

# THE GOVERNANCE PROCESS AND EVALUATION OF SCHOOL CHOICE IN CHINA'S COMPULSORY EDUCATION UNDER THE PERSPECTIVE OF EDUCATIONAL EQUITY

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**Abstract:** This paper examines the governance and implications of school choice within China's compulsory education system, emphasizing the quest for educational equity. By leveraging a qualitative analysis of policy adaptations and their socio-economic impacts, it explores how school choice has evolved as a response to the unequal distribution of educational resources and its effects on social equity. The findings reveal that despite various policy reforms aimed at curbing school choice irregularities, disparities persist, influenced by socio-economic status and regional disparities. The study concludes that while policy measures have managed to regulate school choice to some extent, achieving genuine educational equity requires more comprehensive strategies that address underlying socio-economic disparities.

**Keywords:** School choice; Compulsory education; Educational equity; Socio-economic disparities

## 1 INTRODUCTION

Educational equity is one of the core goals of modern educational systems. In China, to achieve this goal, public schools at the compulsory education stage underwent reform with the passage of the Compulsory Education Law of the People's Republic of China in 1986. This reform included the implementation of a "school districting" policy, ensuring that children could attend designated schools within their residential districts for free. However, despite the policy's aim to reduce the disparity in educational resource distribution, the allocation of educational resources in China has not yet achieved balanced development [1]. As a result, school choice has gradually become an increasingly significant issue in China's basic education. Parents, seeking better educational quality for their children, have adopted various school choice methods such as "power-based school choice," "money-based school choice," and "property-based school choice." These phenomena not only reflect the uneven distribution of educational resources but also exacerbate educational inequality, creating a Matthew effect where the advantaged become more advantaged, and the disadvantaged fall further behind[2]. This educational choice reflects Bourdieu's theory of "habitus," where affluent families have the opportunity to choose better educational resources for their children, thereby maintaining or enhancing their social status, while families with fewer economic resources are unable to access these opportunities, perpetuating their disadvantaged position. The persistence and transmission of this inequality form a mechanism of social reproduction[3].

To address this issue, the Chinese Official Department has implemented several policies such as "school districting," "zoning admissions," and "simultaneous enrollment for public and private schools" (these policy terms will be explained in detail in subsequent chapters). In 2014, the Official Department further intensified its efforts to curb school choice-related fee irregularities, mandating that "by 2017, more than 95% of middle schools in major cities should implement 'zoning admissions,' with 95% of students being admitted through the 'school districting' policy." This policy has been rigorously enforced in recent years to prevent school choice. To date, policy adjustments have ostensibly achieved the goal of "No-Choice" (Ministry of Education of the People's Republic of China, 2014). "No-Choice System" refers to the complete elimination of all forms of "school choice" other than proximity[4]. In the following, this will be referred to as the "No-Choice System". Therefore, in China, there is no formal school choice policy; rather, there are measures to manage the school choice phenomenon.

The primary question remains: has the "No-Choice System" policy effectively promoted educational equity? This paper will explore hot issues related to school choice during the compulsory education stage in China, the process of governance, and its impact on social justice. It will also analyze how policy changes during this process has influenced school choice methods, further examining how social inequality is manifested in school choice. The goal is to provide some insights for the formulation and improvement of educational policies.

## 2 THE EMERGENCE AND GOVERNANCE OF SCHOOL CHOICE PHENOMENA IN CHINA

Before delving into the issue, it is essential to understand what school choice refer to in China. In China, school choice involves parents opting out of the "school districting" policy and instead utilizing various means to enroll their children in schools of their choice [5]. The fundamental cause of the school choice phenomenon is the unequal distribution of educational resources in China. Parents and students, in their pursuit of better educational opportunities, actively choose high-quality schools[6]. Therefore, the emergence of the school choice phenomenon is not only a manifestation of

parents' pursuit of educational quality but also reflects the disparity in the distribution of educational resources in society. This discrepancy underscores the conflict between the high demand for quality educational resources at certain developmental stages and the shortage of existing educational resources.

## 2.1 Reasons

In analyzing why school choice has become a social hotspot, this paper utilizes Bourdieu's habitus theory to explore how policy, economic, social, and cultural factors interact. This theory emphasizes that individual behavior is not solely based on personal thoughts but is also influenced by social structures and rules, revealing the social structural dynamics behind individual school choice decisions [7].

Firstly, the imbalance in educational resources caused by policy influence and social realities is a fundamental factor leading to the school choice phenomenon. Since the founding of the People's Republic of China, the Official Department has implemented a series of policies to concentrate educational resources in key schools, such as the policy of the 1962 *Notice on Effectively Managing a Group of Full-Time Middle and Primary School* [8]. These schools, collectively referred to as key schools, benefited from concentrated resources, resulting in improved teaching quality and academic performance. While this approach nurtured many urgently needed talents during certain historical periods, it also exacerbated disparities in school quality, creating a dichotomy between elite and regular schools. Key schools, with their superior graduation rates and reputations, became the preferred choice for parents and students, driving other parents to also seek these schools for their children despite not meeting the entry criteria [9]. This laid the groundwork for school choice to become a social hotspot.

Secondly, policy directions have, to some extent, intensified the issue of school choice becoming a social hotspot. The reform and opening-up policy implemented in 1978 and subsequent education policies continued to encourage the establishment of key primary and secondary schools until the promulgation of the Compulsory Education Law in 1986, which began emphasizing educational equity and balanced development. The 2006 revision of the Compulsory Education Law stipulated restrictions on setting up key schools and key classes [10]. Despite these restrictions, key schools continued to exist and needed more funds to develop, leading schools to introduce "school choice fees" to balance supply and demand. The standard of these fees varies according to the type, location, and educational resources of the school, and is not regulated by the Official Department. This study argued that the unequal distribution of public educational resources by local Official Departments facilitated school choice, and the competition for "school choice fees" between schools led to public acceptance of school choice. This provided an opportunity for families with significant financial and social resources to choose schools for their children. Economically or socially disadvantaged families had to rely on academic performance to secure places in key schools, leading to increased competition and pressure on entrance exams [11]. Many parents and students believe that attending a "good" or "better" school enhances academic performance and future prospects.

Thirdly, social and cultural factors have contributed to the formation of school choice phenomena, driving it to become a social hotspot. Social cultural factors influence parents' educational choices. Under the traditional belief that "education is the key to success," parents prioritize their children's education. In the context of exam-oriented education, academic performance becomes the primary criterion for evaluating students. This affects parents' educational choices and creates a competitive educational environment at the societal level. Wealthy parents tend to choose key schools for their children. In this environment, high scores and prestigious schools become important indicators of student and family success. Therefore, parents' school choice decisions are deeply embedded in this social cultural habitus, reflecting their pursuit of high social status and cultural capital, viewing quality educational resources as crucial for social upward mobility. However, as quality educational resources are limited, parents resort to legal but irregular means to secure school places for their children. As school choice became widespread, the Official Department long remained an observer, allowing various forms of school choice to emerge.

Researchers have identified five main types of school choice:

- (1) choosing schools through power, where parents with certain social status and power use improper means to select schools for their children, such as using social connections or obtaining recommendations;
- (2) choosing schools through money, primarily involving sponsorship fees;
- (3) a combination of choosing schools through scores and money, where key schools charge "school choice fees" for students with lower scores;
- (4) choosing schools through special talents, where key schools raise admission standards, and students attend external training programs to develop one or more special talents to gain entry into key schools;
- (5) choosing schools through purchasing properties, where parents buy houses or transfer household registration to key school districts to secure educational rights for their children. In practice, parents often use a combination of these methods.

Therefore, parents' ability becomes a key factor in whether their children can access quality educational resources. Parents' status (power), financial ability, and social influence play significant roles in school choice, while families without these resources lose out in this unfair competition. Official Department educational policies, to some extent, reinforce parents' preference for key schools, which has become a societal habitus over time. Choosing quality educational resources has become a cultural pattern that persists to this day.

Through this analysis, we can see how school choice has evolved from an educational policy issue to a social hotspot. The causes of school choice becoming a social hotspot are multifaceted, involving parents, society, and policy factors.

The prevalence of school choice not only affects educational equity but also reflects the urgent demand for quality educational resources and deep concerns about social justice.

## 2.2 The Evolution of the “No-Choice System” in China

Since the promulgation of the Compulsory Education Law of the People’s Republic of China in 1986, although the system of key schools was officially abolished, these schools have continued to exist under different names or disguises [12]. Consequently, the phenomenon of school choice has persisted, prompting continuous Official Department efforts to address it. In the 1990s, a family's economic status determined whether a student could attend a "key school". This situation led to issues of educational inequity. Local Official Departments, following central directives, implemented a series of policies such as “prohibition of school choice” and “proximity enrollment,” establishing a dual governance system from central to local levels.

### 2.1.1 Using the no-exam admission system to reduce the school choice fever (1978—1995)

In the 1970s and 1980s, to popularize education and reduce the burden on students, the policy of “no-exam proximity enrollment” became a fundamental Official Department policy. This policy aimed to ensure children’s right to enroll in nearby schools without limiting families’ ability to choose schools. With economic development, parents' pursuit of high-quality education increased, leading to more and more school fees, which drew the attention of education authorities. In 1995, the Ministry of Education issued the “Five No's Principle”, explicitly banning school choice behaviors in the nine-year compulsory education stage, thus establishing a national policy stance against school choice.

### 2.1.2 Coexistence of school choice and admissions system reforms (1995—2016)

Despite the Official Department’s repeated emphasis on banning school choice, the actual effectiveness was limited. Policy adaptations, relaxations, and implementation distortions allowed school choice to persist. For example, categories like "sponsorship fees" and "transfer fees" provided opportunities for parents to choose schools. Some policies, such as the 1997 allowance for a few schools to admit school-choice students, further weakened governance efforts (State Education Commission of the People’s Republic of China, 1997). Additionally, private schools, through ties with extracurricular training schools, engaged in covertly selecting top students, making themselves the preferred school choice for parents aiming for school choice. In Shanghai, for example, the educational performance advantage of private junior high schools was mainly due to better student intake. The phenomenon of "private first, public as fallback" in Shanghai's admissions is a result of this[13].

### 2.1.3 The Official Department increased efforts to govern school choice, significantly reducing the space for school choice actions (2010 to present)

Under the basic principle of proximity enrollment proposed in 1986, governance of school choice shifted from prohibiting school choice fees to balancing resources among schools and optimizing the admissions system. Policies including teacher rotations, computerised allocation, and simultaneous enrollment for public and private schools gradually limited school choice behaviors. By 2017, the central Official Department explicitly proposed adopting multiple measures to resolve school choice issues. By 2018, the Ministry of Education of the People's Republic of China issued the "Notice on Ensuring the Proper Enrollment Work of Regular Primary and Secondary Schools for 2018", which mandated that the enrollment processes of private schools be managed under the local educational administrative departments, and synchronize their admissions with public schools. This effectively eliminated the long-standing "dual-track system" where private schools had different standards and timelines for admissions, thus addressing the heated issue of "private school choice." Additionally, the Ministry of Education focused on resolving issues related to the linkage between primary and secondary school admissions and extracurricular training institutions' exams and competitions, the cross-regional poaching of students by private schools, and admissions for students with special talents. In 2020, the era of "universal lottery admission" began, effectively curbing school choice. Nowadays, the “No-Choice System” has been initially realized, with parents only able to achieve "proximity enrollment" through purchasing homes in designated school districts. (see Table 1 for detailed policy concepts).For instance, Jinan City in 2015explicitly proposed achieving “No-Choice System” in compulsory education. Aside from enrolling through purchasing homes near schools, all other forms of school choice were entirely canceled [14].

In summary, China’s "No-Choice System" has evolved from no-exam admission to gradual improvement in school choice governance and to intensified governance in recent years. The phenomenon of school choice has been effectively curbed, achieving the primary goal of the “No-Choice System”.

**Table 1** Explanation of Partial Policies for Governing School Choice Issues

Concept name	legislature	Conceptual explanations
1. Proximity enrollment	State Education Commission of the People’s Republic of China	In 1986, the State Education Commission of the People’s Republic of China issued the “ <i>Notice on Reforming Junior High School Admission Methods in Popularizing Areas</i> ”, proposing to “abolish the junior secondary school admission examination”. The policy of proximity to schooling became the basic statutory principle for enrolment at the compulsory education level in China, requiring students to enroll in schools close to their home, in order to safeguard educational equity
2. Computerised	Local Official	Computerised allocation, also known as universal lottery admission, is a

allocation	Department	method of randomly allocating school places by computer. It was first proposed by the Guangzhou Education Department in 1991, with the aim of avoiding human intervention and ensuring fairness in schooling opportunities.
3. Teacher rotations	State Education Commission of the People's Republic of China	Teacher rotation system refers to the regular rotation of teachers among different schools in order to balance the teaching force, improve the teaching standard of weak schools and promote equity in education.
4. Group schooling	Local Official Department	Group schooling is the formation of education groups of quality schools and weak schools to enhance the overall quality of education and expand the coverage of quality education resources through resource sharing and unified management.
5. Synchronization of private schools admissions with public schools enrollment	Local Official Department	A new guideline on improving the quality of compulsory education, issued by China Central Committee and the State Council in 2019, proposes that 'the enrollment of private compulsory education schools should be brought under unified management of the approval authorities, and be synchronized with public schools; for cases where the number of applicants exceeds the enrollment plan, computer-based random selection should be implemented.'

### 3 ANALYSIS AND EVALUATION

Before the analysis, this paper first distinguishes between the two different conceptual categories of “school choice” and “school choice issues.” Internationally, school choice is defined as the selection of schools, also known as educational choice or parental choice. In contrast, the term “school choice issues” in China refers to the negative impacts arising from irrational school choice behaviors such as the commoditization and monetization of school choice. As analyzed previously, China's "No-Choice System" system refers to the continuous governance of “school choice issues,” ultimately aiming to make school choice disappear.

Next, defining educational equity is necessary. Clearly, Educational equity, due to its broad scope and rich content, is challenging to define directly from a theoretical perspective. This paper mainly addresses the two levels of "equity at the starting point of education" and "equity in the educational process," meaning that students can enter schools on equal terms and receive equal educational resources.

#### 3.1 “No-Choice System” and Educational Equity

By analyzing the evolution of the “No-Choice System”, we can see that due to the uneven distribution of educational resources, the quality of education varies greatly between regions, urban and rural areas, and schools. The public's school choice preference is not for educational personalization and diversity but for high-quality educational resources. Before the implementation of the “No-Choice System”, wealthy and powerful families could choose high-quality schools to receive good education, while poor and powerless families could only attend relatively weak schools, affecting the fairness of educational opportunities for disadvantaged groups. In the knowledge economy era, education is a path for many poor families to enter mainstream society. Therefore, it is necessary to prevent the intergenerational transmission of poverty and promote relative educational equity.

Increasing the implementation of the “No-Choice System” can effectively cut off the channels for obtaining school choice through paying high “school choice fees” or “sponsorship fees,” thus effectively governing the phenomenon of “chaotic fees” and positively promoting educational equity. However, these “No-Choice Systems” are only a temporary solution to the current imbalance and do not stop school choice behavior. In today's society, where parents place high importance on their children's education, they will still compete for limited high-quality educational resources through other mechanisms, with the most feasible way being purchasing houses in the school district to “attend nearby schools”. As Bourdieu (1986) pointed out, all types of capital can be acquired through various conversion efforts from economic capital. Therefore, parents who can afford it may move to the vicinity of their desired school to effectively activate school choice. Thus, the phenomenon of school choice at the compulsory education stage in China has extended from a single educational issue to various related fields such as the housing market, becoming a comprehensive social problem. This study believes that this is an indirect form of “paying for school choice,” which exacerbates the unequal distribution of educational resources, creates invisible educational barriers for disadvantaged groups, solidifies social classes, and intensifies social differentiation. This goes against the goal of the national balanced development of compulsory education.

#### 3.2 The Maintenance of Inequality and Habitus under the “No-Choice System”

In the previous section, we explored the positive role of the “No-Choice System” in promoting social equity, while also pointing out its negative effects of increasing social differentiation and solidifying social strata. This raises a question: within the institutional framework, how does individual habitus influence the distribution of educational resources?

As previously mentioned, under the “No-Choice System”, the distribution of educational resources appears to be more equitable. However, as the pressure for school district enrollment increases, financially capable parents will activate

school choice by purchasing houses in desirable school districts. This transformation not only reveals the diversity of capital forms but also their interactions and conversions. However, this transformation is not always equal, as it is often influenced by various factors, one of which is the individual or group habitus. The social life is essentially the result of the complex and interwoven interactions of habitus. Habitus, as a relatively stable disposition and mindset formed by individuals or groups during socialization, greatly influences how they acquire, utilize, and convert different types of capital. Different habitus may lead to different efficiencies and outcomes in capital conversion, further exacerbating social inequality[15].

Firstly, different family backgrounds and social statuses shape different habitus. Children from wealthy families often possess more cultural and social capital. They are more confident and composed when making educational choices, better able to utilize and integrate resources to secure the "best" schools for their children. In contrast, children from poor families may face more difficulties and challenges on their educational paths due to a lack of necessary support and guidance.

Secondly, the culture and educational philosophy of schools also influence the formation of students' habitus. Some schools emphasize the cultivation of students' overall quality and innovation abilities, while others may overly focus on exam-oriented education and academic rankings, leading students to develop a mindset centered around exams and utilitarianism.

Thirdly, public opinion and media propaganda also affect the formation of habitus. Under the "No-Choice System", some media and public opinions may excessively emphasize the importance of the "starting line," causing parents and students to over-pursue the so-called "famous school effect" while neglecting individual differences and diversity in student development. This social atmosphere invisibly increases competitive pressure and inequality among students.

Therefore, we must ask: in the pursuit of educational equity and balanced development, how can we guide individuals to form a positive and healthy habitus? How can we balance institutional fairness with individual differences? These questions deserve further reflection and exploration.

## 4 DISCUSSION

### 4.1 Why Focusing on Regulating the School Choice Phenomenon and not Allowing Parents to Freely Choose Schools

The initial intention behind regulating school selection was to promote equitable distribution of educational resources and reduce disparities between schools. However, due to the uneven distribution of educational resources, especially the scarcity of high-quality educational resources, the phenomenon of school choice has persisted. The Chinese Official Department, adhering to the principle of nearby enrollment, has implemented various measures to curb school choice, aiming to promote educational fairness. Although these measures have achieved certain successes, the fundamental issues of unequal distribution and scarcity of quality educational resources have not been fundamentally resolved. This has led to persistent demand for school choice among parents and students, transforming the "school choice issue" at the compulsory education stage into a "school district housing issue." This has impacted educational fairness and social mobility in several ways.

First, the surge in school district housing prices has made it unaffordable for many families, thereby exacerbating social inequality through the unequal distribution of educational opportunities. Second, the existence of school district housing is also tied to significant issues like intergenerational wealth transfer, leading to further entrenchment of educational resources and making high-quality educational resources less fluid and shared. Parents' social, economic, and cultural capital plays a crucial role in their children's access to educational resources. These three forms of capital interact within the educational field, facilitating intergenerational reproduction of social class and solidifying social stratification. Consequently, many local Official Departments in China are increasingly addressing the hot issue of school district housing[3].

However, it is essential to reflect on why China does not establish a reasonable school choice system, given that the regulation of school selection exacerbates social inequality.

In contrast, Official Departments worldwide strive to promote school choice. Western countries, represented by the UK and the US, have issued relevant laws and regulations to guide orderly implementation of school choice from an Official Departmental perspective. For example, in the UK, parents are given more freedom to choose school and their schools are more diverse, with a broader range of management structures, including selective schools, religious schools, and specialized schools[16]. Such school choice systems expand students' educational options and emphasize individual differences.

In China's compulsory education stage, school choice differs significantly. Chinese parents primarily choose schools with high teaching quality, referred to in this study as "key schools." Under the highly selective educational system in China, parents place greater importance on the quality of education. Professor Wang Rong of Peking University states China is a highly selective society, and each step involves screening. Being screened out means losing access to high-quality education at the next level. The 2017 Overview of Educational Achievements in China shows that students in vocational schools constitute 40.1% of those in high school education, while 0.1% attend vocational or adult high schools (Ministry of Education of the People's Republic of China, 2018). This means that two-fifths of students cannot enter regular high schools, implying that they are unlikely to attend higher education, highlighting the highly selective nature of China's education system. The belief that "education changes fate" is fundamental to social mobility in China.

The desire for upward mobility among economically disadvantaged families and the fear of downward mobility among middle-class families intensify spontaneous educational competition, leading to irrational educational views among parents. Consequently, various school choice issues and extracurricular tutoring problems have emerged.

Therefore, even with a reasonable school choice system, the scarcity of high-quality resources in China would lead to the recurrence of these school choice issues. In other words, the emergence of school choice phenomenon is a rational choice in the context of unbalanced educational resources. Chinese parents' school selection results from the conflict between the scarcity of high-quality educational resources and the growing demand for these resources [17]. Thus, at present, it is not appropriate for the school choice system to be established in the compulsory education stage in China. Then, how can the inequalities caused by the nearby enrollment system be resolved?

#### **4.2 Whether the Continued Implementation of China's "No-Choice System" Promotes the Educational Equity**

**First**, the implementation of the "No-choice system" has played a very positive role in promoting educational equity. This system helps curb speculative behaviors associated with purchasing school district housing by adopting measures such as multiple school districts per neighborhood, random computer lottery, unified enrollment of residents, and group management of schools, effectively reducing speculation driven by school district housing purchases. For instance, the multi-district mapping involves assigning multiple schools to a single neighborhood and distributing enrollment slots through a computerized lottery, encouraging parents to make more rational school district housing choices. Additionally, the implementation of group-based schooling, with the mobility of teachers from prestigious schools, has diminished the distinction between "key" and "non-key" schools. Nanjing has narrowed the gap between key and regular primary schools by adopting group-based schooling, transferring quality educational resources to weaker schools [18]. This study suggests that once the issue of school district housing is controlled, with the diminishment of exam-oriented education and the implementation of holistic education, it will change parents' habitus. Moreover, by increasing the total amount of quality educational resources and continually reducing regional disparities in education, the balanced development of quality educational resources can be gradually achieved. Thus, the continuous implementation of a "no-choice system" based on non-selective, proximity-based enrollment could promote educational equity in compulsory education in China. However, until educational resources are uniformly improved in quantity and quality, it ensures access to education for all, not necessarily access to high-quality education. Therefore, "proximity-based enrollment" does not satisfy all parents and students' pursuit of quality education. At this stage, the no choice system represents only a basic level of equity at the starting point of education [19]. This is also precisely why the phenomenon of "school choice" occurs.

#### **4.3 Whether the Continuous Implementation of The "No-Choice System" Restricts Students' Freedom of Choice**

The ongoing implementation of the no choice system has, to some extent, limited students' freedom to choose. This is because it overlooks the developmental patterns and characteristics of learners, forcing them to passively accept a predetermined education, with many unable to choose a learning environment that suits their personal talents and abilities. In China, educational instruction is delivered through class-based teaching, where each class receives the same educational resources according to a fixed timetable. While this approach may seem fair from the outset, it does not account for individual differences among students—some learn quickly while others do not, leading to inherent unfairness in the educational process. Allowing some degree of school choice within reasonable limits could address these limitations of the no choice system and resolve issues of inequity in education. For instance, the tiered education system at Beijing No. 4 High School offers students increased choice within the school, enhancing fairness in education. This school employs two main tiered teaching approaches: one based on overall student ability and another based on specific subject skills, allowing students to select classes that best fit their needs, though these choices are still subject to certain constraints. However, school choice is not without risks; it is not necessarily a condition for improving academic performance and might even lead to poorer educational outcomes [20]. Similarly, studies have concluded that while many believe choice and competition can drive progress, there is insufficient evidence to support this view [21].

Furthermore, school choice can prove ineffective. For example, in England, parents have the freedom to choose schools, but the likelihood of achieving the desired outcome is not high. This means that despite parents' wishes for their children to attend a particular school, due to intense competition, limited spots, and various other factors, these expectations are often unmet. Additionally, this choice increases the cost of investment, and cause anxiety among parents[22].

Therefore, this paper argues that both overly permissive and overly restrictive choices can create relative inequities. However, reasonably expanding the range of choices and diversifying selection criteria can be justified. For instance, educational choice could extend to the type of education, form of education, type of school, type of courses, and selection of teachers [23]. Currently in China, choices are primarily based on teaching quality, and there is not yet an adequate system in place to cater to students' specific talents.

## **5 CONCLUSION**

While school choice possesses rationality, allowing it to proceed unchecked can inadvertently exacerbate the skewed distribution of educational resources, fostering unfair practices such as high and irregular selection fees. Thus, China

should adhere to the "No-Choice System" based on the principle of nearby enrollment. To promote balanced development in compulsory education, efforts should focus on increasing the overall quantity of high-quality resources and distributing them reasonably. Appropriate reforms should be implemented, such as setting up key classes within schools to achieve rational stratification, enhance teaching efficiency, and meet students' needs.

In terms of diverse school options, it is essential to ensure that students with special talents can choose specialized classes within the school, reducing the financial burden of external tutoring. Additionally, collaboration with education experts, media, and other stakeholders is necessary to actively guide the public towards a rational understanding of school selection and its relationship with academic development. This can help change parents' habitus from a value-oriented perspective.

## COMPETING INTERESTS

The authors have no relevant financial or non-financial interests to disclose.

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