学过奥数吗？ For what/目的？
4. What is the schedule for one day in school/上学一天的时间安排？ How much
time for homework/家庭作业花多少时间？
5. What is the schedule for weekend/平时周末的时间安排？
6. What is the schedule for summer and winter holiday/寒暑假的时间安排？
7. When and what did you and your kid start to prepare for xiaoshengchu/你和你的孩子
从什么时候开始准备小升初，分别准备什么？
8. What kinds of extracurricular classes have you taken (time, subject, purpose, cost)/
报了哪些补习班和兴趣班（时间，科目，目的，花费）？
9. Which schools did you applied or plan to apply? What is the result? Why did you
choose this school? How did you help your kid to enter?/参加了哪几个学校的考
试？ 结果如何？ 为什么选择这所学校？ 你怎么帮助孩子进入学校的？
10. Does your kid have other hobbies/你孩子有其他兴趣爱好吗？

11. How much have you invested on your kid (time, energy, money)/家庭对孩子的投资（时间，精力，经济）？

Parents' opinions about each question was asked.

12. What is your opinion about Chinese education system/你对中国教育制度的看法？

13. What is your opinion about Chinese meritocratic education/你对中国层层择优精英式教育怎么看？

14. What is your opinion about xiaoshengchu and its cancellation/你对小升初及其将被取消的看法？

15. What is your opinion about the importance of cultural, social, and economic capital/你如何看待文化、社会、经济资本的重要性？

16. Family background (educational background/occupation/income)/家庭背景（学历、职业、收入）？