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ROLES OF PARENTS’ CAPITALS IN CHILDREN’S EDUCATIONAL OPPORTUNITIES

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ROLES OF PARENTS’ CAPITALS IN CHILDREN’S EDUCATIONAL OPPORTUNITIES

by

Liping Pan.

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2018
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I was born in a countryside village, and grew in a natural and wild way. I had never ever thought of going to a college even before my senior high school years. However, now I’m working on my doctoral dissertation. It’s like a dream that has come true. Over the pursuit of my doctoral degree, I got married and had a baby. I experienced my father’s bad accident and my mother’s surgery. I moved to a new apartment and was transferred to a new department. The dissertation writing is a long and hard journey. In this sense, it is a miniature of life. Therefore, I’ve learned from my dissertation journey how to be a doctoral student, how to be a wife, how to be a mom and how to be a daughter. I will never forget all those who have helped throughout my journey. My sincere thanks should first go to Dr. Ronald Hallett. Without his profound knowledge as a researcher and his consistent companion as a supervisor, the dissertation would never be done. His conversations with me and his recommendations of academic resources really help me. My truthful thanks also go to my dissertation committee members, Dr. Delores McNair, who teaches me the foundation of research, and Dr. Marcia Hernandez, who offers some new perspectives in my study. Finally I would thank my parents for all the love and courage they have built in my heart, my husband for his support throughout the writing journey and my daughter Rena for her choice of me as her mom.
Roles of Parents’ Capitals in Children’s Educational Opportunities

Abstract

by Liping Pan
University of the Pacific
2018

Bourdieu, the French sociologist, proposed some significant concepts (e.g., habitus, capital and field) to help to explain how social agents play roles in social occurrences. Among his theories, Bourdieu’s trilogy of economic capital, social capital and cultural capital has now been used as a powerful theoretical framework to explain class reproduction and education equity. Over the past decades, his theories have begun to be introduced and recognized in Chinese academic world. And this research attempts to see whether this western theory works in the Chinese educational context.

Shanghai, one of the biggest cities in China, has a huge migrant population. Limited by the unique Chinese hukou system, the migrant population in Chinese big cities mostly faces a challenging situation to ensure their children’s local educational opportunities, especially during the compulsory education levels. However, the past research only focused on its disadvantaged subgroup, i.e., the migrant worker population while ignoring the vast diversity in their economic, social and cultural capitals among this general population. Therefore, this research, by means of a comparative multiple case
study, aims to see how parents’ economic, social and cultural capitals help to win their children’s educational opportunities at elementary education level.

Studying three typical migrant families with distinguishable strong, medium and weak capitals, the research finds the specific paths how the parents respectively use their economic, social and cultural capitals to obtain more educational opportunities for their children, and eventually produce the divide in educational outcomes, school segregation and social stratification. The research extends its discussion with characteristics of parent capitals, redefinitions of educational opportunities, and an unexpected minor theme about full-time mother.

At the end of the dissertation, it can be concluded that Bourdieu’s trilogy of economic, social and cultural capital does work in Chinese educational context. And it indeed helps us to see more clearly what is happening in present China at a transitional age and calls for service and help to the disadvantaged migrant families in Chinese cities.
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Chapter 1: Introduction

Equality of educational opportunity is a foundation for governments pursuing socially just educational policies worldwide. In China, the government passed laws (e.g., The Education Law of the People’s Republic of China, Compulsory Education Law of the People’s Republic of China) that recognize people’s right to education and stipulate that school-aged children should have 9-year compulsory education from elementary school throughout junior high school, regardless of their gender, religion, family status, ethnic background and region (Compulsory Education Law of the People’s Republic of China, 2006). However, laws only assure children of their rights to compulsory education, but not necessarily equitable education. Equality of educational opportunity is still a basic problem in China because good education resources are mainly accessible to families with more economic, social and cultural capital. On May 5, 2010, the former premier, Weng Jiabao, convened and presided over executive meetings of the state council, which passed and then issued the most important educational policy in the past decades The National Medium to Long Term Planning Outline for Educational Reform and Development (2010-2020) (Executive meetings of the State Council, 2010). This policy identified two main challenges in Chinese education context: equity and quality (Yu, 2013), both of which point out the goals and directions of Chinese educational revolution in the future.

As a most demographically diverse city in China, Shanghai has the largest domestic population. In 2013, its permanent resident population was 24.15 million, and
over 41% of them are non-local residents from other places (Shanghai Statistic Yearbook 2014, 2014). Allocating educational opportunities, particularly limited good quality education, among such a large non-local population is really difficult for the government (Yang, Yang, & Tan, 2013). Therefore, Shanghai municipal government created policies (e.g., nearby enrollment policy) and released official documents (e.g., Guideline of Enrollment at Compulsory Education Level in Shanghai, Document No. 10 of Year 2015) to enroll non-local children into the local elementary schools.

The enrollment rate at compulsory education for both local and non-local students aged from 6 to 15 in Shanghai has maintained above 99.9% for years (Shanghai Statistical Yearbook 2014, 2014), but complaints still emerge about the quality differences between schools and the unequal educational opportunity between families (Yang, Yang, & Tan, 2013). The unequally distributed capitals between families partially accounts for children’s discrepant educational opportunities, which has become a problem between different social classes in China (Mi, 2006; Song, 2009; Wang, 2005; Xie, & Wang, 2004, 2005; Zha, 2001). Parents from dissimilar classes employ divergent capitals while acquiring children’s educational opportunities, which ultimately exerts a far-reaching impact on educational outcomes (Cao, 2013; Hu, 2012; Li, 2004; Wang, 2013; Xu, 2010; Zou, Shi, Zhang, & Chen, 2005). Framed by Bourdieu’s concept of capital (i.e., economic, social and cultural capitals) and targeting the migrant or non-local families, this dissertation explores how parents’ capitals influence students’ educational opportunities at elementary school level.
Background

**Hukou and educational opportunity.** In China, students’ access to education resources is closely related to their hukou (户口). A hukou is certificate or record of being a legal citizen of the People’s Republic of China (mainland China). This household registration system officially and legally identifies people as a citizen of a specific residence or address (a province, a city and a community). With a citizenship of a particular province, city and community, people can enjoy public resources and welfare (e.g., medication and education) in this particular place where he or she is registered. Therefore, people with different hukou receive public goods and services different in quantity and quality (Hu & Qin, 2011).

Changing hukou from one province or city to another is difficult once someone registered except in special situations (e.g., marriage with a local person). The local government has talent introduction programs. When someone wants to obtain a Shanghai hukou, they have to meet government requirements related to academic credentials, years of residence, professional ranks and titles, investment, tax payment or others (Shanghai Municipal Government, 2013). Such requirements mostly aim at introducing talents into the city and screen a large number of newcomer families from gaining a Shanghai hukou. Hence, families without hukou may have lived in the city for years or in some cases for two generations, but their children cannot equally enjoy high-quality local educational resources as their peers. They live in Shanghai without being a Shanghainese.

**Migrant population and migrant workers.** Migrant population is defined differently among researchers. In some cases, it relates to the migrant workers only. However, in other cases, migrant populations in China often refer to the entire non-local
population who do not live where their hukou is registered (Li, Sun, & Yang, 2003). In this dissertation, the concept migrant population adopts this broad definition to include all the non-local population without a Shanghai hukou, not merely the migrant worker group. Children of the migrant population are often called migrant children.

Migrant workers are the domestic people who usually leave their homes and move to another place in China looking for jobs (Yu, 2013). They account for a large proportion of the migrant population in large cities. Three representative characteristics for this group of people are “born in rural area, with poor education background, doing manual labor in cities” (Yu, 2013, p. 60). Because many of them are lower in education level and lack skills, they mostly take low skill and pay jobs, such as construction labor, waiter and waitress, housemaid, driver, or cleaner.

**Key schools or demonstrative schools.** In China, elite schools or the first-tier schools used to refer to key schools. The key school policy was adopted in the 1980s. By pooling limited resources, the government tries to cultivate a small number of elite students within a short time to relieve the pressure of talent shortage caused by the Cultural Revolution from 1966 until 1976 (Tan, 1997). Key schools can be subcategorized into city-level key schools and district-level key schools. The former enjoy higher prestige and teaching quality than the latter, and they are both superior to ordinary schools in reputation and teaching quality.

These key schools are given official priority in development, better education resources and more financial allocation. Good-quality teaching enables these key schools to have higher entrance standards so that they can recruit elite students. In turn, pooling more elite students helps to advance teaching quality and increase entrance standards.
However, this policy leads to the unbalanced development between schools within a particular district (Tan, 1997) and many lower-quality schools coexist with key schools (Zhai, 2005). In 1993, the National Center for Education Development conducted an extensive research of compulsory education quality across 11 provinces and cities, involving 15,147 graduates from 282 elementary schools and 12,888 graduates from 201 middle schools and found significant gaps between non-key elementary schools. They significantly differ from each other in the subject of Chinese by 12.4 percentage points in passing rate (i.e., percentage of scores equals to or large than 60) and 3 percentage points in excellence rate (i.e., percentage of scores equals to or large than 80). Similarly, in terms of mathematics, they differ by 7.3 percentage points in passing rate and 20 percentage points in excellence rate (Zhai, 2005). Therefore, it is predictable that there is a much larger gap between key schools and non-key schools. In order to be admitted into a key school, students have to reach a minimum passing score. In some cases, if they are some points less than the cut-off line, they can still be enrolled by paying for their opportunities. Such a school-choosing practice is supposed to cause academic and economic burden to students and their families. Under such circumstances, the newly revised *Compulsory Education Law of the People’s Republic of China* (2006) stipulates in Article 22 that the governments beyond the county level and the administrative departments of education should promote the balanced development of all the schools so as to close the gap between schools and schools should not be categorized as key schools and non-key schools. Evidently, this policy intends to uphold the balanced development between schools by legally eliminating the division between key schools and ordinary schools. However, the name of key schools was replaced by demonstrative
schools. Therefore, there is still an apparent borderline between schools in terms of their titles and teaching quality.

**Nearby enrollment policy.** In China, the current popular enrollment policy at elementary education level is nearby enrollment policy, which emerges as a substitute of school-choosing policy at the age of key schools. This policy is merely applicable to public schools while private schools can have their own enrollment policies approved by the government. *Guideline of Enrollment at Compulsory Education Level in Shanghai, Document No. 10 of Year 2015* (referred as 2015 Guideline later) published by Shanghai Municipal Commission of Education (2015) demands that students should receive elementary education and middle school education at nearby schools in their community if they choose public schools. The 2015 Guideline also specifically discusses education of non-local children, suggesting that they should be mostly included into local public schools at elementary education level or study in some private schools authorized by the government where public schools are not sufficient.

**Elite school property.** The nearby enrollment policy demands that all the public schools at compulsory education level should enroll students only from their neighboring communities. The division of the neighboring communities is largely influenced by, but not necessarily decided upon, the geographic location; it is determined by the local education bureau. Houses and apartments in these neighborhoods are called elite school property. It has now become a nationwide social phenomenon for parents to pay a much higher price for an elite school property so as to secure a position for their children in an elite school. In many cases, having both a hukou and a property in a specific community are required in school enrollment especially when the school is a demonstrative one.
Public and private schools. Shanghai has a good variety of elementary education institutions. They are stratified according to their perceived quality and ownership. They are generally categorized into public schools and private schools. Compulsory education in public schools (i.e., elementary schools and middle schools) is free while private schools will generally charge high tuition. The admission into public schools has to follow the nearby enrollment policy and requires no interview or test of students’ subject knowledge (e.g., mathematics, English). However, private schools can decide on their own enrollment procedures and they normally have interviews and other forms of tests to choose the students they want from the applicants. According to the 2015 Guideline, private schools can choose their students by using activity, observation and interview and consider students’ “habit of behavior, learning habit, teamwork, interest and hobby, practical ability, physical and mental health, family education and others” (Shanghai Municipal Commission of Education, 2015). If the non-local families cannot find a position for their children in local elementary schools, they will automatically be involved in the plan-as-a-whole procedure according to 2015 Guideline that make students subject to the overall arrangements made by the local educational bureau. And the most likely outcome is that they will have to attend the public elementary schools particularly serving the children whose parents are migrant workers.

Study of educational opportunity. The concept of educational opportunities was proposed in the 19th century among Western countries as a key point of education democratization and plays a guiding role in working out education policies (Za, 2001). In China, education inequity is still a basic problem between regions, genders, classes, ethnic groups and social communities (Feng, 1996; Lv & Ren, 2001; Mi, 2006; Wu, 2005;
Za, 2001; Zhang, 2002). And distribution of limited quality education resources to a huge population in large cities between local population and non-local population becomes a headache for the local governments (Yang, Yang, & Tan, 2013).

In order to protect children’s opportunity of education, the central government of China has developed and published laws and regulations, including *The Education Law of the People’s Republic of China, Compulsory Education Law of the People’s Republic of China, The Detailed Rules for the Implementation of the Compulsory Education Law of the People’s Republic of China, Decision of the State Council on the Reform and Development of Basic Education, and Law of the People’s Republic of China on the Protection of Minors*. They all claim to protect children’s educational opportunities. For example, in *Compulsory Education Law of the People’s Republic of China*, Article Two in Chapter One stipulates that,

“The State shall institute a system of nine-year compulsory education. The authorities of provinces, autonomous regions, and municipalities directly under the Central Government shall decide on measures to promote compulsory education.” (Ministry of Education of the People’s Republic of China, 1986, 2006)

Article Four and Article Five in Chapter One demand that “All children who have reached the age of six shall enroll in school and receive compulsory education for the prescribed number of years, regardless of sex, nationality or race” and “The State, the community, schools and families shall, in accordance with law, safeguard the right to compulsory education of school-age children and adolescents” (Ministry of Education of the People’s Republic of China, 1986, 2006).
Laws influence progress in the history of educational equity. However, such equity may only be ideologically meaningful, but hardly true in real life (Za, 2001). In China, laws only ensure children’s rights of nine years compulsory education rather than equal educational opportunities. And things become worse when they move to another place where they have no local hukou. To help them have more access to the local educational opportunity, *Compulsory Education Law* demands when their parents or other legal guardians work or live in a place where they do not have a local hukou, children should have access to compulsory education locally. The local government is obliged to provide equal conditions for them to receive compulsory education (Ministry of Education of the People’s Republic of China, 1986, 2006). In order to better local governments’ understanding and practice of this compulsory education law, the central government later released *The Detailed Rules for the Implementation of the Compulsory Education Law of the People’s Republic of China*, whose Article 14 stipulates that school-aged children can receive compulsory education where they do not have a hukou and they can apply for studying in the local schools only if approved by the local people’s government or educational administrative departments (Ministry of Education of the People’s Republic of China, 1992).

As the most strategic population center in eastern China, Shanghai has witnessed significant increase of migrant population. However, the comparatively inadequate educational resources at compulsory education level make it a big concern for the government to enroll migrant children into local public schools and meanwhile to meet local population’s higher demand for good quality education resources (Yang, Yang, & Tan, 2013). Having no local hukou restrains the migrant population’s educational
opportunities. As a result, parents have to employ their capitals to compete for their children’s better educational opportunity and their outcomes turn out to be largely different. Therefore, there is a need to explore how parents’ economic, social and cultural capitals play a role in creating divergent educational opportunities for their children among the migrant families in Shanghai.

**Research Problem**

Equality of educational opportunity is not a new research problem. A good number of studies have been done in China to identify the problem of unequal educational opportunity, explore its causes, share successful experiences and propose possible solutions. Some studies have broadly identified the problem as between genders, regions and social classes (Feng, 1996; Lv & Ren, 2001; Mi, 2006; Wu, 2005; Za, 2001; Zhang, 2002). Unequal educational opportunity in China is believed to be caused by the binary socio-economic structure of Chinese society between different social classes and between people with an urban hukou and those without it (Feng, 1996), or is related to familial or parents’ background (Feng, 1996; Wu, 2006).

The research outcomes in Chinese context is consistent with that of Coleman Report (1966), which argued that a primary influencing factor of students’ academic achievement is parents’ socio-economic status and their cultural knowledge defined as parents’ economic, social and cultural capitals in this study. In order to offer more convincing evidence, some studies explore the phenomenon by focusing on a specific population, such as including students from both elementary schools and middle schools as a whole group of compulsory education (Feng, 1996; Zhang, 2002). Very few studies
have specifically examined elementary school students and their parents. Therefore, there is a need for more research to be done for a better understanding of this population.

Searching the most popular and canonical Chinese databases including CNKI (China National Knowledge Infrastructure), Wanfang Data, VIP (a website and database as the most important partner of Google Scholar for resources in Chinese) by using the key words of “educational opportunity” (教育机会), “education equality” (教育平等) and “equality of educational opportunity” (教育机会均等) show that some studies discuss the impact of family background or socioeconomic status as two general concepts on educational opportunity (Hou, 2006; Li, 2004; Song, 2009; Wang, 2005; Xie & Wang, 2004, 2005) instead of using specific concepts such as capital, some focus on cultural capital (Shi, 2013; Wang & Dong, 2008; Song, 2012; Zhou, 2008; Zhou, 2012) and others mostly choose their target population from disadvantaged groups, such as migrant workers in the cities and families in the suburb or the least developed regions (Dai & Li, 2011; Gao, 2009; Liu, 2009; Liu, 2010; Tian, 2008; Zhou, 2008). No study has yet been done to examine the entire migrant population in Shanghai, expanding the target population from the migrant workers to all the non-local families without a Shanghai hukou. Up to now, little is known about the educational opportunity of such a broad population.

**Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of this study is to explore how parents of migrant families in Shanghai use their economic, social and cultural capitals to compete for their children’s education opportunities at elementary school level.
Research Questions

The following questions frame this study.

1. How do migrant parents’ perceive their different investment of economic, social and cultural capitals in children’s education?
2. How do migrant parents’ economic, social and cultural capitals that are varied in quantity and quality compete for their children’s educational opportunities?

Significance of the Study

Migrant population appeared during the end of 1980s as a social phenomenon of urbanization and industrialization. A large migrant population dwells in the eastern coastal cities such as Shanghai for more job opportunities and higher income (Li, Sun, & Yang, 2003). Now the migrant population tends to move as families rather than individuals (Li, Sun, & Yang, 2003). Therefore, education of migrant children becomes an important issue for all the large cities. In 2013, the former Shanghai Party Secretary Han Zhen told in NPC (National People’s Congress) & CPPCC (Chinese People’s Political Consultative Conference) that the total number of migrant children at compulsory education level in Shanghai had reached 530,000, accounting for almost half of the students at that level (Jinghua Network, 2013). Now in Shanghai, there are 761 elementary schools in total, and 180 of them are private schools that mainly serve migrant children (Shanghai Statistical Yearbook 2014, 2014).

Extending the research population from migrant workers to the entire migrant population living in Shanghai without a Shanghai hukou, this study attempts to address the research gap and direct people’s attention to this population. A comparative study of parents with dissimilar capitals within this broader population can provide information
about how these families make use of different capitals to compete for children’s educational opportunity when all of them do not have a Shanghai hukou. Also the problems of the disadvantaged families can be seen better when compared with families having more capitals. By answering these questions, policy-makers and educational practitioners can evaluate whether the present educational policies are workable and can improve education practice so as to help those families in need.

This study takes a close look at the elementary school level because it is the first stage of the compulsory education demanded by Chinese government. The equal educational opportunities at the elementary school level can largely predict it at the secondary and higher education levels. This is the reason why this study focuses on the elementary school level. Further, Shanghai has the largest domestic migrant population. In 2013, the whole resident population is 24.15 million and 9.9 million of them are non-local (Shanghai Municipal Government, 2013). This study in Shanghai can be a lens to begin understanding and addressing the issue throughout China.

To promote equity of education and balanced development of education, resources have topped the list of government tasks, but have received undesirable responses from the public (Hu & Qin, 2011). In 2005, SOHU, the globally largest Chinese portal website, in partnership with 21st Century Education Research Institute, a non-profit organization focusing on education public policy, conducted a survey on the public’s satisfaction with education and found that the general public is far from satisfied with the current education situation in China. Among the seven sub-scales (e.g., educational equality, education charges, education process, education policy), the public is the least content with educational equity with a score of 34.76 out of 100 (21st Century
Education Research Institute, 2005). Such a result is also indicated in other research (Hu & Qin, 2011). Therefore, understanding why and how inequity occurs becomes an important step in finding out a way to deal with it. Equality of educational opportunity is core of educational democracy (Cui & Tian, 2005). Horace Mann, Father of the Common School Movement, claims that education, as a tool to realize equality of the human world, is much greater than any other inventions (Feng, 2001). Equality of educational opportunity can promote social justice by closing the gaps between different social classes or communities (Dong & Zhang, 2007) and promote the social mobility by enabling the disadvantaged families flow into a more advantaged class via education (Wu, 2006).

**Theoretical Framework**

This study is theoretically grounded on French sociologist Pierre Bourdieu’s conceptualization. According to Bourdieu, any social practice can be explained by an individual’s overall capacity of resources (i.e., capital) and his or her disposition (i.e., habitus) in a particular social space (i.e., field) (Ho & Kwong, 2013), making his concepts an effective instrument to study inequality in education. Educational context is a space where inequalities are reproduced by means of the unequal “capital” distribution (Bourdieu, 1973). Therefore, his concepts can serve as a good theoretical framework to study how parents’ capitals help to gain children’s educational opportunities as a form of resources distribution.

Bourdieu named three fundamental capitals: economic capital, social capital and cultural capital and specified their dissimilar functions in social life, such as in educational settings (Ho & Kwong, 2013). These capitals individually and jointly play
their roles in education context where parents bring in their capitals (Chen & Xie, 2009; Ho & Kwong, 2013; Li, 2011; Lu, 2013; Yang, 2006). And different amounts of parents’ capitals can be related to students’ variant educational opportunities (Lu, 2013).

Economic capital generally refers to the financial and physical assets and property. It has been commonly studied to be positively correlated to students’ overall education outcomes, including more parents’ companion and better family education (Lu, 2005), more higher education access opportunities (Wang & Gao, 2007; Zheng, 2003), choice of a better school (Wang, 2007) and better educational resources (Ding & Liang, 2010).

Social capital is generally defined as resources available in social networks (Burt, 1997; Lin, 1999; Portes, 1998; Tardos, 1996) that help to gain a choice of institutional resources and support (Portes, 1998; Schmid, 2001; Zhou & Bankston 1998). Parents’ social capital can enable them to establish the family’s relationship with schools, other families (Lee & Bowen, 2006) and other social groups or individuals. Such a close social network may also influence students’ education attainment in homes and schools (Coleman, 1988, 1990), both of which can increase educational opportunity. And social capital is closely related to the Chinese concept guanxi (关系), which is usually translated into connections and relationships. It is one of the major dynamics (Luo, 2007) in Chinese social life. And parents often use their social capital or guanxi to secure their children’s positions in a desirable elementary school. This Chinese specific concept is further discussed in the next chapter.

Cultural capital relates to a person’s habits and dispositions that facilitate a society’s cultural heritage (Bourdieu, 1977). Cultural capital offers students similar cultural knowledge and ideologies that they meet and learn in educational activities, and
therefore, have a better performance in schools (Bourdieu, 1973). Moreover, a family’s cultural environment may have a positive impact on students’ education outcomes (Berger, Paxson, & Waldfogel, 2005; Christian, Morrison, Byrant, 1998; Crane, 1996; Kariya, 2004). Cultural capital creates opportunities for exclusive advantages (Lareau & Weininger, 2003) because only those children whose parents own mainstream cultural capital have opportunities to inherit and acquire the same socially valuable cultural capital and what they inherit from their parents could help them better adapted to educational settings where the same cultures are valued.

**Description of the Study**

This qualitative comparative case study compares three families’ educational experiences by using their divergent economic, social and cultural capitals. Three families were recruited who have lived in Shanghai for years without a Shanghai hukou. The selection criteria is that parents whose children have divergent educational opportunities (i.e., attending schools at different levels), so as to maximize opportunities for a comparable analysis of how parents’ different amounts of capital help to compete for children’s educational opportunities. In this study, data were collected from interviews, observations and documentation. Such a triangulation of data source can ensure research validity (Given, 2008). This part concerning the research methodology will be furthered in the third chapter.

**Summary**

This chapter is an introduction to the study with its background and significance as well as a brief description of its research questions and methodology. The following two chapters discuss the literature review and methodology. Chapter Two begins with a
review of Bourdieu’s major concepts with a focus on capital, discussing its definition, categorization and advantages as a framework of this study. Three fundamental capital, economic capital, social capital and cultural capital will be individually discussed with their relationship with educational opportunity. Then the chapter continues to focus on equality of educational opportunity and review relevant Chinese studies. Chapter Three describes the research methodology, including participant selection, methodology justification as well as data collection and analysis. Chapter Four tells in detail the tales of the three families and Chapter Five is a discussion of parents’ capitals and children’s educational opportunities on the basis of Chapter Three. Chapter Five naturally arrives at the end of the dissertation and make implications for future research.
Chapter 2: Literature Review

This chapter lays a foundation for research questions, data analysis and data interpretation. It begins with an introduction to parental involvement and its roles in education, and narrows down to parents’ investment of their capital as a specific parental involvement. The most important part is a discussion of Bourdieu’s categorization of three major capitals—economic capital, social capital and cultural capital, followed by an account of their relationship with educational opportunity, and closed with an overview of Chinese research on capital. The third section discusses educational opportunity, including its definition, evolution and significance, and a conclusion of Chinese research on educational opportunity.

Parental Involvement and Education

Similar to other significant concepts in education, parental involvement is a value-loaded concept. It not only affects children’s education outcomes and personal growth. More importantly, many policymakers and educators believe parental involvement is crucial to overcoming educational inequalities caused by the wealth gap between social classes and promoting educational equity (Bakker & Denessen, 2007). Therefore, in this study, parental involvement is an important indicator of both education outcomes and education equality. By helping those families in need, educators can significantly activate parents’ engagement in children’s education, ultimately improving their education success and closing the education gap between children from diverse backgrounds (Larocque, Kleiman, & Darling, 2011).
Parental involvement is a manifold concept; it can be defined in diverse ways to conceptualize its spectrum from parents’ home-based and school-based education practice to a socially and culturally defined activity. Parental involvement plays a significant role in education, impacting students in all respects, but it is influenced by factors of parents, teachers and schools, as well as social and cultural factors. The general purposes of parental involvement studies are to promote the level and quality of parental involvement and meanwhile break down the barriers that prevent parents from participating in education.

**Definitions of parental involvement.** “Parental involvement” is also called “parental engagement” (Finn, 1998) or “parent participation” (Potter, 1989). Bakker and Denessen (2007) describes parental involvement as “a variety of parental behaviors that directly or indirectly influence children’s cognitive development and school achievement” (p. 189) based on a study by Fantuzzo, Davis, and Ginsberg (1995). It can occur both in homes and at schools (Davidson & Cardemil, 2009; Epstein 2001, 2009) in form of some specific behaviors and practices (Hong & Ho, 2005). For example, parental involvement in school usually includes, but is not limited to attendance of PTA meetings, communicating with teachers or school administrators and volunteering in school events (Pomerantz, Moorman, & Litwack, 2007). Parent involvement at home refers to parents’ assistance with children’s learning, such as supervising homework, helping with school projects, talking about schooling experience and giving advice (Pomerantz et al., 2007). The term is commonly used to indicate parents’ labor work helping children with school-directed learning tasks.
While the above concepts are defined as individual behaviors, other scholars tend to define parental involvement from a social-cultural perspective as a group behavior to include parents’ cooperation with significant others (Blyth, Hill, & Smith Thiel, 1982) to help children’s education in a specific community. The significant others can be “all significant adults, other than parents, with familial status (e.g., grandparents, aunts, uncles) or nonfamilial (e.g., neighbors, friends, sports coaches)” (Kesselring, de Winter, Horjus, van de Schoor, & van Yperen, 2012, p. 922). Similarly, it can also be a set of group-based actions, beliefs, and attitudes that are considered a factor to define the difference between children as well as their parents in race, ethnic and socio-economic status (Desimone, 1999).

For the purposes of this dissertation, parental involvement is considered as the activities parents take part in (at home, in schools and in society) with their commitment of resources so as to help their children’s achievement. And resources are not confined to economic ones; they can also be cultural or social. Such a working definition is mainly inspired by the following definitions. According to U.S. Department of Education (1998), parental involvement is parents’ investment of money, benefits, time and energy in children’s education aiming to help them achieve success. Similarly, Grolnick and Slowiaczek (1994) consider parental involvement as parents’ commitment of resources in children’s education. The last definition relates the concept to a variety of activities, which are chosen differently by parents mostly depending on their sociopolitical traits including “socioeconomic status, parents’ own past experience with schools and schooling and so forth” (LaRocque, Kleiman, & Darling, 2011, p.116).
Benefits of parental involvement. Despite marked differences in defining the concept, “parent involvement is one of the few things in education about which there seems to be universal agreement” (Nichols-Solomon, 2001, p. 34) across cultures and ages. More parental involvement in education is always regarded as an effective strategy for advancement of education quality.

Academic success. Prior research provides consistent evidence that parental involvement is a predictor of students’ academic outcomes (Ballantine, 1999; Domina, 2005; Epstein & Sheldon, 2002; Fan & Chen, 2001; Greenwood & Hickman, 1991; Houtenville & Conway, 2008; Jeynes, 2005; Makar, 2013; McWayne et al., 2004; Mo & Singh, 2008; Muller, 1993; Patall, Cooper, & Robinson, 2008; Pena, 2000; Rogers et al., 2009). Some research identifies the positive impact of parental involvement on a specific learning activity or subject, such as reading (Senechal & LeFevre, 2002), writing (Epstein, Simon, & Salinas, 1997), and mathematics (Izzo, Weissberg, Kasprow, & Fendrich, 1999).

Both longitudinal and cross-sectional studies have established a positive correlation between level of parental involvement in education and children’s academic success from pre-school through adolescence (Hill & Taylor, 2004). The academic benefits students gain from parental involvement are not merely interrelated with higher achievement; it can also be extended to other aspects, including more positive attitudes toward school (Rogers et al., 2009), better classroom behaviors in class (Ballantine, 1999; Pena, 2000), lower dropout rates (Barnard, 2004), more desirable school attendance rates (Ballantine, 1999; Epstein & Sheldon, 2002; Miedel & Reynolds, 2000), enhanced college enrolment, and a better chance to complete high school coursework (Ballantine,
It also helps to improve academic aptitudes and self-concept (Gonzalez-Pienda et al., 2002), self-regulated learning and reading achievement (Xu, Kushner Benson, Mudrey-Camino & Steiner, 2010) and habits of learning (Ballantine, 1999). The aforementioned research suggests that parental involvement can promote students’ education outcomes because it tends to make students become more motivated in learning and ultimately achieve higher academic goals (Englund, Luckner, Whaley, & Egeland, 2004; Grolnick & Slowiaczek, 1994).

**Social skills.** Parental involvement not only predicts students’ academic success, but also good social skills (Adams, Womack, Shatzer, & Caldarella, 2010; Cox, 2005; Jacobs & Harvey, 2005; Sheldon & Epstein, 2005; McWayne et al., 2004). Moreover, parent–children communication (Ballantine, 1999) and parent–teacher connections improve with parent involvement. In addition, students’ pro-social skills and social skills can be better established (McWayne et al., 2004) through their parents’ involvement. In her book *Unequal Childhoods: Class, Race, and Family Life*, Annette Lareau (2011) points out that parental involvement can help students better adapted in social life. In her study, middle class children often acquire language skills (e.g., questioning and probing) and socializing skills with other adults and professionals (e.g., doctors) while interacting with their parents. And the author concludes that “These differences in parenting, especially language use (questioning, probing), affect the children’s lives both outside and inside the home” (p. 140).

**Values, motivation and behavior.** Parental involvement also influences children’s life after school years when they transition into adulthood. More parental involvement means that children tend to have less disruptive behaviors (Ballantine, 1999) and more
positive behaviors and values (Christenson & Anderson, 2002). Parents have the most powerful influence on children’s attitudes (Tocci & Engelhard, 1991) because students live under the influence of multiple parental factors, such as their education, values, attitudes, experiences, responses from which children can shape their own attitudes, values and behaviors. In Bronfenbrenner’s ecological systems theory, human development is bounded by contextual variation. And family (e.g., parents), which belongs to the micro system of an individual’s ecological system, is a closest element of contextual variation impacting human development (Darling, 2007). If students live in an environment that value education and academic activities, they will also acquire such beliefs and practices. In turn, students will establish their values and motivation in learning, which would usually be extended to other activities or future life (Legg Burross & McCaslin, 2002).

In conclusion, parental involvement significantly predicts children’s academic outcomes and future success (Catsambis, 2001; Makar, 2013; Weldon; 2011). Parental involvement is more than an education issue and it has become legally mandatory in educational process (Cox, 2005). Therefore, it is of great significance to seek ways to increase the level and quality of parental involvement (Larocque, et al., 2011).

**Contributors of parental involvement.** Improving parental involvement requires a good knowledge of contributing factors of parental involvement, which generally involve parent factors, teacher and school factors, and socioeconomic and cultural factors.

**Parent factors.** Parent factors have direct impact on parental involvement. These factors include parents’ education and cultural differences (Olszewski-Kubilius, 2006), parents’ expectation, parents’ attitudes to schools and teachers and attitudes to parental
involvement (Hornby, 2000) and parents’ assets and resources (Hornby, 2000; Zhan, 2005). Another most-cited parental factor is self-efficacy. In this section, self-efficacy is not simply defined in a general sense as people’s belief of their ability to achieve something (Bandura, 1997; Pajares, 1996; Woolfolk, 2001), such as being a parent or in a competition. Rather, it specifically denotes parents’ belief in their ability to effectively play roles in their children’s education (Machida, Taylor, & Kim, 2002). 

Research has found a positive correlation between parents’ self-efficacy and parents’ involvement in education. Parents with higher self-efficacy tend to be more involved in children’s education (Farrell, 2014; Gronick, Benjet, Kurowski, & Apostoleris, 1997; Hoover-Dempsey, 2005; Hoover-Dempsey, Bassler, & Brissie, 1992). Parents’ self-efficacy works as an engine to start parent involvement (Swick & Broadway, 1997). Parents made choice of involvement “by thinking about the outcomes likely to follow their actions” (Hoover-Dempsey, et al., 2005, p.109). When parents think that their involvement activities can help improve students’ educational outcomes, they would choose to become involved (Hoover-Dempsey, et al., 2005). Those children whose parents have higher parental self-efficacy tend to benefit more from parental involvement than their peers (Hoover-Dempsey & Sandler, 1997; Hoover-Dempsey, et al., 2005). On the contrary, some parents will not be as much involved because they are deficient in self-efficacy as parents (Bermudez & Marquez, 1996; Hoover-Dempsey & Sandler, 1997; Usher & Pajares, 2009; Zimmerman, Bandura, & Martinez-Pons, 1992). For example, they are not well knowledgeable of education system or their roles in education settings (Marschall, 2006; Russell & Granville, 2005).
Higher self-efficacy can account for more parental involvement, and it is often related to parents’ education. Bandera’s self-efficacy theory (1989) and Hoover-Dempsey and Sandler’s model of parental involvement (Hoover-Dempsey & Sandler, 1995, 1997; Hoover-Dempsey, et al., 2005) both suggest that parents are more willing to take part in education when they believe that they have the right skills and knowledge to help in children’s education. Also parents’ education can enhance their self-image and self-confidence as a parent (Swick & Broadway, 1997).

**Teacher and school factors.** Teacher and school factors mainly take into account schools’ institutional organization, culture, policy as well as teachers’ training and perceptions pertinent to parental involvement (Hornby, 2000). Teacher and school factors will impact parent-teacher communication, family-school relationships and parents’ engagement in education (Hoover-Dempsey & Sandler, 1995, 1997; Hoover-Dempsey et al., 2005). A few studies have discovered that schools will be more successful in encouraging parents’ involvement when they acknowledge and even offer suggestions to parental involvement practices (Delgado-Gaitan, 1991; Warren, Hong, Rubin, & Uy, 2009). On the contrary, the low-performing schools typically have limited opportunities for parental involvement, such as lack of educational programs to involve parents (Olszewski-Kubilius, 2006). This is consistent with the conclusion that parents’ perceptions of teachers’ invitations to involvement are a significant predictor of parental involvement (Walker, Shenker, & Hoover-Dempsey, 2010).

**Socioeconomic and cultural factors.** Hornby (2000) lists social and cultural factors as demographic changes, historical and societal factors, and policy or legislation factors. They are all essentially related to parent factors because they may exert influence
by means of parenting beliefs and practices especially when the children are young. First, demographic changes (e.g., parents’ race, ethnicity, nationality, culture, occupation, and salary) are related to parental involvement. For instant, low-income parents often juggle multiple jobs and working long hours and, consequently, are unable to attend events at their child’s school (Marschall, 2006). Second, parental involvement can be shaped by the social and historical space where a family live. A good case is that parents in some societies, mainly the East Asian countries, are more interested in investment in children’s shadow education (i.e., extracurricular classes or training) and such an investment is believed to relate to the country’s examination system (Yamamoto & Brinton, 2010).

Third, policy or legislation can influence parental involvement in the way as social and historical factors do. Both will form a climate to encourage or discourage some parenting beliefs and activities. For example, some migrant parents in Shanghai give up having their children educated in the local elementary schools because they neither have a Shanghai hukou nor meet the requirements of the government to allow their children to be enrolled (Tian, 2008). It is a very good case to see how policies influence parenting choices.

These factors influence parental involvement on the macro-level. In Bronfenbrenner’s ecological system theory, parents and families are labeled as the “microsystem” that will produce very influential impact on education success. However, it is within the influencing continuum of the “macrosystem” (i.e., the larger aspects of the society such as socioeconomic, cultural and political aspects) that the “microsystem” works (Paquette & Ryan, 2001).
In this dissertation, I define parental involvement as parents’ investment of resources in education of children with an underlying proposition that parental involvement is positively correlated to children’s education outcomes. Conducted in the Chinese context, this study will explore how parental involvement (i.e., use of economic, social and cultural capital) influences children’s educational opportunity.

**Conceptual Framework**

I employ French sociologist Bourdieu’s conceptualization of “capital”, in particular, economic capital, social capital and cultural capital, to see how parents’ ability to use differ forms of capital they possess can make a difference in educational opportunities for their children. Familial capital is a very close concept. However, I prefer to use parents’ economic, social and cultural capitals because they are more specific and only focus on parents while familial capital broadly discusses capital owned by parents and other family members and the concept itself does not explicitly tell what subtype of capital it includes. This section includes an introduction to Bourdieu’s major concept “capital”, and an elaboration on economic, social and cultural capital, as well as their roles in education.

**Bourdieu’s major concepts.** During his study of French education system, Bourdieu developed his theories pertinent to social reproduction. In 1973, he published *Cultural Reproduction and Social Reproduction*, coauthored by Jean-Claude Passeron. In this book, Bourdieu gives a justification for the educational disparities between children in France during the 1960s and, more importantly, he presents a sociological conceptual framework to account for class reproduction by means of educational institutions.
Any social practice or activity (e.g., parental involvement in education), according to Bourdieu (1984), can be explained by the following formula:

\[ \text{(habitus) (capital)} + \text{field} = \text{practice} \] (p. 101)

This formula includes three major concepts on which Bourdieu’s theories are primarily developed: habitus, field and capital. Such a formula implies that any social practice can be accountable for by an individual’s overall capacity of resources (i.e., capital) and his or her disposition (i.e., habitus) in a particular social space (i.e., field) (Ho & Kwong, 2013). They form “an interdependent and co-constructed trio” (Thomson, 2008, p. 69) to “generate practice, or social action” (Dumais, 2002, p. 46). Also they constitute a systemic sociological framework to account for inequality in education (Zhao & Liu, 2010). The following section is a brief introduction to these three major concepts in Bourdieu’s works.

**Field.** Field is “a network, or a configuration, of objective relations between positions” (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992, p. 97). It is a place where “dominant and subordinate groups struggle for control over resources” (Dumais, 2002, p. 46). Each field is likely to be related to more than one type of capital and capital will not work unless in relation to a field (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992). Within a field, social agents have their special positions like the soccer players on a football field. They all try to maintain or get a better position in this field and their capitals are the weapons they can use (Thomson, 2008). Education is a very special field because it “reproduced itself more than others” (Thomson, 2008, p. 76). In this specific field, the dominant groups try to take control so as to consolidate their dominant position. On the contrary, the subordinate groups
strain for upward mobility by means of having more cultural capital in relation to the education field (Bourdieu, 1973).

**Habitus.** While field is a place where social agents take actions, how they act is largely determined by habitus. Habitus is always related to “one’s disposition, which influences the actions that one takes…It is generated by one’s place in the social structure” (Dumais, 2002, p. 46). Thomson (2008) asserted that within a specific field, social agents follow its unique rules, or “logic of practice” (p. 70); social agents in a particular position will know what and how to behave in this field. Therefore, habitus can be defined as internalized individuals’ beliefs, choices and actions. The development of habitus is actually an internalization process, which finally results in social reproduction or reproduction of social structure (Bourdieu, 1973). Someone’s internalization of the social structure and his or her position in it will impact his or her beliefs, expectations and practices (Dumais, 2002). In other words, habitus justifies why people know how to act and behave in a particular social context (McKeever & Miller, 2004). And this internalization begins from early childhood and develops primarily unconsciously (Dumais, 2002). When someone is born into a particular family, the family’s ethnicity, class, socioeconomic status, labor division and other factors will all work to shape one’s early experiences and behaviors in the future (Ho & Kwong, 2013).

In the field of education, how parents are involved in education is often predicted by their habitus. For example, when students transition from elementary schools to middle schools, parents’ school-choosing behaviors are largely based on realistic considerations—how much economic capital, cultural capital, social capital and power capital they have (Wang, 2007). Habitus in education not only predicts parents’ choices,
but also relates to students’ school performance (Reay, 1995). Students’ decisions on investment in schoolwork and higher education are much reliant on their class (Swartz, 1997). Without habitus, a study of cultural capital will lead to an incomplete understanding of Bourdieu’s framework because one’s actions within a given field are the joint outcome of one’s habitus and capital (Dumais, 2002).

**Capital.** Habitus accounts for people’s actions or choices while capital is the resources or instruments they use to take actions or make choices (Thomson, 2008). Bourdieu’s concept of capital differs from economic theories. He believes that capital and society are directly related in nature and the quantity of capital people have is an important indicator of their social classes or positions (Zhao & Liu, 2010). Capital is the purpose and means of activity in the field (Lu, 2005). The concept of capital will be discussed further in the next section under the subcategories: economic capital, social capital and cultural capital.

**Three fundamental capitals.** Bourdieu describes education as an arena of conflicts where inequity is reproduced by means of the unequal capital distribution. Thomson (2008) noted that Bourdieu did discuss social life as a game (e.g., soccer) and Bourdieu affirms:

“The game that occurs in social spaces or fields is competitive, with various social agents using differing strategies to maintain or improve their position. At stake in the field is the accumulation of capitals: they are both the process within, and the product of, a field (p. 69)”.

Bourdieu identified three fundamental capitals: economic capital, social capital and cultural capital in order to specify capital’s different functions in social life or
These capitals exist in three distinctive forms: embodied form, objectified form and institutionalized forms. Economic capital only exists in objectified form since it usually refers to property, money and other materialized or objectified assets. Cultural capital is embodied as individuals’ dispositions such as their knowledge of highbrow culture and familiarity of using formal language or foreign language. Social capital is institutionalized by establishing interpersonal relationship and network, especially connections with those in significant social positions or those with more capitals (Jenkins, 1992).

Similarly, Coleman (1990, 1994), identified three primary types of capitals: physical capital, human capital and social capital. Coleman’s physical capital is similar to Bourdieu’s economic capital in that both refer to the material resources while his human capital is close to Bourdieu’s cultural capital with both referring to people’s knowledge and skills. Both of them define social capital as the relations and networks between people in social life.

**Convertibility of capital.** Despite the different typologies of capital between Bourdieu and Coleman, “the most important and insightful elements of Bourdieu’s and Coleman’s discourses is the notion of convertibility among forms of capital” (Ho & Kwong, 2013, p. 100). Other researchers also discuss mobility or convertibility of these three capitals (Chen & Xie, 2009; Li, 2011; Lu, 2013; Yang, 2006) and Ho and Kwong (2013) believed that capital convertibility implies two different notions: capital transformation and intergenerational transmission.

Convertibility can refer to the transformation between different types of capital. Economic capital has the strongest mobility. As a fundamental capital (Richardson, 1986),
economic capital can be transformed into the other two capitals. For example, the more economically advantaged families will have stronger social connections and interpersonal network (i.e., social capital), which predicts a better chance to acquire the limited good quality educational opportunities. Comparatively, social and cultural capitals are more intangible. They can be converted into economic capital as means for people to acquire economic capital (Bourdieu, 1981; Lu, 2013).

Convertibility can also refer to the transmission of capital between generations, which can be best illustrated by Bourdieu’s narrative of how a family’s economic capital is transformed into cultural capital, and his belief that cultural capital can take shape in the familial settings and be transmitted between generations (Lu, 2005) by means of family or education (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1977; Lamont & Lareau, 1988).

Why Bourdieu’s theory? Some researchers (Simon, 1957; March, 1978) think that Bourdieu’s concepts are consistent with economic theories in some respects because they both regard human actions and behaviors as “limited in the extent to which they operate out of fully rational principles” and also people will make decisions that are sensible to them (Ra, 2011, p. 16). In the case of parental involvement, parents make different decisions on helping their children obtain educational opportunities according to the resources or capitals available to them (Wang, 2007). Their decisions are meaningful and make sense within their social class (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992; Swartz, 1997). However, their decisions may not be sensible to other classes because they have dissimilar resources and experiences.

As such, parents’ capitals frame their involvement choices and parenting practices. Bourdieu’s concepts and theories are socially and historically constituted (Bourdieu &
Wacquant, 1992). His conceptualization has its strength because it can aid in understanding both the micro forces (i.e., parents’ habitus) and the macro forces (i.e., social structure and cultural climate) that enable his theory to “explain the social phenomena of educational inequality that cannot be explained by behavioral economics” (Ra, 2011, p. 17).

**Capitals and educational opportunity.** As aforementioned, each field is related to more than one type of capital (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992). The educational field is no exception. The capital reproduction can occur in and out of the educational system (Cheng, 2012). Either in or out of the educational system, parents play a role while bringing their capitals into education settings. Lu (2013) believes that differences in parents’ ownership of three capitals (i.e., economic capital, social capital and cultural capital) are largely responsible for students’ discrete educational opportunities.

**Economic capital and educational opportunity.** Economic capital refers to the assets, property and income a family possesses. This is a fundamental capital and can easily transform into the other two capitals (Chen & Xie, 2009; Li, 2011; Lu, 2013; Richardson, 1986; Yang, 2006). Therefore, parents’ economic capital has a far-reaching impact on children’s education.

First, parents’ different quantity of economic capital means a disparity in children’s educational opportunity at all levels of education. For example, good family education requires parents (especially mothers) have more free time at their command, which is largely decided by the economic condition of the family (Lu, 2005). Moreover, the expanding higher education enrollment in China better serve families with more economic capital by means of supplying additional education opportunities (Wang & Gao,
Similarly, Zheng (2003) found that different economic capitals between families lead to an increasing disparity of educational opportunity gaps in higher education.

Second, parents’ dissimilar volume of economic capital impacts their choice of school for their children at all levels of education. For example, Wang (2007) found that parents’ economic capital will influence their school-choosing practice at elementary education level, including what type of school and which particular school they will choose for their children. Zheng (2003) concluded that different economic capitals between families lead to an increasing disparity of educational opportunity gap at higher education level.

Third, parents’ varied economic capital does not only proffer diverse educational opportunities, but also promises distinct quality educational opportunities. Good quality educational resources and opportunities tend to be more accessible to the economically advantageous communities (Ding & Liang, 2010). However, economic capital is usually not studied alone, it is mostly discussed with social capital or under the name of “social class” or “social stratification” (Zheng, 2003) to imply its function to group people in the society.

**Social capital and educational opportunity.** Social capital refers to the resources available in social networks (Burt, 1997; Lin, 1999; Portes, 1998; Tardos, 1996) for people to achieve a range of social outcomes (Coleman, 1990), for example, to accomplish their goals (Stanton-Salazar, 2004; Yosso, 2006), to facilitate their social mobility (Coleman, 1988), or to advance their social status (Bourdieu, 1981; Coleman, 1990). From social capital, people can gain a choice of institutional resources and support (Portes, 1998; Schmid, 2001). In the field of education, social capital can be specifically
defined as resources that people can make use of to promote educational outcomes (Kao, 2004), or seen as a concept that influences students’ educational attainment both in homes and schools (Coleman, 1988, 1990), both of which can increase educational opportunity.

Social capital is a purposeful investment (Dufur, Parcel, & Troutman, 2013). According to Coleman (1998), parents’ knowledge alone cannot ensure the transmission of knowledge to children. Rather, parents have to do it by making careful choices of their investment in children’s education and their interactions with children “to create the bonds along with information can pass” (Dufur, Parcel, & Troutman, 2013, p. 2). Transmission of family capital to children can only be possible if there is a strong relationship between children and those in ownership of family resources (i.e., parents) (Coleman, 1994). Social capital is one of the most valuable mechanisms in modern society “because it offers access to other forms of capital” (Ho & Kwong, 2013). For those parents who have more investment in children’s education (i.e., by creating more or better educational opportunities), they have a higher expectation on their children’s education outcomes and future development, which will secure the family’s social position or promote their upward mobility (Dufur, Parcel, & Troutman, 2013; Ho & Kwong, 2013). This is a good illustration of transmission of social capital between generations.

Social capital can be found within the family and community (Leonard, 2005). Parents can play a role in education by using their social capital to establish their family’s relationship with the school, other families or social agents (Lee & Bowen, 2006). First, Ho and Kwong (2013) argued that social capital can better family-school partnership “in
conjuring up complementary or compensatory contexts” (p. 102), which is consistent with Bronfenbrenner and Crouter’s ecological perspective of child development (1983) and supported by the findings that students’ academic outcomes can be improved with a more supportive family-school relationship or family environment (Marchant, Paulson, & Rothlisberg, 2001). Second, if parents have more social capital, they will have more connections with those in “strategic position” (Ho & Kwong, 2013, p. 102) or they occupy such positions themselves, which will help the family to compete for more educational opportunities (Qiao, 2008; Wang, 2007). Last, parents’ social capital can function in education by its impact upon parents’ motivational beliefs, in particular parents’ role construction and their efficacy (Hoover-Dempsey et al., 2005). When parents are more motivated or have more self-efficacy, they tend to be more involved in children’s education, resulting in more at-home and extracurricular educational opportunities (Hoover-Dempsey & Sandler, 1997; Hoover-Dempsey et al., 2005). In conclusion, there is sufficient evidence of the positive impact of parents’ social capitals (i.e., social connections) on children’s education (Crosnoe, 2004; Durfur, Parcel, & MxKune, 2008; Ho & Kwong, 2013; Johnson, Crosnoe, & Elder, 2001; Marchant, Paulson, & Rothlisberg, 2001; Qiao, 2008; Wang, 2007).

Social capital means much more in Chinese society in that it is supposed to be closely related to or even equal to “guanxi” (关系). Guanxi is recognized as one of the major dynamics in Chinese society (Luo, 2007) or one of the decisive factors of success in China (Shaalan, Reast, Johnson, & Tourky, 2013). Sometimes it is simply defined as the interpersonal relations that have overwhelming power in most aspects of relationships (Fan, 2002). It is usually translated into connections and relationships, but neither of them
can truly reflect its elusive and wide-spectrum cultural implications. Luo (2007) defined the Chinese phrase “guanxi” as follows:

“The concept of drawing on connections in order to secure favors in personal relations. It forms an intricate, pervasive relational network which the Chinese cultivate energetically, subtly, and imaginatively. It contains implicit mutual obligations, assurances, and understanding, and governs Chinese attitudes toward long-term social and business relationships (p. 2)”.

In China, people with more guanxi, or social capital, are believed to have better chance of success and more benefits (Yeung & Tung, 1996). The more social capital or guanxi parents have, the more opportunities students will have to attend a prestigious school or class (Yang, 2006). In her research of students who were allowed to study in Shanghai after the Shanghai government announced its new educational policy to enroll a small number of elite graduates from other provinces, Hou (2006) found that most of the students admitted into the program come from those families with more economic, social and cultural capitals than the average families, and at the end of the study she implied that parents’ social capital or guanxi may work invisibly under the table to compete for their children’s educational opportunity in Shanghai.

**Cultural capital and educational opportunity.** Economic capital alone cannot produce high social status and power; it should work in conjunction with cultural capital. In modern society, high social prestige requires a significant quantity and quality of both economic capital and cultural capital (Zhao & Liu, 2010). Cultural capital is the most precious type of capital (Dumais, 2002).
The concept of “cultural capital” is coined by Bourdieu (1973) to analyze how culture and education work in the process of social reproduction (Lamont & Lareau, 1988). Its definition varies between researchers. Some identified it as the habits and dispositions that facilitate a society’s cultural heritage (Bourdieu, 1977; Lareau & Weininger, 2003) and these cultural habits and dispositions are passed through families (Lareau & Weininger, 2003). Lamont and Lareau (1988) define it as “institutionalized, i.e., widely shared, high status cultural signals (attitudes, preferences, formal knowledge, behaviors, goods and credentials) used for social and cultural exclusion” (p. 156) and believe that it plays an important role in both financial and academic success. Dumais (2002) offers a simple definition by generally seeing it as “a linguistic and cultural competence” (p. 44) together with a wide range of cultural knowledge familiar to the upper classes but less known to the lower classes. However cultural capital is defined, it is regarded as a range of knowledge that is transmitted via families within each social class.

As aforementioned, Bourdieu’s concept of cultural capital is very close to Coleman’s human capital. However, Bourdieu’s concept is more enriched because it includes “taste, lifestyle and cultural consumption such as interest in art and classic music, attendance at theaters and museums, and reading habits” (Ho & Kwong, 2013, p. 100). More importantly, Bourdieu’s concept can help to better understand the relationship between parents’ socio-economic status and their parental involvement in children’s education (Harker, Nash, Durie & Charters, 1993; Lareau, 1989).

A student needs the ability to “receive and internalize” (p. 44) cultural capital, but it is families, not schools that provide cultural capital (Dumais, 2002). Since not all
families have equal resources, their habits and dispositions are not uniform (Bourdieu, 1977; Lareau & Weininger, 2003; Yosso, 2005). Cultural capital serves the dominant or advantageous groups as “power resources or a way…to remain dominant or gain status” (Dumais, 2002, p. 46). Therefore, members of a social class use culture capital to distinguish themselves from other classes and maintain social distance between them and those beneath them on the class hierarchy (Bourdieu, 1984).

Bourdieu (1981) further states that social and cultural capitals are used to reproduce existing social and economic structures. Cultural habits and dispositions can facilitate a group’s cultural heritage but are unequally valued and, therefore, create opportunities for exclusive advantages (Lareau & Weininger, 2003). Cultural capital is discussed more in educational settings than the other two capitals because culture of the dominant or advantageous class is transmitted, and rewarded by the educational system (Dumais, 2002).

Lovelace (2012) concluded four key points of Bourdieu’s theory of social reproduction in education. First, the distinctive culture capital is transmitted within each class. Second, the cultural capital of mid-upper class students and their families are value-loaded in educational settings while the cultural capital of lower class or working class students is devalued (Lovelace, 2012). Indeed, such a viewpoint is agreed among a good many researchers (Bourdieu, 1973; Dumais, 2002). Third, differently valued cultural capital may lead to divergent students’ educational achievements, which will be then in turn transformed to other capitals, such as economic returns (Lovelace, 2012). Four, educational institutions will help to complete such a reproduction process and consequently social hierarchies and their reproduction will be justified as rooted in the
hierarchy of students’ intelligence or skills (Bourdieu, 1977). These four points describe the essence of social reproduction in education. Similarly, Dumais (2002) concludes that “the acquisition of cultural capital and consequent access to academic rewards depend on the cultural capital passed down by the family, which, in turn is largely dependent on social class” (p. 44).

The above theory of social reproduction via cultural capital suggests that the early experiences in a culturally positive familial environment benefits students’ academic outcomes and future development by cultural capital accumulation (Bourdieu, 1973). Yamamoto and Briton (2010) offered a good explanation that “Cultural capital acquired at an early age may essentially be exerting an indirect effect on later academic achievement or attainment via its positive impact on ability and motivation” (p. 69). Cultural activities can help students to be more familiar with the cultural knowledge and ideologies they meet in educational activities, and therefore, have a better performance in education (Bourdieu, 1973). For example, Yamamoto and Briton cited the findings of Kariya’s (2004) study that those elementary school students who grow in a more culturally positive home show higher motivation in academic work. A good number of studies have confirmed the impact of home environmental factors (that is closely related to parents’ cultural capital) upon students’ academic preparedness and outcomes for different ages of children (Berger, Paxson, & Waldfogel, 2005; Christian, Morrison, Byrant, 1998; Crane, 1996). For example, Berger, Paxon and Waldfogel (2005) found that the familial environmental factors are related to the educational outcomes for the three-year-old students. Crane (1996) studied an elder group of students between five and
nine years old, finding that home environment has a greater impact on their academic achievement (i.e., mathematics) than parents’ socioeconomic status.

In many cases, parents’ social capital and cultural capital work together under the name of “socioeconomic status” in educational research. Socioeconomic status is a variable that mostly measures factors such as parental education level, occupation, income or salary (Caldras & Bankston, 1997; Magnuson & Duncan, 2006). Lee and Bowen (2006) told in their study of the third through fifth graders that students from more economically disadvantageous families tend to have lower academic scores. There is a strong correlation between parents’ educational level and students’ academic outcomes (Clotfelter, Ladd, & Vigdor, 2009; Magnuson & Duncan, 2006; Sirin, 2005). These studies show that parents’ economic capital, social capital and cultural capital all have important impact on students’ education at elementary school level. Therefore, in this dissertation, I am interested in further exploring the impact of patents’ different capitals on elementary school students’ educational opportunity.

**Overview of Chinese studies.** Parental involvement is one of the popular themes in Chinese educational research. However, research is more interested in parenting practices, less favoring studying parental involvement from socio-cultural perspectives, such as parents’ capitals. Over the past decade, there has been an emergence of studies on the relationship between capital and an educational outcome (Wu, 2012) since Bourdieu’s concept of capital was introduced in China. These studies have gained popularity in explaining education inequality in China; however, research tends to focus on Chinese higher education (Cao, 2013; Hu, 2012; Huang, 2010; Li, 2004; Wang, 2003; Wang, 2013; Wu, 2010; Xiang, 2010; Xu, 2010). The most explored research questions include
roles of social or cultural capital in college students’ higher education entrance
opportunity (Li, 2004; Xu, 2010), job-hunting experiences (Huang, 2010; Xiang, 2010),
future development after graduation (Zhang, 2012), and choice of academy (Hu, 2012;
Wang, 2013).

In most cases, the three capitals are discussed separately. Only one or sometimes
two of them are explored in one study. Interestingly, researchers prefer studying cultural
capital and its impact upon education (Jin, 2007; Li, 2014; Li & Jin, 2008; Song, 2013;
Sun, 2011; Wang, 2003; Wang, 2013; Wu, 2010; Xu, 2010; Yang, & Zheng, 2013) and a
few choose to study social capital (Chen, 2010; Xiang, 2010; Zhang, 2008). However, no
research studies economic capital alone. There are two possible reasons. First, as
discussed in the section of capital categorization, economic capital has the strongest
mobility and it can be easily transformed into the other two capitals. Therefore, the
influence of social and cultural capitals can be partly accounted for by economic capital.
Second, parents’ economic capital is often discussed with the other two capitals under
broader concepts as “parents’ socio-economic status” (Huang, 2010), “family
background”(Fang & Feng, 2008; Hou, 2006; Li, 2004; Zou, Shi, Zhang, & Chen, 2005),
“social class” (Chen, 2009; Song, 2009; Xie & Wang, 2004, 2005) and social
stratification (Chen, 2009; Wang, 2005; Zhang, 2007). Therefore, parents’ economic,
social and cultural capitals are often discussed together as a composite. In a few cases,
two capitals will be discussed together (Guo & Min, 2006). Rarely a study includes a
discussion of parents’ investment of all the three capitals. Indeed, some research use a
semantically close term, “family capital”, to discuss their relationship with college
students’ academic success (Cao, 2013), children’s psychological condition (Yang, 2011),
and students’ giving up of national college entrance examination (Hu, 2012). However, family capital is different from parents’ capital in that family capital is more broadly defined. Therefore, it is meaningful to look at all of parents’ three capital in one study.

**Equality of Educational Opportunity**

The notion of educational opportunity varies in its definition and has experienced a historical conceptual evolution. As a vital indicator of education equality and equity, educational opportunity is not a new research subject in Chinese academic world. However, it has not yet been much related to parents’ three capitals and studies are more concerned with higher education.

**Equality or equity?** Both “equality” and “equity” are often discussed in educational research. They are related but necessarily interchangeable. Borrowing from *The Random House Dictionary* (1981), Holmes (2001) identified “equality” as “the state of being equal” or “the sameness in ‘quantity’, ‘value’ or ‘ability’” while “equity” is defined as “fairness” or “impartiality” (p. 7). Holmes (2001) made a conclusion of Bronfenbrenner’s (1973) and Pryor-Jones’s (1980) opinions and distinguished these two concepts by arguing that “equality” aims to describe the distribution of resources (i.e., educational opportunity) whereas “equity” is used to judge whether a social practice is fair. To conclude, “equality” is a term used for objective description and “equity” is a notion of social justice.

**Equality of opportunity.** As mentioned above, “equality” addresses the issue of distribution, so the fundamental problem of equality of opportunity is to define what will be the appropriate distribution pattern of resources, rights, and duties in society at large (Calsamiglia, 2005). In fact, this is not only a philosophical problem but also a justice
issue of distribution. The concept “equality of opportunity” means that “an individual’s success or welfare in life be independent of irrelevant characteristics, that is, of characteristics that the individual should not be responsible for” (Calsamiglia, 2005, p. 4).

**Equal educational opportunity.** The Western history of education is also a chronicle of equality of educational opportunity. Plato, in *The Republic*, states that all citizens should receive education from childhood regardless of their gender (Dong & Zhang, 2007). This may be the first announcement of the goal of equal educational opportunity. The modern equal educational movement started in 1950s with the US Supreme Court’s decision *Brown vs. the Board of Education*, 1954. James Coleman (1968), a leading researcher in educational opportunity thought that the 1954 Supreme Court decision addressed issues broader than those of racial equality and considered it as a landmark in developing equal educational opportunity. Indeed, this decision signifies “an evolving change in educational philosophy and practice” (Brick, 2005, p. 166) and symbolizes an important victory for those who had been fighting long for equality of educational opportunity (Johanningmeier, 2008).

The definition of educational opportunity has experienced a historical evolution, demonstrating people’s progressive understanding of it, and offering a foundation for governments all over the world to work out education policies. The idea of educational opportunity evolves as many scholars contribute their ideas. There is no consensus on what makes an equal opportunity (Brick, 2005). However, there are some central questions to consider when people try to define equal opportunity. For example, Okun (1975) asked whether students’ advantage in natural ability make an unfair head start. Or does some students’ privileged background offer them an unfair advantage when their
families or parents use different capitals to promote their learning and development especially at their earlier age? These questions make up important issues when researchers operationalize the concept of educational opportunity.

In the modern world, equal educational opportunity is a socially and politically constructed concept to “advance and undermine various political agendas” (Motiv, 2007, p. 11). This term implies that “schools provide all students who demonstrate the same need with the same resources, allowing the students or their parents to determine the extent to which these resources are utilized” (Motiv, 2007, p. 15). This is also a proposition underlying this study. However, the reality is that unequal educational opportunities result in achievement gaps. And the disparities of education outcomes between students from different families have become the most urgent issue of the 21st century education (Boykin & Noguera, 2011; Colgren, 2014; Muhammad, 2009; Wagner, 2008). Therefore, equality stands persistently as the major concern in educational study all over the world. For example, the American studies of educational opportunities or educational equality are more concerned with the population of minority students and especially the black students (Brown, 2001; Colgren, 2014; Eldridge, 2010; Grady, 2002; Maruyama & Geoffrey, 2003; McNair, 2008), some studies focus on females (Hanna, 2003) or specifically minority females (Okoli, 2007), and immigrant students with limited English proficiency (Movit, 2007).

**Significance of educational opportunity.** As a core value of modern education, education equality persists as a major concern (Holmes, 2001) in making educational policy all over the world. One purpose of modern education is to achieve education
democracy and equality of educational opportunity is an important prerequisite for education democracy because it promises social justice and encourages social mobility.

Equality of educational opportunity is closely associated with social justice as an essential criterion of it. First, equality of educational opportunity is groundwork to establish social justice (Dong & Zhang, 2007; Mi, 2006). Education is a basic social activity by relating to all the families and connecting to every member of society. Therefore, equality of educational opportunity means a firm basis of social justice (Dong & Zhang, 2007). Second, equality of educational opportunity is one of the most operative approaches to promote social justice (Dong & Zhang, 2007; Mi, 2006). By means of equal educational opportunity, people can enjoy fair education, shape knowledge and experience of equality and ultimately produce actions of equality as social agents (Dong & Zhang, 2007). Only in this way social justice can be promised. Last, social justice can be defined in different respects, economically, socially and culturally. And equality of educational opportunity is a cultural gauge of social justice (Dong & Zhang, 2007). Therefore, it is meaningful to explore the current situation of educational opportunity and to consider how to achieve it, which can benefit education development and promote education democracy (Feng, 2008; Zha, 2001).

The cruel reality, however, is that equality of educational opportunity is still a problem across all countries in the world. For example, Holmes (2001) affirmed that despite greats efforts of all parties concerned in education over the 40 years, American education is still bothered with educational inequality in “educational inputs, quality, outputs and longer-run outcomes” (p. 6). As Jeannie Oakes (1985) wrote, “the children who seem to have the least of everything in the rest of their lives most often get less at
school as well” (p. 4). Inequality is more intolerable as a result of unequal opportunity than in a situation of equal opportunities (Okun, 1975). Therefore, it is of great significance to offer every social member an equal opportunity in social life.

**Overview of Chinese studies.** In China, the idea of educational opportunity can be traced back to Confucius. More than 2,000 years ago, this great educator suggested that education should not only be reachable to the noble class among the slave-owners and it should be extended to the middle and lower classes of the slave-owners (Zha, 2001). Although in his suggestions education is mostly available to the slave-owners, his proposal is undeniably an attempt to solve the problem of unequal educational opportunity.

In today’s China, the government has released a dozen of laws and regulations to ensure that every member of society can enjoy educational opportunity, including The Education Law of the People’s Republic of China, Compulsory Education Law of the People’s Republic of China, The Detailed Rules for the Implementation of the Compulsory Education Law of the People’s Republic of China, Decision of the State Council on the Reform and Development of Basic Education, and Law of the People’s Republic of China on the Protection of Minors. Indeed, the legal recognition of educational opportunity promotes educational evolution. However, it is a symbolic equality because to have educational opportunity of education never means to have equal educational opportunity. Equality of educational opportunity can be defined in a broader sense to include equality of enrollment opportunity, equality of educational progress and content and equality of educational outcomes (Mi, 2006), but in this study, the concept of educational opportunity is only related to enrollment opportunities because equality of
educational progress and content and equality of educational outcomes are less tangible and can only be explored in a longitudinal study. The cruel reality is that equality of educational opportunity can only be approached maximally (Wu, 2012). How much we can approach equality of educational opportunity depends on the level of social justice.

Since 1990s, educational equality calls for concerns among Chinese scholars. Unequal educational opportunity has been empirically proved to be a big problem between social classes (Mi, 2006; Song, 2009; Wang, 2005; Xie & Wang, 2004, 2005; Zha, 2001), genders (Mi, 2006; Wang, 2003; Zha, 2001), regions (Mi, 2006; Zha, 2001), and occupations (Mi, 2006). In terms of the research interest, the United States and China show similarities. First, higher education is a common concern (Brown, 2001; Dong, 2009). Second, the immigrant or migrant population gains attention from researchers (Dai & Li, 2011; Gao, 2009; Liu, 2009; Tian, 2008). Again, there is a similar research gap in both countries marrying parents’ capitals and students’ educational opportunities, especially on the elementary education level. Therefore, it is meaningful for this dissertation to study educational opportunity at elementary level by using parents’ capitals as a framework.

A few studies link the concept of capital to education inequality at a micro-level. They even try using the framework of capital, especially cultural capital as a lens to justify the inequality in learning material (Yu, 2005), learning process (Yu, Li, & Yang, 2012) and learning outcomes (Zou, Shi, Zhang, & Chen, 2005). For example, some researchers employ capital a new perspective to account for the achievement disparity in EFL (English as a foreign language) learning, believing that children from the disadvantaged families (i.e., those families with less economic and cultural capital)
tend to be lower achiever in English learning (Zou, Shi, Zhang, & Chen, 2005). Indeed, other studies relate educational opportunities to parental or familial factors. However, these studies are mostly focused on higher education (Song, 2009; Wang, 2005; Xie & Wang, 2004, 2005) while few show concern toward the elementary school level. Moreover, these studies mostly use some vague concepts such as familial capitals, parents’ socio-economic status/social class/stratification (Song, 2009; Wang, 2005; Xie & Wang, 2004, 2005) or family background (Hou, 2006; Li, 2004) in their discussion. Instead, I prefer to use parents’ economic capital, social capital and cultural capital in this dissertation because they are more exactly and clearly defined. By using three different capitals, I can also explore convertibility between them or compare their power when they are used by parents to obtain their children’s educational opportunity.
Chapter 3: Methodology

The previous chapter reviewed parental involvement and its impact on children’s education as well as educational opportunity and its significance to education equality and education equity. Defined as a specific parental involvement, parents’ investment of economic, social and cultural capitals exerts extensive impact upon children’s education (Berger et al., 2005; Coleman, 1988, 1990; Crane, 1996; Ding & Liang, 2010; Harker et al., 1993; Ho & Kwong, 2013; Kao, 2004; Lu, 2005; Qiao, 2008; Wang, 2007; Wang & Gao, 2007; Yang, 2006; Zheng, 2003). And how parents help children to obtain educational opportunity is an effective perspective to see such an impact.

In Chinese educational milieu, parents’ capitals correlate with educational opportunity at higher education levels (Cao, 2013; Hu, 2012; Huang, 2010; Li, 2004; Wang, 2003; Wang, 2013; Wu, 2010; Xiang, 2010; Xu, 2010), but few researchers focus on elementary school level. At the preliminary stage of education, equality of educational opportunity at elementary school level has foundational importance. Without it, equality of educational opportunity at higher levels (i.e., middle school, senior high school and higher education) is unattainable. Additionally, research has been conducted at a macro-level to discuss how educational opportunity is influenced by Chinese economic transition, social stratification and policies (Hou, 2006; Li, 2004; Song, 2009; Wang, 2005; Xie & Wang, 2004, 2005); few studies address such an issue from a micro-perspective, such as having a close look at some families’ real experiences. Last, no research has yet studied the entire migrant population in Shanghai; research usually
focuses on migrant workers. Indeed, the migrant workers are the most disadvantaged group of the migrant population, but they are only a subgroup. Therefore, the following chapter outlines and justifies a comparative case study that attempts to explore how these non-local families help children to gain divergent educational opportunities using their economic, social and cultural capitals.

**Approach**

In this study, a qualitative approach was adopted. As an old research inquiry, it was used by some ancient Greek scholars, such as Herodotus, Sextus, and Empiricus, as precursors to qualitative social inquiry (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011). Qualitative research methodologies are now still developing as important inquiry methods popular in social sciences such as education (Marshall & Rossman, 2011). The primary goals of qualitative inquiry is to “discover and to describe in narrative reporting what particular people do in their everyday lives and what their actions mean to them” (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011, p. 7). Qualitative researchers are more interested in the complication of social interactions as well as the meanings contributed by the participants in these interactions (Marshall & Rossman, 2011). Therefore, qualitative research is essentially “pragmatic, interpretative, and grounded in the lived experiences of people” (Marshall & Rossman, 2011, p. 2). Data vary in their forms, not constrained to numeric data. Their data are the occurrences in the natural context (Marshall & Rossman, 2011; Rossman & Rallis, 2003). Therefore, they collect data from the natural settings without controlling anything as in some quantitative studies (e.g., experimental or laboratory environment) and their data analysis and interpretation is largely dependent on context (Creswell, 2013; Marshall & Rossman, 2011). Inductive strategies are mostly used in qualitative data analysis, seeking categories,
themes or patterns beyond the case (Creswell, 2013) because they are “emergent rather than tightly prefigured” (Marshall & Rossman, 2011, p. 3). In qualitative research, both “the voices of participants” and “the reflectivity of the researcher” (Creswell, 2013, p. 37) are presented throughout, which differs from quantitative research where the voices of participants are muted. In this sense, qualitative research is interactive and humanistic (Rossman & Rallis, 2003).

Qualitative inquiry is chosen for this study because it can better serve the research purposes. First, this study aims to explore the real-life experiences of some families. Their stories take place in real world as a reflection of natural social occurrences. Second, context means a lot in this research, including both the macro-context (i.e., socio-economic context, cultural and historical context, education policies) and the micro-context (i.e., the family environment, parents’ education). The research problem emerges from the context, the data are collected in the context and its analysis is essentially framed by the context. For example, how Chinese traditional parenting beliefs impact parents’ involvement in children’s education? How parents’ education may influence children’s enrollment opportunity? Third, the research is emergent. In the data collection, themes emerged, which in turn proposed new interview questions or observation tasks in the following research stages. Four, data collection and analysis required interaction between the researcher and the participants where humanity of the participants had to be respected throughout. Five, this study is fundamentally interpretative. In the same camp with any qualitative research, this study tries to give an account of how things happen; it is interpretive rather than try to generalize or to predict as a good many quantitative researches do (Creswell, 2013). I am more interested the in specific situations of the
participants, relating the outcomes (i.e., diverse educational opportunities) to the reasons behind it (i.e., parents’ different capitals). In the next section, I am going to elaborate on the specific research method—case study, or specifically, comparative case study—including an overview, its characteristics and a justification for its appropriateness for this study.

Several methods can serve a qualitative study. Creswell (2013) exemplified five major methods: narrative research, phenomenology, grounded theory, ethnography and case study. And Denzin and Lincoln (2005) add more on the list by including life history, historical method, action research and others. Among so many qualitative methods, case study was chosen for this study. To be specific, it was a comparative case study, a specific type of multiple case studies. A single family (with two parents) was seen as a unit of analysis and three families were recruited for a comparison between them.

**Methodology**

As a major approach of research at the beginning of modern social science (Given, 2008), case study is widely applicable across disciplines, such as in psychology, sociology medication, education and anthropology (Yin, 2013). A case study can be simply defined as “a research approach in which one or a few instances of a phenomenon are studied in depth” (Given, 2008, p. 68).

Given (2008) suggested three points of case study. First, as its name implies, a case study is case-centered instead of variable-centered as in quantitative studies. Second, cases are “configurational context- and/or path-dependent entities” (p. 68). Third, the “in-depth strategies such as thick description and process tracing” (p. 68) are preferred. Similarly, Creswell (2013) defined case study as research that involves studying a case in
real-life context with an intention to have an in-depth understanding of a case or to investigate a problem by using a case. Case study can help researchers understand what happens in the real word and can only be achieved when related to the context where the case occurs (Yin & Davis, 2007).

Case study is preferred in this dissertation because it principally aims to answer the why and how questions. “The more that your questions seek to explain some present circumstance (e.g., “how” or “why” some social phenomenon works), the more that case study research will be relevant” (Yin, 2013, p. 33). This study tends to have a holistic view of what is happening (i.e., case), relate and interpret it in the specific politic, socio-economic and cultural settings (i.e., context) aiming to have a thorough and comprehensive understandings of what happens, how it happens and why it happens (i.e., in-depth understandings). Case study, as a qualitative research method, can meet the descriptive-interpretive needs of the study, help to understand the complexity of the social issues and maintain a holistic and real-life perspective (Yin, 2013). More importantly, case study has a much more powerful advantage than other approaches with regards to depth of analysis and interpretation. Depth can be seen as “empirical completeness and natural wholeness or as conceptual richness and theoretical consistency” (Given, 2008, p. 69). Further, this study aims to exam the contemporary events rather than the historical happenings and uses an array of evidence (e.g., interviews, observations, documents and artifacts), both of which work better with case study (Yin, 2013). Therefore, case study is the best methodological choice to answer my central research question—how parents use different capitals to gain their children’s divergent educational opportunities.
Stake (2000, 2008) distinguished two types of case study (e.g., intrinsic and instrumental cases) according to their purposes. An intrinsic case is case-focused (McMillan & Schumacher, 2009); it refers to a case that is merely studied for its uniqueness and unusualness. It implies that the case itself is an interest and focus (Stake, 2000, 2008). However, the idea of conducting a solely intrinsic case study is criticized because description of a case alone is meaningless (Silverman, 2013). However, an instrumental case is theme-based (McMillan & Schumacher, 2009) because it is used to understand a particular issue or problem (Creswell, 2013). Although it is agreed that a case should be studied in depth, the ultimate purpose of a case study is not the case itself (Silverman, 2013). In my dissertation, the cases themselves are common occurrences in Chinese society, so they are not the intrinsic cases. Instead, cases are used as vehicles to understand the current social issues and my focus is not the cases themselves but the implications behind (Yin, 2013).

A case in study can be an individual; it can also be a project, an organization, an activity or an event (Creswell, 2013). However, case study is not confined to only one observation. It can simply look at one instance or phenomenon (i.e., a single case study) or focus on a few units of analysis (i.e., a multiple case study) (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011). Also, case study is good research if the researcher has some clearly identifiable cases for an in-depth understanding of the case or a comparison of a few cases (Stake, 1995; Yin, 2009). For my part, a family with two parents is a case and three cases are involved. With three cases varied in quantity and quality of their economic, social and cultural capitals, I tend to have a comparative study across them in order to see how their different amount of capitals help to compete for their children’s opportunities. It is explained by Yin (2013)
that, “Multiple-case rationales also can derive from the prior hypothesizing of different types of conditions and the desire to have subgroups of cases covering each type” (p. 96-97). One of the tips of case selection offered by Yin (2013) is that the multiple cases show similar results or contrasting results, which is predictable at the beginning of the study. In my study, the purpose of having three cases in contrast. The prior research has already predicted children’s contrasting educational opportunities when their parents have varied capitals. Yin (2013) advised to make a careful decision on doing a multiple case study since it requires consuming extensive resources and time. However, the evidence produced by multiple cases can be more convincing, and the study is more solid (Herriott & Firestone, 1983).

**Participants**

The following section gives an account of the geographic location as well as the criteria and rationale for participant selection.

**Site selection.** As a qualitative sampling strategy, site selection means that a researcher has to be very careful in choosing the best sites where data can be collected (McMillan & Schumacher, 2009). According to the Shanghai municipal government, the city officially has one county and sixteen administrative districts (Administrative division of Shanghai, 2012), among which I choose Putong New Area and Minghang District as two specific areas where I looked for potential candidates as participants. I have some good reasons to locate these two districts. First and foremost, these two districts have the largest migrant population. Up to year 2013, the whole year-end resident population in Pudong New Area is 54 million, of which the migrant population (i.e., floating people) is 23 million. And for Minghang district, the whole population is 25 million and the migrant
population (i.e., floating people) about 13 million (See in Table 4.1). Such a large migrant population makes a better chance to recruit my potential candidates. Moreover, according to Table 4.1, the percentage of migrant population in these two districts is comparatively closer to that of Shanghai. The total percentage of migrant population in Shanghai is 41% while the percentage is 43% in Pudong and 51% in Minhang. Another district, Baoshan also has a close percentage of migrant population, but it is abandoned as a selection site because I do not know anyone who can help me to find participants.

Table 4.1. Population of all districts in Shanghai (Shanghai Statistic Yearbook 2014)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>District</th>
<th>Year-end Resident Population (10 000 persons)</th>
<th>of which Floating People</th>
<th>Density of Population (person/sq.km)</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>2 415.15</td>
<td>990.01</td>
<td>3 809</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pudong New Area</td>
<td>540.90</td>
<td>233.06</td>
<td>4 469</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Huangpu</td>
<td>69.16</td>
<td>18.83</td>
<td>33 803</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Xuhui</td>
<td>112.51</td>
<td>30.15</td>
<td>20 547</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Changning</td>
<td>70.54</td>
<td>17.62</td>
<td>18 418</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jing’an</td>
<td>24.99</td>
<td>6.03</td>
<td>32 795</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Putuo</td>
<td>129.56</td>
<td>35.04</td>
<td>23 629</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Zhabei</td>
<td>84.73</td>
<td>21.01</td>
<td>28 958</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hongkou</td>
<td>83.96</td>
<td>18.43</td>
<td>35 757</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yangpu</td>
<td>132.43</td>
<td>27.01</td>
<td>21 806</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Minhang</td>
<td>253.22</td>
<td>128.30</td>
<td>6 830</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Baoshan</td>
<td>200.91</td>
<td>84.72</td>
<td>7 414</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jiading</td>
<td>155.65</td>
<td>90.64</td>
<td>3 353</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jinshan</td>
<td>78.03</td>
<td>25.43</td>
<td>1 331</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Rationale for participants. Purposeful sampling is commonly used in qualitative research. The selection of both the site and participants can purposefully inform the researcher of the research problem or the most concerned issue in the study (Creswell, 2013). Denzin and Lincoln (2011) exemplify this sampling technique with three or four cases that are different in some respect (e.g., location, form). Using this sampling technique, a qualitative researcher usually has some criteria in advance that can differentiate his or her participants, and the participants who varied with regard to these criteria will be recruited. Therefore, the researcher is responsible for choosing the most representative cases for inclusion in the qualitative study (Creswell, 2013). Take into consideration my central question—how parents’ diverse amount of economic, social and cultural capitals helps to compete for their children divergent educational opportunities, I looked for some families representative of different amounts of economic, social and cultural capitals; the underlying assumption is that the maximum differences in parents capitals can a significant indicator of children’s educational opportunities. Since it is difficult to measure parents’ capitals, I used children’s distinct educational opportunities as criteria to select participants. I looked for three migrant families whose children have distinct educational opportunities: one attending a demonstrative or elite school, one attending an ordinary school that mainly enrolls local children, and the other attending a school that primarily enrolls migrant children. And then a comparative study across the

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<tr>
<td>Songjiang</td>
<td>173.66</td>
<td>107.65</td>
<td>2 867</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Qingpu</td>
<td>119.76</td>
<td>71.56</td>
<td>1 787</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fengxian</td>
<td>115.42</td>
<td>59.62</td>
<td>1 679</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chongming</td>
<td>69.72</td>
<td>14.91</td>
<td>588</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
three cases can inform me of how the different capitals these families possessed influence their ability to obtain distinct educational opportunities for their children. By maximizing sample differences at the beginning, this sampling strategy will increase the probability of producing different perspectives about the cases, which is seen by Creswell (2013) as an ideal in a qualitative research.

I am always concerned with the educational opportunities of the children from marginalized or disadvantageous families, but I did not want to study this group alone. A good number of studies (Dai & Li, 2011; Gao, 2009; Liu, 2009; Tian, 2008) that focus on this group have revealed how limited educational opportunities these children have, which has been discussed in the first and the second chapters. I want to see this group in a different way. I want to have two families with high or medium capitals as a “reference group”, a term borrowed from quantitative study method, in contrast with which, the situation of families with the least capitals can be seen better. A comparison across cases can better demonstrate roles of parents’ capitals in acquiring children’s educational opportunities.

**Participant selection.** I chose three families with divergent capitals as my major participants so as to make a comparison between them. As suggested by Creswell (2013), no more than four or five cases are involved in a single qualitative research. A large number of cases mostly serve generalizability, but it does not mean a lot for most qualitative researches (Glesne & Peshkin, 1992). Therefore, three cases can have power to identify the case themes even for cross-cases analysis. In order to screen out some irrelevant family influencing factors, such as marital status, all the three families are of the same type: two biological parents live with their biological child or children.
I used convenience sampling techniques to locate my participants. I grew up at the border between Minghang district and Pudong New Area where I have adequate personal connections that enable me to look for desirable participants and be informed of the latest educational policies. This convenience sampling technique allowed me to enter the most accessible sites (Marshall & Rossman, 2011). I have classmates and friends who work as teachers in these two districts but I did not ask help from them. If they recommend some families to me as teachers, parents might choose to take part in under some kind of pressure, thinking that they have to if they want to maintain good relationship with their children’s teachers. I looked for some families whose children were receiving elementary education in a demonstrative school, an ordinary school that mainly serve local children and a school that chiefly enroll migrant children. Such a selection criteria is based on an assumption that if a child gets access to the top tier school, the family has the adequate capitals to allow that to happen. And the family whose child goes to the ordinary school that mainly serves the local children has some capitals to help their child. As for the child who is enrolled at the school that mostly recruit migrant workers’ offspring, the family has no capital or weak capital. Finally, maximum variation sampling helped me to choose from the potential candidates three most representative families whose parents showed maximum variation in their economic, social and cultural capitals. This sampling strategy can produce a divergent group of parent participants (McMillan, & Schumacher, 2009).

One of my relatives helped me find the first family, the one with strong capitals. My relative lives in a rich family and their child study in a bilingual school. She recommends one of their child’s schoolmates to me. This family had a young boy who was studying in a bilingual school in Shanghai. The second family was found later. The
father was a colleague of my husband’s classmate in college. His son was studying in a local school mainly for students with a Shanghai hukou. It’s a family with medium capitals. The family with weak capitals is the last one to recruit and it really takes time and efforts to find such a family. I did not have relatives, classmates or friends whose children studied in a school for migrant children. Therefore, I talked with some of my friends who mostly worked with migrant workers and might help, but they were mostly declined. Finally, I talked with one of my friends’ father who worked as a “black driver” (e.g. illegal driver) and asked him whether he could help me. He introduced to me one of his peers who had a daughter studying in an elementary school for migrant workers. I talked with him. He was glad to talk with me, but when I asked whether it was possible for him to join my study, he showed hesitation. Then I continued to talk with him about his daughter and about my research, especially the purpose of it. Finally he agreed to join. However, the last family joined much later than expectation.

When the potential participants emerged out of the sampling process, I talked with them first. At our first informal meeting, I confirmed their age, children’s grade and school type, and other important information (e.g., job, education, and residence). Next, I explained to them my study, especially the research goals and procedures as well as what they were expected to do. They were also encouraged to ask questions about my research. I particularly highlighted the fact that they could not directly benefit from the research so as to keep a neutral position in the research. When they agreed to participate in the study, I showed them the consent form (See Appendix A for consent form) but in a Chinese edition, explained it to them and answered their questions about the consent form. The
consent form was translated by me and the other two researchers. All of us have a good literacy of both English and Chinese and also got a postgraduate degree in education.

**Data Collection.** In qualitative research, data collection is an extensive and laborious activity. In this research, three families are studied when I had interviews with the parents and observations with the whole families. Since the three families have different family schedules and activities, I have observations at altered situations with them. Here the arrangements of observations and interviews with the three families are illustrated in Table 4.2 as follows:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Families with strong capitals</th>
<th>Observations</th>
<th>Interviews</th>
<th>Documents, materials etc.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Family</td>
<td>Two observations at home; one observation at the piano class; one observation of the son’s extracurricular activities.</td>
<td>Three interviews with the mother; Two interviews with the father.</td>
<td>The school paper announcements, the mother’s social media; student’s homework, books, learning materials, and extracurricular assignments.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Families with medium capitals</th>
<th>Observations</th>
<th>Interviews</th>
<th>Documents, materials etc.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Family</td>
<td>One observation at home; one observation at the extracurricular school; one observation of the family outing over weekend</td>
<td>Three interviews with the mother; Two interviews with the father.</td>
<td>The school paper announcements, the mother’s social media; the student’s homework, books, learning materials, and extracurricular assignments.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 4.2. Agenda of data collection
| Families with weak capitals | Three observations at home; one observation in car with the student and the father. | Three interviews with the mother; Two interviews with the father. | The school performance record; the student’s class album, homework, textbooks, learning materials. |

When all the data were collected as mentioned in the above table, I reviewed the data so as to get some general themes (e.g. how parents use their economic, social and cultural capitals to win their children’s educational opportunities) and also found out where new questions and doubts should be addressed (e.g. what they think of children’s cultivated activities). In such a process, some unexpected themes also came out (e.g. three mothers all have full-time mother experiences but for quite different reasons). The last step of data collection was to call or revisited the participants for clarification or more information. For example, I sent messages to the mother of the strong-capital family to confirm how much they had to pay for their children’s piano classes and also talked with parents from the weak-capital family to update the information about their daughter’s graduation and school-transfer to their hometown.

In qualitative studies there are a variety of data sources. Yin (2009) recommended six major forms of data in case study: documents, archival records, interviews, direct observation, participant observation, and physical artifacts. McMillan and Schumacher (2009) suggested five key methods: interviews, observation, questionnaires, document
review, and audiovisual materials. And three data that are both mentioned above were used in this study—interviews, observation and documents.

**Interview.** The essence of interview as a research method is to know the case rather than to know the interviewees (Stake, 2006). Nevertheless, the interviewees’ perspectives are important and the researcher needs to know about the interviewee if he or she wants to have a real understanding of the interview. Therefore, I had informal meetings with the participants before formal interviews. We introduced each other and it helped to establish a familiarity between the participants and me, laying a good foundation for follow-up formal interviews. In order to listen to both voiced of the parents, both parents within a single family were interviewed. I gave three interviews to all the three mothers while only two to the fathers because the fathers were always occupied with their job and they were not as devoted in children’s education as the mothers. Therefore, the mothers contributed most of the information concerning the children’s education, but the fathers did offer much information especially about their beliefs in education.

Moreover, both parents were interviewed separately not as a group. I think an independent interview to a single parent can help me find more of their perspectives and practice as a parent. Even parents within a single family may reveal different ideas and their inconsistent opinions may produce very interesting research questions. If they were interviewed together, some of their voices might be muted considering their unequal status in a family (e.g., a housewife and a husband who has very strong socio-economic capitals to support the whole family). Each interview last from 30-60 minutes, guided by the interview protocol (See Appendix B for Interview Protocol) and specific interview
questions regarding to different research questions and clarification questions from the previous interviews. I used secondary questions to structure the core questions. And such secondary questions in case study can address the issues of the case that you seek to explore and understand (Creswell, 2013). I gave three interviews to each mother but only two interviews to fathers because of the fact that in all the three families, mothers take major charge of the family business and the children’s education while fathers are very busy with their work and are much less involved in children’s education.

During the interview, I used two tips by Yin (2013). One is to give full attention to the interviewee. I had the interviews electronically recorded, and also took some key notes over interviews. It was an important signal to the interviewee that I was listening to him or her. And my note-taking was not expected to be distractive since the purpose of it was simply to take down some new interview questions that came into my mind when my participants were talking or to capture the important information that might not be noted by a digital voice recorder, such as the interviewee’s non-verbal language (e.g., moods, facial expressions, gestures) (Yin, 2013). For example, the mother from the weak-capital family often smiled bitterly or helplessly over interviews while the mother from the medium-capital family tended to be quite proud and excited when she talked about her education beliefs and shared her stories with her son. The other tip I learned from Yin (2013) is to be adaptive. Qualitative study is an interaction with real people and real events (Yin, 2013). As a researcher, I had to be adjusted to the context when something unexpected occurs or another way seems to be more appropriate with the situation. For example, the protocol and the research questions are the same across cases, but the way I ask the questions (e.g., the sequence of questions) or interact with participants (e.g., the
language or words to be used) may be modified. For example, when I talked with the parents from the medium-capital family, I often used the education or press terms. I talked about “boy crisis” and “physical education” with the mother about her education beliefs and how she taught “phonics” and “reading skills” to her son. Also I spoke rather standard Putonghua in the process of our interviews. However, when I interviewed and talked with the parents from the weak-capital family, I tended to use the non-standard Putonghua with kind of local dialect of the place where they lived (and it is also my hometown dialect) so as to make them feel familiar and comfortable. I tried not to use so many terms with them. Instead, I used rather colloquial expressions while we talked.

**Observation.** Observation is another popular data collection method in qualitative inquiry. Before observation, researchers need to further their selection of people, places and events to be included in observation (Stake, 2006). In this study, six parents from three families are primary participants. Their interaction with their children, spouses, or others (e.g. grandparents, teachers, family friends and relatives) were all observed. My observations differ in length, context and purposes between families, depending on the diversity of family activities and children’s extracurricular learning activities (See Table 4.2. Agenda of data collection). Generally, however, observations happened in the following locations where the physical environment and interpersonal interactions were studied: participants’ home, educational settings (e.g., children’s schools), extra-curricular activities and events (e.g., children’s classes in a learning center) and some family events or activities (e.g., family dining in a restaurant) (See Appendix C for observation protocol).
**Documents.** I reviewed some documents related to a) children’s educational opportunities (e.g., a letter of admission by the school or school announcements), and b) children’s achievements (e.g., academic reports, or certificates of children’s extracurricular learning).

**Others.** I also added the three mothers in the study on my social media with their permission so that I can have more updated information of their family lives and their involvement in children’s education. And the social media indeed helped me a lot. For example, by reading the blogs of the mother from the strong-capital mother, I was more informed of the school activities and how the parents in that bilingual school used their capitals to take part in school activities and their children’s education. Moreover, I had a close look at three children’s textbooks and their reading materials at home, which offered a very real picture of how their teachers and parents involved in their reading activities, and eventually allowed me to see parents and schools play a role in children’s education since reading was one of the most important elements in both family and school education. How parents and schools guided and assisted children’s reading is an important perspective to see how they involved in education.

The documents, social media, and other supplementary sources of data really helped to work with interviews and observations to answer my research questions.

**Field logs.** Field logs are not data source, but it is usually kept with data collection. They are documentations of the field work, covering a chronological account of the date and time of the field work and the interaction with participants (McMillan & Schumacher, 2009). The field logs are important for the follow-up data analysis.
procedure. When data are retrieved and reviewed, it requires reading field logs so that researchers can better interpret the data as it is collected (Yin, 2013).

In the data-collection process, researchers need to anticipate new emergent issues or questions, which Creswell (2013) calls “field issues” (p. 147) such as inadequate data, confused answers, or lost information. To solve the problem of the lost information, make sure that data can be easily retrievable and free from damage or loss (Creswell, 2013). In this study, all the interviews were recorded, their transcriptions kept both in paper and in computer together with observation sheets. When problems of inadequate data or confused answers occur, I asked more questions for data or clarification in the next interviews or observations.

Data Analysis

Data collection is followed by data analysis. No computer-assisted data analysis software were used in this study. Given that the study was done in China, Putonghua is the language used throughout the process of data collection and analysis. The transcription was completed in Mandarin, memo and notes were written in Putonghua and the data is coded in Putonghua. English was not used until the final writing-up procedure. If English was used as early as in the transcription stage, something might be lost because of the translation between languages.

Yin (2009) recommended a two-step strategy of data analysis: to identify issues within each single case first, and then to look for those themes common across and beyond the cases. This suggestion really serves this study because it seeks a holistic view across multiple cases on the ground of a comparison between individual cases. Similarly,
Creswell (2013) also offers a two-step procedure to do data analysis in multiple case study as follows:

“When multiple cases are chosen, a typical format is to provide first a detailed description of each case and themes within the case, called a within-case analysis, followed by a thematic analysis across the cases, called a cross-case analysis, as well as assertions or an interpretation of the meaning of the case (p. 101)”.

Both Yin (2009) and Crewell (2013) analyze data in multiple case study by moving from an embedded analysis of each single case toward a holistic analysis across cases. Their two-step procedure lay a solid methodological foundation for my data analysis. When I finished my data collection, I first reviewed my transcription closely and repeatedly so as to be familiar with the data. Then, I had an embedded analysis of each family. For example, I labelling the transcription by using the two triologies, (e.g., education opportunities in school, family and community, and parents’ employment of economic, social and cultural capital) so as to find some major themes. The next step after locating themes is to have a cross-case analysis to find out the similarities and differences between them. For example, I found that all the parents have expectations that their children could attend higher education. However, they showed differences when they talked about in detail what kind of college their children were expected to attend. Parents from the strong-capital family hoped that their children would attend a famous university abroad, the father from the medium-capital family hoped that his son could follow his step to study in a famous college in China while parents from the weak-capital family simply hoped that their daughter could have an opportunity to attend college but have no idea of what type of school their child should go. Also, I labelled some minor
themes if they did not fall in any category of the major themes. For example, I found that all the three mothers have full-time mother experiences, which was actually an unexpected emergent theme from the data. Another example is that all the families were worried about their children’s education but for dissimilar reasons.

Also, I used memo in my data analysis. Memos are some suggestions and records of “any preliminary interpretation of any part of your data” (Yin, 2013, p. 179), which shape the basic conceptualization of the data (Lempert, 2011). It is one of the first and basic creations that can help you in the general data analysis (Yin, 2013). After each interview and observation, I usually wrote up a short memo as a preliminary analysis of them or took down some questions to be further explored. These memos helped me recall the interviews and observations I have done when I later began my coding and drafting for my analysis.

Ronald Hallett’s book *Educational Experiences of Hidden Homeless Teenagers: Living Doubled-Up* (2012b) and Annette Lareau’s book *Unequal Childhoods: Class, Race, and Family Life* (2011) offer inspiration to my descriptive framework of data. I began with a description of each case and then moved on to a cross-case comparison and discussion that gave an answer to my central question. Since one major goal of qualitative inquiry is to “discover and to describe in narrative reporting what particular people do in their everyday lives and what their actions mean to them” (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011, p. 7), the final data analysis of this research was mainly presented in narrative forms with thick descriptions. And Yin (2013) believed that “In most case studies, explanation building occurs in narrative form” (p. 191).
Trustworthiness

Trustworthiness is a concept of logical tests to judge the quality of a research design (U.S. Government Accountability Office, 1990). Lincoln and Guba (1986) offer multiple techniques to meet the standards of trustworthiness in a qualitative study, such as prolonged engagement, member checks, triangulation, and peer review. And in this study, the following techniques were used to ensure trustworthiness: triangulation, member check, thick description but low-inference descriptors.

First, triangulation. Triangulation means using multiple approaches to data collection and data analysis (Curtin & Fossey, 2007; Given, 2008; McMillan & Schumacher, 2009; Yin, 2013) to ensure validity of the research findings (Given, 2008). The underlying assumption is that a variety of data sources and methods can “lead to a singular proposition about the phenomenon being studied” (Mathison, 1988, p. 13). In this study, data were collected in a few forms (i.e., interviews, observations, documents, and the mothers’ social media).

Second, member checking. It is another popular method for qualitative researchers to verify the trustworthiness of their interpretation, but it is also a big concern especially for the budding researchers (Carlson, 2010). It is also referred to as member or respondent validation, indicating that the researcher needs to consult with the participants in order to make sure that his or her interpretation is accurate and consistent with the participants’ true intentions and beliefs (Doyle, 2007; Given, 2008; Merriam, 1998). This method offers a good opportunity for the participants to speak out their opinions (Hallett, 2012a), and can also reduce the researchers’ bias (Doyle, 2007) and enhance creditability of the research (Taylor & Bogdon, 1998). However, it can also be problematic (Hallett,
2012a). For example, some participants may want to correct their grammatical mistakes in the transcripts so as to make their language more decent or accurate (Carlson, 2010), or it may cause a hurt when the researcher have some negative comments on the participants’ academic outcomes (Hallett, 2012a). Therefore, my decision was to present the summary rather than the whole copy of my transcripts to the participants. Any responses (e.g., disagreement) are also an important part of data and should be built in the data collection and data analysis (Decrop, 1999). In my research, the participants did not show any disagreement, but some of them did hesitate, declined or avoided some of the questions. For example, the parents from the strong-capital family avoided answering my question about the person who helped their daughter’s enrollment into the kindergarten.

Third, thick description but low-inference descriptors. Thick description is agreed as an essential element of qualitative inquiries (Carlson, 2010; Creswell, 2013; Marshall & Rossman, 2011; Miles & Huberman, 1994). One of its main purposes is corroboration, that is, “to provide understanding of relevance to other settings” (Carlson, 2010, p. 1104). By providing adequate detailed description, researchers can add more credibility to their studies (Carlson, 2010). With three cases involved in my research, I wanted to offer thick descriptions to effectively and clearly present the commonalities and uniquenesses between them. For example, in order to effectively show the differences between the children’s education opportunities at homes and schools, I gave a detailed description of their homes and schools, including their physical environment and the cultural environment. Of course, I never meant to simply give a large amount of detailed description. It also included participants’ intentions, perspectives and the significance of their actions toward them (Maxwell, 2005; Maxwell & Mittapalli, 2008). Low inference were used at the
same time in my description. This tactic means that “the descriptions are almost literal and that any important terms are those used and understood by the participants” (McMillan & Schumacher, 2009, p. 331). Therefore, I tried to present my description from the perspectives of the participants, on the basis of which, I continued to offer my own discussion and explanations.

**Limitation**

No research can be flawless. This study also has its limitations. First, data are mostly collected by interviews and observations. When interviewed, the parent subjects might give false or incomplete answers or they might polish their answers in order to make them appear more decent or save their face. However, the extended time I spent with them helped to break down barriers and increased my confidence in the accuracy of what they shared. Second, despite the fact that parents recruited in the research are willing to share some of their secrets, such as bribing someone to get a slot in school or get a hukou in hometown, they may not reveal all the truth and details. For example, Xuan’s mother does not want to say too much how Xuan’s younger sister got enrolled in the kindergarten; she simply said “someone helped us”. Therefore, such information is not complete. Last, students’ school performance is an important consideration in this research, but such information is mostly acquired by talks with parents, who are likely to glorify their children’s academic performance. For that reason, students’ homework, school records and other physical materials are reviewed to ensure the information is dependent. Last, three cases are not sufficient to show the whole picture of the Chinese society. The current Chinese society is more stratified than ever before and three families could only serve as cases representative of part of it. However, the cases were carefully
chosen and the rigorous methodological design allowed for a depth of data that allowed me to make meaning of the differences in the student and family experiences.

**Summary**

In the above part, I have outlined the research design—a multiple case study across three families whose children were enrolled into three elementary schools at different levels in Shanghai. With interviews, observations, documents and other data sources, I tried to give a reliable account of how different parental capitals help to create dissimilar educational opportunities for their children.
Chapter 4: One City, Three Tales

Three families were recruited in the research: a strong-capital family, a medium-capital family and a weak-capital family. They were varied in socio-economic status and family backgrounds and their children studied in different types of elementary schools in Shanghai. Living in the same city, they had different tales. Their assorted stories offer realistic and meaningful perspectives into what are happening in today’s China.

Strong-capital family: We are on a different track

The first family is an elite family, a typical entrepreneur family, with strong capitals in all aspects. Children’s access to a quality school is never a problem for this family. Different from other non-local families, they have no worry or concern over their non-citizenship of Shanghai because they have enough capitals to help their children to secure educational opportunities in the city and even acquire high-quality education. And it is rather remarkable that this family is one of those who have begun to seek a new educational track for their children: an international school or a bilingual school as a path leading to their overseas study in the future.

Knowing the family. The first family is a typical entrepreneur family. The couple now lives with three children in a big house in an affluent community. The father, Xu, 46 years old, is a businessman in charge of a middle-sized international trade company with factories located in Shanghai, Zhejiang as well as Cambodia. Graduating with a bachelor degree from a university in Shanghai, he finally resided in the city. Xu is a tall and handsome guy, more than 6 feet tall. He is silent, serious and always neatly-dressed in
suit. The mother, Li, 38 years old, was short but beautiful. Whenever we meet, she wore a
different dress, high-heels, luxury jewelry or fashionable accessories; she looked much
younger than her age with carefully styled dyed hair. Li is a graduate from a secondary
vocational school. After marriage, she gave up her job to become a housewife.

Now the couple have three children—Feng, Xuan and Yun. Feng, the eldest son,
is a child from Xu’s previous marriage. He was a senior high school graduate from a city-
level demonstrative school. In the process of this research, he was busy preparing for his
college application for a school in the United Kingdom. His dream schools were Oxford
and Cambridge. Xuan, the first children participants in this research was the second child
of the family. Over the research, he was a Grade-2 student from a bilingual school in
Shanghai. Yun, the youngest child, was a four-year-old girl who just started her
kindergarten at that time. Li’s parents lived with them in order to help to take care of their
grandchildren. The family had two drivers. One drove Xu to commute between home and
the factory or pick up the business guests, customers and visitors to the factory. The other
was mainly responsible for the family, especially driving children for schooling and
extracurricular classes. Usually this driver needed to drive Yun to her kindergarten in the
morning and on the way he dropped Xuan off at his school bus pick-up station. In the
afternoon, he had to pick up the children. On Friday and Sunday afternoons, he was also
responsible for driving Feng to and from school. Driving three children for different
after-school classes and training was a most important part of his job. When the drivers
were not available, the mother would drive the children by herself because of the
schedule conflict between children.
The family has properties in different districts in Shanghai and other provinces. However, they live in a villa in an affluent community in Minghang District, on the border of the suburban area and the downtown area. The villa is located in an expensive residential neighborhood. Each entrance was guarded by security guards. To ensure the security of its residents, it has a specific pedestrian system separated from vehicle systems. The pedestrian system is high above the ground where the vehicle goes through, so people can walk freely on the special pedestrian paths. Each villa has its individual underground garage and pedestrian path leading to its gate. At the gate of their villa, there is a fenced mini-garden, with flowers, bamboo and a swing next to a set of outdoor chairs and tables.

Walk into the garden, and a big villa comes into sight. It is a four-story building with the total net size about 700 ㎡. The house was valued about ¥ 15,000,000 or $2,370,000 in 2011 when the average housing price in Shanghai is 22,413 CNY/㎡ or 3550 USD/㎡. (However, the price has risen to over 38,000 CNY/㎡ in 2016). The US dollar RMB exchange rate in 2011 was about 6.313. The house is armed with advanced modern facilities. It has an individual power supply and water purifying system. Each floor is equipped with cameras in different corners, connecting to the supervising center of the community and the mobile terminals. Whatever happens in the house, the parents can know via Internet on mobile phone or computer. The building also has a lift going through different floors.

The basement is for entertainment, including a large display shelf lined with varied wine and alcohol, a pool table, a room for a live-in nanny, as well as a subsided court where a small landscape fountain stand in the middle surrounded by trees, flowers and
vegetables grown by Li’s mother. The first floor includes a living room, a dining room, an open kitchen, a close kitchen, a balcony and a room for Yun and her grandmother. The living room is an expansive space for family get-together and activities. In the center of the living room, stand a set of leather sofa and a tea table placed with assorted toys, Yun’s Lego and Barbies as well as her e-books. A huge oil painting is hanged high on the wall, above an artificial chimney place ornamented with some china vases and crystal artwork. Opposite to the painting, across the room, there are a piano and a long shelf displaying Xuan’s large Lego projects, transformers, a helicopter and a police car. Each large Lego set is valued over CNY 1,000 or USD 158 in China.

The living room has a staircase leading to the second floor. By the staircase, Yun has two children-sized study desks, one for drawing and the other for playing. Under the desks are boxes of toys, mainly Yun’s Duplo Lego blocks and art set such as crayons, paper and scissors. On the second floor, there are three rooms for Feng, Xuan and the parents. Each room has an independent restroom. The master bedroom is a suite, with a bedroom, a study room, a coatroom and a restroom. The island-shaped coatroom is filled with Li’s and her husband’s dresses and suits. On the open wardrobe are luxury bags and shoes. In the middle stands a table for accessories and jewelry. Xuan’s room is much simpler. In the main room stand a bed, bedside table, a desk with a chair, a bookshelf and a rug close to his bed. Attached to his room is a small restroom for him only. On his shelf are the textbooks or readers. His brother’s room has a similar layout to Xuan’s. The corridor is dotted with tubs banked with flowers.
The third floor is the roof terrace where the family can have barbecue or hang out their clothes and dry them. A convertible roof allows for a party or reading place even when it rains.

**Educational opportunities in school.** Xuan was not enrolled in a regular primary school program. He attended River School, a bilingual school, which seems to be a common choice for the families with strong capitals in China today. His parents believed that bilingual schools could offer students more educational opportunities with its double-track educational program and curriculum, abundant school activities and resources and good quality of teaching. Children such as Xuan seemed to be on a track divergent from their Chinese peers. Their education experiences in China were seen as a preparation for their overseas study in the future.

**Program and curriculum.** Students in River at elementary school and junior high school levels could take both international courses and meanwhile had some Chinese courses to meet the basic requirements of Chinese compulsory education. To better prepare its students for their oversea study, the senior high school section in River had successfully signed programs of college preparatory education, and had been accredited by The College Board in US for its AP (Advanced Placement) courses.

Since his first day in this school, Xuan had begun to have a similar curriculum as students in US. Every course was taught in English by a native teacher. Meanwhile, he needed to attend some Chinese classes. Xuan’s bilingual courses required a much heavier workload than that of his Chinese peers on a regular track. Compared with the regular curriculum of his Chinese peers, Xuan’s curriculum seemed to be more challenging. However, these courses offered more opportunities to learn and explore, laying a solid
foundation for his future study. For example, one of his courses, Society and Science, was not available in Chinese curriculum for primary school students. There was merely a similar course Science but without Society. Actually such a course means a lot for young students because it helps them to establish a fundamental concept of social science and natural science such as physics, chemistry, biology and sociology, the two main fields students are going to work for in their college. Li described it as “a comprehensive and include-all course” because Xuan has to read “so much as to pass the course”. Xuan failed once in this course. Then in order to catch up, his teacher helped to make a reading list for him. Xuan devoted much time reading and teaching himself, and got a better score in the next exam. His mother believed that such a challenging program would surely be more burdensome for children; however, it was undeniable that it motivated Xuan and developed his potential. Therefore, it is “a sweet burden” in the mother’s words.

Both parents expressed their educational belief that good education should urge students to overcome difficulties and move upward. Xuan’s bilingual program could bestow unique advantages over the students on the regular academic track because he could build strong language skills and protect his exploration spirit and some life experiences that might mean a lot for his future career and life. For any student on a regular Chinese track, much of his or her time is expended in reciting texts, repeatedly doing math problems and practicing English grammar. However, Xuan’s courses require intensive and extensive reading, critical thinking and peer cooperation. Take his English class as an example. When his Chinese peers begin to learn the English alphabet, Xuan has begun to write short English sentences and learn English grammar. In school, Xuan had to express himself in English. Even when he asked help from their Chinese assistant
teacher, he would mostly be responded in English. Even though sometimes Xuan would complain a little about that since he was not very good at English, he was forced to use more English than his Chinese peers in a regular school. Furthermore, teachers in his bilingual school followed the American teaching beliefs and they really thought highly of reading in their teaching. Many of his native teachers would recommend reading lists. For example, his English teacher recommended to the parents a set of Dr. Seuss readers published by Random House. Each reader had about 250 to 370 pages. And his history teacher once asked them to choose and read one or two books of her reading lists. One of them was about the Pilgrims and the Mayflower, which was actually part of the history syllabus for Chinese junior and senior high school students. The compulsory English-speaking climate, the heavy reading assignments and the English culture rich syllabus helped Xuan improve quickly in English.

During his enrollment interview, the interviewer was not that satisfied with his English. Luckily, his math was comparatively better to offset the concern. However, his school program supported his English learning climate and his teachers gave professional instruction, building more self-confidence in him. The deeper truth is that the more inclusive schedule ensured Xuan’s access to more cognitively prepared subjects and the bilingual curriculum and prepared him to be more linguistically advantaged and culturally minded than his Chinese peers on a regular education track.

**School resources and activities.** As a rising star among the bilingual schools in Shanghai, River School enjoys a new campus with advanced facilities and affluent education resources, making it physically possible for its students to have more access to education opportunities. The school campus is built adjacent to a large-scale well-off
community. It covers an area of 7.4 acres with the total floor area reaching 30,000 m². Its green area makes up more than 40% of its total, making it a garden school. The teaching buildings and facilities are equipped with first-class international standards, such as multi-media classrooms, wide campus network coverage and advanced digital campus administration system. The facilities include classrooms, library, labs, gyms, indoor swimming pool, piano room, and playground.

While the school facilities physically ensure students’ opportunities to learn and explore, the school activities allow students’ learning opportunities in an easy and light atmosphere. River school provides a series of consistent school activities across grades. For primary school students, the school is committed to helping students cultivate good behavior norms, living and learning habits, and healthy qualities. The school activities for primary school students cover a wide spectrum of themes including safety, communication, good habits, gratitude, charity, social experience and participation and the like. Based on these various themes, the school develops a series of activities for students appropriate for their age: fire escape drill, charity bazaar, talent show, sports meeting, fun games, parent-child reading, egg protection activity, my mailbox, pen-pal making activity and so on.

One of the impressive activities is the charity bazaar. I first learned about this activity by reading Li’s blog and then I asked her for further information. This is a campus activity involving students of all ages. Li described it as the most exciting activity of the year, lively bustling with “amazing things and people”. Xuan was still excited with that activity when we talked about it later, “I can see a lot of new things. Someone brought a robot, a Lego robot, someone showed his art works and someone sold
his old books. And finally we have a competition between classes to collect the highest amount of money.” In order to sell more things for more money, children and parents tried their best to attract people to buy from them. In one of Li’s photos on her blog, I saw a chef surrounded by a big crowd; the chef was making puff, the very rare and impressive swan-shaped puff. Li told me that the swan puff was the most popular products in the charity bazaar. One family invited some chefs from their restaurants to make the swan puff. Their restaurants are famous for that. All the students and parents were fascinated with that. They sold a lot of puff that day. And that class raised the highest amount of money. The charity bazaar was kept as a tradition in the school. It was believed to be an essential method to cultivate students’ humanity so as to prepare them as good citizens for the future world. Meanwhile, students’ involvement in the process of preparing for the charity bazaar gave them good opportunities to learn skills of leadership, cooperation, organization, communication, and the like, all of which meant a lot for people in such a modern and global world. The educational goal of River is more than a good exam taker; it aims to cultivate a good and competence citizen for the world.

River School has a culturally diverse population. The school activities sometimes allowed students to show their cultures on campus. One Saturday evening, I received an urgent voice message from Li for help. She asked me to recommend some stores where she could buy Han costume, a type of Chinese silk robe, and the traditional Chinese clothes of Han nationality, because Xuan’s school was going to have a Culture Week the next week and all the students are supposed to show their cultures. She had looked for that almost the whole day around People’s Square, the most popular shopping center in Shanghai, but found nothing. I helped her get one from a shopping website.
The Culture Week, as well as other activities, was well prepared and carefully organized. Li shared the schedule with me. As suggested by the schedule, students have different activities to learn and explore cultures: languages, costumes, hairstyles, and food. Bringing real culture into classroom allowed students to know about the culture diversity. What’s more, as Xuan said, they were told that cultures should be respected though they are different. Putting on his Han costume, Xuan went to school proudly.

Many of his classmates, especially those non-Chinese, were very interested in this exotic robe, quite different from theirs. They asked Xuan many questions about his costume the first day, and Xuan expended much time and efforts answering their questions the next day. He searched the Internet, read some books and made calls to some family friends who might have good knowledge of it. Therefore, the school activity extends the education opportunity from in-class time to off-class time and creates more opportunities for students’ self-teaching and self-regulated learning.

Xuan’s mother had very contrasting attitudes towards the schools activities. On one hand, she complained that the school activities took up too much of Xuan’s time and sometimes disturbed the family schedule. On the other hand, she thought highly of the school activities since they helped Xuan learn a lot that could never be taught in the classroom. More importantly, all these activities offered children opportunities to learn, explore and share between each other and between their families.

Peer resources. Xuan’s school offers him a more inclusive and challenging curriculum than his Chinese peers, a good variety of school activities to learn and explore, and even his classmates and their families make good resources for him to acquire educational opportunities. Born in similar elite families, Xuan’s classmates and school
peers had more resources to share. One day in summer vacation on his way to math
classes, Xuan asked me to have a guess of his dream destination. I did not get the correct
answer and he told me that was Africa. I asked him why it was Africa and he explained
that one boy in his class shared his travelling experience in Africa in one share-and-tell
period. Most of Xuan’s classmates would have family travelling home and abroad every
year; therefore, it was a routine for them to share their travelling in and out of class.

“Can you image that you can see real giraffes and other animals running in the
wild?” he was very excited about that and turned to his mother. “Maybe I can make a
plan flying for Africa, but not for this year, because we will fly to Britain to see Feng’s
new school. Maybe some years later when you are elder,” Li replied. Xuan was a little bit
disappointed that he could not visit Africa. Therefore, his mother tried to comfort him,
telling him that he had actually travelled so many places (e.g., Hong Kong, Taiwan,
Australia, Cambodia, Japan, New Zealand and Sanya). It was not that common for a boy
at his age in China to have travelled so many places. However, he responded that his
classmates travelled far more than him, and he really admired their knowledge of the
world, the place, the people and the language.

Resources are not only shared between students, but also between their parents and
families. They share their economic, social and cultural advantages, collectively creating
multiplying educational opportunities for their children. On Li’s blog, I saw pictures of
Xuan’s visit to the Coca-Cola factory. In one teaching period, students discussed
production in factory and the production line. And one parent of Xuan’s classmates
offered the opportunity, inviting all the students to visit the factory of Coca-Cola. “He is
the leader of the factory”, Li explained. Thanks to the parent, Xuan and his classmates
were allowed to visit the storehouse, the production line, and the offices. One technician even explained to the class the whole process of production over their visiting trip. Finally all the children enjoyed a can of fresh Coca-Cola.

Li told me that many of Xuan’s teachers believed that children should learn in real life situations, so they often go out of the campus. However, students’ access to any institution or establishment was a truly challenging in Chinese context, especially those young children. Disturbance of daily routine and children’s safety are often a big concern. Therefore, in normal cases, children are excluded from these places, but if someone knows anyone in the important position, access will be possible. In River, students’ parents mostly work in important intuitions or take high positions, a symbol of their strong social capitals, making it easier for the parents to obtain more education opportunities for their children.

**Quality of school education.** School quality is always one of the biggest concerns when parents choose schools for children. It also guarantees students’ educational opportunities. In Xuan’s case, the school philosophy, the staff and his enrollment interview were all good evidence to see the quality of his school education.

As a bilingual school, River seeks an educational pattern combining the strengths of traditional Chinese education and the international education. It believes in the power of diverse and humanitarian curriculum in building students’ critical thinking, innovative competence and communication skills and tries to cultivate the citizens with international perspectives. The internationally defined educational beliefs lay a solid foundation for its international vision of education and highly selective and diverse courses, which guarantees that students can have access to manifold educational content.
The main teaching body in Xuan’s school is composed of native English-speaking teachers and Chinese teachers. The English/Chinese teacher ratio is one to one. The foreign teaching team mostly graduates from renowned schools and have TEFL (Teaching English as a Foreign Language) certificates. The Chinese group are experts in teaching bilingual courses and half of them have master degrees or beyond. Many of its Chinese teachers come from one of the top three schools in Shanghai. They used to be the leading teachers of each subject (e.g., Chinese, Math, Physics and Physics) in their former schools. Li was very satisfied with the Chinese teaching staff because they were the best teachers in Shanghai, especially in Math and they can help Xuan a lot with these subjects. Sometimes she really admired Xuan, “the children have dream teachers” since he could enjoy such quality teaching resources. And good teachers are the cornerstone of education because good quality of education guarantees the quality of educational opportunities.

School enrollment. School enrollment is an important way for the school to screen all applicants and choose those candidates they need. The high requirement of the school enrollment is an indication of the school quality. All the applicants for River School have to take part in their enrollment interview. Take Xuan’s interview for an example, the whole interview continued for more than two hours and involved all the main subjects in Chinese elementary education. The interview questions for Xuan’s enrollment in River included three parts as follows:

- Chinese. It included a) reading stories, nursery rhymes and poems, b) describing pictures, c) answering questions and d) riddle games.
- Mathematics. It included a) calculation within 20, b) simple sequence of
numbers, c) finding a pattern, d) reading a clock, e) counting shapes, f) percentage and h) application problems.

- **English.** It included a) self-introduction in English (i.e., name, age and favorite color), b) listening and dancing with an English song, and then explaining some words in it, c) listening to an English story and doing multiple choices according to what you have heard, d) describing pictures in English, and e) word spelling according to pictures.

- **Arts.** It included a) playing with flakes pieces (i.e., interlocking plastic set), b) coloring and c) dance.

The complex and well-planned interview helped the school to screen the students who were fairly competitive in all respects according to their standards. For example, candidates are required to describe pictures in English. This was not an easy task for a 7-year-old non-English speaker. Therefore, their enrollment rate is very low. However, this is an important measure to ensure River’s educational quality by screening out those students who are more academically prepared for school work. However, if the families had never sent their children to any academic and artistic extracurricular activities, children usually failed in these interviews. Xuan’s mother even told me that there was a rising industry in the city. There were some special training centers or companies that could helped children to prepare for their admission interviews. Young graduates from kindergartens make up the major body of customers. Some companies could even offer the special service to prepare students for a particular school they tried to sign up for. Of course, the expenditure is enormous. However, she regretted that she knew that too late
but she might register for her daughter when she graduated from the kindergarten in the future.

Moreover, the school enrollment asks for students’ application form with all the family and parents’ information. Li often made fun of such an application that the present application process is similar to a political examination. It requires information of the student, his parents and even his grandparents.

**Educational opportunities at home.** Different from schooling, education is a much broader concept, referring to practice in schools, at homes and elsewhere. Home offers educational opportunities by providing physical resources, parents’ instruction and family time.

**Physical resources.** As described aforementioned, Xuan and his family live in a luxury house. It is more than well-decorated; it physically ensures Xuan’s opportunities to develop his learning in all aspects. The piano in the living room is a necessity for him to practice and improve his music skills. However, piano is not that cheap and its maintenance requires a consistent investment of the family. The flowers and the vegetables grew by Xuan’s grandma improves his knowledge of gardening and plants. Xuan’s Legos at the displaying shelf encourage his creation.

Among all these physical resources, a separate and quiet study place and a collection of books mean more for a young student. Xuan’s room is located on the second floor, next to his parents. Since the living room is spacious enough for the whole extended family to share their family time, their bedrooms are mostly for their individual use. Therefore, Xuan’s bedroom is rarely intruded by others when he is busy with his
schoolwork. A quiet and separate room creates spatial opportunities for Xuan to develop his learning and self-teaching.

Similarly, a collection of books at home create a cultural environment for the family to read and to learn. Books are a cultural symbol of the family. They create an invisible network for the family to share, communicate and learn. On the family’s bookshelf there are business newspapers and magazines, management books, the favorite type for an entrepreneur like Xu. Also, in Feng’s and Xuan’s bedrooms, they have their favorite books on shelves and Yun has a reading pen, the Leapfrog Reader. When the parents are not available for paired book-reading, Yun will turn to her Leapfrog. Li was especially satisfied with this product, believing that it was a good substitute for a tutor because “Yun has learned a lot by using it.” The mother really appreciated the use of technology because she believed that “I could not help children’s study as you do because I did not go to the college” but the use of technology products could make up for that. Although these products are expensive, they deserve that price. Indeed, for many times when I visited the family, Yun sat by the tea table in the living room, using her Leapfrog reader and read after it.

Physical resources are an important prerequisite for children’s learning, particularly at home. It creates opportunities for them to learn. And the advanced development of science and technology brings in more learning opportunities for children at home by offering them learning devices such as reading pens, iPads, and laptops. However, it only happens when essential physical devices or technology products are available.
**Parents as resources.** Physical resources create a possibility for children to learn. However, it is the family members, especially the parents who help the possibility develop into reality. Parents can have a cultural impact on children and siblings also have the significant modeling power within them.

One day Xu was very proud to tell me that Feng was probably going to inherit his footsteps to be a businessman because Feng was considering economics as his major in UK. Feng’s interest in economics has something to do with the family books. In much pride, Xu once mentioned that when Feng was very young, he developed great interest in his father’s newspapers and economic magazines. When he was over 13, he began to seriously read these magazines and talked with his father over the present political and economic issues. Over the family visits when Feng was preparing for his journey to UK, he discussed with his father how Theresa May, the new Britain prime minister, and her strong stances on immigration would influence Feng’s future study and his possible job opportunity there. Whenever the family goes abroad for travelling, Feng would buy such magazines as *The Economist*. Li sometimes jokes that she could not understand how a teenage boy can have such an interest and she even offered a metaphor to explain that, “Xu’s books and newspapers dropped a seed in Feng’s brain, and it developed.”

As a college graduate in 1970s, Xu is academically outstanding among his peers. As a language major, he was an expert in both English and Japanese. Therefore, he could help Xuan with his English. Once Li received calls from Xuan’s teacher that Xu needed to work harder in his English. Therefore, the father began to teach Xuan by himself. Whenever he was not on business, he would spend at least one hour teaching Xuan English every day. And it did work. Xuan began to improve in English. Li also shared
some stories of those “model mothers” around her or in Xuan’s class by telling how these mothers support their children’s education by teaching them English, Chinese poems, Olympic mathematics and so on. The adults in the family all agree that a well-educated parent would create more educational opportunities for the children.

As for Li, she never went to college whereby she cannot help with Xuan’s schoolwork as much as Xu. However, as a housewife and fulltime mother, she has enough time to take the children between different extra-curricular classes and training activities. For example, at the beginning years of Xuan’s one-to-one piano classes, Li had to sit in the corner of the classroom, listening to the teacher’s instruction. Returning home, Li had to schedule Xuan’s piano practice and more importantly, she had to sit beside him and remind him of the teacher’s words. It is a regular practice of piano learning for a young student in Chinese context that teachers teach in class and parents tutor after class. Actually it was never easy for Li since she had never been trained in music. Anyway, she had such experience when Feng was young and learned playing piano. And soon she was going to do that again because Yun has also registered for her piano classes.

Evidently, however, Xuan was not that for piano. One day on his way to his match class, when his mother reminded himself he was soon going to have his piano grading test he softly complained, “I think I have too many classes. I only need tennis.” However, his mother refused his idea, “You are going to have band-8 test. And when you finish your band-10 test, you can have no more classes. Most of your classmates learn playing piano or other music instrument. Can you name anyone who does not?” Xuan became silent. Li said that Xuan sometimes doubted the necessity of piano class, but she would insist on that, “I told him that I never mean to have a pianist in my family. I want him to
learn as much as possible because our family can support him. How many children in this world dream of playing piano and can never touch it? I want him to have some interesting and meaningful habits. Last time when I joked that when he had his children, he would do the same. Then he laughed.” Indeed, piano practice is now a cultural and educational symbol in China. The higher band students can pass in piano grading test, the better chance that they can be enrolled in a good school.

Another similar situation occurs when Xuan went for his off-class math training. Li also needed to sit with all the other parents at the rear of the classroom, listening and even took notes in order to give more instruction after class. And this will be further discussed in Chapter 4.1.4.1 extra-curriculum activities.

As a parent, Xu offers his knowledge as a cultural capital to subconsciously influence his children or give direct instruction in schoolwork. Li offers her time to help with children’s education, especially in their extra-curricular classes. More time to involve in children’s education is actually a symbol of economic or social capital. It reminds me of Li’s joke in a complaining tone that the dream parents wanted by many elite schools are a duo—a businessman father who offer money, and a well-educated housewife mother who offer time. In fact, such a dream pair parents suggests a combination of economic capital, social capital and cultural capital.

**Family time & travelling.** Parents teach children, creating a direct educational opportunity. However, sometimes, more education occurs in an indirect and subconscious manner, for example, family time.

With Li’s permission, I read her QQ and Wechat, the Chinese Facebook or Twitter. They are the most popular online socializing networks in China today. Most of
Li’s blog are about her family time with children, such as the family celebration for Feng’s academic achievements, the family’s participation in Xuan’s and Yun’s school activities, e.g. the fancy party themed bubble dreams, the costume party and in friends’ get-togethers. In the pictures, children were all so happy and what’s more, children can acquire something out of class in those circumstances. For example, in one family friend’s birthday party, a magician and a clown were invited for a fancy show. All the children, including Xuan, can acquire a cultural taste or habit then, which also happen in other similar occasions when Xuan went visiting museums or galleries with the family. Despite a tight schedule, Xuan was often brought for some popular performance. When he was younger, Xuan was taken to see pantomimes based on fairy tales. And as a bigger boy, he would usually attend some concerts, symphonies and art exhibition with his parents. Xu hoped that Xuan could have a good culture taste to become a complete person while Li believed that such a taste is “a bridge” to lead Xuan to an elite circle as his father.

Family travelling is a special form of family time. When the family went travelling abroad, Xuan was encouraged by his parents to ask for directions and buy food in the supermarkets, which create opportunities for using his English. We met for the first interview two days merely before Chinese spring festival. Li suggested that day because it was the only time we could meet. “We have just returned from Taiwan. We spent a week there. And we are going to spend the spring festival in Singapore.” When I was invited into the living room, I found that four suitcases were left there, three unpacked and one not yet. The family’s clothes were hanged on one large clothes rack in the balcony. Li said sorry to me because she had no time to put everything in order. Li led me
to take a seat on the sofa, beginning our interview with small talks. Therefore, I asked for their travel to Taiwan. Evidently Li was very excited with the travel and also she mentioned that travel was “a very meaningful method for her children to acquire some knowledge missing in their curriculum”. She has a good faith in the influence of travelling upon her children. “When Xuan was only three years old, he could recognize all the logos of the airliners at the airport, even the international airliners.” Li was very proud of her son, “This is the reason why we travel around the world with the kids at least twice every year.”

To conclude, parents’ economic capital makes family time real or possible because it is an indication that parents do not need more working time to support the family. Then their social and cultural capitals make it meaningful. Parents’ strong social capital means more opportunities to make an entrance into socializing occasions where children can acquire socializing skills and knowledge of good manners and dress code. Similarly, parents’ strong cultural capital denotes that they know what is the appropriate culture to be taught to their children and they are competent to create opportunities for their children to see, feel and learn about such culture.

**Educational opportunities in community.** For Xuan, his education never stops out of his school or home. It continues in his community, which refers to his school community and his home community.

**Extra-curriculum activities.** A full schedule with various extra-curricular activities seems to be a symbol of education for children in this family. Sometimes when Li and I talked about Xuan’s schedule and activities, Li would say “it’s as same as Feng”. Therefore, it was one of the focuses in my study. Xuan’s extra-curricular activities are
mostly related to three domains: academic learning, art training and sports practice. I spent two afternoons with Xuan and his mother to see his off-class subject learning and art training over the school days. Also I spent a whole day during the summer vocation with Xuan and his mother Li shuttling between their home and Xuan’s extra-curricular activities. These experiences are really impressive.

The August in 2016 is much hotter than ever before. Xuan had to get up as early as 6:30 because his to-do-list was long and full. At 7:30, I was picked up by the family driver at a subway station. Xuan and Li were already in the car. They said hello to me and continue their breakfast in the car because they are too busy in the morning. At 8:00, we arrived in a five-star hotel, which was adjacent to River School. Arriving at the entrance, Li took several bags out of the car, one bag for Xuan’s clothes and sportswear, one for his food and water and the other for his books and stationery. While the driver drove to the parking lot, we took the lift to the third floor where Xuan was going to have his tennis class. He changed his clothes and entered one room where three boys were waiting for him to join. At 8:15, the coach came in and class began.

Li and I sat outside the room. She said Hello to some people around us; they were also the parents who sent children for sports in this hotel and know each other. From their conversation, I knew that many of the children practicing sports here were students from River School. Since the hotel is next to the school, it offers a promotion price to students in this school. Most of the time, the parents talked about their children’s academic work and exchange the information of the popular extra-curricular classes.

45 minutes later, Xuan came out. His clothes were drenched with sweat. He took a 30-minute break, sitting beside us, but soon he found another boy to join him. This boy
was also a student in River. They are in the same grade, but in different classes. The boy said that he was going to spend the vacation in Canada but his mother couldn’t go with him since she was going to have a new baby. And they talked about their school mates who now seem to enjoy their vacations abroad all over the world. It was really interesting to see that all the young children there called each other by their English names and sometimes had a mixed Chinese-English talk. Obviously, their language began to mix, and their lifestyle was also prone to westernization. However, it was normal for students in a bilingual school where Chinese and foreign students mingle.

After the break, Xuan and the boy went for the dressing room to put on their swimming suits. When they head for the class, Li had more talks with me. Then I knew that all the families I saw that day had at least two babies. “Now the government allowed two babies and we have no economic problems. Why not have more children?” Li said.

When Xuan finished his sports classes and changed his clothes, we were taken to another district for his math class. On the way, the drive stopped and we quickly finished lunch together in a restaurant and headed for the next training center. It was a new teaching campus of TAL Education Group. It was one of the most popular after-class schools to offer academic classes in China. Starting merely in year 2007, it now has more than 3000 teachers. It had a highly appreciated name for its math teaching and training. TAL is its slogan, standing for “Tomorrow Advanced Life”. “It’s really hard for parents to get a position for children in this training school because there is a long waiting list of students who want to study here.” Li informed me. Therefore, I asked Li how Xuan could have a position here. She answered that a friend suggested this new teaching campus of TAL to her. Since it was new, it was not popular yet and fewer parents knew about it. Of
course, “you have to find someone who can introduce you to the school or it is very likely that your application will be declined by the school,” Li added.

Similar to Xuan’s piano classes, his math classes requires parents’ attendance in the classroom. When children sit in the classroom for their math classes, they are not supposed to take notes because it might distract them; instead, one of their parents would usually take a seat in the rear of the classroom, listening to the teacher and taking notes for their children. It is believed to help students’ revision of their math classes after class. It is better if parents can tutor their children to finish the assignments.

Although I had known a lot of the school, I was still surprised by everything I saw in the school. The two-floor building was crowded with classroom. The corridor was very narrow, bustling with parents and young children. I was very lucky that day because Li needed to meet a friend near the school that day and asked me to sit in the classroom as a substitute for her. Finally I got a seat among parents: fathers, mothers and even grandparents. Before the class, some children were busy finishing their lunch, working on their assignments or chatting with each other while their parents were using smartphones or talking. Similar to the conversation in the hotel, the talks between parents I hear here were also mostly about children’s examination and academic work. Parents were busy exchanging information of children’s exams and after-class education. In one corner, a mother was even scolding her son for his mistakes in the exam paper. She was very angry because she took careful notes of the teacher’s explanation last time but her son still failed to understand.

Some minutes later, the teacher came into, a man in his early 30s. The parent next to me murmured that this was a very popular teacher and it was even more difficult to
register for his class. The teacher gave lectures on thinking training. The whole class lasts three hours. Some parents were bored and got out for smoking, but more parents keep on listening and notes-taking. I tried to take some notes for Xuan, but it was not that easy. For example, one of the problems is to present three different groups of three-dimensional graphics and ask students to choose the one that would be different when it unfolded. Each graphic was actually composed of more than 15 small cubes. The teacher gave the problem, students gave answers, and then the teachers gave the correct answer and some comments. Soon he proceeded to the next problem, parents buried in notes, writing on their thick notebooks. When Li returned, she replaced me and sat in the classroom.

After the class, Xuan was driven to a shopping mall where he first had a cup of hot milk tea and then bought some books in a bookstore for his English and Math. When I was dropped off by them, it was after 6:30. Xuan spent the whole 12 hours out commuting between extra-curricular learning and activities that single day. And, it is only one of the regular days for Xuan’s vacation.

Sometimes, Li and Xu were very sorry for Xuan because he could not run around in the wild as his parents did in their childhood. Therefore, Li made arrangements for Xuan’s trip to Japan at the end of his vacation as “kind of compensation”. However, they believed that they would not give up this until one day they left mainland China. They used to have a plan to move to Australia, but for some reasons, they gave up. And now they decided to move to Hong Kong China where “children can have a better natural and linguistic environment and have an easier access for universities in UK”, explained Xu. Therefore, they sent Xuan to River School to make him linguistically and culturally better
prepared for his life and study in Hong Kong and UK in the future. Actually they are very traditional Chinese parents. They deeply agreed that the purpose of hard work and money earning is definitely for children. Even though Xuan’s grandmother said that the father had earned money enough for his children and grandchildren, Xu believed that he should work harder in order to help the three children to have the best education in the world. In their case, parents’ capitals are unquestionably seen as tools to get good education.

**Interpersonal network.** Xuan’s home community is mainly composed by the family friends and relatives as well as its neighbors. They offer him academic supports, educational advice and enrollment opportunities.

Xuan did not live on campus, so he returned home every day. From Monday until Tuesday, he did not go to any training or learning centers. He usually went home and did his homework. However, he needed someone to help him with his English each day to improve his English. When Xu is not on business and available, he will take the role.

However, now he has a new factory in Cambodia; he has to fly there and stayed one week each month. And even when he is in Shanghai, he has to attend business banquet or dinner parties where Chinese businessmen prefer to achieve business. Therefore, he gets one of his classmates in college, Mr. Li, to take care of Xuan’s English in his place. His friend is an experienced English teacher who has worked for more than twenty years in a city-level demonstrative middle school, the exact one that Xuan’s elder brother attends now. Sometimes, Li drives him to their house or sometimes Mr. Li takes a taxi there and the family pays for the money. When his tutoring time is over, Li will drive him back. Surely, the couple has to pay for each tutoring period. And to invite an experienced English teacher from a demonstrative school for one-to-one tutorship is not easy, even
with payment. Therefore, to show their thankfulness, the couple often buys gifts to Mr. Li when they fly abroad. Even when Xu and Mr. Li are both unavailable, Xuan could turn to his aunt who taught English in junior high school. Xuan’s mother would take pictures of his homework and sent them to his aunt, which could always well answered by her with both answers and detailed explanations.

The most important thing is that Xu’s elite circle could help him to obtain more educational opportunities by joining their social capitals or connecting their guanxi. For example, Xuan’s position in the popular Math training school, TAL (Tomorrow Advanced Life), was “introduced” by a family friend who also helped Xuan get a good seat in the class. Xuan’s seat was in third row; it’s opposite to the teacher and the screen. It was in the exact core of the classroom, an ideal seat for teacher-student communication. Besides, the enrollment information and interview opportunity in River were also “introduced” by another family friend.

Even for Feng and Yun, their school enrollment was largely correlated to their father’s social capital. For example, Feng’s enrollment in his present senior high school was not possible if without Mr. Li’s help. Feng’s school was a demonstrative school and its enrollment was strict. However, as a teacher in that school, Mr. Li was given the priority to introduce one student in their school’s enrollment test. As an old friend of this family, Mr. Li gave Feng a try. Feng was given an opportunity to sit for an enrollment test and got an excellent grade. Then he became a student in that school. Actually, anyone who wanted to sit for the enrollment test for Mr. Li’s school has to submit their detailed self-profile first and they could only be admitted for the test when their profiles are
reviewed and screened. Without the help of Mr. Li, Feng had to follow such an official procedure and there is a chance that he might fail in the screening stage.

Similarly, Yun’s kindergarten is a public school. It has a very high reputation in Shanghai but charges much less than the private schools. Therefore, it claimed that all the candidates had to be chosen by the enrollment lottery procedure on computer. In other words, all the students who wanted to be enrolled in this kindergarten had to be decided by the computer system just like buying a lottery. However, for Yun, she got the admission letter without such lottery procedure, and she even got it before the admission letters were delivered to those involved in admission lottery procedure. “Yun’s father asked much help in his circle of friends, and luckily it is done at the end, at the cost of some money.” Li told me honestly, but unwilling to reveal how much they spent on that or talk in detail. Actually she admitted that “it was not rare in the present society and many of my friends do the same”. Indeed, competition of the good educational resources is always a war of money and guanxi. Parents’ capitals work a lot in that sense.

Summary. China has witnessed an increasingly growing group of oversea students over the past decades and the age of the oversea students has decreased quickly. Different from their precedents who mostly further their postgraduate study abroad, many of the students today even choose an international school or bilingual school from their elementary schools or even kindergartens to prepare for their oversea study better and earlier. When the decision is made, these children are on another track, diverge from their peers at regular local schools, because Chinese college entrance examination required students’ study of Chinese high school curriculum. Xuan is one of them. This is also a good way for the non-local families to avoid the educational obstacles caused by hukou.
Medium-capital family: We are catching up.

This family is typical of non-local families. Both parents came from a faraway and less developed region, but their diligence helps them to be academically or professionally successful, which led to a decent job and life in Shanghai. Their diligence and education help them to achieve upward social mobility education of their children is a big concern for them because their personal experience implants a belief in power of education. This family experienced a big chance over the research. They made a decision to transfer their son from Happy School, a good public school, to a renowned private school Noble School. Although they do not have capitals as strong as parents in the first family, they try their best and invest as much as they can to work for their children, and more importantly, parents in this family have their own perceptions of their son’s education and try to cultivate their son the way they believe.

Knowing the family. The second family is very typical among the non-local citizens in Shanghai. The parents are the after 80s generation with high education achievement. They choose to live in Shanghai because they got jobs here or used to study in Shanghai. The father, Luo, 34 years old and mother, Mei, 31 years old, were both born and grew up in Shandong Province in Northern China. As a lawyer, Luo is always formally dressed with white shirt and black suit. He speaks slowly and is frequently disturbed by calls from his clients. Even with a pair of glasses, he frowns visibly and looks serious thinking something important. However, he smiles when Han is beside him. His wife Mei is a tall and slim woman. She looks young and pretty, well-dressed and fashionable. She responds instantly and informatively in her conversations with me.
After he graduated from a local university in Shandong, Luo continued his postgraduate study in Shanghai. He majored in law science at a renowned law school and then worked as a lawyer in a famous law firm. He soon outperformed many of his peers, hiring an assistant with another lawyer to help him. Mei is a graduate from a technology institute in her hometown. She met Luo on a train when he returned home for vacation. Then Mei came to Shanghai and to live with him after her graduation. Mei used to work in a company as a junior clerk when she moved to Shanghai, but quit when she became pregnant. After childbirth, Mei took care of the child and housework while Lou worked. However, at the end of this research, Mei started a new job. In 2013, they bought a car for Luo to meet his customers and in 2014 an apartment in Pudong District. Luo makes a good income, but much of it is devoted to the monthly mortgage payment, so this young couple still needs to budget carefully each month.

They have only one child, Han. He used to be a student in a district-level key elementary school, Happy School, which gave priority to students with Shanghai Hukou in application. However, Han managed to get enrolled in this local demonstrative elementary school without a Shanghai hukou. He spent all his Grade 1 and 2 in that district where the family used to rent an apartment. However, he was later transferred to a private elementary school, Noble School, in Pudong District. Now Han is a Grade 4 student in a private school.

The family used to rent an apartment built in early 1990s. It had two bedrooms, but no decoration. Therefore, when Han went to kindergarten, his parents re-decorated his room with some simple IKEA furniture. He had a new bookshelf, study desk and a small display shelf to place his toys, stationery, personal belongings and artistic works. They
later bought an apartment near Han’s new school. Before they made a move, they also redecorated the whole apartment where Han had an individual bedroom, a study desk, and a bigger bookshelf. He also had a new bicycle and more sports facilities in the new house.

**Educational opportunities in school.** Han’s different educational experiences in Happy and Noble and his transition between them reveal some significantly meaningful information about the relationship between parents’ capitals and students’ educational opportunities.

**Program and curriculum.** Han was transferred from Happy School, a public school, to a renowned private school Noble School. The decision is cautiously made by his parents. Although the previous school is a demonstrative public school and the family only needs to pay a very reasonable price, the parents were not satisfied with some of the school philosophies. Luo was extremely unfavorable with the teacher’s punishment strategy, “lizuo” in Luo’s words. That is, when someone in the class did something wrong, the whole class had to be punished for someone’s individual mistake. Or when the class was divided in to several groups and anyone in the group did not behave well, the whole group had to be punished. “Han was often sad and confused when he was punished for other people’s mistakes,” Luo clarified and gave me a firm “Yes” when I asked whether the teacher used it often.

When I asked his satisfaction with the school, he explained that generally they were contend with it but “public schools have their problems. Sometimes they are old in their educational philosophy.” “But their students have good grades,” I proposed. Indeed, Luo admitted that they sent Han there for its good academic reputation, but they were always
looking for some good educational philosophies and appropriate educational strategies.

As for Mei, she thought that “teachers in these public schools do not teach as much as in private schools and students do not have much homework.” Therefore, they as parents will have more pressure because they have to teach their children.

It was the curriculum and educational philosophies in Noble that helped the young couple make the final decision. Noble School enrolls students from kindergarten to senior high school. It offers two-track programs: regular Chinese educational program and the international program. Hence it has a choice of curriculums. On one hand, it offers the regular Chinese national curriculum and its school-based curriculum that has a Noble signature; on the other hand, it offers International Baccalaureate curriculum and joint curriculum co-built with overseas schools. Supported by its multiple curriculums, Noble can meet students’ needs beyond the national Chinese curriculum. As for Han, his school-based courses at the elementary level in Noble include literature, Chinese Guoxue (i.e. the study of Chinese language, literature, or civilization), Calligraphy and Swimming. However, Mei is more concerned with the overall development of Han. “Indeed academic achievement is always a very important concern, but we want an environment that is better for his physical and mental health and can make him feel happy and motivated.” These words from Mei surprised me since she was the only parent who mentioned children’s physical and mental health.

Noble’s strength in developing multiple curriculums attracts parents. Despite a young school, Noble has been renowned in Shanghai. The diversity of its programs and curriculums can also be inferred from the honors it has earned. It has be recognized or accredited with many honorary titles such as Geographic Education Base of Chinese
Geography Academy, Shanghai Calligraphy Education Experimental School, Shanghai Secondary-Primary Art Education Specialist School, Shanghai Secondary-Primary Technology Education Model School, Shanghai Language Standardized Model School, Shanghai Fire Control Model School, and Shanghai Secondary-Primary Psychology Counseling Association Experimental School. These titles and awards are the evidence of the school’s excellence in overall respects.

The new school makes it by offering him a more diverse curriculum and more experience, enabling him to develop in more than academic success. The school has its clearly defined educational philosophy, that is, to meet the need of every student, and fulfill students’ all-around development. Mei had a good memory of the school philosophy and she could even recite it exactly over our talk. Based on that, it sets up a coherently structured school-based curriculum, which develops hierarchically across primary and secondary education and creating a good bridge between different grades.

Although Mei believed that one of the reasons why they chose Noble is that it teaches more than Happy, but it was never a primary reason. The real reason is that in Noble students are never evaluated solely by their academic achievement. “It also cultivates students’ confidence”, Mei explained, “as the diversity of curriculum can allow students to explore their own interests and strengths and they will be happy with whatever they can do.” For example, physical exercise is highlighted in Noble’s curriculum while it is much neglected in other schools. Noble not only has several sports clubs but also has a daily “sunshine break”. It is a time when all the students have to go outside to have games, exercises, whatever they like to do. Over the sunshine breaks,
students would usually group them autonomously, create their own games and developed their own rules.

Furthermore, Mei and Luo agree with Noble’s teaching belief that good teaching happens unconsciously; students learn and grow up by immersing themselves in a rewarding environment or a constructive climate. And Noble is the one. One of its feature school-based courses is Chinese Guoxue and this is taken as an important form of cultural heritage. Mei has a supporting attitude toward it because she thought that in Noble students can learn Chinese Guoxue courses in a natural way. Its learning happens whenever and wherever on campus. For example, students in Noble will do their special Guoxue morning exercises, the first section of which is named “courtesy, wisdom and faith”. Luo believed that “children would gradually accept these Chinese values in heart if they do it every day” and “there is no need for children to deliberately learn these things.”

Another thing favorable to Mei and Luo is Noble’s English curriculum. His mother mentioned that Han had two English textbooks; one is the regular English textbook within the uniform syllabus under the education bureau, the other one is of specific service to his school-based curriculum. Two textbooks are indicative of the school’s two-track English curriculum, composed of a uniform curricular published and governed by the local education bureau as well as a school-based curricular that aims to cultivate students’ specific linguistic competence beyond the uniform curricular. Therefore, it is natural that Han’s English classes in Noble are much more challenging than that in Happy. In Happy School, Han had only four English classes per week, but in Noble, he had seven. However, in eyes of both Han and Luo, they think it deserves
because they think that good English competence means a lot in today’s society, such as better job prospects. More importantly, they have a plan to send Han abroad probably for his post-graduate study. Noble’s English curriculum put more emphasis on students’ oral English and communication skills. As a school offering bilingual and international programs, Noble has a team of native speakers as English teachers. Even for students in regular Chinese program such as Han, he has one oral English class with a native teacher from US. According to Mei, Han likes his oral English much more than his regular English classes (e.g. reading, grammar, and writing) because students can have more fun by engaging in games, activities, discussions, music, and drama.

All in all, the couple is quietly satisfied with the school curriculum, school-based courses, and philosophy of education and teaching methods. However, such a private school is not accessible to all the families. The tuition is about $7,000 per year, excluding meals, school uniforms, class trips, and accommodation if students choose to live on campus. The high tuition alone will make a big concern for a lot of families to weigh their decision before apply for Noble. However, this family can afford it and produce more educational opportunities with all these education programs and curriculum.

School activities and resources. Established in 2003, Noble School takes up 216 acres of land and its building area is 147,000 m². The campus is divided into seven sections, including the teaching section, the sports section, the living section, the art centers, the center of student service, the library, the science and technology section, all of which can meet students’ multiple needs. The first time when Han was taken to visit Noble, he was very pleased with its physical environment. “He was as happy as a flying bird. He ran here and there.” Mei laughed, recalling that day, “Can you have a guess what
he said that day?” I shook my head. Then Mei continued, “Han said it would be awesome if he could study in this school.”

Indeed, Han’s reaction is unexpected. At first, the couple only told Han that they were going to have a trip in a school. They did not mean to tell him about their school-transferring plan. “We don’t want to scare him. Anyway he had spent two years in Happy. Teachers and students there are nice to him. We suppose that he would not like to say goodbye to them”. Mei was a little worried about that Han would lose a sense of attachment if transferred to Noble. She had never expected that Han loved Noble and expressed his wish to study there. Once I asked Han why he said that on his first trip to Noble. Han responded that he loved the campus because it is considerably larger than Happy and students can run and have sports as they like. It is true that Happy is location in the downtown area and has a long history and therefore its limited sports and activity space limited students’ many opportunities to have physical exercises.

Mei talked a lot of the school swimming pool. It was a new, large and indoor constant temperature swimming pool with adequate air-conditioning facilities. Swimming classes are particularly popular among students. It is also one of Han’s favorite classes. Han has two swimming classes per week. Each class has two coaches and six teachers. While teachers look for students’ safety beside the pool, one coach would be responsible for the beginner swimmers and the other would take care of the veteran swimmers, teaching them new swimming strokes. Han began to develop a passion in swimming, and gaining more confidence as a “little man”. Mei shared a funny story to tell how excited students were the night before their first swimming class. Some boy students get some
water from their bathroom and poured it onto the tiles of their dormitory, and then they swam on the tiles!

The modern and easy-to-use facilities attract both Han and Mei when they visited the school for the first time as a guest. Of course, the resources alone can only make it possible to have access to more education opportunities; it is the students’ interactions with the resources, peers and teachers that achieve education opportunities, which will be further discussed in the following part.

**Peer resources and influence.** In *Coleman Report*, peer influence is a significant indication of students’ academic work. Sharing knowledge, information and other resources is one main type of peer influence in my research. And such sharing practice happens between students as well as parents in this case especially when Han was transferred to Noble.

With the help of Han’s Chinese teacher, all the students were required to bring three of their favorite books into the classrooms, filling the shelf and making a reading corner in the classroom for everyone. Also all the students combine their favorite books into a long reading list. According to Mei, it was a good practice because “you can read those books that you may never read without others’ recommendations”. For example, *The Adventures of Tintin* used to be Han’s favorite. He had a complete Tintin collection, which was a birthday gift from Mei’s brother. However, the reading corner creates an opportunity for him to read other students’ favorite books and he had indeed found another of his favorite, *The Adventures of Treasure Hunting* (《寻宝记》). It was very similar to stories of Tintin by telling adventures in different places from China to European countries, which are in fact a good introduction of people, place and culture all
over the world. He loved it so much that he even read it when he used the restroom. However, this popular collection was often taken and read by other students and sometimes Han could not read it when he wanted. Hence, Mei promised to buy the complete collection if Han could do a good job in his final-term examination.

Actually, students’ sharing not only occurs physically such as in the reading corner activity, but also happens invisibly in and out of the class, which fosters kind of influence or climate among students. When students finish their reading, they are also required to give their presentations, including simple book reviews and reflections upon what they had read. In essence, it is a sharing of knowledge, idea and experience. It is an extended activity of the reading corner and makes the reading activity more meaningful. More importantly, students’ sharing within the whole school campus could nurture a kind of atmosphere. Both of Luo and Mei described it by using the words “competition” and “spirit”.

As a school offering international program, many Noble graduates chose to go abroad for further study. Whoever are enrolled into some famous universities all over the world, their names, universities, grades of TOEFL (The Test of English as a Foreign Language) or IELTS (International English Language Testing System), scholarships would be printed on a red paper and posted on the wall. Such red paper, which is to deliver good news, is called “red roll” or “honor roll” in China. These honor rolls invisibly create peer influence on Han. When asked for her expectation on Han, Mei laughed and told me that Han had already had his own great expectation. One day, he saw the honor rolls on the wall and asked Mei about scholarship. Mei told him that “the better university you can go to, the higher scholarship you can be granted” and he responded
firmly and sincerely, “Oh, now I know, Mum. Wait and see. I will win the highest scholarship one day and take you and Dad travel around the world”. After that day, he often stares at the red roll.

Peer resources and influence sometimes happen in the form of parents’ contribution, either indirectly or directly. The direct parental contribution usually happens in the form of communication of parents’ community. In China, it is a common practice that parents of students in the same class would set up a community on the social media where they can exchange information (e.g. an interesting museum that children may be interested in) and discuss students’ school learning (e.g. how to improve their oral English). And sometimes they organize class-trips and collect money online. These different types of communication among the parents’ community are truly the exchange or accumulation of their economic, social and cultural capitals. The indirect parental contribution happens when students are required to share their cultural knowledge or artistic skills especially in class time or on some school events. Students’ presentation and performance are mostly an outcome of parents’ preparation and help.

Education in China, especially at the compulsory education period, has attracted more parental involvement over the decades. Luo often joked that it was less possible for him to go to university if he was born today because “my parents are farmers and they cannot read”. Mei often exhaled a sigh that today’s education is not only children’s education, but also parents’. “It’s really demanding to be a parent if you child goes to a good school. You should have money, time, knowledge, skills and patience.” Mei commented. This is also a reason why she gives up her job. Her words reminded me of Li, the mother in the first family. Li once joked that the elite private elementary schools
wanted children with housewife mothers so that the families could make the largest contribution of time and efforts in children’s education.

**Quality of teaching.** Han’s old school Happy is a national experimental site for small-class teaching. Therefore, there are 24 students at most in each class, which ensures that each student can get more attention and help from the teacher. It was ranked the top 3 among public elementary schools in its district for its academic performance. However, Luo and Mei wanted something more than academic performance; they wanted the kind of teaching that can help students develop in the long term.

The teaching staff in Noble School is recruited from all over the country. Most of them are experienced and excellent teachers in their previous working places constituting a professional and productive teaching team. More than half of them have won the academic and scientific research awards or teaching awards at national and municipal level, such as classroom teaching competition winners and National Math Olympic competition coaches. The flow of talent is a characteristic of the private schools and it largely grantee their teaching quality.

What’s more, the school invites some local education experts and builds an in-service training workshop, mentoring and helping to develop the teaching team. In Noble, the teaching style is less rigid and classroom atmosphere is more relaxing than Happy. Mei believes that this is a featured difference between public schools and private schools. Also Mei was impressively gratified with Han’s teachers in his new school, particularly three of his teachers who taught Chinese, English and Math. These three subjects are traditionally called “three major subjects” in China with regard to their importance in academic success. Mei rated them as “more helpful” because they would respond to her...
questions, problems and needs quickly. However, in Happy, teachers are less responsive, which Mei related to the fact that teachers in public school are financially dependent on governments rather than on tuition paid by parents.

A more important reason is that Han’s parents were confident that teachers in Noble could teach teachers in a right way. They do not teach by the cramming methods; they inspire and encourage students to explore and learn by themselves and offer the very professional and really rewarding strategies. In parent-teacher meeting, Han’s Chinese teacher highlighted the importance of reading in children’s Chinese language learning.

“His Chinese teacher said that learning Chinese language is a process that requires accumulation of knowledge over years. It is very possible that you cannot see improvement of children’s grades soon. However, in the long term, children will benefit,” obviously Mei repeated teachers’ words. She always emphasized her agreement with the Noble teachers that education is a lifelong process and it takes time. Cramming probably works well in the short term, but it will do harm to students’ education in the long term.

**Educational opportunities at home.** Different from Xuan’s family whose responsibility is large shared with the after-class schools, parents in this family take a more active role in children’s education. They are self-devoted into creating opportunities to have positive influence on Han or creating opportunities to improve his education with all possible means such as their house decoration, their own participation and even family time together in and out of the home.

**Physical resources.** The family used to live in a rented apartment in a downtown district. That was a two-bedroom apartment about 50 square meters. It had no particular dining space, so the family ate in the living room. The apartment was located on the sixth
floor in a residential building merely next to the light rail station. Built in early 1990s, it was simply painted and had no floorboards, wallpaper or furniture. After the birth of Han, however, the couple began to do some simple decoration. Han’s bedroom was decorated with wallpaper and some Ikea furniture was moved in. Han had his study desk and chair, next to a double wooden book rack and a multiple-block shelf to sort out his toys, stationery and others.

In 2014, the family bought from one of Luo’s colleagues a small apartment at a price of 270,000 dollars in Pudong District. Again, the parents re-decorated the apartment “for a better learning environment and living condition for him because he is growing fast and needs more privacy, which is important for a young boy heading for his adolescence”. That was Mei’s big concern. Now Han had his own new independent bedroom with his new study desk and a bigger bookshelf rather than a simple rack.

In both their old and new apartments, their “domestic library” is impressive, though it is not large in size. Books can be found here and there, in a good variety, Han’s readers, fictions, textbooks as well as the mother’s books. In this new bigger apartment, there is a bit more room for Han’s boys’ stuff: his skateboard, bicycle, badminton racket and other sports facilities, so Han can have some physical exercise there, such as push-ups. Physical education is also an important element of his family education to tackle “boy crisis” problems. However, without a roomy living room, it is never possible to make it.

*Parents as resources.* This family illustrates the power of parental involvement in children’s education. Both graduating from college, this couple was well-educated. The father even graduated with a master degree from one of the best known law school. And
they are playing their roles of parents, instructors and guidance in all respects of Han’s life, making themselves good resources for Han’s education.

In China, a housewife is also called “fulltime mother”, mirroring the fact that the Chinese housewives are most dedicated to caring and educating their children. Different from Li in the first family, Mei, as a college graduate, offers more than her time and companionship to Han; she also gives her instruction in English and Chinese, help in cultivating Han’s life and study habits, and sometimes serves as a psychological counselor.

Mei was the only parent in the research who highlighted the significance of good life and study habits for a child. Mei insisted on making breakfast for Han. It is rare for young parents in China because they are busy sending children to schools and then heading for jobs. Most young parents would choose to buy breakfast on their way to schools. It is convenient and time saving. However, Mei contended, “a healthy breakfast means a lot for students, especially the young students. They need a healthy body to have enough energy to work on their schoolwork”. In order to make her breakfast more nutritious and balanced, she read and learned from the websites. Her breakfast was not only delicious for teeth, but also tasty for eyes. She often placed the food in lovely and interesting shapes, such as a panda under a tree so that the eating mum’s breakfast was always a pleasant thing for Han.

Furthermore, Mei helped Han with his subjects such as arts, English and Chinese by herself. Mei showed a lot of pictures of Han’s artistic works, most of which were done at home with her mother. Mei knew a lot of using waste materials to do artistic creation and she taught Han how to do it. In one photo, Han was composing the fallen leaves into
a picture of some dancing children. In another, Han was dipping the plastic bottom of 1-liter Coke into paint and then depressing the bottom onto the paper, and finally he produced a picture of flowers. When I wondered how so many interesting ideas come out, she smiled and confessed that those ideas were learned from websites or friends. Today’s parents have to learn in order to catch up with the world, or you will have no idea of how to educate children. Self-teaching is a precondition of children’s education. This was Mei’s comments.

In China, it is a common practice that the teacher will publish homework online and parents would help their children to do and check their homework (e.g. reciting the text and doing some dictation). Mei also needed to take care of all these jobs. For example, when Han was transferred to Noble school, he began to have more English classes. In order to practice his oral English, his teacher often asked students to read English, have it recorded and sent it to the teacher online. Therefore, Mei had to help Han practice. She listened to him, pointed out his mistakes in pronunciation, and recorded it electronically. In order to give the best edition of his reading assignment, sometimes they have to do the recording for many times and choose the best one and have it sent to the teacher.

Mei did more than that. She had a good faith in power of reading. Therefore, when Han was young, she often read to him. When he was a little elder, she often took him to different libraries, reading coffees, (coffees where people read while enjoying coffee), and book markets, which were all recorded in her Wechat and QQ (i.e. Chinese Facebook and Twitter). Also she worked with Han to make his reading list at his different ages. As a young mother, Mei is profoundly influenced by the new education
philosophies. Over our interviews, she used so many terms of education in our conversations (e.g. boy crisis, mental health, gender awareness, teaching methods, parental involvement, and sense of identity) and whenever a question is given, she had so much to share. When asked how she involved herself in Han’s education, she emphasized her role in helping Han address his “boy crisis” and told me that she believed that “a good learning habit is more important”, because study is Han’s own business, not parents, and a child with good learning habits could deal with her academic work by himself.

Han is a very good-looking boy, wonderfully similar to Mei. He has fair skin and beautiful long-lashed big eyes. Whenever he went out as an infant or toddler, he was mistaken as a girl. However, now he does not like to be mistaken as a girl. He will be angry with that. “Therefore, he wanted to show his masculinity. When he finishes his push-up every day, he would raise his arms high up and ask me to see whether he has more muscle” Mei laughed. Nevertheless, she did respect Han’s ideas and try to help him to gain a sense of masculinity. In Mei’s belief, masculinity is more than having muscles. Instead, she believed that “persistence and sense of responsibility are two essential characters to be a real man”. Therefore, she would purposefully help Han to cultivate these two qualities. For example, Han is now a Weiqi (i.e., a Chinese chess game) player and only when he won two competitions out of three, he could get promoted in his ranks as a Weiqi player. And one month ago, he lost one of Weiqi promotion competitions and was kind of depressed. Mei said that she helped Han to regain his courage with an intimate parent-child talk and accompanied him to take part in the next competition. “When we arrived at the entrance of the competition, he asked me to go with him, but I refused. I told him that he is now a little man, and he has to shoulder the responsibility by
himself so as to be a real man. He hesitated and head for the new competition alone.” Mei was very happy with the outcome when Han came out bouncing into her arms. He won the first two competitions and got promoted with no need of the third one. Mei especially mentioned her conversation with Han after the competition. Han told her that he began to understand what masculinity really mean and asked her mum to call him “little man”.

Luo, despite his full working schedule, offers his instruction in Han’s school work and physical exercise. Luo was born and grew in an under-developed area, but he was enrolled in university as a top student in his hometown. Therefore, he was academically competent as a homework instructor, but he was more competent and responsible as a coach for his sports. As a well-trained amateur badminton player, he takes part in weekly practice with his friends. Therefore, he helps Han practice his badminton and also entered him for a badminton training center for juniors. “Also he teaches Han by himself. His father has taught him some basic strokes, such as flat service, backhand grip and cut.” Mei was very proud of her husband’s role as Han’s coach. Luo’s passion for badminton has obviously been transferred to Han.

Han’s parents are not as economically and socially strong as Xuan’s. However, their own culture advantage makes up for that and they are the most involved family in children’s education.

**Family time & travelling.** I went out with the family for several times (e.g. in the shopping mall, learning center, restaurant) and was very impressed with the interaction between parents and the child. Luo and Mei always tried to bring different experiences to Han and help him to learn in real life, which happen naturally during the family time.
Travelling is an important makeup of their family time. Whenever the holiday comes, the family would choose to travel together. The family has visited many provinces in China and Mei even had a plan to take Han for a trip in California where her uncle lived. Mei and Luo both agree on the Chinese proverb that “read a thousand books, travel a thousand mile”, which is indicative of the power of travelling.

When there is no holiday, the family usually will go out on the weekends. And they have a diversity of activities, most of which produce good opportunities to educate Han. For example, once when the family was seated in a very popular but busy restaurant waiting for their orders, Mei and Han had a chain spelling game to kill the time. Mei gave an English word, and Han had to give another word that began with the last alphabet of her mother’s word. The game continued for a long while and he even invited me to join them when Mei told him that I could also speak English. At the end of the game, Han asked me “Do you know Saturn? I want to make it my English name.” “Why? It’s a planet.” I felt surprised. However, he responded that he loves the ring of the planet and both he and Mei thought it was the most beautiful planet in the solar system. “He is really crazy for the outer space. And it is also his favorite reading theme.” And then they talked more about the solar system and Saturn before their order was taken to them. In the process of their conversation, Mei listened patiently and responded carefully, and Luo also joined part of their conversation. This is a very typical weekend for the family. Parents unconsciously teach with parent-child conversations.

Apart from the unconscious instruction, Han and Luo would take advantage of their family time to have some purposeful cultivated activities. For example, when it rains or the weather is not that pleasant for a going-out, the couple took Han to a
children’s recreation center where Han did some rock climbing, jumping and other physical exercises. The protective gears such as helmet were offered and instructors were available if necessary. Using any or all the facilities in this center would cost $15 per person each time. “But we bought a rechargeable member card, so it will be a little cheaper.” Mei mentioned. While I thought it was expensive, this couple both thought that it was worthwhile because children in Shanghai, such a bustling city, cannot have much access to much natural resources and physical exercise and this recreation center could make up for that. “Anyway, it can offer children an opportunity to practice and have fun, and Han likes it. Boys need these exercises for a better growth.” Luo smiled, watching Han running about between different facilities in the center.

Moreover, when Luo went to meet his clients on weekends, Mei would usually take Han to look for a bookstore or a coffee house for reading. Her social media is posted with a lot of pictures that Han was absorbed in reading a book. In order to reading more interesting, Mei would usually take Han to visit different bookstores (e.g. one with glass floor) or coffee houses (e.g. one housed with some lovely cats). Museum visits and some studios or workshops are often a good alternative for a bookstore. For example, they would spend the whole afternoon on a pottery class where parents and children are assigned together to produce a pottery craft work.

All in all, Luo and Mei is a typical pair of well-educated parents. They use their own knowledge and skills to teach and influence Han, and meanwhile they make most use of their family time to cultivate and develop Han’s interests and tastes, both unintentionally and tenaciously. Both Luo and Han reckon that parenting today is not as the same as the old story. Parents’ responsibility is far beyond meeting children’s basic
life needs; parenting responsibility is more identified with parents’ personal involvement in education. They both mentioned that they never mean to have the most successful child in the world, but they tried to make him a better man by offering as much resources as they could.

**Educational opportunities in community.** Han does not have a tight schedule of extra-curriculum activities as Xuan. However, the family has enough economic capital, though less stronger than that of the first family, is capable of supporting his extracurricular activities and training. Besides, the interpersonal network of his parents especially of his father, offers him very important opportunities of school access.

**Extra-curriculum activities.** Han is a smart boy. He academically outperforms many of his classmates. Therefore, his parents are not too much worried about his school courses and his extra-curriculum activities are mostly for sports practice and development of personal interests. Actually Han has tried a lot of different extra-curriculum activities. He learned calligraphy, painting, swimming and the like. However, then when Han begun his elementary school years, Mei made a decision to stop all these activities except for weiqi, a Chinese chess game, and badminton. She explained that elementary schooling required students’ more commitment to academic learning and too many extracurricular activities would deprive students of their sleep time and sports time. Therefore, she asked Han to decide on two of the activities he would like to continue.

“'Weiqi is a good method to train children’s memory and problem-solving ability. More importantly, when children lose and win in the weiqi competition, they would learn to be persistent and strong-willed. That’s the most important reason for him to be part of it,” Mei seems to have a high opinion of Weiqi. As for badminton, Luo, the father loves it
and he teaches Han often, developing his passion for sports, so Han wanted to go on with it.

Mei continued to talk about their confusion as young parents today in big cities. On one hand, they agree that it is good to see children jump, run and play around to use their body and develop their strategies. On the other hand, they have to consider following the general trend to send their child for academic training. The family made a hard decision to follow the trend and take part in mathematics classes by TAL as Xuan does. When Han was transferred to the new school, he had to be more devoted to schooling and homework because private schools have higher academic requirements than public schools. Therefore, most of Han’s classmates had a full schedule of extracurricular classes, which helped them to secure a more advantaged position in school work since school examinations are much more difficult and inclusive than school classes. Take Han’s math test and examination as a good example. The full score of them are 120. 100 are the full score and the other 20 are the extra points. The full score tests what students have learned from schools and textbooks while the extra 20 points are mostly related to Olympic mathematics that is not included in elementary school curriculum, which means that a student who tries to get a higher score have to sign up for an extracurricular mathematics class, or he or she will miss the 20 scores.

Last summer, Han took part in a summer course on mathematical thinking, which requires a full weekday schedule. Han had to go for classes from Monday to Friday while his mother waited for him in a nearby coffee house or book store. And after the class, Mei would help him to review his classes. Then when the summer vacation ended and the new term came, Han took a mathematics examination and he got the highest score
because “he got the extra 20 points”. Mei and Han both contributed these extra points to his summer course. Inspired and motivated by his outperformance in this examination, the child and his parents decided to change their policy and signed up for an Olympic mathematics with TAL.

In terms of extracurricular activities, Mei has a similar viewpoint with Li that almost every child around you is learning this or that, it will be a pressure upon parents if they don’t sign their children up for some after-school classes in fear that their children will be left far behind. However, Mei is more democratic than Li since she allowed his son Han to make the choice of the class by himself and insisted on his sports practice while Li would have the final say on Xuan’s after-school classes and tend to be more oriented to academic learning.

**Interpersonal network.** As an experienced lawyer, Luo has established a strong and high-quality interpersonal network, though both he and Mei are newcomers to Shanghai. His interpersonal network is mainly composed of his classmates of his master programs and his clients. He gained his master degree in the best-known law school in Shanghai, and most of his classmates worked for either the central government or the local governments, taking office in different departments. Also, as a lawyer student majoring in civil law, the main body of his clients are entrepreneurs or businessmen; he primarily helps his clients to deal with their contracts. 10-year professional service has enabled him to be acquainted with many people in significant positions. Therefore, his interpersonal network becomes his strong social capital.

Happy School, as one of the top three public elementary schools in its district, attracts a lot of families in that district for its low tuition and high-quality teaching. Also
as an experimental school of small-size class teaching, each class in it can only accept about 20, which is only half of a regular class in other schools. Therefore, it is very problematic for parents to get a position for their children in it. However, Luo, with the help of his friends, secured a position in this school where Han spent his first two years of elementary school years. Luo and Mei did not want to say too much about how they help Han enrolled into the school; they simply and vaguely admitted that it happened by using Han’s “social guanxi”. “It’s his friends…who help us…Anyway parents are all trying to use guanxi to help children go into a good school.” Mei is probably right when she thought that all the parents were trying their guanxi, but luckily Han is one of those whose social capital is adequate for supporting Han’s enrollment.

Before Han turned into Grade Three, his parents made a careful and important decision to transfer Han to a private school in Pudong district where they had bought an apartment. The couple is seemingly more willing to share this school-transferring experience. The president of the school comes from Shandong province, Han’s and Mei’s hometown. On a business party held by a chamber of commerce, they met and got to know him, and soon they came to visit Noble School as a guest visitor. And their campus tour was really impressive to them. Returning home, they began to prepare Han for the yearly interview specific for all the student applicants for school transferring. Mei told me that Noble, as a rising star in education, was receiving an increasingly high number of school transferring applications. “I think we meet at least 50, but it’s only a small proportion of applicants.” Mei recalled the bustling scene that day when Han went for the interview. However, knowing someone important in the school definitely help them to secure a position there.
Mei thought that interviews were not that challenging for Han because they were well-prepared. Different from his husband, Mei is a housewife. She does not have much business relationship. However, she is so sociable that she has a large circle of friends in real life and online. She often takes part in get-togethers and parties, attended by her classmates, friends and some online mother clubs, where mothers shared and exchanged information about students’ education, such as the rising quality training schools for students to take after-school classes, the latest ranking of schools, or the interview questions of the renowned schools.

Mei’s socializing competence helps her easily acquire information of school enrollment, interviews, examination, and extracurricular activities, which also makes her confident to be more purposefully, strategically and effectively involved in Han’s education. Before this interview, Mei asked her friends in real life and on the social media for their suggestions and any information about the interview. Some informed her that the interview content mainly include three major subjects: Chinese, Math and English, some gave suggestions on how to respond and behave in the interaction with the interviewers, some offer information about the interview questions in other similar private elementary schools in Pudong District and others helped Han prepare a handsome draft of self-introduction in English. Finally before the interview, Mei helps Han to practice his English self-introduction and some interview questions that might be asked over the interview.

Therefore, in this experience, Han’s social capital produced the opportunity for them to know someone in significant who can offer the chance of application, while Mei’s social capitals create opportunities to be better prepared for the interview and
eventually outperformed in the interview and was enrolled in the school. Han has now transferred successfully from Happy to Noble. Han’s opportunities of enrollment to both schools are indeed a joint outcome of his parents’ social capitals, as well as their cultural and economic capitals.

**Weak-capital Family: Where is the School?**

The third family I is a typical migrant worker family. Two parents live with their children in Shanghai with no local hukou. Different from the previous two types of non-local families, the migrant worker families have nothing advantageous or competitive either in finance, social status or culture. They live from hand to mouth, rent a humble apartment, and have very few social activities. And their children study in an elementary school especially for migrant children, and then return to their hometown for secondary education.

**Knowing the family.** The child in the third family is Lan. She is 11 years old, a fifth grader at a private elementary school that mainly enrolls migrant children. Her father Guo is 44 years old and her mother Yu 42. They are both medium-sized, and appear a bit older than their age because they are dressed in an old-fashioned way, more like those who were born in 1960s. Yu wears a gold necklace and a pair of gold earrings of traditional style all the time, and they seem to be her only jewelry. Guo is quiet while his wife is more talkative, but both smile a lot. They both came from Anhui province, much weaker in its economic development than Shanghai. Discontinuing their junior high school education, they began to work and live in Shanghai where they later got married and had two children. They shifted between varied odd jobs over the past decade. When I came to know them, both of them are black or illegal drivers. They offer paid driving
service without operation certificate. Sometimes they drive along the streets and stop at
the bus stops to see whether people would need their drive. Sometimes they get phone
calls from regular customers and drive them to destinations. More often, they stop cars
and wait for customers in their cars at some fixed locations. Yu used to wait for her
business at the gate of a hospital whose main service includes maternity service, child
care and vaccination. The larger number of would-to-be mothers, babies and younger
children attract many black drivers here, so Yu’s business can only help to relieve the
economic pressure of the family but not much. The husband Guo has better business than
Yu because his honesty and kindness win some regular customers. However, as my
research continued, this family has experienced a lot of changes. At the end of the
research, both Guo and Yu have changed their jobs. Yu sold her car to one of her
relatives and returned to the hometown to take care of Lan merely one week when our
interviews and observations end. Meanwhile, Guo began his new job as a car dealer.

Guo and Yu had two children, Lan, and her elder brother, Cheng, 22. Cheng
works in a factory and lived together with his girlfriend Ying, 25, who was pregnant over
the research, and their 3-year-old daughter. Their daughter was born before his father
reached the legal marital age and Ying’s family knew nothing about this girl and thought
that Ying is expecting her first baby now. Therefore, Ying’s parents urged them to get
married soon. However, Guo and Yu wanted to delay the wedding ceremony because
marriage was too expensive. “We need to decorate the house in our hometown, buy new
furniture, and the ceremony is also costly. To tell you the truth, we even have no enough
money to pay the bride price.” Yu was very helpless with that.
The family rent an apartment from a local. It’s a relocated household. For some 
reasons, mostly for public infrastructure construction, the government takes away some 
locals’ land ownership and in exchange it gives some apartments to local people as 
compensation. And the local people usually rent their extra houses to tents, so these 
relocated household is usually rent at a much lower price than other commercial 
residential buildings. However, Yu often complained that her landlord was really shrewd 
and looked for every opportunity to raise the rent. However, she was helpless with that 
because other apartments were even more unaffordable.

The whole family lives together in a two-bedroom apartment undecorated with 
cement ground and white paint. The electrical lines are perceptible. Despite its location 
on floor 11, the room was under lighted. Each room has only one small-sized lamp, 
without shade but only a bulb above head. However, the first time when I walked into it, I 
was rather shocked that it has no door for each bedroom, no door for the kitchen and no 
door even for the bathroom, but only cement door case as the same as when it was built. 
The apartment is about 60 m². It is not spacious so that almost everything in it can be 
seen clearly once the door is opened.

At the right of the entrance are the kitchen and the bathroom. The kitchen and the 
bathroom have no window but only a cement door case; it is so dark that you cannot see 
clearly even with the bulb on. The kitchen is equipped with a gas range running off gas 
cylinders and a kitchen sink. With no shelf or cabinet, all the dishware is stacked on an 
old small table in the corner. Next to it, there was a skip, which is made out of a paint 
bucket. Next door to the kitchen is the bathroom furnished with a toilet, a basin and a 
bathing section where a shower is installed over an old bath. The ceiling, the walls and
the ground in the bathroom are all not decorated with ceramic tiles as most Chinese families do, but remain in cement. At the left is the living room. There is a small old-fashioned table in the corner with a thick large piece wood on it in order to make the tabletop larger for better storage. More than half of the table is plied up with assorted things. No dining table or chairs are visible.

**Educational opportunities in school.** The school Lan attended is named Hope, which mainly aims to serve the migrant children. It is very popular for those incoming migrant families who cannot find an opportunity to get their children in a local public school or afford the high tuition of a quality private school. Although Lan’s school has upgraded a lot over the last decade with the help of the municipal government and educational bureaus at all levels in order to improve educational equity, the school is still far behind other schools. Its curriculum, resources and teaching quality deprived Lan of a good educational opportunity to lay a solid foundation for her further study or to cultivate rewarding learning habits.

**Program and curriculum.** Every morning, Lan was driven to her school by either her mother or father if anyone of them was available. It was five minutes driving distance between her school and the home. The school mainly enrolls children whose parents are migrant workers. Different from River School or Noble School that offer a good variety of curriculums, Hope only offers elementary school education and a regular Chinese elementary school curriculum, which “can satisfy students’ basic needs but can offer no more than that”, in Guo’s opinion.

Guo is undereducated. He did not even finish his junior high school and came to Shanghai for work before he was sixteen. Before our formal meeting, I used to be
worried that he might be unwilling to share much with me. To my surprise, however, he is so expressive and willingly to share. On one hand, he voiced his helplessness and shame that he could not help Lan to study in a local public school. On the other hand, he often openly expressed his anticipation that Lan’s school can have a more diverse curriculum that “can help students to find out their own interest and strength” and a more constructive curriculum that “can really help students better adapted to their further life”. When I told him that the research would not probably directly benefit him or his family, he gave me an unpredictably answer that “it will be good if our voices could be heard and other younger children may benefit in the future.”

School resources and activities. As a private school for children of the migrant workers, Lan’s school Hope is economically disadvantaged. It does have financial grant from the government at the township level as one of its education programs, but compared with its neighbor schools, the financial grant is far from adequate. Lan’s school grew out of a common private elementary school for children of the migrant workers, which was transformed into a new private school Hope School in 2008 with the support of the government at the township level when its education committee works to carry out Documents No. 3, No. 37 and No. 58 of Shanghai Elementary Education published by The Education Committee of Shanghai. Then Hope School was relocated on an old campus of a local public school while this public school moved to a larger new campus. The school gate straight faced the main road. The population introduction into this town over the last decade led to the increasing traffic jams on this road especially over the rush hour when parents all swamp at the school gate and drop their children off. Therefore, this campus was a little bit noisy specifically over the rush hour. Additionally, the main
teaching building was narrowly adjacent to a major road, about 13 feet distant from each other, thus sometimes classes would be disturbed by the honks of an automobile on the main road.

The total area of the campus now covers about 12,000 square meters and its floor area is 3000 square meters. The school has 26 classrooms, each covers 60 square meters. Most of its facilities including desks, chairs, computers, books and the like are donated by the nearby elementary and junior high schools when they update their facilities or move to a new campus.

The school has 26 classes at it most with about 1,300 students and 70 teachers and administrators. After receiving the donation from the local government, its headmaster was assigned by the government and someone from a local public school worked as a part-time deputy headmaster in the school. Its philosophy was written on the wall of the teaching building: lay a foundation for the whole life of immigrant children. Obviously, the school only serves students whose parents are migrant workers.

Until after year 2010, the school began to improve its teaching facilities such as library and multimedia classroom. However, these few facilities are not fully utilized. For example, Lan does not know well how to use the computer or the Internet to help her schoolwork. She does not know how to send mails or download music and books as a fifth grader. The only thing she learns to do in her school is to use Baibu (i.e., a Chinese Google), the most popular Chinese search engine. She does know how to key some words into the search engine and she only uses it to look for the meaning of some English words. Lan said that they do not have computer or information classes on the schedule.
Contrastively, computer science and technology is popular and common in other schools at the same level. Students are often required to take some online learning, do some online search and even submit their homework or projects via Internet. In Shanghai, computer is even an indispensable facility in a kindergarten classroom and young children begin to learn how to operate the computer. In Lan’s school, indeed, their teacher would sometimes lead them to the computer room to work with the computer, but no specific guidance or instruction is given. “For the most time, we only do whatever we like on the computer. Some students watch movies, some listen to music and others computer games.” Lan looked frustrated as she cannot tell what they really do in the computer-using period.

As aforementioned, the majority of the books in the school library are donated by schools in the neighborhood, so they are old books. However, Lan was still very glad to have such a place to get something to read since there is no book in her home. Lan once told me that she really loved reading, when I asked her for her favorite activity for leisure time. Lan usually borrowed books there once every other week. Her favorite books are stories such as Andersen’s Fairy Tales, but more often she could not find the books she was really interested in especially those popular ones and the latest ones. One day, we talked about the news that Cao Wenxuan, a professor at Peking University and also an author of children’s literature had won the Hans Christian Andersen Prize. This is the highest international honor for authors and illustrators of children’s books, and Cao is the first Chinese to get it. Lan learned about Cao and his works by TV news and showed her yearning to read his works, but she could not find any of his works such as Grass Hut or Fire Mark. Therefore, when her parents returned to me the book voucher as a small gift
to them for joining my research, because “we don’t have time to go to the bookstore and we don’t know which books are appropriate readers for Lan”, I bought her one of Cao’s stories *Grass Hut*, she was exceedingly excited. That is one of the few moments when Lan spoke excitedly and loudly; for all the other moments, she spoke in a low voice, lowering her head or smiling silently and shyly.

After taken by the local government, the school began to update its curriculum, adding three extracurricular courses, such as pottery-making arts, badminton, and mouth organ. For Lan, she attended the pottery-making club and a harmonica club. The pottery-making club was scheduled to meet once a week, but sometimes they would have to cancel the club activity “for no specific and informed reasons” according to Yu. What’s more, children mostly use plasticine instead of pottery in their club activities, probably to save the money. However, Lan joined the club for two years and she could only make some very simple handcrafts. Therefore, her mother often complained to me that Lan made no progress at all. Meanwhile she related such a bad situation to the instructor’s disqualification for that course. “Teachers in that school are not professional at all. They are mostly not graduates from normal universities and they do not know how to teach dancing, singing, handcraft, and arts.”

As for the harmonica club, it again did not have a regular meeting time. Students joining this club only meet when the teacher notified them of the time and the place of their meeting. One day, Lan’s niece took out Lan’s mouth organ and I asked Lan whether she could play the instrument for us. Lan said that she could not play a difficult melody. The only song she could play is *Twinkle, twinkle, little star*. When she began to play, she quickly gave it up. Obviously she was not expert at playing it. Her parents sometimes
made jokes of her music skills saying that “she could only play this children’s melody and no more than that.” However, they were also proud of her in that she was the only one who can play music in the family.

In our interview, her father especially mentioned his wish for more extra-curricular classes, believing that “these classes can help explore children’s specialty and maximize their potential, which is impossible without guidance and instruction.” However, he felt disappointed that these activities were not well-organized and scheduled, so “it does not work well for the students.”

**Peer resources.** Sometimes Lan likes to talk about her classmates. They have classes and play games together. When I learned about peer sharing in the first two families, I asked Lan whether she and her classmates would share any information or resources about their schoolwork or study. Lan simply said no except for their gossip about some popular TV stars and their dramas.

“Will you talk about your schoolwork, extra-curricular classes, news and the like? Anyone of your classmates join classes like Olympic mathematics?” I proceeded. Nonetheless, Lan’s answer was still a no because none of her classmates took part in any extra-curricular activities. Neither did her. However, her parents added that these children would discuss through word-of-mouth where the workbooks or exercise books are available if their teachers recommend some. This is the only thing shared between Lan and her peers.

It is true that Lan and her classmates do not have much to share between them. First, they do not share residential space and naturally they do not share leisure pursuits. Lan and her classmates live separately in different relocated apartment communities. Like
most children living in big cities, they seldom hang out with each other on the street as children did two decades ago. Second, their parents do not like the idea too because it would be dangerous for a young teen to go out alone looking for their peers. Traffic accidents and crimes are a big concern for them. And as for the parents, they are not available when children want to hang out since their parents mostly tended to work for longer hours and need more relax. Third, none of Lan and her classmates took part in off-class training or learning like Xuan and Ben did in the other two families (which will be more discussed in extra-curriculum activities), so their information sharing was less necessary. Last, children like Lan have very few family activities, which could not bring them enriching experiences. It will be further discussed in parents as resources.

**Quality of school education.** Lan’s school is the one especially enrolled by children whose parents are immigrant workers, which is clearly stated in its introduction on its website. Yu often joked to me that “locals like you will never send your children to this school even if you don’t need to pay the tuition”. Indeed, none of the local children study with the immigrant children; they usually attend a public elementary school, which is located no more than 500m away. This local school has a long history and a fairly good reputation in the town.

And comparatively the overall quality of Lan’s school is unsatisfactory. First, the teaching staff was not up to qualification. Yu often complained that their teachers were not qualified for their teaching positions. She was most unsatisfied with the fact that many of the teachers in Hope School were not bachelor degree holders or full time university graduates. Moreover, the teachers are not responsible for their jobs. Sometimes the teachers did give homework, but much of it was “completely meaningless” according
to Guo. For example, students were required to copy the text for 5 or 10 times word by word, which seemed to be a popular way among both Chinese and English teachers.

What’s worse, some teachers in Hope were not ready for their positions since they were not responsible at all. For instance, some teachers never gave take-home assignments to students. Yu made a joke that “all the students would absolutely love it surely because they did not do anything after class”, but she also doubted what students could learn from school if they had no homework. Anyway, she believed that homework is one of the best ways for students to revise what they had learned in the class.

Another example is that Yu once mentioned that when one of Lan’s teachers was pregnant last year, she began to have an irregular working schedule. “Sometimes she is absent for two weeks.” Evidently Yu was not happy to see that. When I suggested that the school would get some substitute teachers, Yu laughed bitterly, “They cannot find the substitute teachers. Teachers come, and soon they leave.” Yu’s words unveiled the high turnover rate of teachers, which makes true troubles to students’ normal school education. When Lan was in Grade Five, her class used to have no English class for half a term because no new teacher could be found to fill the teaching position. And then Yu offered her understanding of the high turnover rate, “Who wants to work in such a school? The job is underpaid and the families are poor. You know, all the teachers want students from rich families or well-educated families. Their kids are smart and the parents can give all the supports they want.”

Third, the teaching style and school climate is not desired. Although parents have relatively lower expectations of the teaching quality of Hope School, Lan’s parents have a lot of complaints about the teachers and their teaching style as well as the school
climate. There is one thing they really hate is teachers’ punishments. For example, when students spell one word wrongly, they are required to copy the word 300 times. However, according to Lan’s father’s description, many parents did not agree with such a teaching style; they believe that it could not really help students to remember the correct word and it was merely a waste of time. The other thing parents did not like is to punish the whole class when one student failed to behave well or do something wrong. Both Guo and Yu believe that the innocent children should not share the punishment with the bad child. And Lan, in most cases, was one of the innocent children, but she had to be partly responsible for her classmates’ mistake. And “it really makes Lan unhappy with her schooling and weary of her schooling” as explained by Guo.

One day, Lan showed me their graduation photo. When her niece was interestingly looking for Lan, I paid much attention to the boy standing beside Lan who closed his eyes with his head titled to one side. Then I was astonished to hear from Lan that he was an autism patient. Inclusive education is not yet popular in China and in most cases students with special needs will attend special schools. Children with autism are rarely seen in regular classrooms.

“So tell me what he usually does in the classroom?” I really wanted to know more.

“Nothing”, Lan answered, “He can do anything he wants.”

“Will he make trouble with the class?” I continued.

“Sometimes, but most of the time he lowers his head looking down. We don’t talk with him.” Lan explained.
“Will the teacher give any instruction to him? Or give some help?” I moved on.

Lan shook her head and uttering in very lower voice, “no one takes care of him, including the teacher.”

The major part of interviews and observations took place over the summer vocation when junior high schools publish their cut-off line or minimum passing score. The only junior high school possibly accessible to graduates from Hope is ranked at the very bottom of its district and town levels. However, even such a school is unattainable to most of the graduates from Lan’s schools. Only several best graduates who have a complete pile of documents and certificates required by the municipal government can luckily continued their study in this school.

In summary, for Guo and Yu, Lan is as intelligent as her peers, but her educational opportunity is diminished by the school for its outdated facilities and resources, for its undesirable teaching, and for its overall quality.

Educational opportunities at home. Home is our first school where education starts at birth. One’s educational opportunities are mostly related to the family’s physical resources, his parents as resource and family activities.

Physical resources. Open the door of the apartment and you can see two bedrooms right in front of you through the living room because they have no doors. Both of the bedrooms are south faced. The left room is slightly bigger, shared by the younger couple, Cheng and Ying, as well as their daughter. The only bed leaning against the wall, on which pillows, quilts, sheets, blankets are all left lying around. At the head of the bed was a small pink toy piano, one of the very few toys in the apartment. Yu told me that they took it home when someone abandoned it in the corridor of the building. The 3-year-old
niece really loves it though it is stained and some keys cannot work well now. On the wall above the piano are some sketches made by her and also some sticks for children such as Winnie Pooh, Dora the Explorer. By the window stand a small study-desk for one person only as well as two plastic stools. However, this only child-sized study desk is not for study at all. On it quilts for winter are left in a heap. An electric rice cooker is placed on the ground. Besides it are two electric fans, whirring hardly. When I went to visit the family, Yu would move two electric fans together, shift them to me and have them play more upon me, apologizing that they had no air-conditioners.

The right room has two beds besides each other, the larger one for Yu and Guo and the other for Lan. Opposite to the beds a dated tube TV is placed on an old table, together with piles of junk: food packing bags, cups, supermarket flyers and the like. The apartment does not have other furniture. Therefore, some plastic and fabric cases or boxes are placed under the beds or in the corner for storage. Most furniture is worn-out and much damaged after the family make several moves.

Since there is no chair in the apartment, most of the time I sat on the small plastic stool or on their beds. Actually the first time I went to visit with the family, Lan was reading an English textbook by the small study-desk in Cheng and Ying’s bedroom. However, the next time, Lan began to sit on the small plastic stool by Cheng and Ying’s bed for some writing or writing. Their bed becomes her desk because the desk was moved to the window for winter quilts. Yu explained that they need that desk to air and dry the winter quilts. Otherwise, they would easily get mildewed in the long rainy season in Shanghai. Once Yu asked Lan to read her English textbook to me for my English-learning advice, and there was a new word she did not understand. Then she turned to me
for help. I did not tell her the answer directly; instead, I asked her to try looking it up in a dictionary. “Yes. I do have a dictionary,” Lan told me happily. However, I was a little frustrated when the dictionary was taken to me. It was a pocket-size dictionary with some very simple English words and their Chinese meanings only. It had no information of the word pronunciation, or morphological changes. Neither has it offered any illustrative sentences. However, Lan was going to head for her junior high school, such a small-sized dictionary was not informative to help her English learning.

*Parents as resources.* “She has to depend on herself. We cannot give her any help with her school work because we have no college diploma,” Yu always repeats words like that to me whenever we talk. As parents, Guo and Yu had no self-efficacy as parents and they had a firm belief that under-educated parents had no possible participation in their children’s education and children’s success especially their academic achievement was largely reliant on their own commitment in school work. Therefore, Lan’s opportunities to learn with parents at home are largely deduced by their inactive participation, which are derived from her parents’ under-education background and the absence of their parental self-efficacy.

Both Yu and her husband thought highly of college diploma and also felt regretful to miss it in their lives. They often expressed their admiration right in front of me because my husband and I are postgraduate students. “People like you are regarded as genius in our hometown and become a big honor for the whole family. Very few people can make it.” Guo told me when he decided to join the research. Moreover, both the couple believed that I must know how to teach my daughter and my daughter must be intelligent and outstanding with a mother like me. Another day, when she told pointed at her grand-
daughter, saying “what a pity that she was born in our family. If she were born in families like yours, her future and the whole life must be different. You know she is smart actually, but no one can teach her”. This is also the reason why Yu attempted to leave her granddaughter with her son and his girlfriend. She thought that she could contribute nothing to the granddaughter’s education and the girl would “learn more with her parents anyway” because they had longer schooling years.

One day, when I visited the family, Lan was working on her English homework, she was required to copy the whole text five times and read the text three times to anyone of her parents. However, she did not read the text because her parents know nothing of English. “They only know ‘hello’ and ‘bye bye’”, the girl giggled. Then I sat beside by the bed with her, advising her to read it to me. Happily she began to read. When she finished, I found that she read each word separately. I suggested that she could read some words together as a meaning group since they expressed the same meaning. To read each word separately is not a good way to speak English. “Maybe you can listen to the audio of the text. Follow and read with it,” I told her, “Do you have the tape of the text?” “Yes”, she showed it to me. The tape was the supplementary material attached to the textbook, “but I don’t have tape recorder.” Then I looked through the textbook and found a link to download the audio files of the texts. However, the family had no computer and no Internet access. Therefore, the young couple Ying and Cheng both preferred to work in the factories where Wi-Fi was accessible all the time and they could use their smart phones freely. “Do you have an mp3 player or the like? I can help you download and you can listen to the text,” I offered my help. She thought for a while and shook her head, “No. My brother and Ying have smart phones, but they won’t allow me to use them
unless occasionally I want to check word meanings. It will cost money. They want to save their data.”

Knowing that my daughter is one month elder than her granddaughter, Yu often talked about these two toddlers over conversations. Born in September, 2013, my daughter could not be enrolled in kindergarten in September 2016 because she was not yet three years old. One day Yu asked me why I did not find a position for my daughter in kindergarten by using some guanxi, “You are a local, a teacher and you husband work for the government. You must have some guanxi to make it.” I told her that if my daughter went to school at an earlier age, she might not be ready for school. Actually I thought it was more sensible to go to school the next year because she would be one of the eldest children in her class. Most probably she would have more successful school experiences, building more confidence in herself. Nonetheless, Yu did not agree with me, “Going to kindergarten one year later means that she has to graduate one year later, start her job later and get salary later. Now the living cost is increasingly rising. That’s not a good deal.” Therefore, half a month later, Yu secretly told me that she had spent $300 buying a hukou by guanxi for her granddaughter in her hometown. Before that, the child had not local hukou because she was a child of illegitimate birth outside of wedlock. Her father had not reached a legal age for marriage when she was born. Also she found a kindergarten for her granddaughter. She thought that the child could learn more with anyone than with her.

Evidently, economic factors are a big concern for the family. And education is seen as an investment. Hence, she wants short-term returns to come out earlier at a lower cost. Words such as overall development, quality education, whole human being
frequently heard in the first two families are totally missing in this family. Instead, “diploma” is the word Yu and Guo talked most. Many of their responses were “because we don’t diploma” or “if we have diploma”. For example, “if we have diploma, we will be better paid”. “It is impossible to help Lan’s schoolwork because we don’t have diploma.” For them, diploma is significantly related to their work and life as well as Lan’s.

**Family time & activities.** Most often when I stayed with the family, Lan and her mother, as well as her niece were all seated in front of the only TV set in their home. Sometimes Lan watched some TV drama together with her mother, sometimes she watched animated cartoons with her niece and for other times Lan simply played games with her. Lan seldom read or did other meaningful things. Moreover, her parents never took her out except shopping in the supermarket. Therefore, Lan, despite as the eldest child subject in the research, did not have much real life individual experiences to share with her classmates and vice versa.

In the summer of 2016 when Yu was busy packing for their return to the hometown, the whole city of Shanghai was excited with the opening of Shanghai Disney Resort. Young and old children in Shanghai, or even all over the country, began to look forward to a tour in Disney and parents were mostly eager to take their children there. For example, Han’s mother took him for a Disney trip before its formal curtain-up. They successfully got two tickets over the trial operation because one of their family friends bought two and transferred the tickets to them. For Xuan, he had a family visit to Disney some months later when one business partner of his father gave some tickets to them as a popular gift. However, Lan was evidently not as lucky as Han and Xuan. The last time
when I visited the family to say goodbye, Yu told me behind Lan’s back that Lan wanted to go to Disney, but Guo declined because he had drove some families to that park and he knew the price of the ticket. It would be 53 dollars per person on weekday and 71 dollars on weekend. Since Lan was still 12 years old, she had to be accompanied by her parents and of course their granddaughter could not be left. Her parents calculated that they had to pay more than 200 dollars excluding food, water, transportation and parking. “That’s a huge amount of money.” Yu said, “We need to save money for other more important things. Don’t you remember that we are still worried about the bride price?”

Though the family almost had no organized or planned family activities, such as a museum visit or a concert, the parents had a strong desire for that. However, they were helpless with such a situation. They often felt sorry for Lan. One day Yu told me that Guo was looking for a new job.

“It’s too tiring. He had no time for rest, for family, for the children, not to mention, for him. When he got calls from a regular customer, he had to set off to pick him or her up. If he declined the customer once, the customer would probably never call him. Anyway, he does not want to lose customers.”

Indeed, Guo’s job was exhausting and laborious. In the morning he started off before 6 am and he never returned before 8 pm. He never returned home at noon for a nap or for lunch because it was expensive to drive back. Usually he chose to take a short or quick nap in the car if he had no business. And at weekends, he was even more fully scheduled because people needed driving service for their family activities. Guo sighed once to me that he really admired other parents who took their children for different activities. Whenever he drove other families for their family trips, he felt frustrated that
he could not do that for his children, “sometimes I felt bad because people at my age usually have the ability to support the family, send their children to good schools, and take the whole families out for holiday.” However, when he returned home, had dinner and took a bath, it was mostly after 10 pm when Lan went to bed. “They even had no time for a small talk. Of course, he was introvert in his personality and does not talk much.” Yu explained, but she exemplified that one day when Guo was too tired to go working, he told a story to Lan and Lan was very happy although she believed that the story was kind of childish for a girl at this age.

In conclusion, Lan’s parents are weak in their economic, social and cultural capital, which largely cut Lan’s educational opportunities. First, they are economically disadvantaged, so they cannot provide a quiet and well-facilitated family environment to help Lan focused on her study and they have to take up long-hour jobs, which deprived their family time. Moreover, their shortage of social capital, or to be precise, their no acquaintance with significant people leads them into a helpless position in education. Last, they are culturally disadvantaged and it is impossible for them to create a learner-friendly or culture-inspiring environment to motivate Lan’s learning.

Educational opportunities in community. Despite the fact that the family have lived in Shanghai for about 20 years, they seem to be the outsiders of the city. They basically have social connections with some neighbors or more often they communicated with their fellow-townsmen in Shanghai, who came from the same hometown with them. Their social activities are rather limited in physical and social space, which is also indicated by Lan’s educational experience.
Extra-curriculum activities. When asked whether her classmates were engaged in extracurricular training or activities, Lan shook her head. “What about Olympic Mathematics? Or Wallstreet English? Disney English? New Concept English? Or TAL Education?” I exemplified some best-known and most popular courses among young students, but Lan consistently responded by shaking head. Then her mother Yu cut in, “Children in your families have such courses. They are not for our children. They are too expensive and unaffordable to us.”

Most of our interviews and observation were done over the two-month summer vacation when Lan stayed at home most of the time. Since she was going to be transferred to a new school in her hometown, she had no homework for her summer vacation. She mostly watched TV, helped to take care of or play with her niece and sometimes she would read her English textbooks when her parents criticized her for her idleness.

In the past, migrant children like Lan played together, spending most of their off-school time outside, running or playing some games. However, the urbanization is so fast that more and more people have been moving into apartments of the high buildings. Doors are now closed, children separated from each other. They could not visit their friends whenever they want as in the old days when doors were closed only at sleep time. These children are actually now in a dilemma. On one hand, they cannot play outside or in the wild as their hometown peers. On the other hand, they don’t have a similar extra-curricular schedule as their city peers, filled with swimming, English, Math, or art and handcraft training. Their summer vacation is in the grey area. They don’t have freedom in space, unable to running joyfully in the field. They don’t have a tight schedule. They are
the countryside children living the city, but their living and education style are not consistent with the city.

Lan has no extracurricular activity. She has no idea of what she should do and could do. Nor her parents would give her any suggestions or do some arrangements. As in the case with Lan, all of her classmates have nothing on their extracurricular schedule. However, Lan often expressed her desire of extracurricular activities. “I want to learn music, maybe, piano. Sit in front of it, dressing beautifully, like a princess.” However, she could only play her niece’s old toy piano in real life.

**Interpersonal network.** Lan had to leave the city now. To continue her study in Shanghai requires a pile of documents and certificates, which however seem inaccessible for the family. For example, the family needed to show their property ownership certificate, but to buy a house was too luxurious for them. Or the family could offer a permanent resident permits, tax certificate and social security. However, as a black driver, he could never provide this stuff. This is also the reason why Guo wanted to change his job. He wanted to have security. Without tax certificate and social security, he was worried about his future. Anyway, he was 43. Life and work would be increasingly challenging for him.

Since they could not offer any essential documents to help Lan, I asked them whether they had tried other methods? “You mean using guanxi?” Yu was very straightforward, “Of course, we want, but we have no guanxi.” However, Guo told me that someone in Lan’s school used guanxi to continue their study in Shanghai. Yu used to tell me that there were about more than 30 students in Lan’s class when they were enrolled at Grade One, and then more students joined. Her class used to have more than
50 at its most. However, at the end of their Grade Four, the school began to suffer from student drain and when it came to Grade Five, there were very few students stayed in the classmate. They all returned to their hometown.

However, Guo revealed a secret that someone used guanxi to help their children continue education in Shanghai. He mentioned that there were 10 quota limits of students who could continue their education in Shanghai even if they could not have a whole package of documents or certificates. He and Yu used to believe that this enrollment would be done on a first-come-first-served basis. However, to their disappointment, when they called the school, they were told that there was no vacancy left for Lan. “They said that there were ten, but they never revealed to the public who were given the opportunities.” Guo was a little bit angry.

Now Guo was considering a new job and Yu said Guo would have a salary of $720 per month with the new job while Yu was now jobless since she had to take care of her daughter and granddaughter. Therefore, Guo’s salary had to support the family. However, a one-room apartment about 60 m² in the same building of their apartment was valued at $280,000. “The first year when we moved in, the apartment was only $500 per square meter, but now it rose to more than $5,000 within the past 6 years. Of course, we wanted to buy an apartment. If we buy one, all the problems can be solved and Lan could stay in Shanghai. Sure that we want her to study in Shanghai, but it is never possible to buy one.” said Yu, smiling bitterly. This is the facial expression I saw most on her face.

Living in Shanghai for two decades, the family has never identified themselves as citizens in this city. They have limited physical space and social space for activity. Since they are economically, socially and culturally underprivileged, their social network was
far from resourceful and informative. They cannot offer much help, so Yu and Guo had to depend on themselves. This problem was more prominent when it comes to seeking a position in schooling for Lan. When asked why she chose Hope for Lan, Yu blurted out, “Because her brother graduated from this school.” Similarly when asked how they chose the new school for Lan in their hometown, Yu said, “No…I found that school while I walked along the road from my home.”

Then I wondered why they did not look for anyone to help them in their homework where people in the same village were more or less connected or even descendants of the same clan. Guo articulated that their folks in the hometown could not help because those who were well-educated, made good fortune or had enough guanxi to be successful all went out to big cities like Shanghai and Beijing. “When they made a lot of money or got good jobs in Shanghai, they won’t stay in the same circle of friends with us. And they won’t help you. They know that you cannot repay them.” This is Guo’s explanation of their shortage of guanxi to help them.
Chapter 5: Discussion

One goal of this research is to offer a perspective into what is happening in contemporary Chinese urban communities by focusing on three dissimilar families living without local hukou in Shanghai. The Chinese reforming-and-opening policy brings about the rapid overall growth in China over the past decades, which eventually transforms into changes in people’s economic life (e.g., housing price, real estate within the good schooling district), social life (e.g., family type, parenting styles) and cultural life (e.g., increased college enrollment, education values and beliefs). Chinese society is experiencing a transitional age. However, education continues to maintain a dominant position in China. Chinese families throughout history prioritize education. Hence, parents tend to invest all they have in their children’s education. How that investment occurs is framed by their access to different forms of capital.

The preceding chapter portrayed how three families experience this dynamic context. In the follow sections, I provide analysis concerning how differential parental capitals help to create, secure or compete for children’s educational opportunities and themes out of the research. The final section includes recommendations for policy, practice and future research.

Parents’ Capitals and How They Work

To illustrate the complex ways parental capitals framed the educational process, I created a diagram for each family (see Diagram 5.1., 5.2., & 5.3.) Each of the diagrams demonstrates how parents’ economic, social and culture capitals work together in
influencing children’s educational opportunities. The circle in the middle of each diagram is the type of parental capital in function, the squares designate all the factors or mediators involved in the functioning process deriving from parents’ capitals and working toward children’s educational opportunities and the grey square is the destination of parents’ capitals, that is, opportunities of education. The lines and arrows are representative of the patterns, transitions and linkages describing how parents’ capitals help to produce, secure or compete for children’s educational opportunities. The full line is indicative of the direct impact of parents’ capitals upon children’s educational opportunities while the dotted line reveals the indirect impact of parents’ capitals. The arrow tells the directions of the influence, specifying the mediator works toward the destination. In the following sections, I am going to unpack how these different forms of parental capital related to children’s educational opportunities.

**How parents’ economic capital work.** Economic capital is the resources that are “convertible into money and may be institutionalized in the form of property rights” (Bourdieu, 1997, p. 47). Parents’ economic capital refers to family wealth and assets as a major component of the family’s socio-economic status (SES) (Ra, 2011). This research finds that parents’ economic capital seems to be the most powerful among the three capitals. It exerts a far-reaching impact upon children’s education by directly buying physical materials, paying tuition for schooling and extracurricular activities, engaging in bribery and providing accesses to related resources, information and activities, and meanwhile indirectly gaining better teaching quality, more peer influence and resources sharing and higher future orientation, all of which eventually lead to more solid education opportunities of children (see Diagram 5.1).
Diagram 5.1: How parents’ economic capital works toward children’s educational opportunities

Indicated in the above diagram, parents’ economic capital works toward children’s educational opportunities by tracking the paths at home, in school and within the community. First and foremost, parents’ economic capital plays its role in obtaining children’s educational opportunities at home mainly by: 1) creating a student-friendly learning environment; 2) increasing parents’ companion and teaching time; and, 3)
producing family cultivated activities. For example, Xuan has his own room and private learning space. His family has enough money to buy all the learning materials he needs. The Lego transportation sets in the living room and his original readers bought abroad are very expensive for ordinary families. Han and his family cannot afford such spacious learning space and expensive learning materials, but his family can offer his own room to ensure that he is not disturbed and buy books he wants regularly. When some books are expensive, his parents will not buy it immediately, but give it as a gift or reward to Han. However, Lan’s educational opportunities are largely limited by her physical learning environment. She has no private space to do homework and even has no desk to sit at. She loves reading, but there are few books in her home. She has educational tapes attached to her textbooks, but she does not possess a recorder to play the tape.

Next, parents’ economic capital influences children’s educational opportunities in school mainly by: 1) bribing someone to buy a position in a good school; and, 2) paying tuition. In the school context, the primary role of economic capital is to ensure the enrollment opportunity. It is one of the most important forms of educational opportunity because children’s enrollment in a specific type of school will eventually lead to discrepancy in curriculum and programs, teaching quality, peer influence and school climate, which builds different levels of motivation in children and shapes their future orientation. The peer influence and the school climate are actually closely related, exerting a joint effect upon outlining children’s sense of future development.

Lastly, parents’ economic capital enables them to offer children access to extracurricular study. Extracurricular activities are not compulsory, which means public or government funding are not available. A child’s participation in a specific
extracurricular activity requires an expensive and long-term investment. For example, Xuan has piano classes and he needs to sit for National Piano Test from Level 1 to Level 10. Students generally take one or two terms to move toward a higher level. Therefore, in order to get a credential for Xuan’s piano Level 10, his parents have to pay for his piano tutoring class throughout his preschool period to his elementary school years. That is a very expensive. Surely if parents want to register their children with a better teacher or a more advanced course, or if parents want one-on-one service, it will cost more.

Extracurricular activities require a significant financial investment. However, parents are still willing to make the investment in order to help children obtain more educational opportunities. Some extracurricular classes are on students’ academic learning or subject learning, such as Chinese, English and Math. Taking part in these academic classes, students can directly improve their school work and also get a higher score in examination. Some extracurricular classes are for students’ credentials and certificates, such as musical instrument, chess, and calligraphy. Getting a certificate in these skills can increase students’ enrollment opportunities, especially when they apply for a private school. Other extracurricular classes are for students’ skills, such as painting, dancing, and singing. They may prepare students to enroll in a school specialized in these skills. For example, if students want to major in fine arts in university, they likely need to prepare and practice painting at a young age. Extracurricular activities indeed increase opportunities to be enrolled in a better school. However, high tuition pushes out students like Lan. Although Lan’s parents really wanted their daughter could live and receive education like a local, such as “having classes to develop her potential” in her father’s words, they had to give up because they could not afford it. This is also one of the
reasons why Lan’s father was often-self-regretted for Lan and himself. Without economic capital, children’s educational opportunities are largely limited.

**How parents’ social capital work.** Social capital is defined by Bourdieu (2005) as a type of personal network to provide its members with “actual and potential resources” (Hassani & Ghasemi, 2016, p. 678). People as social agents within this network are acquainted with each other and, more importantly, they share their resources to support each other, which can eventually consolidate their social network and render it far stronger.

Social capital works mainly in form of guanxi in Chinese context. Guanxi is “a special Chinese idiom of social networks” (Xie & Postiglione, 2015, p. 1016). It is mainly composed of private or interpersonal relationships, such as neighborhood, friendship, colleagues and kinship. In this sense, guanxi network has to be distinguished from networks defined by “legal institutions” (Bian, 2002). Normally, when people cannot seek help or solve the problem by following official or legal procedures, they turn to their guanxi network for help. Using guanxi involves asking or seeking a person who has the ability or who knows another person with ability or power to help. Sometimes, using guanxi network is not decent, or even legal, but it is indeed a very effective way to solve problems or achieve opportunities in Chinese context. Ownership of more guanxi in the Chinese context means that a person has more social privileges and advantages in all respects of social life, including education. And this phenomena is termed as “loss of nothing” ("不落空") or “winners take all” ("赢家通吃"). Diagram 5.2 is suggestive of how parents’ social capital works access more educational opportunities for their children by providing resources in home, at school and within community.
Diagram 5.2: How parents’ social capital works toward children’s educational opportunities
Parents’ social capital works similarly in and out of home by seeking help, sharing resources and, in many cases, social capital works together with cultural capital. In home, parents’ social capital works mainly by: 1) setting up a higher bar for children’s future orientation by sharing successful stories and experiences in their social network; 2) getting material resources or human resources to help with children’s academic work; and, 3) bringing some worthy parenting values, beliefs and practice into parenting. For example, when Xuan had trouble with his English learning and his father could not help much since he had oversea business trips, he would use his guanxi (in this case, classmate relationship) to find someone to offer tutoring to Xuan. Out of home, parents’ social capital works by: 1) knowing a significant someone to obtain or secure an enrollment opportunity; 2) creating a more consistent and interconnected communication pattern between families and schools; and, 3) having more material resources or human resources to seek help from. In this research, the enrollment of Xuan and Han were achieved by using their parents’ guanxi.

In a family with strong social capital, stories of Xuan and his sibling demonstrate the characteristics of social capital and how it works. The friends of Xuan’s father helped Xuan’s sister Yun to be enrolled in a famous public kindergarten without taking part in the lottery system, which is a compulsory procedure to the public. Xuan’s mother told assuredly that the person who helped to secure her daughter’s position in the kindergarten would not simply help for money. This significant person only helped people he trusted. There are so many people who want to buy such a position, but their money alone will not work because they do not know the person or the right way to offer the money. In this case, knowing the right person and the right way is the social capital. However, such
information is only available and shared to creditable members of Xu’s social network. Similarly, Mei, Han’s mother, is offered education information within her circle of friends. They share such information with others as an exchange for more information. Lan’s parents have social network, but it does not have enough social capital to offer much valuable information. Their social network create good channel of information. For example, Lan’s mother looked for a school in both Shanghai and their hometown by walking along the road and asking one school after another. She does not think that other people in her network could help because they were in the same situation.

Social capital in this context has three crucial characteristics. First, different from economic capital that offers physical resources, social capital typically arranges for intangible resources, such as information. Second, social capital usually does not work alone. Social capital tends to work with economic capital and cultural capital. Third, social capital is mostly shared between members of a specific social network, but screened off from non-members. Social capital can fortify the social network by increasing its members’ interests while decreasing non-members’ opportunities. Among the three types of parents’ capitals, social capital is more related to social privileges because by it can “create class advantages in school success” (Xie, & Postiglione, 2015, p. 1016) and eventually intensify inequality and stratification in education.

**How parents’ cultural capital work.** In spite of Bourdieu’s belief in the power of economic condition in preserving inequality, he thinks that the economic and physical conditions are not sufficient to account for inequality. Further, “the more subtle way in which people’s seemingly ‘normal’ behaviors or ‘choices’ helped to maintain the social stratification” (Winkle-Wagner, 2010, p. 4). Therefore, cultural capital, the concept
coined by Pierre Bourdieu, is now extensively used as an important theoretical and analytical instrument to explain social inequality especially in the educational context (DiMaggio, 1982; Lareau, 2003).

Different from economic capital that mainly takes monetary form, cultural capital usually appears in intangible form. It exists in three states: an embodied state, an objectified state, and an institutionalized state (Bourdieu, 1997) and in different forms, such as educational experiences and background, professional knowledge, cultural consciousness, knowledge of institutions (e.g., schools), cultural preferences and tastes (especially in art, aesthetic, and life styles), traditions, norms and values of the mainstream social life, etiquette and so on (Swartz, 1997; Winkle-Wagner, 2010).

Parents’ cultural capital also functions as an investment in children’s education in form of parental involvement. I found that parents use their cultural capital to help their children capture more educational opportunities mainly by taking the following paths in Diagram 5.3. Parents from the medium-capital family made the biggest contribution of their cultural capital in their son’s education. Moreover, parents’ cultural capital is closely related to their economic capital, or sometimes their social capital.
Diagram 5.3: How parents’ cultural capital works toward children’s educational opportunities

The above diagram describes how parents’ cultural capital works to win children’s educational opportunities in this research. It also works differently at home, in
school and in community. Parents’ cultural capital works in home by creating an environment physically, culturally and communicatively friendly for children’s education.

First, parents’ cultural capital creates a physical environment friendly for children’s education. In families whose parents have stronger cultural capital, there are usually more cultural objects or materials in the home. These artifacts objectify cultural capital. Books and learning materials are typical types of objectified cultural capital. Xuan’s and Han’s parents prepared private learning spaces, bookshelves, books, technology products for them in order to facilitate learning. In contrast, Lan had no individual room, desk, or reading materials beyond her textbooks. Objectified cultural capital can lay a physical foundation for children’s education, creating opportunities for children to learn and be educated. Without such a physical environment, the cultural communication, immersion and transfer are difficult at home.

Second, parents’ cultural capital creates a cultural environment friendly for children’s education. Different from a physical environment, a cultural environment is immaterial. Parents’ cultural capital work directly to make home a place where an intergenerational transfer of cultural norms, cultural awareness, traditions, tastes, values, and cultural knowledge happens from parents to children. In such ways, parents’ habitus is transferred and replanted in students. The intergenerational transplant of habitus is completed. For example, both Xuan and Han acquire the value of education from their parents. Enrollment at a university is part of their future plans and a significant investment is made to ensure they have the opportunity to attend. It might be accounted for by their parents’ expectations for them as well as their parents’ college experiences. For example, both Han’s parents have college degrees, so when they talk about such
experiences, a kind of cultural environment is subconsciously formed to acquaint Han with the value of higher education and the skills that might be used to deal with problems on campus. Lan’s parents were not exposed to college. They did not finish junior high school. Therefore, college is something that does not fall into the domain of their cultural knowledge. For them, Lan’s enrollment in college would be nice and good fortune, but not essential. Working in a factory or other forms of labor would also be acceptable to them. Their son was a labor worker at the time of the study. Labor work is a baseline for the family and going to college would be a blessing. Therefore, in our discussions about their expectations for Lan, they did mention college, but they did not exactly have much idea of what it really means for Lan. That is also the reason why Lan’s mother often asked me to talk more of college to Lan since they cannot help in this respect. This cultural environment is very similar to that of peer influence and school climate in educational institutions in that they all create an environment for children to capture and acquire intangible cultural capitals that are valued within their social class.

Third, parents’ cultural capital creates a communicative environment that frames the children’s education. Parents with more cultural capital would have more communication with their children at home. Moreover, their cultural capital familiarizes them with the proper ways and strategies to communicate with their children. Their communication is mostly culturally-based, by which parents deliver their expectations, emotional support and supervision to their children, or offer children knowledge and skills of dealing with the world, institutions (e.g., schools) and people. All these knowledge and skills will better prepare children for their academic work and career in the future. This communicative environment can ensure occurrence of the cultural
environment. The parent-child communication and appropriate communicative strategies can also be habitus to some extent that is passed from parents to children.

In schools, parents’ cultural capital mainly works in familiarizing and preparing children with knowledge of the cultural standards and skills that are important for their school enrollment and academic success. This knowledge also forms students’ habitus. When children’s habitus is consistent with the school and the teachers, they will be rewarded in this particular educational setting. For example, Han’s parents highlight the importance of reading in education, and when Han was transferred to the new school, many of his teachers also thought highly of reading. And his mother was especially excited and satisfied with this because she believes that good reading habits will benefit students in the long run and what she and her husband really care is Han’s overall development, not only over the school years. This connectedness and consistence of the same habitus between family and school would reinforce reading in Han and eventually rewards him as reading becomes his everyday habit.

In community, parents’ cultural capital works in community by involving children in culture-related activities. When Xuan went to attend concerts with his parents, and Han visited libraries and played badminton with his parents, Lan had to stay at home, playing with her niece or watching TV. She rarely takes part in culture-related activities. However, these activities are really constructive in two ways. On one hand, they convey cultural capital in form of cultural knowledge to students. On the other hand, they build more social connections between students and the community, which is in fact laying the ground of their social capital.
In conclusion, cultural capital can play a role as a “power resource” (Swartz, 1997, p. 75) (e.g., knowledge of culture and institution, abilities, skills, tastes, acquired norms and etiquette) by which people can acquire “acceptance, recognition, inclusion, or social mobility” (Winkle-Wagner, 2010, p. 5). Cultural capital is primarily acquired in two ways, either by people’s birth or education (Bourdieu, 1984). With the three families involved in my research, the intergenerational transference of cultural capital and family strata from parents to children continues and is reinforced by children’s education. In this sense, parents’ cultural capital helps their children’s habitus to build upon their parents’ cultural capital. Swartz (1997) mentioned that people’s socialization forward to a habitus can start as early as childhood. Therefore, it is natural that children whose parents have more cultural capital to transfer to them will outperform those students whose parents have less cultural capital.

**Characteristics of parent capitals**

Within the theoretical framework of Bourdieu, parents’ economic, social and cultural capitals have been discussed in the Chapter Four on how they work in gaining educational opportunities for children. In this process, characteristics of parent capitals are also found. The parent capitals work directly and indirectly, individually and jointly and their fluidity and convertibility are also evident in their working process.

**Directly and indirectly.** This research has found that the economic, social and cultural capitals of parents help with children’s educational opportunities in both direct and indirect ways. Economical capital can directly enable students to buy books or other learning materials to help with children’s education. Social capital, especially guanxi network, can help children to be enrolled in a good school without taking part in
interviews or lottery enrollment procedure. Cultural capital can enable parents to tutor children by themselves. However these capitals can also work in an indirect way. For example, children are positively or negatively impacted by school climate and peers’ influence. Such an influence can be indirectly done by economical capital or social capital. For Xuan, the boy from the first family comes from a wealthy entrepreneur family. His family’s sufficient economic capital can buy him a position in a bilingual school where students can enjoy more westernized and competitive peer relationship. This is the way how economic capital indirectly influence children’s school climate and peer influence. Also it is found that his classmates are mostly from the similar families. The similar social status of their families creates similar parents’ expectations and involvement strategies in children’s education (i.e., attending bilingual schools, having piano classes, travelling abroad for vocation). With such families as the major customer body, the school tries to meet their needs (i.e., offering bilingual curriculum, organizing various social activities, practicing students’ social and communicative skills), all of which will naturally develop a more open and competitive school climate and forge students’ future orientation. In this sense, parents’ social capital can indirectly affect children’s motivation indirectly via school climate and peer influence.

**Individually and jointly.** The three types of parent capitals sometimes work individually, but in more cases, they work together in educational settings (Chen & Xie, 2009; Ho & Kwong, 2013; Li, 2011; Lu, 2013; Yang, 2006). Economic capital offers an important perspective for people to understand the material world, but economic capital itself is inadequate to account for “how advantages in individuals’ life opportunities are produced and reproduced” (Ra, 2011, p. 19). It often works with social capital and
cultural capital. For example, in Xuan’s case, his parents used guanxi to find a family friend to seek an interview opportunity for Xuan. However, in the case of Xuan’s sister, the parents used both money and guanxi to buy her a position in the kindergarten. Both economic and social capitals are employed.

Again, cultural capital and social capital are interconnected. Even Bourdieu believes cultural capital can also be defined by social concept because most states of cultural capital or habitus (e.g., disposition, norms and tastes) are cultivated only in a particular social context (Winkle-Wagner, 2010). Piano learning is a good case. As a very typical Western music instrument, piano is always the most popular choice for families whose children have plan to learn instrument. Over the research, I found that all the three children from the first family have piano-learning experience and the boy Han from the second family began to have piano classes at the end of the research. All of their parents agree that piano playing is a good way to express oneself. Another case is that the first and the second families have a family habit to take children for vacation with a deep belief in its benefit on children. The cultural preference for westernized lifestyle (i.e. piano learning or family vacation) is more valued among upper-middle class but not that popular in lower classes. Of course, a most important reason is that the lower classes families such as Lan’s cannot afford that lifestyle. Hence, in this case, economic, social and cultural capitals are all involved because they are dependent upon each other.

Cultural capital is closely related to both economic capital and social capital. On one hand, in many cases, the productive employment of cultural capital requires the physical or material support offered by economic capital. For example, Xuan’s family bought a piano to cultivate his artistic taste. On the other hand, cultural capital is only
valued within a specific social network. In this research, piano-playing skills are considered as a necessity for Xuan’s family. When Xuan showed unwillingness to learn it and have a test for that, his mother responded by arguing that every child in their circle of friends is learning piano. However, Lan’s family never mentioned piano in our communication and none of children in Xuan’s class had any experience of learning piano. Piano, for these families, means a luxury not a necessity. Moreover, habitus, a term by Bourdieu to name the total sum of cultural capital or the “cumulative collection of dispositions, norms, and tastes (Winkle-Wagner, 2010, p. 9), also work together with social capital to solidify the social network and eventually define the social stratification.

**Fluidity and convertibility.** Fluidity and convertibility is another important characteristic of capitals. It may also relate to their joint work in educational settings. Among all the three types, economic capital is the most fluid capital. It can transform into social and cultural capitals. It might be related to the fact that economic capital can offer physical and material foundation for social and cultural capitals to happen. To put it simpler, economic capital has the buying power. Hence, when parents use money to buy books, their economic capital is converted into cultural capital. Another case in point is that parents’ economic condition is an important determinant of their social class, which implies that their economic condition can be transformed into social capital. For example, Xuan’s father has a strong social network, and most of his guanxi network involves business partners and associations. His economic capital strengthens his social capital and helps to establish a stronger social network, which exerts influence in seeking guanxi to secure his children’s enrollment in schools.
Cultural capital also shows its fluid quality in the study, especially in its power of social reproduction. When Han’s mother exchanges education information within her communities, she is using her cultural capital to obtain information, and then by means of exchanging information, she gains social capital, because her ability in obtaining useful information is a requirement for her entry into this community and her entry into this group with social quality increases her social capital. Again, when Han’s parents choose to tutor his homework by themselves, their cultural capital transforms into economic capital in some way because they don’t need to buy tutoring service like Xuan’s parents. These three types of capital are intertwined, so the pattern or paths how they work are rather complicated as indicated in the above diagrams.

**Disparity and Divide, Stratification and Segregation**

Before 1980s, the Chinese society was characterized as a homogeneous society. Little variance existed between people’s economic, social and cultural capital. The Chinese society was rather homogenous, showing little stratification. The only stratification indicator might be people’s political status or position. However, the reform and opening policies brought an overall development in Chinese society. The market economy produces more and diverse social positions among the Chinese population by creating more industries and entrepreneurs. The resulting popularization of higher education produced a desire for good education. Therefore, the political status began to be replaced by people’s economic capital, social capital and cultural capital, which work together to make the Chinese society a more stratified one.

In this research, three families are economically, socially and culturally diverse. And they are a microcosm of the Chinese society. Their class divide is the reason why
their children experience stratification in education, which eventually solidifies the segregation between the “haves” and the “have nots”.

**Path: Disparity and divide.** The word “path” is actually borrowed from HBO’s documentary *Class Divide*, which highlights the residential, economic and educational divisions between different social classes. A 16-year-old male student, Dan, came from an affluent family and was educated in an elite private school whose annual tuition is over $40,000 USD. He knew his parents’ life development and predicted his life as kind of following the “path”. This concept also applies to Xuan, as well as many of his classmates and peers. As a son of an entrepreneur, as soon as he was born, Xuan was already on his path to be a businessman or a similar professional career. Good schooling, good jobs and good family capital seem to be a natural reward to him at birth. He never worried about housing, tuition and extracurricular activities. His destination is seemingly known and predictable.

When I met his schoolmates and their families in the gym of a five-star hotel, I found that these families and children are on exactly the same trajectory. Their path is clearly outlined: they are studying in international schools or bilingual schools, which lay a linguistic and cultural foundation for their oversea study after graduation from senior high school. Their parents usually expect them to take a major such as business, finance or the like and then take over the family business. Xuan’s mother never camouflages her expectation on Xuan. She often says that Xuan, as a boy, is sure to help with his father’s business. After school, parents send their children for cultivated activities. Many of Xuan’s classmates even took classes in camping, golf and ice hockey. These classes are actually not that popular among the Chinese population, but these parents did want to
prepare their children for their international experience. In the HBO’s documentary, it is also termed as a preparation for children’s “international life”.

Similarly, Lan is following a parallel path to that of her schoolmates. They were allowed to receive elementary school education in Shanghai, but in a separate school because their parents are migrant workers. On their first schooling day in Shanghai, the students and their parents know that they would mostly return to their hometown. At the end of the research, Lan as well as most of her classmates packed their stuff and had to leave the city where they spent most of their days before adolescence and even where many of them were born. Parents in these families worried about their jobs and income while their children are bothered with a question where they can go to school. I received a message from Lan’s mother in the seventh month of their return. She told me that Lan often got full marks in her English test but both of them were worried. “People here in our hometown do not think highly of English. And English taught in her school is too simple,” Lan’s mother explained, “English Lan is taught here is as easy as what she learned in Shanghai two years ago.” Moreover, Lan’s new school cannot offer extracurricular activities as her previous school did. Now both of Lan’s parents are worried that she is not going to senior high school and university. However, such a question never occurs to Xuan because everything happens so naturally to him. Usually Xuan and his classmates will discuss where they will go for college, UK, US or elsewhere.

The HBO documentary was shot in Manhattan, a city similar to Shanghai since population in these two cities was stratified considerably. In the documentary, the “haves” and “have nots” live in separate communities, go to segregated schools and grow with
separate stories. In the shared urban space in Shanghai, social divide places children in separate communities and segregated schools; their life paths develop on divergent but seemingly predictable roads. The real picture behind it is that social divide leads to education stratification. If stratification continues and worsen, problems of educational inequality are produced.

The similar stories in different cities can be an indicator that now the world is experiencing the same problem of educational inequity. That is, students’ educational opportunities are significantly contributed by their parents’ capitals, which is an important part of literature review in Chapter Two. Therefore, it has become a global mission to solve the problem. UNESCO (2015) published a report *Rethinking Education: Towards a Global Common Good?* It proposed the common problem for the global citizens by stating “Greater wealth but rising vulnerability and growing inequalities” because the greater wealth is unequally distributed between classes and it severely influences social justice. For that reason, UNESCO forwarded *the Education 2030 Framework for Action*. One of its goals is to “Serve as the basis for policy dialogue at national/regional levels, contextualizing the Education 2030 goals and targets as a collective responsibility.” Indeed, the tendency of globalization is irresistible. Different countries and regions began to show more homogeneity in their development, including their challenges. Therefore, it is meaningful to have a Sino-US or a global dialogue to solve the problem of educational inequality for common goods.

**Anxious investors.** Paths of both Xuan and Lan were most divergent. However, Han’s story is different because his path is a “grey area”. Han comes from a typical family of “sandwich class”. The term “sandwich class” is used often by the Chinese
media to refer to such families as the Hans between the elite class and the lower class with an indication of the pressure those families bear. Parents’ life and educational experiences as well as the social position of this family make the parents anxious investors in education.

On one hand, parents from the sandwich class have more expectation upon children’s education. It is mostly related to their own life experience. Han’s parents were born in a faraway village. Living in the countryside, they were never educated in quality schools and their parents offered no help with their school work. They used to be in the same situation as Lan. However, their intelligence and diligence help them work all through the hard days until they are enrolled in college and finally dwell in a big city. Therefore, education means more for them because they have personally seen the impact. And their expectation upon Han is mostly dependent on his education. For example, the expectation of Han’s father upon his son is that Han could attend a renowned and historic university. The reason might be that Han’s father himself is a graduate from such a university and he knows well how much he could benefit from as being a graduate of such a school.

On the other hand, parents from the sandwich class are more anxious than parents from upper and lower classes. First, Han’s family does not have capitals as strong as Xuan’s parents. Although they think highly of education and are willing to invest in education, they cannot invest as much as Xuan’s parents. As a result, they have to invest more of their time and efforts. Han’s mother even gave up her job to take care of him before he was transferred to a new school, and even while looking for a new job, Han’s mother still looked for a part-time job so that she could have time to drive him to and
from the school. However, investment of her time means a decrease in family income. They are anxious because they are in two dilemmas. First, they want to invest more in Han’s education but are limited by their socio-economic capitals. Second, they want to schedule more for Han’s extracurricular activities in order to increase his competitiveness, but their cultural knowledge reminds them that an overscheduled life does harm to Han’s physical and mental health. Both the parents are far away from their previous childhood life in the countryside. They are much more successful than their ancestors; they have bought an apartment and a car in Shanghai. Hence, it is impossible for them to lower their expectation upon their child like Lan’s parents do. Lan’s parents wish that she could go to college, but their desire is not that strong. Lan’s mother even believes that an early marriage is more important than receiving more education, especially for a girl.

As the first generation of migrants to Shanghai in the family, Han’s parents know that life is not easy for families like them. The academic success of Han’s father enables him to live a more advantaged life than his parents and his peers faraway in his hometown. His story is a very typical old-fashioned but inspiring story for students for humble beginnings. However, he is the first generation in his big family to move upward. Therefore, they are really eager to consolidate the family’s social position via Han’s success and they know that catching more educational opportunities can help Han move closer to the desired destination. This is also the reason why they become the anxious investors.

**Education outcomes and future development.** As indicated by the title of the fourth chapter *One City, Three Tales*, the three families have fairly dissimilar experiences. Their varied quantity and quality of economic, social and cultural capitals leads to the
class division between them. The most evident symbol is that they live on pretty alienated roads of life that frame how their children’s schooling experiences differ. These three children are at similar ages; however, they exhibited difference in quite a lot of respects, which can be indicators of their academic success and life development in the future.

**Social-emotional skills.** The three children have different levels of social-emotional skills, which is evident in their interaction with adults. When I stayed with the three families, children showed different ways of communicating with me. Xuan and Han are very active and showed their humor and communicative skills when talking with me. One day on our drive for Xuan’s math classes, Xuan was excited to know that I would have an “interview” with them and laughed, “Oh, an interview? Does it mean that I will be a star? Stars have interviews.” He also invited me to play Legos with him. Similarly, Han invited me to join his spelling game with his mother in a restaurant dining place when we waited for the orders. I find that they are both able to talk comfortably with adults, not only their parents but also other adults. Xuan would start a conversation with his driver and his tutors and they have very good exchanges. Usually Xuan could call them by uncle or auntie and he would call me auntie. As for Han, when he was in public occasions such as in dining places and training centers, he knows how to talk with the working staff (e.g., waiter, receptionist) and professionals (e.g., teachers). He could also order for himself after reading the menu. Similar findings are also in the book *Unequal Childhoods* (Lareau, 2011) that children from the upper-middle classes tend to know more of communicating with professionals such as doctors. However, Lan tends to be shy with me. Sometimes she simply responds with a smile or lowering her head. Her mother
also mentioned that Lan seldom asked questions to her teachers even when she needs help with her schoolwork. Her mother contributes all this to Lan’s introverted personality.

**Communication skills.** Similar communication patterns are also found between these children and their parents. Parents with more capitals tend to have more talks with their children and their talks are more content-based and skill-based, which helps children acquire a natural and effective pattern to communicate with adults or simply others. Parents’ cultural capital can make parent-child conversations more profound in content and more skilled in exchanges, which may produce better outcomes. For example, Xuan’s father has a lot of Japanese business clients and a good knowledge of Japanese language and culture. Xuan has acquired some knowledge and skills from his talks with his father. He would sometimes say simple Japanese and attempt to teach me. Han’s mother showed good communication skills in her talks with him. Whenever Han was in bad mood and lost his temper, she would first leave him alone to calm himself down and she would only begin their talks when Han responds a “Yes” with her question “Are you calmed down? Can we talk now?” In these cases, Xuan acquires language skills and Han practices social-emotional skills. These skills are important because they are the foundation of communication.

**Competence of using technology.** Technology skills matter in the modern digitally connected world. It is an important tool for students to search for information, acquire knowledge and have social communication. They are essential skills for education, including schooling, self-teaching and life-education. Han and Xuan have computers, iPads, kindles and their parents’ smartphones at hand. They can use these technology products under the supervision of their parents. And their schools and parents
teach them how to learn and practice these technology skills. For example, some of their school projects or assignments have to be finished by using technology, such as preparing a presentation with PowerPoint or recording English reading with a recorder. In contrast, Lan, the eldest child in the research, has no computer at home and family members’ smart phones are not available because there is no WIFI at home. However, her homework sometimes requires using technology.

**Reading habits and skills.** Reading is a habit or competence important for academic achievement and success; it is also “a critical piece of more elite societies” (Brown, Hurst, & Hail, 2016, p. 116). It is acquired within the family cultural climate, transferred from parents to children, or reinforced in schools, according to this research. Therefore, children such as Xuan and Han acquire good reading habits and have extensive reading experiences from their parents and in schools. Lan, on the contrary, despite her enjoyment of reading sometimes, has not yet formed reading habits since there is no supply of books for her at home and reading is never emphasized in her schools.

**English skills.** For the past decades, English is regarded as one of the three main subjects, and it is given more priority in international cities like Shanghai. Good English competence can help students to get high scores and outcomes in school work and better enrollment opportunity in higher level education. Therefore, parents and children all know about the importance of English and are willingly to invest more in English. Xuan takes an international curriculum and most of his classes are taught in English. And Han’s school highlights English in its curriculum and English classes play a higher proportion in its curriculum. Moreover, their parents help them with English at home
either by reading English books or watching English movies with them, practice English with them and create English speaking opportunities for them. For that reason, both of they have good competence in English. Although Xuan’s English is outperformed by many of his classmates, he is still a good English learner compared with his peers in public schools. As elementary school student, both of them have good English pronunciation, simple conversations with their parents and read some simplified or abbreviated editions. Comparatively, Lan’s English limited competence in English. She cannot speak English well; when she reads English, she read a sentence word by word in a separate way with little comprehension of meaning. She has no idea of when some words should be read together. She has no English reading materials except textbooks. Lan’s parents actually have some expectation on her English, but they are helpless with that fact that Lan cannot have a good competence in it and they cannot help much.

Motivation and orientation. Both Xuan and Han have the ambition to head for their oversea study when they are older. However, the difference is that Xuan’s oversea study is destined to happen because he is now studying in an international school. And comparatively, Xuan has a much clearer definition of his future. He wants to be a Lego designer and expects a journey in Africa. His ambition brings in his family expectation and also his personal interest. As for Han, he has kind of ambition when inspired by the poster of his schoolmates who has been enrolled in well-known universities. However, his ambition is much vaguer than Xuan’s. His ambition is fundamentally grounded on his parents’ expectation. As for Lan, she is lost in front of this question. She seldom thinks of this question because the whole family believes that going to college is a based on luck. Neither the school nor the family can give her much help, so they believe that Lan can go
to college if she is born to be intelligent. If she is not that lucky, she will become a manual worker as her parents. Lan’s ambition is vague and weak. For her parents, although Lan’s college attendance is their dream, but it is not a priority for the family. However, her mother mentioned that she does not want Lan to delay her marriage.

**Re-defining Educational Opportunities**

In Chapter Two, much of the literature review is about the concept “educational opportunities” and it is found that there is no consensus on its definition. For that reason, it is a concept that wants careful consideration. At the end of penning this dissertation, I have some reconsideration of its definition. Educational opportunity is rather complex concept, and it can be defined spatially, chronologically and sociologically.

A spatial perspective. Educational opportunity is a spatial concept in terms of where it happens. From a spatial perspective, educational opportunities do not simply exist in schools. In this research, it is found that educational opportunity is not limited to the educational activities students have within the schools; educational opportunities can also happen at home and in community (see Diagram 5.4). The reason is very simple: education is a far broader concept than “schooling”. While schooling mainly occurs in schools and requires some family involvement, education and educational opportunity is everywhere, in school, home and community. Therefore, spatially, a child’s or a student’s educational opportunities are distributed in the contexts of homes, schools and communities. Also parents’ capitals work in these contexts to win more educational opportunities for their children.
A progressive or chronological perspective. Educational opportunity is also a chronological concept when considering how it develops. This research outlines a picture of how parents’ capitals help their children obtain educational opportunities at their elementary school level; however, it reflects what parents’ have done before and also predicts (or at least correlates with) children’s academic success, career development and future life since now they have shown considerable divergence in their knowledge and skills essential for success in school and life. Parents’ competition in children’s educational opportunities will even continue at their college entrance.

Moreover, the progressive or chronological perspective of educational opportunity is rooted in the fact that education has now become a lifelong and concept and can even develop between generations. As education continues with life and age, educational opportunity also develops with it. It is also interesting to see that the significance of motivation and future orientation chronically extend the concept of “educational opportunities”, developing it in the future sense. Therefore, it can be concluded that educational opportunity is a progressive or chronically perspective in that obtaining educational opportunity happens throughout children’s whole life.
A sociological perspective. Educational opportunity is also a sociological concept when we consider how it differs between social classes. Parents from varied social strata have formed a path for their children to develop and the path becomes more divergent as children grow up. Educational opportunity has to be defined from a sociological perspective because it has to be defined in varied quality and quantity and measured by different standards between social classes. For families with strong capitals, educational opportunity means attending an elite school in Shanghai, for families with medium capitals, it means an enrollment into a popular local school while families with weak capitals simply relates the concept to a certificate or permit to allow them a slot in any school in Shanghai.

Education opportunity is a social concept because it denotes the screening function in a society. In the modern society, social status or social position is no longer simply dependent on one’s blood and family; instead, the modern society looks for those with high intelligence, knowledge and skills. Only those with knowledge and skills essential for the social development can secure their social status. That is, education plays a screening role in social development; it screens out those who cannot contribute more intelligence and skills for the society. Education, especially school education is the main means for people to acquire knowledge and skills. Therefore, parents try all their best to seek more education opportunities for their children so as not to screen them out in social competition. Educational opportunities, in truth, have become a method to realize the transformation of parents’ economic, social and cultural capitals to their children’s capitals. In this sense, educational opportunity is a social concept since it has its social function of intergenerational transmission.
In conclusion, this research sought to uncover how parents help their children win their educational opportunities by using their economic, social and cultural capitals. By means of this research, it is found that all the three types of capitals, individually or jointly, play their roles in home, school and communities, outlining educational opportunity as a spacious concept; it is found that the three capitals are active in their function at the moment and their functions will continue to help children win more educational opportunities in their future life, extending educational opportunities from a current state to a future state as a chronic concept; and the three capitals, as important credentials of social class, help to consolidate social class by closing and maintaining more educational opportunities within upper-middle classes, and enlarging the gaps between classes, eventually highlighting educational opportunities as a social concept.

**Full-time mother: Why and how**

The phenomenon of full-time mother is an unexpected theme that emerged. The rapid economic development allows one parent, mostly a mother to retire from career and fully devote themselves to children’s education while the other provides the economic support. Full-time mothers at elementary school level have become a social phenomenon in China (Zhai, 2016).

Stay-at-home mother is sometimes termed as fulltime mother. The reason why “fulltime mother” is used in this research is that fulltime mothers can specifically refer to those who chose to stay at home taking care of their families or children while stay-at-home mothers sometimes refer to those who have to stay at home because they cannot find good jobs or they are less competitive for a position. All the mothers in the three
families have stay-at-home mother experiences, which are virtually all different, because they made different choices for different reasons.

Xuan’s mother Li gave up her job soon after marriage and devoted all herself to family. After the birth of two children, her schedule is simply a combination of all the children’s schedule. And she had no plan to return to career. First, their adequate economic capital ensures that there is no need for her to earn money. Second, her limited educational experiences cannot make much cultural capital for her, and thus she had no self-efficacy in career development. The most important thing is that she is happy with her self-identity, though sometimes she admired successful career women.

Han’s mother Mei has shifted between her career and family. When she first came to Shanghai, she had a job, but she gave it up after her pregnancy. She was devoted to taking care of Han and did not consider returning until recently. For Mei, to be a fulltime mother is only a temporary choice. Her higher education experiences encourage her to return and at the end of the research she did find a job. However, she still chose a job with very flexible schedule, so that she can take more care of the child and the family when necessary. For Mei, she can freely choose to develop her career and to be a full-time mother. She had enough education to return to work and the family also has the money to have someone in her replacement.

However, in the case of Lan’s mother, she was forced to be a fulltime mother and grandmother in her early forties. When Lan had to return to their hometown, her mother definitely needed to be with her while Lan’s father had to stay in Shanghai because he was the bread-earner. Actually Lan’s mother was unhappy with this decision, but she was helpless. She wanted to work simply for more money. She had a daughter to support, and
had to pay the bride money. The economic burden disallowed her to give up her job, but
the real situation forced her to do so. Therefore, she told me she would seek some part-
time job when she returned home.

Despite their divergent maternal experiences shifting between career and family,
all three mothers give priority to their family life. Their choices and considerations are
for the well-being of their children. Surprisingly, none of them unveil concern about their
career development. In this sense, the parent or family choices are still based on their
children’s needs. It is a traditional pattern of children-centered family choice. The
family’s capitals also play some roles in their decisions. On one hand, the economic
capital predicts mothers’ satisfaction with their roles of full-time mother. When Xuan’s
mother and Han’s mother need not worry the family income when they retire from career,
to be a fulltime mother is quite acceptable to them. However, Lan’s mother was very
upset with her situation. Money is always her and the whole family’s first concern. On
the other hand, their cultural capital probably influences their efficacy as a working
mother and their self-value as a fulltime mother. Han’s mother was the only one who was
confident with her return to business. Although she thought that she would need to adapt
herself at the beginning of her return, but it only took time before she would make it.
Meanwhile, she had the highest self-value of her participation in Han’s education. She
not only had a good faith in maternal involvement in children’s education, but also
believed that it was worthwhile to take care of Han’s education at the cost of several
years’ of her career. Earning money is important, but Han’s education is always on the
top of the list.
Chapter 6: Conclusion

Research on impact of family background (e.g., parents’ capitals) mostly focused on the educational outcome without much attention on the process how these educational patterns are made and reproduced (Lareau, 1987). Therefore, this research offers a good perspective to understand how such a process happens with a special choice of subjects. Different from most studies that focuses on the migrant workers as the disadvantaged group or simply the general population, this research aims at the whole migrant population in Shanghai, including but not limited to migrant workers. As a huge percentage of residents in Shanghai, they should not be forgotten in research. More importantly, this research is done and discussed within the framework of Bourdieu’s three capitals (i.e. economic capital, social capital and cultural capital) so as to see whether a Western sociological theory can work when situated within a Chinese context.

Using capitals, parents create: 1) the contexts where parents are engaged in children’s education, 2) the means by which parents are involved in children’s education, and 3) the patterns of how parents take part in children’s education. And the contexts, means and patterns of parents’ involvement in students’ education via capital help students to be enrolled in different schools, have dissimilar family and community education experiences, thus leading to an enormous discrepancy in their knowledge and skills that may be important determinants of their academic success, career and life development in the future. Therefore, it can be concluded that parents’ varied economic, social and cultural capitals produce discrete educational opportunities that might

**Summary of discussion**

Based on a comparative case study, this research has arrived at some major conclusions.

First, the disparity of educational opportunities is actually rooted in the disparity in educational resources. The disparity of educational resources happens in schools, families and communities. Moreover, in the present Chinese context, families, especially how much capitals parents have in hand are rising as social factors that strongly influence the distribution of educational resources and opportunities. The above findings are consistent with the research by Wen and Gu (2017).

Second, the disparity in educational resources significantly impacts educational outcomes and causes problems of educational inequity. Especially under the influence of strong social capital, education plays a more passive rather than constructive role in social stratification, thus producing a trend of ruining education equity (Chen, 2010). Therefore, education equity has risen as a big social concern (Yang, 2006) in today’s China particularly in big cities like Shanghai when the society tends to be more stratified.

Third, education equity means equity of both educational rights and educational opportunities (Wen & Gu, 2017). Only when both of them work together, they can guarantee the starting point of education equity and play a constructive role on educational process and outcomes (Wang, 2017). However, the fact is that laws ensure people’s equal rights of education but not the equal educational opportunities. Also, the socio-economic development in China has made enhanced people’s requirements and
expectations on educational equity. People are no longer satisfied with having a plain opportunity to go to school; they are more concerned with how good educational opportunities or how equal opportunities they can have access to. Similarly, Yang (2006) concluded that the main concern of the general public has transferred from students’ rights of education to education opportunity (Yang, 2006).

**Hukou problems: Stronger capitals, better solutions**

Hukou system is an institutional method of the government’s population management since ancient China. It has its advantages and even far-reaching impact upon neighboring countries. However, now the rapid social development of China generates more population mobility. Having no local hukou creates limitations for the migrant population, such as buying commercial residence or attending a local school. However, from this research, we can find a fact that the three families in this study solved the problem differently. Enough strong capitals free the family from the hukou problem and medium capitals help the family delay the problem, but the weak capitals force the family to leave the city.

**Overcome hukou problems.** The family with strong capitals is a good case to illustrate the professionalism of children care and education in China. Since industrialization, responsibilities of education have been transferred from family to society. Over the past few decades, Chinese society has witnessed the unprecedented economic, social and cultural development. The wealth upsurge among the elite families leads to their increasing demand on children’s education.

They probably face some problems as Xuan’s parents. One is that the father cannot contribute adequate companionship and teaching to children’s education because
of his business and the other is that the mother cannot help much with children’s academic work with her own direct tutoring because she only has a secondary education diploma. However, these problems are easily solved by the family’s strong economic capital. The mother retires from her job to be full-time mother and devotes all her time to children’s education. Also the family buys educational services to make up for the father’s absence and the mother’s limited educational training. Their adequate economic, social and cultural capitals release them from concern over children’s educational opportunities. For them, hukou does not stop them from obtaining a position in a good school for children. Instead, their extensive social capital helps their children have an access to good educational opportunities, their solid economic capital supports the expensive quality schooling and diverse extra-curricular activities, and their cultural capital creates a constructive environment for children to develop and expand their educational opportunities and subconsciously nurture their culture taste.

Hukou is never a problem for their life and children’s education. They even do not care about whether they can have access to a local hukou because they have a plan of immigration. Immigration, according to Xuan’s parents, is a path for families like them since many of their friends and business partners have such a plan. For parents in this family, their educational concern is to offer the best quality education to their children and successfully dominate good social status in the future as their families. To gain educational opportunities is an important means to realize the heritage of family business and wealth, which in essence, is to secure their social class.
Delay hukou problems. The family with medium capitals does not have economic and social capitals as strong as the first family, but they still have moderate capitals to help their child to acquire education opportunities.

However, this family is also confronted with two problems. One is that the family has not yet obtained a Shanghai hukou and Han’s education in Shanghai might be limited especially when he transfers from junior high school to senior high school because only those with a Shanghai hukou are entitled to having college entrance examination in Shanghai. Considering that college entrance examinees in Shanghai will have a higher rate of admission in Shanghai, a large number of migrant population want to gain a local hukou, which means winning a better chance for their children to be enrolled in universities in the future. The other problem is that they cannot have economic and social capitals as strong as the first family to afford elite schools or expensive extra-curricular activities as the first family.

The first problem is not completely solved since the father is still on the long waiting list to be granted a Shanghai hukou, but it is delayed by their moderate social capital when they sent Han to a private school that offers elementary and junior high school programs. Therefore, they do not need to worry about Han’s education in Shanghai before Han completes his junior high school program in this school. That is to say, up to now, the family still has about five years to solve the hukou problem. Han’s father, is now already on the waiting list. He is confident that he can get it within five years. Although this family cannot afford an international program to completely avoid the hukou problem, but they have moderate social capital to look for and afford a position in a comparatively good school.
The second problem is solved by parents’ cultural capital and their involvement in education. Parents in this family have their own educational philosophies. They have modern and popular teaching and parenting beliefs. And they contribute time, knowledge, skills, and beliefs to their son’s education. While the first family buys professional or educational service for their children’s education, this family attempts to devote themselves. For example, Han’s mother helped with Han’s reading and his father coached Han to play badminton. Their education background helps them build faith and values in education.

Indeed, hukou is a problem for families like Xuan’s, but they can delay the problem by using their capitals. At least, now, the child is still living with the parents and having an access to a fairly good school in Shanghai. For parents in this family, their educational concern is that their son could enjoy rather decent education in Shanghai and attend a university as his parents. Of course, an elite Chinese university or oversea learning experience is a better destination for Han, according to his parents. To gain educational opportunities means that their son can do better than his parents and the family can have a more secure position in this city. It is a very typical aspiration for the first generation of migrant population to help the second generation to be rooted in the city.

**Stuck in hukou problems.** The family with weak capitals are often under the research spotlight as the most disadvantaged community in the urban life because they have the least economic, social and cultural capitals.

This family encounters two problems. One is that they are short of economic and social capital to help them solve or delay the hukou problem as the other two families. To
sign up for a good-quality private school means a large sum of money beyond them, and they don’t have enough economic capital to pay for that. For a family without a local hokou, the child’s enrollment in a good public local school means the parents can provide a complete profile of residence permit, a proof of personal income tax payment, diploma or certificate of specialty and technology. It is not problematic for Han’s parents since his father has a master degree, has a decent job, get a very good salary and high personal income tax payment, which successfully enables Han to be enrolled in a good public school before he transfers to a private school. However, for Lan, her parents cannot even offer a diploma of junior high school. They are temporary workers with no employers, so they cannot provide proof of income tax payment. Also they do not know some important people to get or “buy” a position for their daughter. Their weak social and cultural capital prevents Lan from a local public school. Therefore, their only choice is to send Lan to a school that specially enrolls children of migrant workers.

However, at the edge of Lan’s graduation, they can do nothing but take Lan back to their hometown for high school education. They could solve the problem either by sending Lan to a private junior high school or affording an international program, but their very limited economic and social capital put them in a helpless position. Meanwhile, their parental involvement in education is narrowed by their economic, social and cultural capitals. To earn more money, the father has to work overtime while the mother works or take care of the granddaughter, so they are often not available as a companion to their daughter. Moreover, they do not have strong social capital to establish a social network where education resources and information can be exchanged and shared. For example, they do not know where they can buy dictionaries for Lan. Despite their expectation that
Lan could go to college one day, they both think that they can only leave it to fate because they cannot help much as dropouts of junior high school students. Their understanding of parental involvement probably simply means two things. One is to provide basic needs (e.g., housing, food and money) and the other is to provide teaching. However, as undereducated parents they can only do the first. They never mentioned their concerns of other aspects of Lan’s life and education. Also, education only means involvement in schoolwork and going to a college one day.

Hukou is really a big problem for this family. Having weak economic, social and cultural capitals, they cannot help their daughter to continue to stay with them in the city and continue her study. If they have a local hukou, they can at least have access to an ordinary public school. With neither hukou nor capitals, the family is stuck in the hukou problem. For parents in this family, their educational concern is simply a slot in a local school. They do not have much expectation on its quality since it is a luxury for families like them. For them, to gain educational opportunities simply means that their child can attend a local school, live with them together in the city and continue seeking a Shanghai dream.

**Geographical and historical comparisons**

The significance of this research is that it tells the real and lively stories of people living in Shanghai, China. Therefore, it can be more inspiring and informative if it is compared geographically with what is happening in other regions and countries, or historically with the situation in other period of Chinese history.

**Historical comparison with old China.** Historically, some scholars (e.g., Chen et al.) think that compared with the Western societies, the origins of elites in Chinese
society is more diverse and heterogeneous, which is related by them to the openness and inclusiveness of education. And they conclude that the Chinese educated elites have experienced four significant changes, forming four phases (Chen et al., p.52), which is adapted in this research as in the following Table 6.1:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Phases</th>
<th>Years from…to…</th>
<th>Major body of educated elites</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>1865-1905</td>
<td>Children of officials and achievers of imperial Keju examinations/civil service examinations.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>1906-1952</td>
<td>Children of businessmen and professional and technical personnel.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>1953-1993</td>
<td>Children of the proletariat such as factory workers and peasants.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>1994-2014</td>
<td>Children of property and children of the proletariat but the former began to show their advantage.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

It is noticeable that the last phase covered in the above research is 1994-2014 when the major body of educated elites in China shows more heterogeneity than the previous phases. That is, children of those of property and children of the proletariat co-compose the educated elites. However, they also noticed that children of those of property began to take a more dominant position than those who have less property. Some scholars also pointed out three origins of elite communities, including “economic elites, privileged elites and educated elites” (Chen et al., 2017, p.48). In other words,
children whose families have more capitals began to make up a larger proportion in Chinese educated elites. Ownership of capitals has become an indicator of people’s social classes.

Chen (2010) specifically points out that the Chinese society used to be composed of working class, peasant class, the peasantry and the intellectual class. However, now it has transformed into a more complex and stratified society. “The structural transformation of the elite community and appearance of the burgeoning elite community is an important sign of social transformation.” (Chen et. al, 2017, p. 48) In the process of its market transition, China has witnessed its economic prosperity and increasingly widened income gap among the population (Xie, & Postiglione, 2015).

Zhang (2015) believes that Chinese society has been experienced momentous changes in structure of social classes, especially after Reform and opening-up. The Chinese society began to witness the sharp differentiation. And social stratification has become an academic focus over the recent years as the Chinese society is experiencing a huge social change (Chen, 2010). In the context of education, marketization produced huge shocks to educational institutions (Li, 2006). Marketization of education changed the nature of education in China since education has partially become a production for families and parents to buy.

Education plays a double role as a driving force of social mobility and an instrument for the privileged class to solidify their positions (Li, 2006). However, in this research, it is evident that the privileged families utilize their capitals via education as an agent to help their children to win more education resources even at their very young age. These privileged families transform their economic, social and cultural capitals or
resources to educational resources, exclude non-privileged families in competition and eventually monopolize the channels of social mobility. Therefore, education is losing its power as a role to promote social mobility. Therefore, based on this research, we can conclude that if nothing is done to release the problem of education equity, the five phases of forming educated elites in China after year 2014 will definitely witness the educated Chinese elites narrowing down on the group of haves.

Indeed, educational opportunity is a multi-dimensional concept. And education is a dialectical concept. On one hand, education partially accounts for social stratification. On the other hand, education is an important tool for people to transcend their original social strata transferred from their previous generations and move upward their social hierarchy (Brown, Hurst, & Hail, 2016). Most educational problems can be traced back to the issues of educational opportunities. The reason why educational opportunity is chosen as a perspective to explore the issue of educational equity is that it is the core of educational democracy (Cui & Tian, 2005). And to close the class gap, those families in the most disadvantaged positions should be helped to flow into a more advantaged class via education especially (Wu, 2006).

**Geographical comparison with Unequal Childhoods.** The completion of this study is largely inspired by Annette Lareau’s *Unequal Childhoods*. Also in the writing process, the three families in her work are often compared with the three families in this study. In general, both studies reveal the gaps between classes and its reproduction in educational context. People from different classes are physically segregated from each other in residence, distinguished by their disposition and tastes, and are educated in separated schools, which is caused by and reinforce social stratification. However, some findings in
this study are more specific to the Chinese framework, but not mentioned or explicitly illustrated in Annette’s work.

First, all the parents, despite their socio-economic status, have high expectations of their children. Even Lan’s parents hope that Lan could attend a college. Therefore, they tend to invest as much as possible in their children’s education, depending on their capitals at hand. And their high expectation and investment might be a reason for their stress in children’s education. Surely, their stresses and concerns differ between the three families, but each family’s educational stress is a reflection of the collective and shared concern of the communities they belong to. Different from Annette Lareau’s findings that those lower class families allow natural child growth, I see all the families have a belief in concerted cultivation. And their devotion to concerted cultivation depends on how much capitals they have. Both of Lan’s parents clearly expressed that they hope that Lan could have those classes, training and activities as other children, but they felt sorry that they could not help much as other parents. All the parents, regardless of their capitals, have a strong belief in parents’ significance in children’s education and its outcomes. This can account for the phenomenon that all parents try to help their children win more educational opportunities in life. And their capitals become the weapon to win this war of competition. Education, in today’s China, looks more like parents’ competition when parents are told how important their involvement is in children’s education. parents’ with more economic capitals try to win by paying more economic capitals, parents with more social capitals try their social networks and parents who have less economic or social capitals might contribute all of their cultural capitals. As for those parents who have no type of strong capital, they are doomed to lose in this competition.
Another point is that Chinese parents also make a large investment in shadow education. Although in Annette’s book, she described the cultivated activities popular in the middle class families, the American families obviously are not as keen on shadow education as Chinese parents. And the shadow education, as a special type of non-schooling education form has become a huge-profit industry in China and therefore arouse a national debate over it. The last interesting point I have noticed is the evolution of private education and its subtle relationship with public education. Private education was born as compensation to public education in China, and the public used to have doubts over its quality. However, private education, at least at the elementary level, exceeds in its attraction and reputation among the public. Therefore, the public elementary schools need to compete with the private schools. The position of the private schools has seemingly transferred from a subordinate position to a rival position with the public schools.

Last, Wang wrote that the problems of educational equity are more related to race in the Western world while more related to public rules and regulations in the Chinese context (Wen & Gu, 2017) because strong social capital is often used to get social privileges such as better educational opportunities. Also Chinese research comparatively focuses more on “social capital”. From its ancient times, Chinese society is a relationship-based rather than society (Fei, 1985). Therefore, even in such a modern society where Chinese people are constricted by laws and regulations, Chen (2010) still argues that what really works under the table is relationship. It is a kind of special social capital that can work well in Chinese society, or social capital can be seen as a kind of law or regulation that works under table. This is probably the reason why the general
public is said to have a tendency of hostility to the rich. Social capital, in Chinese context is presumably a blur concept because it is unknown to the public how much capital the elite group have in hand on earth Chen (2010) and their social capital enables them to obtain various opportunities with less or even no cost, which threatens social equity and social justice.

All in all, Annette offers many micro perspectives for its readers to see and understand the three families’ stories. Her narration is detailed and inspiring, defining many dimensions and terms by which we can borrow to perceive the families’ life experience. I did notice many dimensions in Annette’s book and is motivated by it; however, it tends to connect the subjects’ life stories to the Chinese framework, associating the minor perspectives of individuals’ lives and the major perspectives of the country’s economic, social and cultural changes.

Implications

Implications for policy & practice. Based on a scientometric analysis of Chinese research on educational equity that were published in core journals from 2012 to 2017, Cai and Yang (2017) found that 58% of the research focuses on theoretical discussion; therefore, we really need to think of how the problems can be practically solved. In this comparative study, it is found that among the non-local community, those weak-capital families are confronted so many real problems because of their shortage of economic, social and cultural capital. Now this research is going to discuss how we can help those disadvantaged families and their children.

Parents’ ownership of economic capital deprives children mainly of availability of physical education resources to them. Their families do not have spare money to buy
children books, computers or other devices to help with their study. Therefore, we can help in the following ways. First, scholarships can be granted to those high achievers of school work among those economically deprived families. Second, those schools for children of migrant workers should be given more support so as to upgrade their teaching conditions and quality. It is the only way to give those children equal educational opportunity in school since those weak-capital families cannot afford other expensive private schools. Third, the community can offer learning environment and conditions for those children. Now the Shanghai government is working hard on the program of “Homes of Neighborhood” (邻里之家), which aims to serve people living nearby in the neighborhood by offering lectures, sports facilities, small libraries, cultural activities and so on. I think those non-local families, especially those economically disadvantaged families should be informed and encouraged to take their children to Homes of Neighborhood where the children can enjoy the noiseless, well-lit and air-conditioned learning space, use computers and other learning facilities, and broaden their mind and interests by attending lectures and cultural activities there. Adding those families on their service targets will not be trouble for the government since it is no need for the program to offer extra service, but it can help a large proportion of nonlocals in Shanghai.

Parents’ shortage of social capital chiefly produces two problems. One is closeness of effective education information (i.e. information about school admission or strategies of parent involvement in education) and the other is social injustice out of corruption. To solve the first problem, the government, the schools and all the institutions should establish and speed up their information opening systems so as to ensure that all the families, regardless of their socio-economic status, can have equal access to
educational policies and information, especially the information related to students’ enrollment. Moreover, considering the fact that those families such as Lan’s have no channels of obtaining education information, schools are advised to help to create more opportunities to have direct communication between teachers and parents while communities to create more opportunities of communication between schools, families and children from various social tiers. For example, students from different schools but within the same community can be involved in some exchange programs. It can be an opportunity for some students like Lan to be influenced by school climate and peer influence from other campuses. Also, the families such as Han’s can share their parenting beliefs and strategies with those families such as Lan’s.

To solve the second problem, the government shall have more supervision methods to guarantee less or no corruption in the process of students’ enrollment. The latest news is that the Chinese government has established supervisory commissions by people’s congresses to supervise anyone who exercises public power (Supervisory commissions of Shanghai, 2018). Teachers and the working staff especially those who work for the public schools have to be included in the supervision under the commissions.

Parents’ lack of cultural capital prevents their involvement in children’s education. One of the biggest concerns for these parents is that they cannot offer instruction or supervision to help. It is really tough and impossible to promote parents’ educational background within a short time and those under-educated parents also cannot afford to work for less time. Therefore, one of the workable suggestions is to establish the long-term volunteer participation mechanism. For example, volunteers can help families with counseling service or family therapy, offer suggestions for parents’ effective involvement
in education and offer students homework tutoring. Actually, college students have already worked as the major group of volunteers in China since 1990s and they are playing a constructive and irreplaceable role especially in community service (Sun, 2008). Colleges should encourage its students to devote themselves in community and reward them with credits. Such a policy not only helps those culturally deprived families, but also offers students opportunities to practice what they have learned in the class.

The core problem of educational equity is the distribution of educational opportunities or resources. To solve the problem, first, schools, homes and communities have to work together. They are three independent but interconnected systems in children’s education (Epstein, 2001). In her book *School, family and community partnerships: Preparing educators and improving schools*, Epstein (2001) explicitly presents a model of school, family and community partnerships to help students to improve. Therefore, to solve any problem in children’s education, school, homes and communities have to work jointly (Yang & Liu, 2013).

Furthermore, it is a suggestion that market mechanism should be introduced and utilized in problem solution. Market mechanism is now one of the major sources of providing educational opportunities. Indeed, the upper-middle class families can buy productions of educational service such as extracurricular learning so as to increase their children educational opportunities. However, Wen and Gu (2017) asserted in their consideration of educational resources supply that the market mechanism not only brings challenges but also “opportunities to distribution of educational resources” (p. 22). In the Chinese educational context, the government used to play a multiple roles as a policy maker, practitioner, and a supervisor and so on. It can guarantee the education
development on track but it also takes away vigor and possibility from education. I think the government can solve the problem by taking advantage of market mechanism. For example, the government can encourage and support to build more private schools for those students without a local hukou, especially children such as Lan. Also, the government can buy education service from the market for those deprived non-local families such as sports training, homework tutoring, and extracurricular activities. The final goal is to offer compensation for children like Lan. Compensation in education should always go to the most disadvantaged families.

**Implication for research.** The meaning of this dissertation is to reveal the big picture of educational opportunity by telling stories of three families. However, this dissertation only focuses on three families over one or two years. The future study can develop into a longitudinal study so as to investigate what happens to these families in the future. More research questions can be explored. For example, how do the gaps in these children’s educational opportunities change as they grow? Do they close or broaden? How do they develop? Furthermore, a quantitative study can be conducted with a larger number of families included to see how and to what extent parents’ capitals and children’s educational opportunities are related? Moreover, the subjects can extend from primary school students to junior and senior high school students, and even college and postgraduate students. Also we can make a comparison of the impact of parents’ capitals over different educational periods. Compared with education at other levels, such as higher education, and secondary education, elementary education and preschool education are less studied (Cai & Yang, 2017). It is an indication for the forthcoming research to extend the spectrum of research to the earlier education levels. Last but not
least, children such as Lan deserve more attention in research, not only their education, but also their life development and psychology welfare especially their self-identification. Born in waves of urbanization, they grow with the rapid development of urbanization. However, they and their parents are culturally and politically denied despite they are economically accepted as important labor resources.

**Closing remarks**

The American poet Robert Frost begins his poem *The Road Not Taken* with a line “Two roads diverged in a yellow wood,… To where it bent in the undergrowth”. Now three children are on the divergent paths in the same city, and the three paths lead them forward in a somewhat predictable direction but farther and farther away from each other.

Children’s educational opportunities should not be limited by who their parents are. If their educational opportunities are significantly and largely stratified at the beginning of their schooling, those children from the weak-capital families lose opportunities to develop their potential. It is unfair for both the families and the children. The stratification of education is actually an important symbol of class solidification. Lack of social mobility means loss of competition, which will eventually deprive the vigor of social development.

“The divergent incomes, living conditions, and consuming capacities of various social classes are a prediction that the major problems in life are different for them.” (Zhang, 2015, p. 82) While I am now concluding the whole dissertation, the three families are confronted with new challenges in children’s education. In order to guarantee its’ academic reputation, Xuan’s school is going to screen out half of its students when they transform from elementary school to junior high school. Xuan’s parents are much
concerned with that and registered Xuan for more English improvement courses. Meanwhile, Xuan’s parents begin to prepare Xuan’s young sister for her enrollment in elementary school. Now she has registered for about 7 courses in all as a preparation. Hence, the couple is really busy especially over the weekend when they need to take two children for extracurricular learning. Han is doing well in the new school and has begun to have his piano classes. However, the Shanghai Municipal Government announced The State Council’s approval of the overall plan of the city of Shanghai (2017-2035), which said, “By 2035, the resident population in Shanghai will be controlled at around 25 million.” Obviously, Han’s father as well as Han will have to delay their access to a Shanghai hukou with such a more restrict population-controlling policy. Lan returned with her mother to her hometown and began to study in a new private school. The family has to pay more than 2, 000 yuan, or 320 dollars per month for her schooling. It is not cheap for their family. Therefore, her mother found a part-time job in a small restaurant nearby their home while her father worked in Shanghai. Although the family is now separated, they still have a nice wish that one day Lan could attend a university in Shanghai so that the family can be reunited.
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APPENDIX A. INFORMED CONSENT FORM

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<th>University of the Pacific</th>
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<td>Glady’s L. Benerd School of Education</td>
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INFORMATION SHEET FOR NON-MEDICAL RESEARCH

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Informed Consent Form</th>
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<tr>
<th><strong>Project:</strong></th>
<th>Roles of Parents’ Capitals in Winning Educational Opportunities for Elementray School Children</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Researcher:</strong></td>
<td>Liping Pan</td>
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</table>

I am asking for your voluntary participation in my research project. Please read the following information about the project. If you would like to participate, please sign in the appropriate box below.

**Study Purpose:**
This study aims to explore how parents’ different capitals (i.e., economic, social and cultural capitals) play roles in helping their children to win educational opportunities.

**Process Description:**
1. The researcher will have three interviews with you over six month. Each interview will last about 60 minutes and you will be asked some questions concerning your perceptions and employment of capitals to obtain your children’s educational opportunities.
2. The researcher will have observation of your interaction with your children for three to five times over the six month. Each observation will last about one hour. Observations may happen in the following locations: your home, educational settings (e.g., your children’s school), extra-curricular activities and events (e.g., your children’s English classes in a learning center) and some family events or activities (e.g., family visit to the zoo or to the museum).

3. The researcher will read some documents that are key to you’re your capitals (e.g., you diploma or credential) and your children’s educational opportunities (e.g., children’s English course certificate, letter of admission by the school).

**Potential Risks:**

There is no risk involved in this study. no illegal or illicit activities are involved.

**Potential Benefits:**

There is no direct benefit to you either. However, the results of the study may help the public know more of parents’ roles in children’s educational opportunities and encourage the education practioners and policy-makers to better our policies or programs so as to create more equal educational opportunities at elementary school level in Shanghai.

**Confidentiality Maintenance:**

All the information you supply in the process of this research will remain confidential. It will be not be revealed unless with your individual permission. Any personal information about you (i.e., name, age, gender, address, contact information) will not appear in type of publication. The data obtained will be secured in a location only accessible to the researcher and will be destroyed when the data have been analyzed,
and the study ends.

**Voluntary Participation:**

Participation in this study is completely voluntary. If you decide not to participate there will be no negative consequences, no penalty or loss of benefits. Please be aware that if you decide to participate, you may stop participating at any time and you may decide not to answer any specific question.

*If you have any questions about this study, feel free to contact:

Name: Liping Pan

E-mail: Elaine_pan777@126.com

Mobile phone: 15618917317

**Participant’s Consent Declaration:**

I understand that my signature below indicates that I have read and understand the information provided above, that I willingly agree to participate, that I may withdraw my consent at any time and discontinue participation at any time without penalty or loss of benefits to which I am otherwise entitled, that I will receive a copy of this form, and that I am not waiving any legal claims, rights or remedies.

Participant Printed Name:

Participant Signature:

Date Reviewed & Signed:
APPENDIX B. INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

Questions at the first informal meeting:

1. What is your name?
2. What is your age? What is your spouse’s age?
3. What is your education level? What is your spouse’s education level?
4. What are your and your spouse’s occupations?
5. What is your and your spouse’s age? How much is the family income per year?
6. How many children do you have?
7. How old is he? / How old is she? / How old are they?
8. Which grade is he/she or are they in?
9. What type of school is it?

Questions for the first formal interview:

1. Can you introduce your child’s school? (e.g., type, location, size, curriculum, extra-curriculum activity, other supports, events or activity)
2. How does the school or the teachers interact with parents?
3. Does the school or the teachers encourage parents to participate in children’s education or have high requirements on students’ school work? If yes, what do they do?
4. How do you and your spouse divide your responsibility in your child’s education?
5. What do you usually do to be involved in your child’s education?
6. How do you know the education information or policies? (e.g., news, friends, Internet?)

7. What challenges have you experienced in supporting your child’s education?

8. How do you perceive parents’ roles in children’s education?

9. What are your motivations to take part in your child’s education as a parent?

10. Can you tell me something that you think can be helpful to inform how you are involved in your child’s education?

**Interview prompts (for clarification, more information):**

1. So you do mean ____________?

2. Thank you. But would you mind telling me about (or more about)____________?

3. Actually I want to know more about____________.

4. Can you give me an example?
APPENDIX C. OBSERVATION PROTOCOL

**Observation protocol**

Observer: __________

Date: _______

Time: _______

Length of activity: _________

Site: __________

Participants: __________

Purpose:

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<tr>
<th>Descriptive Notes</th>
<th>Reflective Notes</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
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<td>Physical setting: visual layout</td>
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<table>
<thead>
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<th>Time: _______ to _________</th>
<th>Reflective comments:</th>
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