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The Transformation of Educational Policies on Assessment and Evaluation in China

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ABSTRACT

Chinese basic education has undergone profound changes since China introduced
the market-oriented economy in the 1980s. All the social changes in the past four
decades can be traced to the very first reform and opening-up policy in 1978, which
were a historical turning point marking a new era in China. This Ph.D. dissertation
investigates the transformation of Chinese basic education through educational
reforms focused on quality evaluation and assessment. This dissertation was
prepared during a consortium comparative project, funded by the Academy of
Finland from 2014 to 2017, which investigated how the rise of quality assurance and
evaluation (QAE) as an influential force has reshaped educational politics in three
countries: Brazil, Russia and China (BCR). This dissertation focuses on one of these
countries—China—and analyses how Chinese educational development has
changed in interaction with its historical, cultural, political and global contexts.
During educational development over the past four decades, the Chinese state has
undertaken several rounds of reforms to improve basic education, first from a
quantitative perspective and then from a qualitative perspective. The many reforms
since the late 2000s have included the establishment of large-scale assessment.

This dissertation locates educational changes at the interface of the global–local,
the traditional–nonconventional and the political–apolitical to analyse the
characteristics of the politics of change. The transformation of education evaluation
and assessment has occurred within a changing, contested context fused with
contests between multiculturalism and nationalism, internationalism and
regionalism, elitism and populism, and many other -isms, such as neoliberalism,
postmodernism and universalism. This dissertation takes a critical but constructive
stance towards political studies of education and socio-cultural studies of China and
re-assesses their strengths, limitations and applicability to analyse the politics of
change in China.

This article-based doctoral dissertation is grounded in three publications with
three main themes: institutional changes, changes in political discourse, and changes
in actors' positions in policy-making. The data were collected in China during 2015
and 2016 using semi-structured interviews and snowball sampling. Qualitative
thematic and discourse analysis were applied to analyse the data.

Article I examines institutional transformation by analysing the developmental trajectory and institutionalisation process of educational changes. Drawing on institutional theory, this study finds that Chinese institutions of supervision have the flexibility to adapt to new environments through multiple methods, reinforcing their authority and positions in the political system. For instance, inspection (the old) incorporates assessment systems (the new) to increase its capacity. This finding challenges the traditional institutional understanding that new institutions replace old ones in the process of institutional learning.

Article II analyses the discursive transformation of education politics focusing on the topic of education equality and equity based on the state's official documents from 1980s. The analysis of political discourse indicates changes in political orientations and the reconstruction of political power. The study shows that in the Chinese official discourse, the political agenda decides how to recognise and define equality and equity. The state's official discourse further defines the political reality of whether inequality is considered to be problematic and how policy is made to address inequality.

Article III focuses on the role of Chinese experts in knowledge brokering and on changes in their status in Chinese education policy-making. Through analysing how local experts in China perceive global knowledge and what reasons support their actions in knowledge brokering, this study shows that Chinese Academic Experts representing Chinese top intellectuals display exclusive acceptance on the technical level and give mostly uncritical recognition to advancements in international educational assessment. Their acceptance of international large-scale assessment has led directly to the establishment of Chinese large-scale assessment. Behind the exclusive acceptance of the global education agenda of QAE, educational internationalisation has a hidden but strong nostalgic, nationalist agenda to restore China to its past status as a strong nation respected by all other countries.

Through these three articles, this dissertation provides new insights into the study on politics of change, such as transformation of the object (being changed) and the subject (initiating change); the nature of time as not linear but relational and collective, as presented in cultural studies on the politics of change; and the significance of distinguishing the manifestations of change and the underlying ideas supporting change. In the Chinese context, particularly Chinese educational politics, the importance of cultural perspectives should be better acknowledged as they are interlinked to the core reasons why change happens or is resisted. Methodologically, this dissertation demonstrates that relational and transactional approaches can be used to explain the interrelationships between the causes and consequences of human actions and interactions.

TIIVISTELMÄ

Kiinan koulutusjärjestelmä on käynyt läpi merkittäviä muutoksia maan siirryttyä markkinavetoiseen talousjärjestelmään 1980-luvulta lähtien. Kuluneen neljän vuosikymmenen aikana tapahtuneet sosiaaliset muutokset alkoivat ensimmäisistä uudistuksista ja avautumispolitiikasta vuodelta 1978, joka oli merkittävä vedenjakaja ja uuden aikakauden alkupiste Kiinassa. Tässä väitöskirjassa tarkastellaan Kiinan peruskoulutuksen muutosta laadunarviointiin keskittyvien koulutusreformien näkökulmasta. Väitöskirja laadittiin osana Suomen Akatemian rahoittaman vertailevan tutkimuksen kenttään kuuluvaa konsortiotutkimushanketta. Projektissa tutkittiin, miten perusopetuksen laadunvarmistuksen ja -arvioinnin (Quality Assurance and Evaluation, QAE) voimistuminen merkittäväksi tekijäksi on muuttanut koulutuspolitiikkaa kolmessa maassa: Brasiliassa, Venäjällä sekä Kiinassa (Brazil, China, Russia; BCR). Väitöskirja keskittyy maista yhteen – Kiinaan – analysoiden, miten koulutuksen kehitys on muuttunut vuorovaikutuksessa historiallisen, kulttuurillisen ja globaalin kontekstin kanssa. Kiinan valtio on toteuttanut useita uudistuksia parantaakseen peruskoulutusta neljän viime vuosikymmenen aikana. Näitä uudistuksia on toteutettu aluksi määrällisestä ja myöhemmin laadullisesta näkökulmasta. 2000-luvun ensimmäisen vuosikymmenen lopulta lähtien toteutettuihin uudistuksiin sisältyy laajamittaisten arviointien käynnistäminen.

Analysoidessaan muutoksen politiikkaa tämä väitöskirja paikallistaa koulutuksen muutokset globaalin ja paikallisen, perinteisen ja ei-tavanomaisen sekä poliittisen ja epäpoliittisen yhtymäkohtaan. Koulutuksen arvioinnin muutos on tapahtunut muuttuvassa ja kiistanalaisessa kontekstissa, jossa monikulttuurisuus ja nationalismi, kansainvälisyys ja regionalismi, elitismi ja populismi sekä monet muut ismit kuten neoliberalismi, postmodernismi ja universalismi kamppailevat. Tämä väitöskirja ottaa kriittisen, mutta samalla rakentavan asenteen yhtäältä koulutusta käsitteleviin politiikan tutkimuksiin sekä toisaalta Kiinaa koskeviin sosiokulttuurisiin tutkimuksiin. Näin toimiessaan se uudelleenarvioi niiden vahvuuksia, rajoitteita sekä käyttökelpoisuutta muutoksen politiikan analysointiin Kiinassa.

Artikkeliväitöskirja perustuu kolmeen tutkimusjulkaisuun, jotka käsittelevät kolmea eri pääteemaa: institutionaalisia muutoksia, muutoksia poliittisessa diskurssissa sekä toimijoiden aseman muutoksia politiikanteossa. Aineisto kerättiin

Kiinassa vuosina 2015 ja 2016 hyödyntäen puolistrukturoituja haastatteluja sekä harkinnanvaraista otosta (lumipallo-otanta). Aineiston analyysi toteutettiin käyttäen laadullista temaattista analyysiä sekä diskurssianalyysiä.

Artikkeli I tutkii institutionaalista muutosta analysoimalla koulutuksen muutosten kehityskaarta sekä institutionaalisia prosesseja. Instituutioteoriasta ammentaen tutkimus osoittaa, että kiinalaisilla koulutuksen arviointijärjestelmillä on joustokykyä mukautua uuteen ympäristöön eri keinoin, vahvistaen näin auktoriteettiaan ja asemaansa poliittisessa järjestelmässä. Esimerkiksi vanha koulutuksen arviointijärjestelmä on sulauttanut itseensä uusia arviointijärjestelmiä kasvattaakseen toimintakykyään. Tämä havainto haastaa perinteisen institutionaalisen ymmärryksen siitä, että institutionaalisen oppimisen prosessissa uudet instituutiot korvaavat edeltävät instituutiot.

Artikkeli II analysoi koulutuspolitiikkaa koskevan diskurssin muutosta. Huomio keskittyy koulutuksen tasa-arvoisuuden ja oikeudenmukaisuuden teemaan valtion virallisissa dokumenteissa 1980-luvulta eteenpäin. Poliittisen diskurssin analyysistä nousee esiin poliittisten suuntautumisen muutoksia sekä poliittisen vallan uudelleen-rakentamista. Tutkimus osoittaa, että Kiinan virallisessa diskurssissa poliittinen agenda ratkaisee, miten tasa-arvoisuus ja oikeudenmukaisuus tunnustetaan ja määritellään. Valtion virallinen diskurssi määrittelee lisäksi poliittisen todellisuuden koskien kysymystä siitä, nähdäänkö epätasa-arvo ongelmallisena, ja miten epätasa-arvoon keskittyvää politiikkaa toteutetaan.

Artikkeli III keskittyy kiinalaisten asiantuntijoiden rooliin tiedonvälittäjinä sekä heidän statuksensa muutokseen Kiinan koulutuspolitiikan toteutuksessa. Tutkimus analysoi, miten paikalliset asiantuntijat Kiinassa kokevat globaalin tiedon, ja mitkä syyt tukevat heidän toimiaan tiedonvälittämisessä. Artikkeli osoittaa, että kiinalaisten yliopistojen asiantuntijat hyväksyvät poikkeuksetta teknisen tason ja antavat pääosin varauksettoman tunnustuksen edistysaskelille kansainvälisessä koulutuksen arvioinnissa. Heidän kansainvälisiin, laajan mittakaavan arviointeihin, kohdistuva hyväksyntänsä on johtanut suoraan kiinalaisen arviointijärjestelmän syntyyn. Globaalin arvioinnin ja laadunvarmistuksen käytänteiden hyväksymisen ja institutionalisoitumisen taustalla on kätketty ja samalla nostalginen ja nationalistinen agenda palauttaa Kiina takaisin voimakkaaksi, muiden maiden kunnioittamaksi kansakunnaksi.

Näiden kolmen artikkelin kautta väitöskirja tarjoaa uusia näkemyksiä politiikan muutoksen tutkimukseen. Nimenomaisesti väitöskirja keskittyy muutoksen kohteena olevaan objektiin ja muutosta ajavaan subjektiin sekä ajan luonteeseen suhteellisena ja kollektiivisena (kuten muutoksen politiikkaa koskevissa kulttuuritutkimuksissa tehdään sen sijaan, että se nähtäisiin lineaarisena). Väitöskirja osoittaa merkittävyyden tunnistaa muutoksen ilmentymät sekä muutoksen takana olevat ajatukset. Kiinan kontekstissa ja etenkin Kiinan koulutuspolitiikan osalta kulttuurillisten perspektiivien merkitys tulisi tunnistaa, koska ne kytkeytyvät niihin juurisyihin, jotka johtavat muutokseen tai niiden vastustamiseen.

ASIASANAT: Kiinan peruskoulutus, koulutuspolitiikkaa, laadunarviointi, koulutusreformit, koulutuksen muutos, muutoksen politiikka, Kiinan valtio

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This journey has not been easy for me as it might not be for everyone else. This is a journey more than acquiring a PhD degree, or getting a key to the academia or acquiring research skills. To me this is a journey of searching for myself, my identity because of which I was discriminated and also because of which I was created. To me, this is a journey of learning how to get strength when you are knocked down again and again and again by life (for instance by journals), of learning how to search for help when you feel that you stand alone, of how to understand people from different countries, backgrounds and with different personalities. I was told that people get emotional when they wrote the acknowledgement. To me I am emotional during the whole journey. Looking backwards, I saw struggling, crying, self-questioning and frustrations, but besides those I also saw smiles, encouragements, hugs, trust and believing. I received help, support and caring from different people at different points of time. Therefore, I took this opportunity to express my gratitude to you all. For this is a formal acknowledgement, please allow me to use all your full names and titles. You are the sparkles lighting up my life with joy, happiness and kindness. Therefore, this is also a blessed journey.

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<div style="text-align:right">

你们永远的

兴国

04.10.2019

卡里納, 芬兰

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Table of contents

List of publications

This dissertation is based on the following original publications, which are referred to in the text by their Roman numerals:

I.   Zhou, X., Kallo, J., Rinne, R., & Suominen, O. From restoration to transitions: delineating the reforms of education inspection in China. *Educational Assessment, Evaluation and Accountability*, 2018; *30*(3): 313-342. DOI: 10.1007/s11092-018-9282-8

Zhou contributed to developing the paper's structure and theoretical framework, conducting the analysis of the empirical material, and writing the sections on research findings and their discussion. The theoretical framework sections were discussed during the process with Rinne who also provided critical comments in improving the quality of the paper. Kallo contributed to the revision of the research questions and suggested to combine the documents data and interview data, and she also contributed to the editing of the manuscript and made substantial contribution to the revision of the abstract and conclusion. Suominen contributed to the editing of language and checked the correctness of terminologies between English and Chinese.

II.   Zhou, X., Rinne, R., & Kallo, J. Shifting discourses of equality and equity of basic education: an analysis of national policy documents in China. *Nordic Journal of Studies in Educational Policy*, 2018; 4(3): 168-179. DOI: 10.1080/20020317.2018.1554021

Zhou was responsible for developing the conception, design, theoretical framework, conducting the analysis of the empirical material, and writing the sections on research findings and their discussion. The theoretical framework sections were discussed during the writing process with Rinne, who also provided critical comments in improving the quality of the paper. Kallo contributed substantially to research questions, overall interpretation of the data in addition to the theoretical framework.

III.   Zhou, X & Rinne, R (under-review) In pursuit of international standards: a
       critical reflection on the role of Chinese academic experts in establishing
       large-scale assessment in China.

       Zhou was responsible for developing the paper's structure and theoretical
       framework, conducting the analysis of the empirical material, and writing the
       sections on research findings and their discussion. Rinne, critically reviewed
       the theoretical framework and overall comments on the manuscript to improve
       the quality of the paper.

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1   Introduction

This dissertation adopts an incremental stance on the concept of the transformation of Chinese educational politics and views transformation as happening changes in a way that preserves the old and integrates the new. In the past decades, the whole Chinese society has undergone notable changes and education is no exception. This research aims not only at answering the question of what has been changed but also at exploring the unchanged, that is, what has been preserved and why. This work investigates the struggles and tensions between the preservation of old practices and the introduction of new practices informed by globalisation. It analyses the role of time in differentiating the concept of change from transformation, the relationship of change intertwining with the past and the present in Chinese educational reforms, the tensions between the global trend and the new domestic practices. It demonstrates that the manifestations of incremental changes are not only on the institutional level but also in political discourse and ideology. The theoretical contributions of this dissertation provide several entries for analysing the transformation of Chinese education. For instance, on conceptual level change refers a status in motion which states differences in position, state or format though some extent of comparison with the status in the past. The differences could be small, partial, phenomenal or constant, but they do not indicate the direction or the degree of being different. However, transformation as suggested by this research possesses stronger indication of the quality of being different. The extent to which differences in position, state and format are found defines how thorough the transformation is. The concept of transformation should be analysed in the dimensions of space and time, and in the manifestations as well as the underlying values. The dimension of space means transformation should be understood as a cumulated volume of changes. The dimension of time means not only the quantitative of time span matters but also the punctuated moments are important. In Chinese political discourse, transformation (*biàngé*) is positively associated with the meaning of changing into a better, higher and accountable status through reforms (*gǎigé*), in contrast with the term of revolution (*gémìng*) which is closely associated with the meaning of change through violence. More importantly, this research suggests that transformation also means being similar which is mostly ignored in the relevant discussion where attentions are

dedicated to the question of differences. If a status transformed from A to B, besides differences the association and closeness between these two statuses should be found. This is why this research suggests that the changed and the unchanged constitute the transformation.

Methodologically, this research follows the conventions of qualitative research on a holistic, context-specific approach. The methodological and theoretical starting points of this dissertation were somewhat constrained as it was part of a consortium project comparing the politics of quality assurance and evaluation (QAE) in Brazil, Russia and China (BCR) funded by the Academy of Finland from 2014 to 2017. The objective of the project was to study the impacts of the new global educational governance through large-scale assessment in three emerging, developing countries (BCR). This project was organised by three research groups at three Finnish universities, the University of Helsinki, University of Tampere and University of Turku, which each attended to one case country. This dissertation is a contextualised case study of China. It aims at tackling the repeated articulated core theme – educational transformation – through studying Chinese state's educational reforms on assessment and evaluation. The research questions are to search for answers to the questions of what practices evaluate the quality of Chinese basic education, and what reforms have been initiated by the state and why. These questions are studied by taking multidimensional contexts of the international, national, economic and cultural conditions. The following sections of this chapter begin with a brief introduction of the theoretical background of the consortium project, which sets the background for this dissertation too. I then highlight the distinctive knowledge of the educational change and outline the research gap and indicate its implications for analysing the case of China. Finally, the research objectives of this dissertation and implications are presented in the last section.

QAE is becoming increasingly important to the conceptualisation of educational reforms and is among the growing changes in the global educational domain captured by researchers. QAE refers to the shift in educational politics to use educational indicators, standardised testing data and comparisons in policy-making and management. For instance, Ozga, Dahler-Larsen, Segerholm and Simola (2011), among many, suggested that European countries' education systems have adopted similar policies to utilise large-scale assessment to increase educational accountability and performance and ultimately improve the quality of learning and education. The policy-making landscape in Europe is influenced by the QAE regime that has shifted the understanding of education as a domestic, territorial issue to a 'fluid, flexible and cross-national phenomenon—that of learning' (Ozga et al., 2011, p. 5). Earlier, Simola, Rinne, Varjo, Pitkänen and Kauko (2009) showed that Finland, as a model student of the Organization of Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), has followed the New Public Management trend decentralising and

deregulating educational administrations and increasing local autonomy in schools. Many studies have also shown that many countries, including BCR, have employed standardised tests and similar tools to enhance education governance and increase actors' accountability and educational performance (Gurova, 2018; Kauko, Rinne & Takala, 2018; Takala, Kallo, Kauko & Rinne, 2018). The question arises: does this Western-born concept of QAE apply to the case of China?

There are abundant publications studying Chinese educational policies and practices that notify the dramatic social and educational changes happened in China in responding to the global trends. Quite often, to emphasise how new and dramatically different things are, many use the term *transformation* to refer to more comprehensive changes happened. Within the context of globalisation, changes are thematised into different domains of study such as the educational internationalisation (e.g. Guthrie, 2012; Huang, Wang & Li, 2015; Mok, 2009), including policy transferring in China, global influences on Chinese educational changes (e.g. policy and practices; Mok, 2005) and local impetus for internationalisation (Wang, 2013) and increasing debates concerning policy convergences and divergences (Bennett, 1991; Holzinger & Knill, 2005). Many seem to have agreed that globalisation strongly affects Chinese educational changes as they have found traces and evidences of many ideas and practices related to globalisation in China. For instance, Mok and Lo (2007) and Zhao and Qiu (2012) suggested that global neoliberalism and the marketisation of education are the foremost contributors to change in Chinese education. Promoters of educational internationalisation highlight the connections between local changes and global pressures and argue that Chinese education has experienced multitudinous impacts from the globalisation of education (Mok, 2007; Yang, 2002; Zhao & Qiu, 2012). Referencing the global influence on local educational changes has become the new academic norm, including studies on Chinese educational reforms. Despite this global context, many publications look into the reasons which can be categorized as the domestic elements of influencing on Chinese educational reforms. For instance, culturalists stress the role of culture and tradition in educational changes and hold that globalisation and transnational organisations' educational agendas have limited impacts on authoritarian regimes such as China. These scholars carefully analyse the impacts and contextual reasons for reforms related to Chinese educational changes, such as the state's impacts on the shifting from government to governance (Hawkins, 2000; Chou, 2009), policies of educational decentralisation (Cheng, 1994; Karlsen, 2000) and the various consequences of educational inequality and the Chinese political agenda (Cheng, 2009). Some studies have explored how leadership transitions contribute to educational changes (Dello-Iacovo, 2009; Lin, 2004).

S. E. Anderson (2010) pointed out that in social studies on educational changes, social scientists' understandings of change are surprisingly confined to a few

conventional ideas. For instance, long-lasting small changes over time can lead to transformation of an entity. On the political level, studying educational changes has a long tradition of adopting a historical institutional perspective discussing the path dependency of how (political) organisations change via increasing returns to positive feedback (Pierson, 2000). Some understand the role of time as a linear flow from the past to the future, so what happened in the past might affect events that happen later (Sewell, 1996). Many (e.g., Pierson, 2000; Schriewer, 2000, cited by Simola et al., 2017; True, Jones & Baumgartner, 1999) have suggested that in addition to this wide-spread assumption of sequential chronology, time is sometimes qualitative (Simola et al., 2017). In other words, in the process of change, some parts of time fractures are more critical than others (see, e.g., the punctuated-equilibrium theory proposed by True et al., 1999). For instance, this research supports the argument of the weight of time being qualitative. One example is the year of 1978 which has become one of the punctuated time fracture marking new dynamics of Chinese politics. This leads to another point of analysing the change in society – periodisation which has been the most common, convenient way of conceptualising linear flow of change. In fact, Chinese study has a methodological preference for the periodical approach of chronological comparison to categorise thematic-based educational practices into different stages or phases (S. E. Anderson, 2010; Mok & Lo, 2007). They use the periodisation to divide history (Green, 1995) and to comprehend new phenomena (Mok & Lo, 2007). This approach is partly inherited by this research too in order to theorize transformation. The periodical approach of theorising change involves the study of 'a process that evolves through identifiable personal and organizational stages or phases over time' (S. E. Anderson, 2010). For instance, globalisation as well as the transnational organisations are considered identifiable elements for causing changes in contemporary literature on China.

However, I agree with what Guthrie (2012) stated a few years ago: 'our understanding of the changes (in China) that have occurred there lags far behind the reality' (p. 8). Despite the quantity of literature on this topic, it has a qualitative deficiency: a lack of studies challenging conventional ideas for studying change. In the Chinese literature, change certainly appears as one of the most frequently used terms[1] (Guthrie, 2012). But much attention focused on analysing the causes of changes as if the change itself is a given outcome of recipes of causes. In other words, changes are expected to follow the causal logic that given sets of causes lead to sets of consequences. For instances, globalisation is often considered the cause while educational marketization is seen as one of the expected changes. If not, then researchers look into the cultural aspects and local actors' apparatus for reasons of

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[1] The policy is also known as the open-door policy initiated by Deng Xiaoping in 1978 to integrate China into the global market (Zhou et al., 2018).

interfering such causality. There is lacking challenges on such conventional logic of thinking about changes, least of all little in-depth analysis of the extent of QAE. The key question of what, how and why are far from sufficiently answered to understand the politics of QAE in China. Few studies have theorised what change is and what transformation is. If transformation has happened as many studies have claimed (Gore, 2015; Guthrie, 2012), how we can recognize and define it, which is one of the main aim of this study. First of all, this dissertation does not take these two concepts as synonyms that can be used interchangeably. Instead, the aim is to examine them and to see how to recognize transformation when it happens from the perspectives of institutional differences, political discourse, and key stakeholders' perception of education. Given the problematic methodological dichotomy of the global versus the local, this research employs multifaceted methods (thematic and discourse analysis) and focuses on multiple perspectives to address institutional change in the evaluative tool (education inspection), the objective of evaluation (education equality and equity) and the interactions among the transnational layers affecting evaluation policy-making (domestic academic elites). This research is intended to take into account the holistic contexts of the global, transnational and local to which educational reforms circumscribes. Moreover, this dissertation separates the idea of cultural preservation from the world system theory of path dependency analysing the convergence and divergence of educational policies. Cultural preservation instead places more emphasis on domestic initiatives' inferior position when facing the challenges of globalisation (Silova & Rappleye, 2015). Analysing the transformation of education is not only about what is changed and why but also what is not changed. In addition to what has changed, this dissertation sheds lights on the unchanged perspectives on Chinese education, particularly those based in tradition and culture.

The first study (Article I) explores the institutional change in QAE; the development of the official organ, Education Supervision (ES); and the extent to which the change can be explained by the historical institutional theory. QAE emphasises the politics of quality and takes itself as a provider of quality and, therefore, becomes a strong entity with normative power as the keeper of the criteria defining good and bad education (Kauko et al., 2018). The second study (Article II) examines the manifestations on the level of official discourse which reveals the state's stance on educational quality and equality. As the social situations changed, the Chinese state responded with various reforms to cope with the new situation. The manifestations on the official language is strong. Article II shows that Chinese state possesses strong capacity of learning, integrating local and global discourses for its use. The level of language changes as well as the institutional changes reveal the mentality of the state also subject to change. Institutional and discursive changes show that the transformation of Chinese educational politics has been not only incremental but also contingent. Contingent as shown by the Article I means that top

leaders' decisions are of vital importance which could turn around the direction of development. It is particularly true in Mao-time and Deng-time when their decision-making process was less predictable and transparent to the public. The Chinese state evolves as the knowledge and civil society grows in China. The power of top leaders is largely constrained by the fragmented authority. The decision-making process is filled with joined forces with different voices to share public discourse. Contingent as shown by Article II means the state's understanding of educational equality and equity are contextually bounded. What to be highlighted by the state partly is due to its political need, which is not a surprise though, but Article II shows that Chinese state's perception on equality or equity shifts not completely from one perception to another. It often is a mixture of a few understandings including egalitarianism, constructive and critical reflections. However, the process of ideas shifts remains in a black box known little by people. Article III, therefore, examines relationships between academic experts in brokering ideas and the adoption of ideas in initiating new educational reforms. It further shows how foreign ideas landed in China through not only political filters and lenses but also that of the elites. As important actors in influencing Chinese policy-making, academic experts among various other think tanks deliver significant amount of reports, information to the state. But how these reports and information are perceived are again in the black box of state's decision-making process. The academic experts and the state established a mutualistic way of subsisting. All three Articles, notwithstanding the different implications of their findings, indicate that globalisation has had a role in Chinese domestic changes. Responding to the fundamental question of whether ideas affect political changes proposed by Goldstein and Keohane (1993), the Article III points out that as knowledge brokers academic experts positioning at the interlinkage of the global and the local besides introducing global ideas to the local and gatekeepers filtering global ideas down to the local, have their own initiatives on from whom to borrow and how to introduce the brokered knowledge to China. Moreover, the brokering is a complicated process, especially from the perspective of receiving countries and their motivations and perceptions on transnational educational governance. In sum, this dissertation is designed to make theoretical contributions to the concepts of the Chinese state's reforms on QAE by the analysing the political conditions of QAE, the shifts in representations of the official discourse and the role of ideas. Methodologically, this dissertation can help researchers interested in multicultural and comparative studies gain awareness of otherness and cultural sensitivity. In the next chapter, I narrow the focus to one aspect of Chinese education—the evaluating systems including their historical roots and the proliferation of various evaluative activities in practice.

Here, I make a few general elaborations. First, all the discussions on educational changes in policies and practices concern only the basic education in mainland

China. Although higher education is a highly important domain, changes in policies and practices in this level profoundly involve the interests of the Chinese majority. But, this dissertation won't involve discussions on level of the higher education. Second, the names of various practices have varied over time, and many are context-specific terms that sound unfamiliar to non-Chinese readers. To increase the readability, I use the corresponding English terms for equivalent terminologies accompanied by official Romanised Chinese (e.g. the Romanisation of Chinese (*hànyǔ pīnyīn*)). The following chapters are arranged as follow: the Chapter 2 reviews the background introductory knowledge upon which the theoretical framework is grounded; Chapter 3 reviews the current literature, based on which to outline the theoretical framework of how to analyse the educational change in China; Chapter 4 presents the research design and reflectivity of researchers before moving to the empirical discussion of this dissertation in Chapter 5. This dissertation ends with discussion Chapter 6 in which main research objectives, findings and possible future studies are summarized.

2 Outlining the Cultural and Historical Development of Chinese Education Evaluation

This chapter begins with basic information concerning China and Chinese education and then moves deeper into reflections on the concept of Chinese through cultural stance: the logics underpin Chinese education, learning, examinations and their purposes. The importance of this section is to provide historical and cultural entry points emphasized by Chinese state which is not discussed fully. The last section returns to the topic of Chinese evaluation and assessment to frame the structure of Chinese QAE and delineate a portrait of the complexity of the multidimensional evaluation systems in China. To make a brief explanation, we should bear in mind that the timeline of this dissertation is from reform and open-up policies in 1978 and onwards, which excludes the content in Mao-time and the prior. But, there is no intention to deny the significance of Mao-time relating to the understanding of Chinese current issues, especially concerning that Chinese school system was adopted from the Soviet Union in 1950s promoted particularly by Chairman Mao. What I see more relevant is the political reflections and corrections made in relation to the Mao-time. For instance, in 1960s Mao started a radical social movement known as Cultural Revolution turning education as part of his political battle. The damage was profound. In sharp contrast to traditional cultural of respecting education, the value of traditional schooling was belittled. During that time, normal schooling suspended because the students were busy with participating in social movements. Educated people such as intellectuals and teachers were devaluated and scrutinized and lots of them suffered from torments. They were criticised-struggled[2] (*pīdòu*) as capitalist-supporters and regarded as people's enemy. The entrance examinations were replaced by recommendations based on their capability of proving political correctness and activeness in labour work (Pepper, 2000; Price, 1970). The function of examination was decremented to the minimal level. Actually,

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[2]   It was one formality of humiliating those regarded as rebellious against or Anti-Mao's leadership.

most universities did not recruit students until the 1970s. Under such chaotic social circumstances, education was ideologically politicalised to party-education, as was used as a catalyst to promote the radical movement in order to achieve political goals. In post-Mao time, a great amount of efforts from the top leadership was to correct the political radicalism (Pepper, 2000) and avoid chaos from happening again by shifting China into the track of economic reform and open-up to the global market as called in this dissertation the reform and open-up era.

2.1   Education and Evaluation in China

China has a huge education system. The country's land territory in East Asia on the western side of the Pacific Ocean covers around 9.6 million square kilometres (National Bureau of Statistics of China, 2018)[3]. China has a population of 1.3 billion, with 270 million students and more than 1.6 million teachers studying and working in about 504,220 schools in 2018 (National Bureau of Statistics of China, 2018). The head of this system is the Ministry of Education (MOE), which acts as the national directorate for educational matters. Beneath this head is a three-layer administrative network with provincial, city and county/district levels. Collectively, they constitute the pyramid governing system of education. Although the MOE is the heading governing body, each layer of administrative organs, especially the provincial level, has considerable authority and jurisdiction over decisions regarding basic education within the province. Basic education according to the Chinese official definition includes preschool education (2–3 years), primary education (5–6 years) and secondary education (6 years) (MOE, n.d.). Compulsory education is nine years, including primary education and the junior secondary education (Su, 2002). The enrolment rates are 99.9% at the preschool level, 98.8% at the primary level, 94.9% at the junior high school level[4] (National Bureau of Statistics of China, 2018). The basic education curriculum has three levels: national, provincial and school. Chinese compulsory education was not completely free of charge until 2006, when the Law of Compulsory Education was amended to ensure that free education for all students throughout compulsory education will be provided by the central government (National People's Congress, 2006). In the early 2000, China announced that the Two-Basic[5] project had been completed and China had achieved successfully the

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[3]   This research focuses mainly on the educational reforms in the mainland China, so no
       discussions are made on the contentious issues on the country's territory.
[4]   The rate for senior high school level for year 2017 is not available.
[5]   Two-Basic (*liǎngjī*) is a shortened name of a national project to achieve the first basic
       goal to make nine-year compulsory education universal and the second basic goal to
       eliminate illiteracy.

goal of establishment of universal night-year compulsory education and finished the goal of eliminating adult illiteracy (Yu, 2012).

However, the aforementioned governmental organs or bureaucratic systems (Lieberthal, 1992) in education should not be taken as synonyms of the Chinese state, though it is often the case in literature. Referring to Chinese political entity, there are tree well-recognized notions categorizing Chinese state as a party-state which emphases on the authoritarian aspect of Chinese regime controlled by Chinese Communist Party (Goldman & Gu, 2005; Holbig & Gilley, 2010; Laliberté & Lanteigne, 2008). This approach has dedicated particularly to the legitimacy issues of such a party-state in the absence of Western democratic basis. In line with this approach, many integrate the CCP, the governmental organs and the state into one powerful trinity in China. The second cluster of studies consider the Chinese state as one typical form of developmental state which aims for developing the country's economy with 'an efficient, loyal bureaucracy along Weberian lines, committed to implementing the policies decided by the political elites, which in turn is sufficiently powerful to resist particularistic interests and prioritize long-term goals over short-term political advantages' (Brodsgaard & Young, 2000. p, 2; Howell, 2006). Hui (2016) in her literature review spotted the third notion – the corporatist state – which is infused with Confucius ideology that the state is the guardian of the nation, and the sole legitimate representative of the nation (the closest Chinese concept could be *guānfāng*). Hui suggested that neither of these notions could capture the entity of Chinese state, therefore she further proposed a nutshell notion of the hegemonic transformative state 'driving the country's passive revolution to assisting the capitalist class to build up hegemony' (2016. P, 19). This dissertation in line with Afred Stepan's definition (2015), inherited from Max Werber stance, to define state as something to 'structure relations between civil society and public authority in a polity… to structure many critical relationships within civil society'. In other words, state is the 'mechanism of domination and control' (Stepan, 2015. p. xiii). Therefore, the three notions reveal different aspects of Chinese state conveying the mechanism of structuring Chinese social relations, situating the CCP in the centre of domination of sole executing legitimate power to govern China as a nation. For the convenience of discussion, this dissertation takes Chinese state as a 'collective actor' (Walder, 2000, p. 157), carrying an identity as Chinese, being motivated to maintain safety and stability of Chinese society by all means including education and other coercive methods.

Under the reform and open-up policies, the Chinese state has considered education to be the most important means to produce human capital and boost the country's economy. In the past four decades, China has changed drastically in all social domains. The state generated various reforms on powering up the economic activeness involving bold changes on judicial systems, financial sections, inter-

governmental adjustments, health care reforms as well as the household registration system (*hùkǒu*) and policies on international relationships (Huldt, Kerttunen, Wallander, Ikegami & Huldt, 2007), especially adjustments made by China for joining the World Trade Organization (WTO). The features are well captured by sinologists summarizing as state's moves of balancing 'the economic liberalisation and political authoritarianism' (Rutanen, 2007). Some moves are bold, and impacts are strong and maybe even problematic, and many are carried out in the name of Chinese modernization. In educational domain, several rounds of state's reforms have also been initiated to modernize Chinese education system. Socio-economic-oriented theorists believe that the main purpose of Chinese educational reforms has been to meet the need to improve teaching quality to facilitate economic growth, which has become a pressing preoccupation of policy-makers and educators in China (Kipnis, 2006; Murphy & Johnson, 2009; Pepper, 1992). Among many other reforms, those related to education evaluation and assessment have often aroused the most concern among parents and families as they directly affect their children's school records and future. Parents' reasons lie in the anxiousness of competition spurred by the limited number of good schools. In parents' perspective, good schools (e.g. some public schools) are those having excellent teachers, equipment and resources, while bad schools (e.g. some *mínbàn* schools[6]) have low teaching quality, and some might have difficulty retaining full-time teachers. Those ranked low and poorly equipped in parents' perspective are bad and they try if they can to avoid sending their children to those schools because they worry that studying in these schools will place their children in less-favoured positions on the standardised exams. If possible, parents would try to send their children to the best schools within their reach through various means, such as investing more in their children's education, hiring private tutors and buying property in the areas where household is assigned to their targeting schools. All of which requires high financial capacity. In Chinese view, the beginning of schooling marks the departure of competition, as the very well-known saying in Chinese elaborated winning at the starting line (*yíngzài qǐpǎoxiàn shàng*). The competition involves not only parents' wealth, social connections and power but also students' intelligence, diligence and exam scores. For most Chinese students, one of the ultimate battles to win is the national College Entrance Examination (CEE; *gāokǎo*) to get into the best Chinese universities within their reach.

Though to define a school by a simple label of good or bad is problematic, it reveals to some extent the problematic uneven level of educational development in

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[6]   *Mínbàn* schools are non-public or non-state schools widely associated with the label of low-quality education (see, e.g., Hawkins, 2000). But, the example here is not absolute case, and it is rather people's general impression of public schools or non-public schools.

China. The quality disparity is no news in China and is regionalised to a great extent as school quality varies dramatically across regions, cities and provinces (Zhang & Kanbur, 2005; Liu, 2017). To gain better reputations for enrolling good students, most schools and teachers study carefully changes in examination and evaluation policies to inform and to train their students accordingly. Policy-makers introduced standardised examinations to ensure justice and fairness in education given the quality disparity, though standardized examinations have become a source of all kinds of educational inequality (Cheng, 2009). Perceived as the fairest means of selection, standardised exam is widely used in other social domains to recruit employees, public servants and teachers. The Chinese state intends to use exams for multiple purposes in education governance, including testing school curricula, checking students' academic progress, examining students' graduation qualifications, recruiting and distributing students and teachers and evaluating the competitiveness and performance of schools (Clarke, Madaus, Horn & Ramos, 2000).

This leads to an impression that China is an evaluative society. People often relates the evaluative environment to the Chinese long history of using exams for election, such as Imperial Exam (IE; *kējǔ kǎoshì*) which was used by emperors to select candidates for their imperial kingdoms for more than 1,300 years (Liu, 2010; 2012). Such traditional practices do not simply disappear. Whenever there is a selection there is examination. In China employers, government officials, teachers and students are all subject to performance assessment and evaluation to some extent, and one of the common method is exam (Feng, 1999; Liu, 2013; Yu, 2008; H. Zhou, 2009). Regarding the topic in focus in this dissertation, the Chinese state increasingly recognises the importance of the prevailing global trend that should not be overlooked in the planning of Chinese educational reforms. China, as a critical OECD non-member country, had Shanghai participate in the Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) first as a try-out. The results turned out to be surprisingly good with high rankings (Yang, 2008). These unexpected results brought China positive recognition, and countries seeking best practices started to gaze to the East. The Chinese state grew confident in its educational quality and began reorganising its relationship with PISA, letting more cities participate. Kauko et al. (2018)[7] studied and compared the impacts of QAE on the developing BRC countries and found that the politics of Chinese education have undergone dramatic changes. The relationship between the state and experts (Rinne, Zhou & Kauko, 2018), for instance, has started to redefine education governance as the general Chinese government converging into a new model of consultative authoritarianism

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[7] The consortium research project on BCR's QAE produced the book as a masterpiece compiling the three teams' work.

defined by Teets (2013), where experts and expertise are increasingly valued by the state and are gaining stronger influences on policy-making in general. As knowledge society taking shape in China (Grek et al., 2009), the governance turn in education is due largely to the triumph of evidence-based policy-making (Clarke et al., 2000; Kauko et al., 2018). Academic research on the topic of changes in global educational politics through the lens of QAE is more evident in the Western academia. Competitive findings captured in QAE studies have shown how QAE has gained momentum in the education field through the accountability of education (Brennan & Shah, 2000; Kauko et al., 2018), new forms of education governance (Ozga et al., 2011; Simola et al., 2009) and reforms from norm steering to steering of outcomes. Ozga et al. (2009) and Ozga et al. (2011) observed how QAE has re-constructed the politics of education in the process of Europeanisation where criteria and indexes make the quality of education more visible through comparisons of standardised testing results. Performance data enter into the frame of educational governance in aligned with the governance turn. Kauko et al. (2018) argued that in developing states such as China, quality governance supported by QAE is gaining momentum. The definable impacts of the OECD's PISA have enabled international comparisons, changing the relationships between transnational organisations and nation-states (Wang, 2012; Yang, 2008; Zhang, 2008).

However, China as a whole nation has not participated in the PISA. To be included in the global conversation platform, China has been internalising and updating its educational policies through transnational learning. It has experimented with independent, large-scale assessment systems (as described in detail in next section) instead. The official reason given by the state is conventional political argument (Jones & Baumgartner, 2004) saying that it is urgent to do so because China does not have a similar system that produces micro-level data pinpointing problems in learning and teaching. Traditional idea of educational data was about number of schools, teachers and students, which are counted by statistics bureaus. The state argued that a new system was needed to produce reliable, educational data that could be used as evidence supporting education policy-making. Such arguments are easily found in educational documents. For instance, a 2010 blueprint document (State Council, 2010) suggests that it is essential to establish a new system capable of conducting nationwide tests and to create a national database as a resource for policy-making (Cai, 2015; Cai & Xiang, 2015; Supervision Steering Committee, 2015). Some studies have shown links between such arrangements and the global trend of large-scale assessment (e.g. Kauko et al., 2018). However, unlike much research in Western contexts finding that increased evaluation and assessment simply have increased the performativity and competitiveness of education (Kauko et al., 2018; Ozga et al., 2011), China's official rationale was to decrease the competitiveness and selectiveness of education. The State Council considers large-

scale assessment to increase the accountability of its policy-making (Cai, 2015). The official rationale is that valid data based on a large-scale, standardised assessment could make the policy-making process more accountable for producing useful solutions to real-world problems identified by the test (Cai & Xiang, 2015). In 2007, China piloted a system to collect such data, and by 2015, the MOE endorsed the National Assessment Centre of Education Quality (NAEQ) as an official organ of the education system (Kauko et al., 2018).

From its inception, the NAEQ was introduced by the state as a different, newer and better practice than other methods of assessing educational quality. This dissertation adopts the umbrella concept of QAE to navigate all these changes, particularly evaluative activities such as inspection, examination and standardised testing. The QAE concept is drawn from Kauko et al. (2018):

> Quality assurance implies the need to demonstrate quality (of education) to outsiders (Harvey, 2004-17); 'evaluation' refers to the general aim of learning and changing current practices, providing 'retrospective assessment of public-sector interventions, their organisation, content, implementation and outputs or outcomes, which is intended to play a role in future practical situations' (Vedung 2010). Our definition is intentionally wide, and it encompasses an array of activities used to evaluate and assure quality. (Kauko et al., 2018, p. 1)

Moreover, the state views the Chinese large-scale assessment represented by the NAEQ as a governing system that does not appraise or select students but produces evidence for policy-making and educational administration (Cai & Xiang, 2015). Since first appearing in the national discourse in 2010, QAE has become an inclusive concept replacing the concept of Quality Education[8]. However, neither official discourse nor academia has produced a commonly agreed-upon definition of QAE. This dissertation uses QAE as an umbrella concept related to the study goal to investigate the dynamics in educational politics responding to the new phenomenon of global comparisons of education based on benchmarking and indicators. However, Centeno, Kauko and Candido (2018) pointed out the pitfalls of umbrella concepts and argued that despite the convenience, individual researchers need to face the challenges of the in-built assumptions and associated knowledge of such concepts. In using the QAE concept, therefore, I do not intend to claim that what is observed in other countries under the concept is also true in the case of China. Instead, I take QAE as a phenomenal term to conceptualise the global and local contexts of educational politics in the dynamics of neoliberal trends and education

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[8]   *Sùzhì jiàoyù* (see more in Kipnis, 2006; Zhou et al., 2018).

accountability. In the Chinese context, QAE entails the study of new changes from local educational reforms interlinked with the dynamics of global educational changes.

2.2   The Cultural Schemas of Education and Evaluation

Public discussions on the Chinese education system rarely seem cognisant of the inbuilt rationale defining education by a single geographic dimension – China's territory. Is the geographic dimension sufficient to define Chinese education as Chinese? To the Chinese state, more sufficient definition is always stated to a degree of the territory integrity with distinctness of cultural characteristics. That is the so-called Chinese characteristics. However, what Chinese characteristics means remains an unanswered question except a vague anticipation in relation to Chinese culture. This question has certainly theoretical significance to the study of educational transformation as it holds significance in Chinese official discourse used by the state to differentiate the Chinese path to modernisation from the Western path. For instance, the notion of socialist market economy is adhered closely by the state as one of the Chinese style of economic reforms combining state ownership and the market economy. The state insists that it is a unique economic model created to fit Chinese context, which differs significantly from the Western market economy (Mann, 2012). These so-called Chinese characteristics become more indistinct as the official discourse applies them to various contexts to claim policy originality and Chinese exceptionalism.

It is one of the attempts by this section to provide a cultural stance on the concept of Chinese characteristics as it is also considered by this dissertation a cultural entry of understanding Chinese educational reforms. A cultural stance is not relating current China directing with any specific period of regimes in Chinese history, rather it is to highlight the aspects of cultural elements in the possibilities of constituting, shaping and defining China as a nation. Strauss and Quinn's (1997) *A Cognitive Theory of Cultural Meaning* opened the discussion on the role of cultural schema in social changes. The authors emphasised that cultural schemas are collective ways of processing knowledge based on shared history, cultural and social contexts. To be clear, cultural schema are not culture per se. Culture refers to wider manifestations of all human intellectual activities in society, including the arts, languages, lifestyles and religions. Many found the concept of culture is problematic for it carries a strong sense of coherent homogeneity and boundary-ness (Brumann, 1999), while the human intellectual activities are bounded with diversity, varieties, changes and contentions even within a community at different stage of history (Hartley, 2003 cited by Herrmann-Pillath, 2010). This dissertation in line with Brumann's definition

(1999) takes the concept of culture as a totality of the complexity of a civilization – Chinese civilization – which is composed by a large variety of intellectual and diversity of 56 ethnic groups. The largest one – Han group which makes up over 92% of the total population – and with other 55 ethnic minorities together compose Chinese civilization. That is not to say each ethnic is equally represented in Chinese culture because regarding the distinctions in ethnical traditions, habits, customs and even languages, the elements of Han group are obviously privileged. Given the China's large territory and rich ethnic groups, any suggestions on unified systems are challenged by the applicability and suitableness to what extent explains the rich diversity on local level. This diversification also reveals the difficulty in the state's reforms attempting on educational changes on nationwide scale.

However, Brumann (1999) continued to point out that one culture distinguishing from the other culture is due to the indefinable common elements through which people can recognize them. Those common elements are defined in this dissertation as cultural schemas. A schema is 'a collection of elements that work together to process information at a given time' in social cognitive domains (Strauss & Quinn, 1997, p. 49). Cultural schemas are thus sets of 'schematic representations of generic concepts distributed among cultural members' that influence their way of interpreting and processing information (Hui, 2005, p. 18). The transmission of cultural schemas could past generations and some studies show that these concepts are surprisingly hard to change and, to some extent, might prevent change, as vividly stated:

> Our experiences in our own and other societies keep reminding us that some understandings are widely shared among members of a social group, surprisingly resistant to change in the thinking of individuals, broadly applicable across different contexts of their lives, powerfully motivating sources of their action, and remarkably stable over succeeding generations. To omit this older view of culture from current thinking about it is to ignore the fact that both domination and everyday practices (concerns of many current anthropologists) rest on shared interpretive schemes, schemes learning in ways that sometimes render them resistant to change. (Strauss & Quinn, 1997, p. 3)

Cultural schemas constitute the cartographical elements resembling to the concept of cultural values (Cheng, 1998), or cultural capital (Herrmann-Pillath, 2010) which are cognitive, collective and generic elements to shape how people think within one civilization. Paying closer attention to those elements can help decode the model of cultural reproduction and understand the Chinese logic of thinking. In other words, better understanding the logic of thinking helps to understand Chinese state's behaviours in educational reforms and transnational

learning. Hong Kong researcher Kaiming Cheng (1998) through studying educational changes, raised the question of whether cultural values could be borrowed in transnational learning. Cheng (1998) suggested that what was observed as differences between countries' practices might indicate wider learning gaps due to different cultural values that cannot be changed simply through transnational policy borrowing. Cheng (1998) suggested that cultural schemas are values by nature persistent and accumulated over time and resistant to be easily changed, which echoes Strauss and Quinn's conclusion. To be clear, to stress on importance of generic elements in one culture does not indicate that these elements are in favour of the state's agenda presumably. Rather, the generic elements and the state agenda could be contentious, and their relationship is rather fluid than fixed. Fluidity means not all generic elements form equally influences on the state over the history. Some are more evident at one point of time and others at another point of time. Contentious means the state's action of reforming education might be constrained by meta schematic mind-set on one hand but attempt to tackle issues caused by such schematic mind-set on the other (as introduced later about the ambivalent attitude towards examination).

This dissertation draws on this stance and reflects the impacts of transnational learning to what extent changing how people perceive education and state's approaches to educational reforms. Global education studies have seen education as heading in two directions in the era of globalisation (Mundy, Green, Lingard & Verger, 2016). On one hand, educational policies are converging as increasing evidence shows that nation-states' educational reforms are informed by global educational policies promoted by international organisations such as the World Bank, OECD and United Nations. On the other hand, education is diverging as localities remain the dominant deciders of the direction of educational reforms (Mundy et al., 2016). However, I suggest a more nuanced approach to considering global-local interactions and the impacts on local changes. Instead of asking whether a country is converging or diverging, it might be more productive to explore to what extent and in what conditions changes have happened, and what enables the localities remain dominant in deciding the educational issues. What roles of cultural schemas are in explaining educational changes or no changes? This section presents five cultural schemas that explain the cartographical logic of Chinese perceptions on education and education evaluation and assessment and the role of state in educational governance. Of course, I do not intend to claim that these selected schemas are the only ones since Chinese culture is rich and diversified on different levels.

The first schema is the collectivist structure of society. People in collectivist-oriented society is likely to concern about the appropriateness of their behaviour within groups. Social relationships are more intense and tighter than in individualist

contexts, which also explains why *guānxi*[9] has been found to have vital significance in understanding Chinese social practices (Barbalet, 2015; Herrmann-Pillath, 2010; Ruan, 2016). Triandis (1989), after analysing manifestations of individualism and collectivism on the personal and cultural levels, argued that the collective cultural structure subordinated individuals' goals to the goals of the community. For instance, a culture subject to this schema is more communal and emphasises the integrity of the community. In Chinese political discourse, unified national identity is always highlighted, though some political studies perceiving it as part of the state's nationalist propaganda. What is overlooked by those studies is it is the collectivist why of thinking providing sources for such propaganda. In the domain of education, collectivist thinking affects ideas of child-rearing, family education and schooling, as well as the keystone expectation that people are more collective in addition to professionals. Despite the various reasons on the personal level, researches have shown commonalities among Chinese students that fit the model of collectivism in contrast to the individualistic culture of the West. Chinese place more emphasis on youngsters' fit with groups and community (*héqún*) and have higher expectations that children behave properly and be obedient than in individualist contexts (Triandis, 1989). Stevenson and Stigler (1992, p. 98, cited by Cheng, 1998) confirmed these findings, reporting that in the Chinese collectivist-oriented context, 'much more importance is given to establishing interdependent relationships between the child and other members of the family and society'. Pan (2013) illustrated how collective values were reflected in various forms of Chinese arts such as Chinese painting, seals, calligraphy, sculpture, drama and architecture. However, the stress on collective cultural values does not suggest that Chinese always think collaboratively or have homogeneous identities and perceptions, instead it points attention to the intangible impacts of such way of thinking. To bear the collectivism in mind is helpful in analysing the particular governing model of the Chinese state and its mechanism in producing educational policies on macro level, and on micro level to understand the knowledge brokers' (i.e. Chinese academic experts in Article III) behaviour of transnational learning and interactions with the state. Awareness on collectivist mind-set could also be methodologically useful to researchers conducting field work inside China.

The next schema is the utilitarianism in Chinese culture (Hui, 2005; Tillman, 1982). This dissertation adopts Hui (2005), Jullien's (2004) and Tillman (1982) definition of educational utilitarianism (*gōngyòng zhǔyì*[10]) as a condition when the

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[9]   *Guānxi* is literally relationship or personal connection (Barbalet, 2015, p.1038).

[10]   Another commonly engaged Chinese corresponding translation is *gōnglì zhǔyì* which gives more emphasis on the purposefulness in achieving personal benefits, power and reputation. *Gōngyòng* on the other hand emphasizes the efficacy in terms the purpose of education.

large share of attention is given to its usefulness and efficacy of education[11]. To be clear, usefulness of education is not about being practical in the content of teaching but about the expectation of gaining benefit after receiving education i.e. the practicality in the purpose of education. Tillman (1982, p. 7) explained that Chinese hold the ideas that education should be instrumental to 'attain concrete results or consequences' and 'maximize benefits or advantages' on personal level such as gaining positions in the emperor's court and good jobs after graduation or on state level such as the logic of education governing. Some elements of utilitarianism can be found in Confucianism as well. In the original texts of Confucius collections, *The Analect*s mentions several times that learners should put their acquired knowledge to political uses: 'the officer, having discharged all his duties, should devote his leisure to learning. The student, having completed his learning, should apply himself to be an officer *(shí'ér yōu zé xué, xué ér yōu zé shì)*' *(The Analects of Confucius*, n.d.). To be an officer *(shì)* is to become part of the government *(guān)* (Gore, 2019). The enduring of IE is to some extent a manifestation of the utilitarianism which conditions the imperial ruling with meritocracy and aspiring to social fairness. Receiving or acquiring education is instrumental. The emperor used the IE – standardized test – to select scholar-bureaucrats into the governing body as governing instrument while people at the bottom considered IE their hope to change their fate – a life could have been decided by their social class and inferior background i.e. an instrument for changing fate. However, to stress on the utilitarian aspect does not indicate that Confucius takes education only for its practicality. Large content in Confucius collections are about moral education to cultivate the personality and morality of people to be like a *jūnzǐ*, a notion close to that of a gentleman and only who can gain the true knowledge of the universe to contribute great virtue to the world (*xiūshēn qíjiā zhìguó píng tiānxià*[12]). Lin (2018) pointed out that Confucius saw the first goal of learning as cultivating oneself to become a sage-like, well-educated, highly moral person (*jūnzǐ*). Today, traditional ideas are intertwined with various theories and philosophies borrowed outside of China, but the usefulness of education holds its significance in Chinese society as a valuable entry to analyse the motivations of the state initiating educational reforms.

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[11]   Please be aware the utilitarianism in focus is different different from Western concept of utilitarianism of maximizing personal happiness (for more please see Smart & Williams, 1973). Utiliatianism is also different from the phelosophical traiditon of pragmatism in the West promoted by John Dewey which has profound influnced on Chinese educational development (Zhou et al., 2018).

[12]   *Xiūshēn qíjiā zhìguó píng tiānxià* by literal translation means cultivating personal quality, the ability to manage the family affaires, ability to manage the state affairs, and the ability to manage the world peace.

The Chinese state was not aware of how problematic their utilitarian polices were until the 1990s. When the state put major attention to develop economy, education was again useful to the state to train qualified workers. Society justifies personal, group and state's behaviours for pursuing economic benefits even at the cost of other's benefits (i.e. egoism) (Herrmann-Pillath, 2010), at the cost of environment (i.e. environmental indifference) (Song and Woo, 2008), or at the cost of social justice and fairness (i.e. crony capitalism) (Bai, Hseih and Song, 2014). In education, researchers started to notice that utilitarianism was causing the exam-oriented education and over-competition (Ge, 2013). Some said it was because the Chinese morality was lost in searching for rich materialised world (Sun, 2013). Wu (2012) believed that the prevalent utilitarianism in China was because the society went to another extreme of over-recuperation of the damage made in Mao-time when schooling was de-valued and depreciated, so the attitude shifted from education-is-nothing[13] to education-is-everything, which was encouraged by the state. Fan Gang (2013) – a prestigious Chinese economist – suggested that it is the utilitarian element that enabled the Chinese state to create the economic miracle through searching for opportunities between the market and the state control.

The next cultural schema is the meritocratic root in education, which conditions the Chinese selective environment and the Chinese educational fairness. Meritocratic education is historically rooted in Confucianism, which invented the idea that the selection of feudal bureaucrats (*guān*) should be based on merits, not blood connections or family background (Gore, 2019; Liu, 2013). Unlike other democratic contexts, China has single-party governance by the Chinese Communist Party (CCP), whose legitimacy and accountability are derived from its performance legitimacy, as coined by Gore (2019). The CCP's legitimacy is based on its capacity to meet the people's expectation as a 'caring, sensitive and responsive to the needs and wants of the ruled, taking care of them much as parents took after their children' (Gore, 2019, pp. 166–176). Gore (2019) asserted that the Chinese state shared partly the Confucian belief that a good emperor needed to gain support by winning the hearts of the people. The capacity to govern is legitimised through political meritocracy, or the selection of officeholders based on their merits, capabilities, expertise and professionalisation. Today, recruitment in China, including for civil service positions, public school teachers and students, is based on similar idea of fairness assured through standardised examination. One reason could be simply because facing China's huge population, standardized examination is simplest way of filtering the candidates. Another aspect is the meritocratic logic justifying those

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[13] Education-is-nothing in Chinese is *dúshū wúyòng lùn* that are anti-intellectualism or anti-education waves happened many times in Chinese history when people belittle the usefulness of education and degrees.

who pass and rank at the top are better qualified for the position. This is not to assert that in reality, the principle of meritocracy is strictly implemented. *Guānxì* can still influence the selection process in various ways. Gore (2019) showed that the Chinese understanding of democracy is fundamentally different from the Western concept of democracy in which political legitimacy comes from the people's vote. Chinese democracy, in Gore's (2009, p. 167) words, is a 'guardianship discourse that … democracy means government for the people rather than by the people'. In other words, the government should take care of the people and govern by virtue, as mentioned. Education, therefore, emphasises social tolerance and embraces competition, selection and ranking in schools.

The next schema is the Chinese attitude towards history. The attitude towards history fills the Chinese education with a sense of historical responsibility. The 5,000-year history of Chinese culture makes it unique. Pierre Ryckmans, an accomplished sinologist, argued that the Chinese attitude towards its history is a complicated paradox, and the nation loves the significance of its history as one of the world's oldest continuous civilisations (1986). The continuity of culture has significant implications for Chinese national identity, partly shaped education too. Ryckmans (1986) thought that Chinese philosophy perceives history as the 'repository of all human values' (p. 8). Chinese explain how history has influenced current educational practices and how they want to preserve the history through education. When history is perceived as a repository of values, references to historical roots give legitimacy to government reforms in the name of preserving history. Doing so not only taps into historical roots that legitimise what is or is not done in the present but also enhances the state's agenda to maintain continuity with the past. The CCP's dichotomic policies on its territory, cultural heritage and nationalism all can be related to the desire to ensure a sense of the continuity of Chinese history, which applies to the educational reforms.

A typical example of such historical continuation and constitution comes from education evaluation methods. As described in previous sections, the evaluation of education is filled with selective, competitive and utilitarian ideas. Traditionally, the concept of evaluation meant selection, and tools were examinations. The longest-used practice was the IE administered to select feudal bureaucrats (*guān*) (Han & Yang, 2001; Pepper, 1996). According to IE specialist Zheng (2000), the IE is recognised as the oldest, least changed and most influential system in China. Zheng (2000) further illustrated that under a hierarchical, authoritarian regime, people needed to know that social justice and equity were ensured to some extent because the majority relied on the old logic that the state could create a (comparatively) fair game in which the people could seek justice and equity. In the past, the IE was the presumably fair selection methods. Those ranked on top of the IE were nominated by the emperor and being considered by the people qualified and legitimate

governors. The IE, the social fairness and the authority of the emperor integrated and constituted the ground of elitist feudal governance for the emperor over centuries, which institutionalised to a large extent of how Chinese understood the relationship between examinations and social justice, as well as the role of elites and the state.

Chinese believe that examinations are a comparatively fair, scientific means in all social domains such as school's enrolment, jobs interviews and promotions because of the anticipated objectiveness in evaluating criteria of standardized test. Selection in such way is a fairer competition of merits. The assurance of fairness is important especially in a society where *guānxì* is ubiquitous such as China, when connections and power can help many to dodge legal restrictions and regulations to get what they want (Barbalet, 2015; Ruan, 2016; Li, 2012). For instance, they can get their children study rights in good schools through connections bypassing the regulations on school enrolment (Barbalet, 2015; Ruan, 2016). In the past, the game was the IE, and at present is the CEE. In the same way as its predecessor, it is expected to be an equal, objective selection means. However, idealisation does not mean less criticism against examination. Many studies have debunked these claims of its objectivity, fairness and the assurance of education equity (see e.g. Liu, 2010), because of the corruptions in education and many other negative impacts (Davey, Chuan & Higgins, 2007; Dello-Iacovo, 2009; Kirkpatrick & Zang, 2011). Though strongly criticising the examination systems, Chinese does not want to abolish it. Given that educational resources are far from equal and sufficient for everyone in China, many still think selecting through examination is necessary in ensuring education equality and fairness. Maybe the best way to explain Chinese idealisation of examination is, as Liu (2012) concluded, it serves best for Chinese context.

The last but not least schema is the Chinese correlativism, which shapes Chinese way of thinking about education and change. Correlativism refers to the logic of perceiving the universe as interconnected world (Chan, 1963; Chen, 2005; Needham, 1959). This schema is important because it underlies the epistemology of Chinese understanding of educational changes in the long run. Change is for the adaptation to the environment. Resonating with Granet's (2013) work on Chinese civilisation, Needham (1959) and Chen (2005) emphasised that Chinese philosophy is a fundamentally organic, correlative way of thinking. It sees things as universally connected, and holds ideas that when one thing changes, it directly or indirectly affects other things. The *Book of Changes* (*yì jīng*), for instance, is the most widely used source for sinologists to study Chinese understandings of change in terms of the relationships among human, nature, time and space. Chan (1963, p. 262–263) explained that the *Book of Changes* sees the universe as an entity in 'constant changes … in which all things are correlated, and man and nature form a unity', as envisaged by the yin–yang school. Chinese, therefore, tend to understand change as continuous, inter-fused and intermingled with things. The universe is a realm of

perpetual activity. Chinese philosophy is interested in the relationship between humans and nature, so the attention given to humans, nature, time and space is far from equal. This logic underpins Chinese culture. For instance, both Confucianism and Taoism, despite their different ideological and methodological stances, contribute to some extent Chinese way of thinking change as continuum and as journey to the harmony between human and nature, but the focus is in human. I use a quotation from Mei (1951) to elaborate on the weight of human and nature in Chinese philosophy:

> Assuming a common root for man and the universe, Chinese philosophy is grounded in man and his life. Man is the centre of all things, and it is his nature, his relations, and the development of his personality that are of absorbing interest. And, in the end, is man able to achieve perfection and to identify himself with the universe—a synthesis of this world, which man affirms and does not relinquish, and a world beyond—this is the final problem of Chinese philosophy and particularly of Chinese ethics. (Mei, 1951, p. 302)

Ancient Chinese philosophy perceives the purposes of learning as the human-centric activities of developing the personality and morality of a whole *rén* (human beings) and understanding what a *rén* is, how to be sage and how to achieve harmony and balance between nature and the entity of humanity (i.e. society; Mei, 1961, cited by Chan, 1963; Chen, 2005). Confucius also emphasises that learning should lead to becoming a sage, and teaching should elevate students' moral standards. Culturally and historically, the Chinese purpose of learning has been less about discovering nature per se as in Western education. With the introduction of a modern school system based on the Western model (Zhou, Kallo, Rinne & Suominen, 2018), subject teaching has become the main content in school. However, the underlying expectation of an educated *rén* with good qualities and high morality remains evident in school curriculum and Chinese educational policies. Society has especially high expectations for teachers' morality. In the past, the importance of morality manifested in politics expecting emperors to govern by virtue (Chen, 2005). At present, in school, students' learning also has moral implications. Parents might perceive students who do not study diligently as a bad quality (Grant, Stronge & Xu, 2013). Now, if we recall the IE, one crucial cultural perspective missed in most literature is the embedded logic of virtue in education in relation to selection through IE and governance. Because of the correlativism, Chinese way of understanding change follows less about causal logic, but more about thinking and seeing change as a totality of all the elements accumulated from the past to the present, though Chinese believes in karma influenced by Buddhism.

These schemas in Chinese ways of thinking make more sense in the case of China's recent economic development because the majority of Chinese believes in China's peaceful growth. Their attitudes towards the past is also reflected their attitudes towards the future – the continuity of history. First, instead of withdrawing from the past, Chinese dwell in its history and expect to add more memorable achievements of their own to it. Second, they hope that the development of China will follow a good direction such as solving many problems in current society. For instance, Chinese political system becomes more democratic, society becomes more equal, and education focuses more on students' full development, although much of history shows that change can happen in the opposite direction, with power becoming more centralised, and inequality of society becoming more evident. Regarding the topic of this dissertation, these cultural schemas reveal the Chinese fundamental logic of understanding education, education evaluation and examination.

However, the power of conventional thinking could also restrain Chinese policy innovation in making bold change, such as breaking the boundary of meritocratic thinking of educational equality and equity. As presented in the next section, the state's reforms of evaluation and examination practices repeat similar generic logic of taking examination as necessary. Before moving to the next section on China's multidimensional evaluation systems, I want to end this section with a quotation from Ryckmans (1986) that still has theoretical significance for studying Chinese thinking and for better understanding Chinese social transition and transformation:

> The vital strength, the creativity, the seemingly unlimited capacity for metamorphosis and adaptation which the Chinese tradition displayed for 3,500 years may well derive from the fact that this tradition never let itself be trapped into set forms, static objects and things, where it would have run the risk of paralysis and death. (Ryckmans, 1986, p. 11)

2.3　　Multidimensional Evaluation Systems in China

A review of literature on Chinese evaluation systems gives the impression that the state's reforms have walked into a trap of proliferation of evaluations in the name of improving the quality of education and solving problems in the education system (Liu, 2009, 2012; Pan & Qin, 2003; Wang & Zhang, 2013; Zhou, 2000). Quality is numericised into comparable criteria to evaluate students' competitiveness and academic performance. China has established multidimensional evaluation systems to appraise various activities and works related to basic education. Different levels of the working units in education (e.g., national, provincial and local educational bureaus), various stakeholders (e.g., headmasters, teachers and students) are all evaluated and appraised to some extent. For instance, ES inspects and appraises

schools and educational administrations' accountability, administrative bureaus evaluate schools' and teachers' performance, and large-scale assessment evaluates students' learning achievement. The proliferation as understood by this dissertation is informed by the global trend of QAE using large-scale, standardised assessment to increase the accountability of education governance. In order to elaborate the complexity of the multidimensional evaluation systems, I follow a chronological order to introduce different systems in place. The examination is introduced first and the ES which are perceived origins of the problems giving the state reasons to introduce more. Discussion moves on to the recently introduced large-scale assessment – China's PISA alike system – NAEQ which are affiliated to ES. And, this part ends with one example of newly introduced testing system on school level. The proliferated multidimensional evaluative systems seem to be the synonymous with education governance.

China's examination system has a long history and two-fold functions. First, it functions as a selecting tool. Various knowledge-based tests and examinations are widely used in other social contexts of recruitment and selection. For instance, the local educational bureau organises standardised examinations to select teachers. Passing the exam is usually the first step for recruitment of public teachers. Examinations in school test students' learning through their recall of the knowledge delivered by teachers. Comparing to many examinations in China, the CEE has drawn the most attention in the Chinese literature because it is the most selective, competitive and high-stakes exam deciding the study right of tertiary education (Liu, 2009; Pan & Qin, 2003). Except for a small number of students entering higher education through other selection means such as recommendations, the vast majority must go through the CEE to be enrolled in higher educational institutions. The CEE is held annually in July, and the test-takers are senior high school graduates. In 2018, 9.75 million students participated in this exam, and the enrolment rate was more than 80%[14] (Cai & Wu, 2018).

Many studies have investigated the reasons for the CEE's competitiveness and high-stakes and attributed in them, in part, to the distribution of most access to higher education institutions through the CEE. As shown in Figure 1, the selection of students is based on students' CEE scores[15]. The examination executive office under

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[14]   The enrolment process is quite complicated, especially as the Chinese government has initiated several rounds of reforms to make the CEE a fairer tool to promote equal opportunity. But it is not the intention of this session to explain the complexity of enrolment policies of CEE. Please see e.g. Pan & Qin (2003) for more.

[15]   Though the state has initiated a few rounds of reforms to CEE attempting to enrich the criteria of selection by including students' school records, extra curriculum activities and moral levels, the most valued criteria remain the score. For more elaboration, please see discussion on AATHS later in this section.

the provincial education administration sets the threshold score for enrolments in the different types of higher institutions. The first threshold score, which is the same throughout a province, is the baseline for enrolment in the key universities including the 985 universities and the 211 universities[16]. But as shown in Figure 1, the actually enrolment scores for 985 and 211 universities are much higher than the 1st threshold score. Only those passed the first threshold score can have the possibility of being enrolled by the universities ranked as key universities. Those students who failed to reach the 1st threshold score enter into the secondary pool of selection that starts after the first round of selection. Then, a second set of threshold scores is released for enrolment in average universities, including local universities, colleges and professional institutes (see Figure 1). The real enrolment process is actually more complicated that what I just described, however the point here is to illiterate how the hierarchical structure of Chinese universities causes the selectiveness and competitiveness of the CEE.
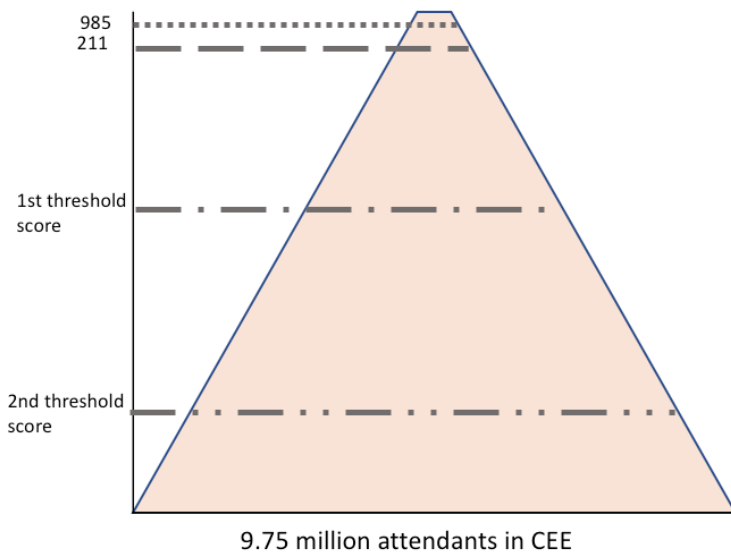
Figure 1. The pyramid of CEE recruitment. Source: This figure is based on information on two analytical reports from the two main education news channels (China Central Television, 2018; Chinese Education Online, 2018).

[16] The MOE decided to implement a revitalization action plan to create education for the 21st century. The government aimed to build Beijing University, Tsinghua University and other 37 higher education institutions into world-class universities, and these 39 universities have been referred to as the 985 universities (MOE, 2013). This project included 211 national key universities and 116 higher education institutions.

The Chinese state announced years ago that Chinese higher education has moved to the stage of popularisation, with the enrolment rate for tertiary education well over 50%. Latest statistics show that in 2018, the enrolment rate in tertiary education was 81.13%, which means about 7.9 million students had opportunities to receive higher education. China has 2,198 higher education institutes including various types of universities and professional and vocational training colleges. Of these 2,198 higher education institutions, 39 are 985 universities ranked on top of hierarchy – the best among Chinese key universities. The enrolment rate of those 39 universities was about 2% in 2018 (the Chinese Ivy League; MOE, 2013). The second-best universities called 211 universities consist of about 100 key universities (including 985 universities) and the enrolment rate was about 6% in 2018 (Figure 1; Cai & Wu, 2018). Based on a simple criteria of enrolment rate, we can say that the selectiveness and competitiveness in CEE is related to the huge gap between demand for good universities and the limited amount in place. This could also explain partly why Chinese students are attracted to those world top universities abroad. The vast problems generated by the high-stakes CEE, well summarised by Li (2012), include requiring too many pre-test practices, such as weekly class test, mid-term and end-of-term tests, generating huge pressures on students, who have to do many scholastic exercises, and families, who try their best to send their children to better schools to be winners on the CEE. From this perspective, it is fair to say that in many ways, the CEE is a continuation or even a reproduction of the IE. The government also included this point in its agenda to change the CEE into a better and fairer tool of selection. Whereas some have suggested that CEE is the best choice given China's population and regional disparities (e.g. Liu, 2012), many have focused on the CEE's negative impacts on Chinese society and education. For instance, the original motivation for quality-oriented educational reforms[17] was to address the exam-oriented education caused by the CEE's competitiveness and selectiveness (Zhou, 2000).

Examinations are normal and omnipresent in Chinese schools. In addition to selective examinations such as the CEE, evaluative-oriented examinations are a method commonly used to inspect the learning and assessment process and outcomes of teachers and schools. The second function of examination is quality gatekeeper. As displayed in Table 1, weekly, monthly and mid-term semester exams occur alongside the various high-stakes enrolment tests. In the past, teachers ranked and compared students based on their scores to identify good, average and bad students. In 2010, the MOE officially forbaded public ranking and comparison of students in compulsory education (State Council, 2010). However, schools still regularly use students' examination scores to check student's learning only without publishing them.

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[17]   It is also known as *sùzhì jiàoyù* see more in Kipnis, 2006.

Table 1.   Main examinations in basic education.

Basic education	Grades	Examination
	12	College entrance examination (*gāokǎo*)
	11–12	Academic achievement tests (*xuéyè shuǐpíng kǎoshì*)
	10–12	Weekly/monthly, mid-term and end-of-term exams, jointed-exams between schools, regional exams, simulation exams
	9	Graduation exam for senior high schools (*zhōngkǎo*)
	7–9	Weekly/monthly, mid-term and end-of-term exams
	6	Graduation exam for junior high school (*xiǎoshēng chū kǎoshì*)
	1–9	Weekly/monthly, mid-term and end-of-term exams
	Preschool	No exams

Sources: Author's common knowledge.

The problems caused by exam-oriented education have been headaches for policy-makers, but it seems that the solution to these problems has been to replace the old tests with new, allegedly better ones. Here, I use the example of the Academic Achievement Tests in High School (AATHS; *xuéyè zhìliàng píngjià*; State Council, 2010). AATHS is also an illustration of examination as quality gatekeeper because schools use it to decide if students can be issued with a graduation certificate. This brand-new academic achievement testing system was introduced gradually during the late 2000s to replace the high school graduation exams for grades 10–12 (Table 1). The official explanation was that the old graduation exams were no more than a symbolical graduation ritual, which was true to large extent because graduation exams was hollowed out by CEE and failed the function as a reliable gatekeeper to certify graduation. The state introduced AATHS – a more complicated alternative set of tests – to replace the old graduation exams. Similar to the many rounds of reforms of examination systems, the central government's underlying logic remains the same: replace the old tool (e.g. graduation exams) with the new (i.e. AATHS). What differentiates AATHS from the graduation exams is the former introduces a grading system with five categories of student performance (A, B, C, D and E). In principle, students should attain these levels at the following rates: A: 15%, B and C: 30%, D and E: 25%. Level E scores are considered to be unqualified/failed (Nan, 2013; State Council, 2010; Yang, 2013). Students receive high school graduation certificates if they have no AATHS subject scores in category E. To avoid AATHS becoming another symbolic graduation exam, the central government is piloting how to include students' AATHS records with the CEE (MOE, 2014). Many researchers are concerned that combining the AATHS and the CEE will much likely turn the

former into another high-stakes test as the CEE, which is not what they expect from AATHS as it should play totally different role from CEE. In educational documents, the state has introduced various new notions such as diversification, formative and summative evaluation and the involvement of different stakeholders in the evaluation process (Nan, 2013; Yang, 2013). The AATHS is informed by many of those new ideas, but the logic of evaluation seems unchanged. The Chinese central government is using examination logic to cope with exam-oriented education systems. The names and formalities of examinations have changed but not the logic of evaluative-oriented education and performance- and score-based criteria to determine the quality of education. However, on local level there might be no differences because many studies have shown that reforms targeting at examinations are often hard to implement as schools resist new ideas and changes and, more importantly, do not know how to change (Nan, 2013; Yang, 2013).

2.3.1   The Institution of Education Inspection and Assessment

The inspection system (Education Supervision: *dūdǎo xìtǒng*) has a different role than examinations in China. It is a governing instrument used by the state to appraise the policy implementation at the local level (MOE, 1991) and to govern the quality of basic education according to state's requirements. I will outline its institutional structure first. Following the pyramid structure of the Chinese government (central, provincial, city, and district government), inspection has a four-layer organisational structure (see Figure 2). The supervisory offices extend from the national level down through three or four administrative levels. The top layer — the MOE's Office of National Education Inspection[18] — is the highest authority responsible for making inspection policies and regulations. On the national level, five offices each have responsibility for one type of education inspection. As shown in Figure 2, in general, five regular inspecting activities have been established: inspection of compulsory education, theme-specific inspection, and inspection of schools, inspection of educational administrative organs and inspection of preschool education. Theme-specific inspections are temporary tasks to inspect particular topics initiated by the MOE. For instance, the MOE (2013, p.5) started a new set of theme-specific inspection on the implementation of 'one-hour campus sports activities for primary and secondary school students' after the state requested the schools to have at least one hour for students' outdoor activities. Comparing to other inspections, theme-

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[18]   The Chinese government often uses the term *national* to refer to the hierarchical ranking of official organs. National indicates the highest ranking, and usually has the jurisdictive power over whole China.

specific inspection is more responsive to the incidents happened in China. For instance, the inspection of preschool education is newly promoted to ES's agenda due mainly to the intensive media news about kindergarten bullying in recent years. The ES as requested by the state started to pay more attention to kindergarten management. In quantitative terms, the inspection system is huge as 97.5% of local (city) and 97.77% of county (district) having inspection offices. There are in total more than 35,000 inspectors (MOE, 2004). The historical institutionalisation of ES is presented in Article I.
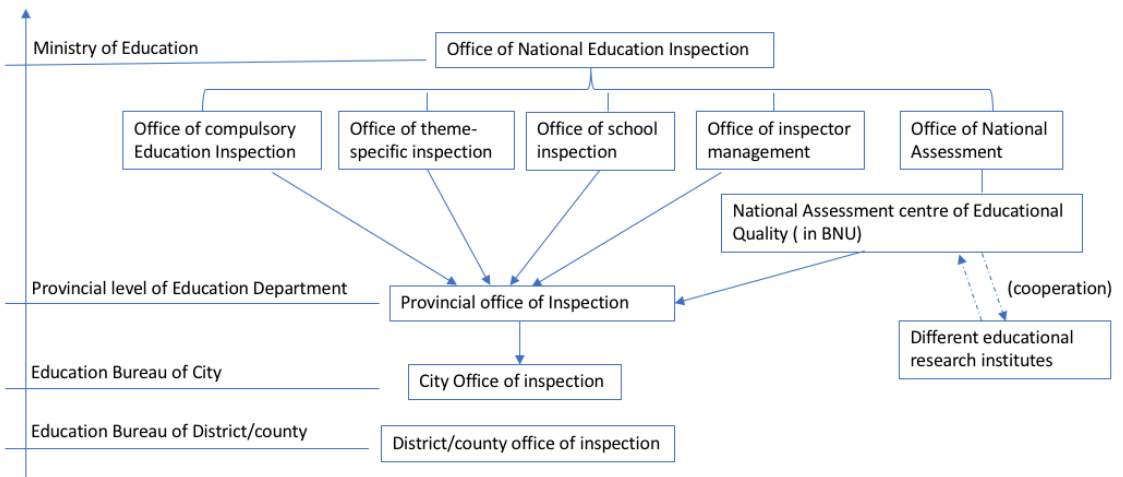
Figure 2. Institutional structure of the inspection system. Source: The figure is based on information from the MOE's (1991) website.

A point to clarify is that the branch on the right side of Figure 2. It is the newest organ of the NAEQ, established in 2009. However, in practice, the NAEQ based at Beijing Normal University (BNU) is the headquarters organising large-scale assessment. This headquarters intends to remain academic oriented and keep close cooperation with local and international research institutes and universities (Zhou et al., 2018). Inspection officials at the local level assist with testing (see more in 2.3.2).

Embedded in the global trend of evidence-based governance, education inspection is widely used as a tool of quality control in different countries. However, its institutional structure, mechanism and functions vary greatly across countries. The English-language literature has mostly focused on the (in)effectiveness and impacts of the inspection system (Cravens, Chu & Zhao, 2015; Ehren, Altrichter, McNamara & Hara, 2013; Ehren, Leeuw & Scheerens, 2005; Ehren et al., 2015; Ehren & Visscher, 2006; Gaertner, Wurster & Pant, 2013; Kemethofer, Gustafsson & Altrichter, 2017; Peng, Thomas, Yang & Li, 2006). In a comparative study of

European inspection systems, van Bruggen (2010) concluded that inspectors evaluate schools in quite similar ways. For instance, inspection usually includes preparation for a school visit, the visit itself, feedback and a follow-up visit after the feedback. The school visit often includes observations of lessons and discussions with students and teachers. Some countries also involve parents and other stakeholders in school evaluations (Ehren & Visscher, 2006). For feedback, inspectors usually give schools evaluation reports on their strengths, weaknesses and areas of improving. Inspection from different countries also share a similar logic of developmentalism that is using inspection as a mean to improve schools' performance assuming that inspection can make improvements and that educational performance is measurable. In line with developmentalism, naturally the critical question centralises on the effectiveness of inspection and how to make inspection more reliable in terms of school development. Questions cover as wide as methodological debate on the inspectors' qualification, usage of feedback, schools' participation.

Van Bruggen (2010) argued successful inspection requiring several conditions. The first condition is that inspectors have full access to all schools' information, which can eliminate many 'cheating' actions taken to make schools look good during visits (Van Bruggen, 2010). The second condition is standardised criteria for good education. Van Bruggen (2010) found that most European countries had similar pedagogical approach to inspection with different inspection frameworks. Creating a European-wide common framework clearly defining what constitutes good schools could be beneficial and make inspections more efficient. The third and fourth conditions concern feedback. Van Bruggen (2010) suggested that inspectors' feedback reports should be written in clear language and give specific suggestions in which way schools should treat inspection reports seriously and try to solve the problems identified. Ehren (2012) developed six causal mechanisms of developmentalism underpinning school inspection. His study demonstrated the universal perspective on why inspections were carried out: to set expectations (e.g. criteria for good schools), check whether schools meet these criteria and encourage schools to self-evaluate and undertake improvements to enhance their capacity. However, researchers also found that these casual assumptions did not always function as expected; instead, unexpected outcomes and side-effects challenged all inspection systems (Ehren et al., 2015). For instance, in another study, Ehren et al. (2015) compared the six European countries and found unexpected side effects: inspection narrowed the curriculum, discouraged teachers' motivation and increased the performativity of self-evaluation and school inspection from schools' perspective. Ehren and Visscher (2006) showed that inspection had a role in making school improvements in the Dutch context if the inspector and the school made a specific agreement. However, many have questioned the impacts of inspection.

Gaertner et al. (2013) explained that in the case of the German inspection system the perceptions of good and bad schools and improving or changing the quality of education were not likely to be changed due to inspection outcomes.

Chinese school inspection has a similar organisation and process as in many other countries. Reviewing the Chinese literature, I found a solution-oriented and pragmatic paradigm intended to improve the Chinese inspection system (Hong, 1991; Lee, Ding & Song, 2008; Li, 2004; Lin & Zhao, 2005; Wang & Zhang, 2013; D. Zhou, 2009). For instance, D. Zhou (2009) focused on the institutional development of the Chinese inspection system for more than six decades and showed that it had followed the most common path of organisational development from not existing to becoming an entity and growing bigger and stronger. During this process, inspection has become a full-time, professional occupation (Lee et al., 2008; Li, 2004; D. Zhou, 2009). These solution-oriented academic publications pay major attention to problems within education inspection, devoting the most concern to the professionalism of inspectors. In Chinese literature, it seems that the capacity of inspectors is the key to successful inspection. Though they argue that Chinese inspectors have transformed from amateurs to professionals, the inspector's professional skills are not living up to the expectations from them.

The context of bringing ES back traces to the Mao-time. After the Cultural Revolution, Deng Xiaoping restored the position of inspectors to appraise the development of basic education for the following reasons (Han, 2011; Zhou et al., 2018). At that time, educational level in China was very low and underdeveloped, though all the schools were converted by the state into public schools by 1956 (Huang, 2006). However, at that time, Chinese state did not have enough funding to support the nationwide basic education. Decentralisation was the choice of shifting the financial responsibility away from the state. It happened not only in educational domain but also in all other social domains since the early 1980s (Cheng,1994). Some believed that it was because the state lacking financial capacity to support all the schools over the country, so decentralisation was rather a burden-shifting decision for the state to give the locality more authority on taxation in exchange for their responsibility on basic education (Mok, 2002). Lacking enough funding, many places even did not have rooms, table and chairs, teachers – those necessary supports – to provide compulsory education. After the decentralization, the financial responsibility was delegated to the local government in exchange for more tax freedom. Facing the decentralised governing system, the state needed the ES to inspect the local governments and schools to know whether they were putting sufficient efforts into basic education.

Over thirty years of development, the Chinese ES faces many similar problems as other countries having but it has its own unique issues (Brown, McNamara, Hara & Brien, 2016). For instance, one unique practice of Chinese ES is inspection over

educational administrative sections called *dūzhèng*, which often handle financial and human resources, as well as distribution of recourses. *Dūzhèng* were expected to generate pressure on local governments to put more efforts into education. However, *dūzhèng* is found the most problematic and ineffective as they have no power over governments, letting alone to supervise. Despite the pragmatic methodology embedded in Chinese academia, it seems that old problems are rarely solved, and new problems regularly appear. For instance, one new change that is not yet known whether it will become a problem is the integration of inspection with the new NAEQ system, which is generally believed to be a product of the integration of global ideas (e.g., large-scale assessment) and Chinese conventions (e.g., education inspection). In 2015, the Chinese central government integrated juristic affiliation of inspection and the NAEQ to compensate for the inability to produce data on students' academic achievement. The official rationale was that inspection focused more on the political domain, while the NAEQ focused more on learning and students. The new system will create a national database with detailed indicators of all school subjects and other important aspects including students' physical records and moral and mental health condition. The next section presents the state's construction of this new system.

2.3.2   National Assessment of Educational Quality

The history of national assessment is short compared to the ES, but national assessment bodies the Chinese dream of modernising Chinese assessment and evaluation. Before its establishment, many researchers had studied, tested and negotiated the possibility and practical issues of how to create an effective, large-scale nationwide assessment in China. Questions hardly find commonly agreed answers such as why China needs another test? What if it becomes another competitive system? What if it creates more stress for teachers and students? The structure of NAEQ manifests many facets of these debated concerns as a compromised outcome. For instance, globalists (Liu, 2014; Wang, 2013; Yang, 2008; Zhang, 2008; S. Zhou, 2012) who supported transnational learning paid close attention to transnational, large-scale assessment such as PISA and the practices of other countries and focused mainly on the merits and advantages of those assessments. Their work was fuelled by an instrumental pragmatism borrowing foreign ideas and experiences to help China develop its own large-scale assessment. Their paradigm was similar to cherry-picking, selecting others' experiences to introduce to China, and the neoliberal ideology of evidence-based policy-making influenced their justifications for transnational learning and governing at a distance. Researchers were divided on what to borrow, from whom to borrow and how to adapt foreign ideas to the Chinese context. But, one precondition rarely doubted is

the direction of transnational learning that China should follow the trend[19]. This section presents the NAEQ's structure, logic of functioning mechanisms and assessment processes.

A system in its early stage might survive better if it attaches to a more prominent institution, like the NAEQ and its affiliation to ES. Legislation makes this system a branch of the education inspection (see Figure 2). The headquarters is the NAEQ (*jiāoyùbù jīchǔ jiāoyù zhìliàng jiāncè zhōngxīn*), which is affiliated with the National Supervision Office and located at BNU. In 2017, the name of NAEQ in BNU was changed to the National Innovation Centre for Basic Education Quality (NNCBEQ; *zhōngguó jīchǔ jiàoyù zhìliàng jiāncè xiétóng chuàngxīn zhōngxīn*), but the MOE continues to use the old name of NAEQ. After BNU changed the name of its NAEQ to the NNCBEQ, it started to undertake educational assessment and evaluation postgraduate and graduate degree programmes. This dissertation uses NAEQ in line with the usage by Chinese MOE considering its role as official organisation handling Chinese large-scale assessment, rather than an affiliate of a teaching institution. China has only a few NAEQ centres on the provincial level, and they appear to be aimed more at developing local standardised testing and utilising assessment results to improve educational performance. During the few years as the NAEQ was officially established, the academic discussion shifted to replicating similar sub-centres on the local level and creating similar, four-layer networks of NAEQ centres extending to the provincial, city and even district levels (Li, Ren & Jiang, 2017; Wang & Pan, 2013). On the provincial level, only a few developed provinces such as Jiangsu and Shanghai have centres specialising in local standardised assessment (State Council, 2010). However, since NAEQ is new and in transition stage, the question of how to build the institutional networks remain unclear and under debate and negotiation.

The topic of large-scale assessment is embedded in the process of educational internationalisation. The major literature on Chinese large-scale assessment is embedded this topic in the transnational and global contexts and considers NAEQ a product of emulation by China[20]. For instance, Xin, Li and Li (2007) analysed similar practices of a wide range of countries to take their practices as international experiences for China to establish its own largescale assessment. The overall voice of Chinese publications supports the establishment based on what they publish (Chen, 2008; Li & Zhu, 2018; Tan, Li & Luo, 2018; X. Zhou, 2012). In line with the MOE's decision to establish such a new system, more publications have justified the importance and rightness of this decision by investigating how this new system can solve many problems caused by examination. For instance, Tan et al. (2018)

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[19] Please see Article III for full illustration of this argument.
[20] Please see Article III for full discussion.

discussed the possibility of using large-scale assessment to solve problems in the Chinese education system, such as educational inequality. Tan et al. (2018) argued that the NAEQ was a useful tool as the assessment results provide hard evidence of how inequalities among schools and areas and what causes of poor student performance. Therefore, the NAEQ could be used to follow up on the implementation process and the effectiveness of these policies aiming at inequality. Xin, Tian and Zou (2012) suggested that large-scale assessment opened up a discussion on re-evaluating the concepts of education equality and shifted the exclusive political focus on the equality of educational access to a more beneficial discussion on the equality of educational outcomes. This argument was raised in response to the official discourse focusing on central problems of educational opportunities and giving little attention to other aspects of education equality. Xin et al. (2012) argued that the NAEQ enabled assessing the full picture of inequality, bringing to the government's attention not only the quantitative but also the qualitative aspects of education equality, such as equal access and quality of educational opportunities. It seems that the rationale of transnational learning remains the same: to borrow others' ideas and experiences, such as the OCED's PISA, to solve China's own problems. The NAEQ is a combination of the different pedagogical concepts, the old and the new, and as formally pertaining to global QAE trend of data governing.

3 Conceptualising the Transformation of Basic Education in China

This literature review has three aims. First, it further addresses the objectives of this dissertation. Many publications have loosely referred to but not clearly defined the concept of the transformation of Chinese education. Second, this literature review establishes a comprehensive set of background knowledge and theoretical starting-points for the three articles in this dissertation, which follow a progressive approach to analysing educational changes from three different perspectives. Third, this review critically considers the politics in academia, primarily in the Chinese context, based on a comparison of the cross-referencing between the Chinese and English literatures. It sees that Chinese publications more often cite theories from the West than the reverse. This communication is essentially unidirectional as knowledge flows from the West to the rest, including China (Rizvi, 2007). However, I do not suggest that this dissertation dismisses all the findings from the literature and challenges their validity and accountability. Instead, I only intend to raise awareness of dichotomies in academia. As quite often, what is presented depends on the stance taken in the research, and citations might result from the accessibility and availability of resources for researchers. The danger is that the marginalized could become more distant and academia trap deeper into ideologically, methodologically and epistemologically dichotomy. However, before moving to a detailed discussion, I want to emphasise that China never remains static, so what claimed to be the situation in this dissertation may not be the case later as the literature included had been published at the time of the writing.

3.1 An Articulated Core Theme: Transformation

Transformation is one of the most frequently used terms in the Chinese literature (Cheng, 2012; Mok & Forrest, 2009). A considerable number of studies has contributed to the knowledge about China's transition on a broad scale in global and national contexts over the past four decades. Assuming that it is valid to talk about the transformation of Chinese education as claimed by many works in the literature, we should be able to find traces of evidence supporting such argument at least in the

levels of the structure, fundamental characteristics, appearance and facets of education. Analysing social transformation first requires making comparisons over time to detect differences. Time is used as a chronological tool to compare similarities and differences between current and past practices. The Chinese literature quite often compares educational policies under Mao Zedong and Deng Xiaoping. For instance, Ten Brink (2013) and Landry (2003) proposed that Chinese contemporary history conventionally has been periodised into the Mao era and the post-Mao era. The former refers to the period when Mao Zedong, founder of the People's Republic of China, was chairman of China from 1949 to 1976, and educational policies were imprinted with his signature idealist Marxism. The later refers to the period after Mao in which the introduction of marketization created different educational policies than under Mao. In the case of China, another approach to time is to divide time by the Chinese central administration. In addition to Mao and Deng, there have been a third central administration under Jiang Zemin, Li Peng and Zhu Rongji (1989–2003); a fourth central administration under Hu Jintao and Wen Jiabao, known as the Hu–Wen Administration (2003–2012); and a fifth central administration of Xi Jinping and Li Keqiang (2012–current)[21]. This dissertation draws on this convention of taking into account the sequence of central administrations in analysis.

A few studies have made attempts to theorise transformation from a sociological perspective. In an earlier contribution focused on the macroeconomic perspective of social transformation, Drucker (1994) argued that since the 1990s, human history has entered a new epoch of transformation through nonviolent methods due to the development of technologies and knowledge society. This transformation on a global scale has effected fundamental changes in social structures and relationships among individuals, community and countries. Knowledge has gained unprecedented importance, and knowledge capital is the most useful type of capital to accumulate. Relationships among countries, communities and individuals are being adapted to the emerging world economy and knowledge society in which the status of countries depends on their knowledge competencies, and people are knowledge workers. Individuals have never faced more opportunities and possibilities to make significant impacts in the world. To Drucker (2012), this social transformation had made social structures, relationships and international relationships fundamentally different.

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[21] This is a simplified categorisation of generations of top Chinese leadership within mainland China. The transition of power is not always so smooth. For instance, Jiang Zeming did not vacate the position of central leader of Chinese army until 2005. The fifth Xi–Li administration is changing into an Xi-centred administration. However, this dissertation focuses less on the central government struggles and tensions and instead takes each central administration as a whole formality to enable the discussion.

Davis and Rootes (1994) suggested that globalisation was one of the important aspects to study when considering the causes of social transformation. Drucker (1994) predicted that this epoch of social transformation would also be an age of social innovation, producing new, more suitable mechanisms for dealing with the new challenges created by transformation. These innovations and creations, in turn, lead to further changes in society, initiating yet more transformation. Another school in the studies of social transformation is interested in the mechanism of social movements in advancing and achieving social improvements (Bretherton, 2018; Christie, 2018; Haglund & Stryker, 2015).

Most discussions on China, however, do not use the concept of transformation in this sense. In the Chinese context, the notion of transformation refers more likely to the cumulative, incremental changes over time. Due to its fast-economic development, China is catching more attention as it is becoming an important player reshaping the world order (Cheng, 2012; Mok & Forrest, 2009; Wiseman & Huang, 2011). A wide range of topics has been studied from various perspectives to illustrate China's differences: its international relationships (Guthrie, 2012), its role in global common concerns such as climate change (Song & Woo, 2008), political reforms (Li, 2008), social inequality policies (Gustafsson, Shi & Sicular, 2008; Whyte, 2010) and education governance (Chou, 2009; Wiseman & Huang, 2011; Kauko et al., 2018). Despite these varied topics, the Chinese literature tends to use the notions of transformation and change interchangeably as if the former is the power of the latter. But this help us little in understanding what happened in China, and how to understand those new things or why China has not changed more. Human history is a history of change, which means new practices constantly replace old practices, and manifestations in the present differ from those in the past. Following Drucker's (2012) definition that transformation means fundamental change in social relationships, we need to prove that evaluation and assessment politics are not merely claim that the China has undergone a transformation to become the case today. Although the later has long been taken for granted, this dissertation suggests that a careful theorisation of the Chinese educational transformation can help use to understand better China and Chinese politics.

To many sinologists, China seems to walk a divergent path unlike the Western and post-communist paths (Mann, 2012). It only makes sense to cite Chinese exceptionalism to make sense of China's dramatic social and economic changes. Many English and Chinese publications have advocated that China is different. The methodologically preference throughout many sinologists' studies is to trace the history and Chinese culture. To make sense of China's present, they are caught in a trap of trying to describe China's inexhaustible past and culture. Especially considering the fast development of the Chinese hybrid economic model combining public ownership and the market economy, many theories applied to explain Western

contexts do not fully explain Chinese phenomenon. For instance, Sinocentric philosophies (Ho, 2014) hold that instead of conforming to Western-style political and economic systems, China has chosen to explore a third way—an alternative path to modernisation. That is an exceptional model called socialist market economy with Chinese characteristics. Critics have questioned so-called Chinese exceptionalism as it seems similar to many other exceptionalisms advocated by rising countries. For instance, Callahan (2012) pointed out that similar processes had happened to other superpowers, such as the United States, which celebrated its culture and values throughout the world. This dissertation does not suggest rejecting the dichotomist mentality of determining whether China is exceptional but, rather, urges taking into account historical, cultural, political and international elements to explain the reasons for China's transformation. The question should be not only from where it came but also where it will go. The following sub-sections of this chapter further develop the articulated concept of transformation in the domains of politics, economics, government educational reforms, evaluation and assessment.

3.2   The Starting Point of Educational Reforms: Social and Economic Contexts

As mentioned in the previous section, the social and economic contexts have changed dramatically since Deng Xiaoping decided the reform and open-up policies in 1978. Chinese educational reforms are embedded within these contexts. This literature review covers works on, about and related to the discussion on the Chinese social and economic environments for educational reforms. It is a standard argument that China's fast economic development is the main contributor to the profound social changes, and the authoritarian regime is the main preventer restrains China from further political revolution. P. Anderson (2010, p. 95) vividly declared that China

> has [s]een the most dynamic form of either capitalism or communism. Never have modern industries and urban infrastructures grown so fast, never have people moved out poverty so fast, but never have both inequality and corruption grown so fast, and never have workers or peasants, formerly heretical masters of the state, been treated [so] ruthlessly.

These descriptions highlight several significant positive and negative impacts of China's fast economic development. A positive impact is China's enriched material condition. As often mentioned in the literature (e.g. Cheng, 2012), China is an emerging superpower that has developed into the world's second-largest economy, bringing rich material to the state and the people. However, the negative impacts are

alarming too. For instance, social and educational inequalities have reached new high, and corruption, nepotism and environmental pollution threaten social and political stability (Barbalet, 2015; He, 2000). Li et al., researchers from University of Western Ontario, estimated that the Gini coefficient of China was above 0.45 in 2011, which positions China in the least equal 25% percent of countries in terms of wealth distribution (Li, Sato, & Sicular, 2013; Sicular, 2013). Education inequality[22] finds strong correlations to local economic level as well as the wealth of family (Li, Sato, & Sicular, 2013; Sicular, 2013). The options for families, for instance, in terms of access to quality education, vary drastically according to their social and economic capital.

The close of the Cold War marked the end of communism and the transformation of most former communist states into post-communist states, but China was an exception (Zheng, 2018). The starting point of the following discussion on social and educational changes and the grounds for this dissertation is the economic reforms opening China to the global market. China's economic reforms have introduced a mixed, hybrid planned–market economy using socialist planning and market principles to manage public affairs (Jeffreys & Sigley, 2009; Solinger, 2016). In such an umbrella concept, the economy is controlled by both the state and the market as the state withdraws from full, direct, rigid control over economy to let the market function. Before reviewing the content of state's reforms, I would like to clarify a few terminologies. Reforms (*gǎigé*) are state's actions to make changes, to implement state's political visions and agenda into practices. Usually, in this process, the state identifies a problem, searches for a solution, pilot the solution on small scale in a few localities and implements the revised solution throughout the country. In the Chinese context, reform contrasts with the idea of revolution (*gémìng*) that is drastic changes achieved by violence. The latter is the foremost method of the state to avoid in achieving social changes because the priority of the state is to keep the stability of China (Rutanen, 2007). Underpinning logic of state's reform is bounded with policy experimentalism that processing of policy production constitutes stages of formulating and piloting ideas in a few sites and implementing nationwide. In contrast with the democratic context where public decision-making is based on the assumption of equal participant of each member of the society, regulations and policies in China are made by decision-makers, experts and to some extent public involvement in the drafting stage. If a new idea is suggested, the state usually pilots the idea in small scale of places e.g. in Shanghai for a few years to see if the idea works in Chinese context. New ideas could come from research-based or borrowed agenda from transnational organisations or another country. If the outcome is

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[22] For systematic analysis please see Article II.

persuasively positive, those ideas are more likely being adopted into policies. The experimentalism is manifested evidently in the five-year plan on various social domains when the state constantly adjusts its goals and agenda to meet. During this process, the state's policy learning is vital as the whole logic of policy experimentalism is based on the rationalist stance that the state should learn from piloting experiences and then revise policies accordingly. The proverb of groping for stones to cross the river (*mōzhe shítou guòhé*) has become one of the most well-known political slogans motivating governments at all levels to create possibilities and be innovative (Guthrie, 2012; Han, 2014). To some extent, they act like the opportunists.

Many Chinese economic reforms have concerned to what extent the state should intervene the economy. Studies have shown that the state has withdrawn from the Mao-style, tight economic control to grant more decision-making authority to the market (e.g. Jeffreys & Sigley, 2009). Jeffreys and Sigley (2009, p. 16) argued that by the late 2000s, the Chinese state was trying to develop more localised, economically efficient, autonomous forms of government to 'simultaneously bolster CCP support'. There is concrete evidence of policy learning as China has actively adjusted its policies to solve problems encountered during development (Guthrie, 2012; Hawkins, 2000; Mann, 2012; Tsang, 2000). The literature review shows that a few layers of experimentalism can be identified. First, on the political level, adjustments are made to seek the best ideology for the Chinese-specific path. Second, on the institutional level, adjustments are to seek the best organisational structures. Third, responsive adjustments address domestic and global challenges and pressures. Fourth is the need to balance traditional heritage, existing practices and prevailing global trends. Especially while integrating into the global market under the influence of global neoliberalism, China is cherry-picking ideas to find best practices (Zhou & Rinne, submitted).

What concerns the Western scholars most is that China's economic reforms have 'not [been] accompanied by much political reform, though ideological reform came with the dominance of market ideology coupled with meritocratic rather than political criteria for advancement' (Mann, 2012, p. 225). Compared to Western expectations, China's political reforms have not been promising and have been much less comprehensive than its economic reforms. Some critics argued that China practices capitalism under the suit of a marketised socialist economy as 'China has not embraced the tenets of a Western-style free market, [so] it simply cannot succeed in building a healthy market economy' (Guthrie, 2012, p. 8). Guthrie (2012, p. 8) attributed China's economic achievement precisely to 'the state's participation'. With no ready-made experiences of how to combine a planned-market economy (more popularly known as a socialist market economy) before China under Deng, Chinese economic reform stepped onto a path later defined as policy

experimentalism (Guthrie, 2012; Hawkins, 2000). However, as Kolodko (2018, p. 292) interestingly stated, 'call it what you will, the heart of the matter is about efficiency and competitiveness rather than ideological and political disputes'. This statement precisely summarises the philosophy underpinning the logic of the government's social and economic reforms – an opportunist stance.

However, it is equally inaccurate to suggest that China has made no political reforms as it remains sole governing party of the CCP (Montinola, Qian & Weingast,1995). Problematically, this argument views the CCP as a single, coherent, static party with no internal tensions or branches and overlooks the long-standing, loose division between leftist conservativism and rightist reformism. The former supports moderate social and economic policies, while the latter favours more liberal, proactive reforms, but they are not divided ideologically, with both supporting the sole governing party and big government (Nathan & Shi, 1996). This division is covered by the common goal of China's modernisation– a civilized political system governed by law. Due to the successful hybrid economy, some new Orientalists (e.g. Callahan, 2012) have started to talk about China leading the world. They see China as changing from a Western rules-follower, integrating into the global economic market through reform and opening-up, into a rules-maker, although criticised in the Western media for exercising new colonialism (neo-colonialism) over other countries. However, some evidence supports that China is not as exceptional as has been claimed as the convergence of education policies observable since the 2000s proves that globalisation has strongly influenced China (Mok, 2009; Mok & Lo, 2007).

All the educational reforms analysed in this dissertation are embedded in such controversial, constantly changing contexts (Huang et al., 2015; Qi, 2011). To some extent, educational reforms are compact exemplars of the tensions created by macro changes (Tsang, 2000). For instance, basic education has benefited from economic success through increased investment in education (Mundial, 2009; Yang, Huang & Liu; 2014). Greater material resources have increased China's capacity to support better a nationwide basic education, which must be understood in contrast to the Mao era when China was extremely poor and establishing mass education was economically and politically challenging (Pepper, 1996). With the growing economy, China announced in the early 2000s that it had accomplished one of its biggest educational projects, Two-Basic, and could ensure basic access to school for all students even in the poorest regions.

The discussion of how to ensure access to quality education has risen to the top of the political agenda (State Council, 2010). The literature provides much quantitative input demonstrating the increased numbers of schools and teachers, illustrating the impressive achievements in China (Huang et al., 2015). Education, in turn, has spurred economic development by providing workers with proper

education and contributed to urbanisation as more educated people move to cities. From the 1980s to 2000s, educational policies were designed to support the economy (Ngok, 2007). Along with an increasingly market-oriented economy, the Chinese education system, especially higher education, has adopted more neoliberal policies (Mok & Lo, 2007). Decentralisation, marketisation, commodification and privatisation have dramatically changed the appearance of Chinese education. Although basic education remains the domain least influenced by marketisation, reforms epitomise the development struggles experienced by China, such as dilemmas between the planned economy or the market economy, the left or the right, efficiency or equality, and decentralisation or recentralisation.

3.3   Decentralisation: Alternative Means of Direct Control

Decentralisation is the main theme of Chinese educational reforms (Lun & Chan, 2003; Ngok, 2007; Qi, 2011) and was the very first reform taken up in the early 1980s when the state decided to be more open to the world. Before elaborating the conceptualisation and content of decentralisation, we need to understand how the dynamics of power are conveyed in the discussion of decentralisation. Decentralisation in democratic contexts refers to the devolvement of political power to the people at the bottom (Montinola et al., 1995). Power is dispersed from the top to the bottom (e.g. from the national level to the local level), and re-shifting power would consist of re-centralisation from the bottom to the top. However, in the Chinese context, the process does not happen linearly from one direction to another in a simple, smooth process. As indicated by many, this process is quite complicated and often creates tensions among various stakeholders about how to divide the authority/power and responsibilities, which is highly important in a nation with a hierarchical power structure (Montinola et al., 1995). The process of decentralisation can be complicated and tortuous. Especially in China, the extent to which authority is delegated is the main dispute in conceptualising decentralisation and centralisation (Qi, 2011).

The works of Bray (1991) and Hanson (1998) have been widely cited in the Chinese literature to theorise the concept of decentralisation. Hanson (1998, p. 112) defined decentralisation as 'the transfer of decision-making authority, responsibility and tasks from higher to lower organizational levels or between organizations'. Bray (1991) and Hanson (1998) proposed three categories indicating the extent to which power was decentralised: de-concentration, delegation and devolution. Methodologically, many researchers have employed this categorisation to analyse decentralisation in China (Bray, 1991; Hanson, 1998; Hawkins, 2000; Montinola et al., 1995; Qi, 2011; Zhao & Qiu, 2012). Based on the extent of the transferred power,

the first category of de-concentration refers to the delegation of the workload to more horizontal units, which extends the regime of central control. In the second category of delegation, power and authority are transferred to hierarchically lower, more dispersed units, increasing their power. The third category of devolution involves fundamental shifting of decision-making authority from the top down to the bottom.

The Chinese literature on decentralisation centres on the puzzle of how an authoritarian regime such as China can decentralise power, which challenges the Western logic separating decentralisation and authoritarianism. Landry (2008) answered this question by proposing the concept of decentralised authoritarianism: 'decentralization has to be considered in the framework of the political institution's reform, but not as democratisation. The whole process should be seen as a change of the central government's strategy to control the bureaucracy' (Myšička, 2009, p. 63). Zhang's (1996, cited by Jeffreys & Sigley, 2009) findings supported Landry's (2008) conclusions, cautioning that China's hybrid economic should not be mistaken as a sign that Chinese political reform would follow the steps of the West and gradually lead to a weak, minimal government; instead, it should be understood that this dual model maintains the governing position of the CCP. The Chinese state uses decentralisation to strengthen its governance.

Another theme in the decentralisation literature loosely addresses what parts of authority have been decentralised and why. Answering the first question, China's educational decentralisation focused exclusively on the financial system (Cheng, 1994; Hawkins, 2000; Qi, 2011; Zhao & Qiu, 2012). Responsibility for financing basic education and authority for managing local educational affairs were transferred from the central government to local governments to create local incentives for education. The education system was poor and underdeveloped when China was hamstrung by the political movement led by Mao during the 1960s through 1976. As mentioned in previous chapter, in the early 1980s, education was restored to serve the economy when Deng and other reformists decided to correct the Mao's strategy by shifting the government's priority from political revolution to economic development. China adopted the five-year plan to implement compulsory education within two decades. This plan demanded financial support beyond the state's capacity, so it decided to shift responsibility through fiscal decentralisation (Bray, 1991; Cheng, 1994; Hanson, 1998; Hawkins, 2000; Mok, 2005; Qi, 2011; Teets, 2013; Tsang, 2000; Zhao & Qiu, 2012). As Cheng (1994, p. 265) explained, this decentralisation consisted of two types: '(a) devolution of central funding to local funding, and (b) the diffusion from the government to nongovernment funding agencies'. Decentralisation started with the reform and open-up policies as the government decided to loosen the methods of resource distribution from strict planning by the central government. Cheng (1994) perceived educational decentralisation as a collateral reform of the overall financial and management reforms in the 1980s. Under these reforms, the state let villages keep

most of their tax revenue to cover local educational expenses. Later, the state gave local governments more decision-making authority over local plans and regulations in spending on local basic education. During this shift, the provincial government gained authority over educational issues within each province, while the burden on the village, the lowest level of government, increased (Hawkins, 2000; Zhang & Kanbur, 2005).

In Western civil society which is considered to have democracy as its foundation, decentralisation means power is devolved to the bottom, minimising the state's power. Whereas Western decentralisation was largely motivated to 'strengthen democracy, transferring power from central to local bodies … [and] decentralisation was perceived as a necessary condition for school-based development… strengthening the local culture … [and] achieving rationalisation and efficiency' (Karlsen, 2000, p. 527), decentralisation in China was motivated by financial deficiencies. Power and authority were decentralised in exchange for local financial support. Many suggested that the central government's singular motive was to shift the financial burden to the bottom level of local government (the district government in the city and the village government in rural areas; e.g. Ngok, 2007). Policies promoting educational marketization and privatisation were introduced later for similar purposes of attracting private investment to education.

Although the decentralisation process is more complicated than this simplified explanation, the intention here is not to describe the complex and detailed variety of the process, but to present another central concern in literature about the impacts of decentralisation. The worst consequence of fiscal decentralisation has increased the regional disparity in the level of educational development that is caused by the absent of core funding by the state and the reliance on the local financial capacity. Almost all the literature directly or indirectly suggests that fascial decentralisation has increased educational inequality (Cheng, 1994; Hawkins, 2000; Qi, 2011; Tsang, 2000; Zhao & Qiu, 2012). The reasons of such disparity as Hawkins (2000) explained are that economically well-off regions have more capacity to invest in education and thereby support local economy than economically deprived areas. The latter have frequently been trapped in a vicious cycle as a poor economy leads to inadequate investment in education, and the subsequent brain drain slows the economy, resulting in less investment in education. What worsened the scenarios is local governments with financial difficulties shifts further the financial burden of investing in education to families, which again causes those families already in poverty to stop sending their children to school (Hawkins, 2000). Some local governments use the chance of decentralisation through marketization of local education. Localities open channels of making money by collecting additional educational taxes, tuition fees and donations from public and private actors to increase local revenue to ease the financial pressure of basic education (Mok & Wat, 1998, cited by Hawkins, 2000). The role of capital has changed the distribution of

education to favour the rich and the powerful (e.g., Qi, 2017; Wong, 2004; Zhao & Qiu, 2012). Hawkins (2000) and Wong (2004) showed that since the 2000s, the state has attempted to take back some authority and financial responsibility to address regional disparities; many have defined this move as recentralisation. This happened not only in education. The 1990s witnessed a wave of recentralisation when the state decided to take back large share of tax revenues. This move later is also found problematic which caused more problems on the local level. This take-turn policy has revealed the Chinese paradox: if power is decentralised to the bottom level, and the lower level encounters problems, then the central government resumes power, and the lower level stagnates (*yī fàng jiù luàn yī guǎn jiù sǐ*).

Some studies have reported positive impacts from educational decentralisation, including increased autonomy and decision-making power on the school level (Qi, 2017; Wong, 2004; Zhang & Zou, 1998). In the case of Shanghai, Zhang and Zou (1998) found that the majority of public and private schools has decision-making responsibility over school matters, such as resources allocation, curriculum, student assessment and recruitment and firing of teachers. Similar findings from Guangzhou, one of the biggest Chinese cities, also showed that schools' authority has indeed expanded due to decentralisation policies (Wong, 2004). Based on the analysis of the Shanghai case, Qi (1998; 2017) argued against the idea of recentralisation, saying that critics have ignored the paradox of decentralisation that makes decentralisation more than delegation of authority. Instead of choosing between the dichotomy of decentralisation and recentralisation, Qi found that the state had piloted alternatives that could create a balance between the state and the local. In Chinese cultural contexts, too much authority on the local level has led to corruption and abuse of power (Qi, 2017).

For instance, instead of recentralisation, the state has introduced an independent inspection system (ES) to ensure state control over basic education (Qi, 2011). According to Qi (2011), ES is the interlinking organ that ensures both decentralisation and central control. In the Chinese context, delegation of authority to localities is grounded on the assumption that localities will follow the plans and national policies made by the state, an assumption that ES ensures. Some requirements are quite general, such as Quality Education, which has been for long the goal of educational reforms, whereas others are highly specific, such as schools must allow students to play outdoors for at least one hour per day (State Council, 2010). In addition to direct control through ES, researchers have found that the state exercises direct control through the curriculum, which consists of three layers: the national, the provincial and the local (e.g. Qi, 2011; Wong, 2004). The national curriculum is decided by the MOE, placing the core content for CEE, and dictating what knowledge should be taught and studied. Inspired by Qi's (2011) study, we can conclude that decentralisation and authoritarianism are not controversial if we

understand that decentralisation serves the state just as marketization of the economy has.

However, what I see as more significant to the study on Chinese politics than arguing decentralisation or recentralisation is understanding the quaked ground in the political logic. Huang et al. (2016) showed that the state increasingly believes in soft control of education e.g. steering at distance and implementing performance evaluation with education indicators. Cheng (1994) noted that the logic of political legitimacy is shifting from the capacity to accurately allocate resources to the capacity to devolve authority to localities. The more authority is delegated to localities, the more support localities give to the state. For instance, before decentralisation, civilians perceived a good state to be capable of doing everything, but now, people expect the state to do its job and to let locals do their job. If decentralisation and other reforms such as steering at distance are understood as means used by the state, then expecting internal changes within the state might be more likely than expecting an authoritarian state to be converted into a democratic state overnight.

3.4 Shifting Governance: The State's Pragmatic Strategy

This section introduces another notable theme in literature suggesting that soft governance is gaining momentum in the Chinese education system due to two main factors: technological advances and the influence of globalisation (Jeffreys & Sigley, 2009; Qi, 2011; Yu, 2010). The central idea in this theme concerns the shifted role of the state in educational policy-making (Bell & Hindmoor, 2009). Governance initially is used as a concept to understand the new global relationships emerging since the end of the Cold War as transitional organisations such as the World Bank used peaceful methods rather than violence to solve international conflicts (Rosenau & Czempiel, 1992; Weiss, 2000). The notion of governance has been taken as an alternative term for a good governing system by the Chinese state in contrast to the conventional notion of government as a top-down power structure. But what good governing system refers to is still unclear, at least in official discourse. Luckily, input from literature provides richer theoretical and practical implications. Governance indicates a new era of 'a new process of governing' (Rhodes, 1994, p. 652–653). It represents the neoliberal trend replacing the state's hard control of coercive orders and regulations with soft control of steering at distance, minimal state direct interferences on social issues, establishing corporative governments and allowing non-governmental organizations to thrive (Bell & Hindmoor, 2009; Rhodes, 1994). Supporters highlight the merits of governance as more effective mechanism as it is achieved through decentralisation, accountability, technology and democratic and

collective management to maintain order in the world without a big powerful government or with a minimum government (i.e. authority; Pierre, 2000; Rhodes, 1994; Rosenau & Czempiel, 1992).

The Chinese terminologies are worth of mentioning here because many Chinese scholars convey the debate on government and governance under such terminologies. The literal corresponding term for governance is *zhìlǐ* concerning the 'relationships between the government, corporations and communities' (Jeffreys & Sigley, 2012, pp. 11–12) and that for government is *zhèngfǔ* referring to the executive and bureaucratic organs, departments and bureaus that represent the will of the state to establish social norms and order. Thus, *zhìlǐ* is closely related to the debate of how-questions of ways of governing, and composition of political power and apparatus of political relationships. Concept of *zhìlǐ* entered into China already in the 1990s being used to reflect on and re-evaluate the function of the Chinese political systems and administrative mechanism, but there is no commonly agreed conclusion of what a good and suitable model of governance for China. What is clear is that it is not understood as a replacement but more as a supplement or updating of the outdated way of direct control with more efficient ones (Zhang, 1996, cited by Jeffreys & Sigley, 2012). In this sense, China's authoritarian state again takes governance as an effective tool to enhance its governing capacity. In the following, I scrutinise the literature on governance in general and on China specifically to outline the reasoning.

First, the argument that governance shift is in China is based on the findings indicating the retreat of direct state control over education. In many articles, the notions of decentralisation and governance shift appear together. Many have found the decentralisation in education as discussed, particularly in different levels of the Chinese education management system (Chen & Feng, 2013; Guthrie, 2012; Hannum, 1999; Hawkins, 2000; Mann, 2012; Sun, 2010; Tsang, 2000; Zhang & Kanbur, 2005; Zhao & Qiu, 2012). Moreover, Jeffreys and Sigley (2012) proposed a second perspective: the Chinese transition from government to governance had manifested in a shift from socialist planning to market socialism, a Chinese governmentality that was a type of network governance leading by the state in cooperation with lower-level governments, international agencies and nongovernmental organisations (Jeffreys & Sigley, 2012), which was subject to the concept of 'fragmented authoritarianism' in sociological studies on China (Qian & Mok, 2016).

Second, the governance shift happens when increasing performance evaluation by third sectors appears, and the weight of data in decision-making increases (e.g. governing by data; Ozga, 2009) and evidence-based/informed policy-making lands. The development of assessment technology and the accumulation of performance data have made governing at a distance possible (Lawn, 2014; Lawn & Grek, 2012;

Rose & Miller, 1992). The use of evidence-based policy-making strategies to govern education systems has gained momentum globally, promoted by transnational organisations such the OECD underpinned by the triumph of neoliberalism (Comaroff & Comaroff, 2001; Kauko et al., 2018; Kipnis, 2006). For instance, growing, transitional large-scale assessments, such as the PISA, have, to some extent, incorporated the understanding of not only a good assessment but also a good education. In an audit society, everything is considered to be measurable and comparable (Brøgger, 2019). Thus, the quality of education is translated into sets of standards labelled high, objective and research-based. Evidence-based policy-making has become a golden standard based on the advanced technology of educational assessment and evaluations. Policy-makers long to find best practices through transnational comparisons, particularly from the top-ranking countries on the PISA (Breakspear, 2012; Steiner-Khamsi, 2014). China has looked globally for alternative ideas and practices to improve its practices, including borrowing the idea of steering at distance through modern technology. Qi (2011, p.26) argued that 'globalization has become a transforming power' generating various influences on Chinese policy-making who searches for the support and endorsement by translational organisations such as OECD, and empowerment of the 'certification effect' (Steiner-Khamsi, 2014, p. 155).

Third, another school of studies on governance shift focuses on the phenomenon of policy-networking. In the political regime, among many, China's governing is shifting due to the emergence of civil society as policy-makers increasingly rely on expertise and policy-making networks (Teets, 2013). Many studies indicate governance shift happening in China because they found that a broader range of actors from different professional areas started to participate in decision-making through the institutionalised channels of policy consultation and researches cooperation. Similar studies on the educational regime have found that think-tanks, policy advisers, international and transnational originations are all involved in the Chinese policy-making process to some extent (Mok, 2005; Rinne et al., 2018). According to their findings, the Chinese state has shown a strong interest in employing evidence-based policy-making and promises to reform accordingly. What should be pointed out here is what underpin the transition from government to governance, if it is true, are properly the political incrementalism and experimentalism holding that 'if something work[s], continue with it; if not then discard it' (Mann, 2012, p. 25). Over the past four decades, state's policies have seemed to serve economic purposes and to adhere to political pragmatism in solving problems. In sum, if education governance is taking shape, but in the case of China, this shift is far from hollowing out the state to achieve governing without government (Jessop, 1993, cited by Mok, 2002; Rhodes, 1994). On the contrary, the Chinese government aims to maintain a strong government, and all those reforms and new

means – indirect interventions, evidence-based policy-making, consultative decision-making and decentralization. This dissertation perceives them as only part of the state's strategies to increase its governing capacity and stabilise its governing position.

Last point suggested by literature is the increasing discussion on accountability. For instance, the ES is questioned by its accountability (Rasmussen and Zou, 2014). However, the notion of accountability is understood and used differently than in its neoliberal understanding. The latter supports ideas of test-based accountability that have implications for educational management and administration (Verger & Parcerisa, 2018). Indeed, 'the form of (test-based) accountability that is spreading more intensively in the governance of education has a managerial and outcomes-based nature' (Verger & Parcerisa, 2018, p.1). Accountability is rising alongside the triumph of large-scale assessment and the revolution of public governance and management. In line with this understanding, accountability emphasises the extent to which decision-making is informed by evidence based on scientific measurements. Rasmussen and Zou (2014, p.2) defined accountability in public management in the Chinese context as 'the request for responsibility and giving account for that responsibility', which is very close to the educational reforms of accountability practiced by the ES government body. Inspectors are held more accountable for their roles, as emphasised in the ES accountability reforms, and thus are individually responsible for their regions, blamed and even punished for anything wrong or poorly done in inspection activities but also rewarded for work done well. Comparing Chinese and Danish education accountability, Rasmussen and Zou (2014) found that policy-making in China involved multiple stakeholders to increase the accountability of the education system. Similarly, Teets (2013) argued that the governing education system tended to disperse decision-making power by involving more people in policy-making discussions and introducing evidence to support policy-makers' decisions. In this sense, accountability means to make decisions accountable, which aligns with the global discourse on accountability to some extent.

3.5   Reflections on the Literature

Throughout this chapter, I have reviewed both Chinese- and English-language publications on Chinese educational changes and reforms. The objective of this dissertation is to study these educational changes systematically and critically. Based on the themes emerging from literature, I can identify an articulated theme called educational transformation that categorises educational reforms by social and economic perspectives, educational decentralisation and the shifting governing model. To conclude this literature review, this section revisits the challenge raised in the beginning of this chapter: conducting a critical review of Western and Chinese

academia, although the division of them based on language is rather crude. It is not possible to simply define Chinese academia because many of them have international and transnational studying and working backgrounds. An increasing number of non-Chinese researchers also publish in Chinese, and their contributions to Chinese publications, though small compared to those of native Chinese researchers, are important for bridging the cross-national understanding. Meanwhile, many English publications are by native Chinese researchers. The division between the so-called Chinese academia and the English academia is problematic and worth more attention in future research. This section considers discussions based on the single criteria of language or nationality. This division is not intended to ignore the diversity of academia; instead, it reflects the need to conduct the discussion based on assumptions that different research paradigms and power inequalities exist in China and the West. Significant, valuable publications in other languages are not included in the literature review due to the researcher's limited language capacity. The overall impression of the literature is that the English publications are trapped in an imaginary of the world which China is not familiar case, which could be true as most publications and researchers studying Chinese topics live in China and write in Chinese. Another explanation could be that Chinese topics are a comparatively marginalised topic in political studies, and there is a need to provide more background information for the readers.

Several few characteristics found interesting in the literature review are worth highlighting. First, although scholars always emphasise that contexts are important, universalist, Orientalist interpretations of China are very common. For instance, a recent book on Chinese social and political reforms edited by Cheng (2012) presented a typical, common judgmental attitude towards China through the lens of Western universalism. According to his logic, the situation in China was merely terrible before it adopted Western democratic systems, and current Chinese systems had no virtue. Meanwhile, the considerable body of Chinese studies on Western theories and countries does not recognise a genealogical approach to education policies and evaluation (Gu & Zhou, 2007; Lee et al., 2008; Zhao, 2012). Many researchers (e.g. P. Anderson, 2010) have started to call for cultural awareness and context sensibility in cross-cultural studies. Growing postmodernist studies (post-colonial theorists), especially researchers from the East, have begun to participate more actively in global discussions on educational topics. Neo-orientalist publications increasingly criticise the Western hegemony and pay more attention to discourse inequalities in academia. Many developing countries, including China, are gaining national awareness of the power of global discourses and start to reject being defined and labelled.

The impression of inequality between English and Chinese publications becomes stronger from the perspective of reference and citations. As the review progressed, I

came to see Chinese publications referring to English publications to establish their theory, background and method—but not vice versa. The reasons why Chinese publications are rarely cited cannot be explained simply by this literature review, although the language barrier is a reasonable guess. Compared to English publications, Chinese academic publications are more instrumental, providing solutions to the research questions suggested by the authors. Another strong impression is that Chinese publications more often promote and support Chinese exceptionalism than English publications, though many of these do emphasise China's exceptional cultural and political conditions. Given that most readers of Chinese publications are Chinese and read Chinese, the general impression is that the arguments for Chinese exceptionalism are continuously enhanced rather than challenged.

Through this literature review, I have concluded that the language barrier is one of the most important causes of the discourse dichotomy between China and the West. For instance, major publications in Chinese circulate only within China. The information exchange has improved particularly because the availability and accessibility of others' research and publications. But I am worried that the communication gap between China and the West are not witnessing promising bridging as the West insists on Western logic, and China on Chinese exceptionalism. Another reason could be the different epistemological and methodological approaches to Chinese topics. Typically, Orientalist studies on China have employed stereotypical paradigms (Baber, 2002; Said, 1978), while Chinese researchers have dwelled on the country's history and agenda of self-preservation. However, this situation could change with the development of globalisation and internationalisation. For instance, Chinese researchers are actively publishing English-language works in global discussions on issues in Chinese education and many Western sinologists and researchers are dedicated to understanding China and bring their view of China to the global audience. Efforts to establish a more inclusive global discourse are being made by those such as the post-colonialists. From China's perspective, the Chinese state has noticed hostile attitude towards China and is eager to show China's positive image and to diminish those unfavorable attitudes. I do not want to spend more space reviewing these official propagandas or their impacts, though they are very interesting, but not the focus of this dissertation. Rather, I want to enounce that one purpose of this dissertation is to make its subtle contribution to bridging the communication gap.

4   Research Tasks and Methods

This chapter introduces the methodology of this dissertation, including the project background as a sub-study in a transitional comparative project, a reflection on the research and data collection processes, and the research design and data collection and analysis. This chapter is aimed at allowing readers to evaluate the methodical choices in this study, and of shedding light on the issues of validity and credibility, in addition to the explanation on the subjectivity and reflectivity of the research process from the data collection to the presentation of the findings. The implications for this dissertation are presented in the following sections, which stresses two themes: the sensitivity of the Chinese context and the reflexivity of the researcher.

4.1   Research Objectives

This dissertation is situated within the paradigm of qualitative research, and the research objectives are carefully contextualised. Research is a systematic, scientific search for knowledge (Liamputtong, 2010; Neuman & Robson, 2014). Unlike quantitative research, the aim of qualitative research is to understand and interpret the meanings of contextualised experiences (Liamputtong, 2010). This method emphasises the significance of the construction of knowledge relative to its context, time and space, with humans playing important roles. Qualitative research is intended to understand how humans make sense of nature and human development through meaning and ideas. Embracing the constructivist view on knowledge, I stress that the findings in this dissertation are a version of reality constructed by the participants (e.g. interviewees and policy-makers) through the medium of the qualitative researchers (i.e. the author of this dissertation). I do not intend to generalise these claims and statements as the only true version of China but, rather, to provide a different entry point to interpret China as a complicated, conflicted polity. In this dissertation, I aim to reveal how Chinese make sense of their lives and how Chinese politicians problematize reforms to serve their agenda. I want to explain the Chinese logic of thinking, doing and making changes. These topics should be emphasised and acknowledged more in the era of globalisation.

The objective of this dissertation is to provide a theory of educational transformation that conceptualises the recent changes in Chinese educational politics

to ensure the quality of basic education. The first task is to construct a contextualised, operational concept informed by the global phenomenon of QAE developed by Western researchers and used to re-articulate the space of the transnational, national and local in studies on educational politics (Kauko, Corvalan, Simola & Carrasco, 2015; Simola et al., 2017). However, given that the QAE concept was proposed to navigate global policy and the study of education governance, it is by nature 'hard to define precisely' (Simola et al., 2009, p. 163). Simola et al. (2009) suggested it might be more important to shift attention to the impacts of the changes in education in the new, interconnected, local–global era rather than to strictly define the concept. This argument is partly true; it is not possible to define Chinese QAE as the assurance of educational quality can depend on various support systems for education, including finance, investment, policy supports, teacher training and educational appraisal, assessment and improvement. This argument is further supported by reviews of Chinese educational documents. For instance, *zhìliàng bǎozhàng yǔ píngjià*, the Chinese translation of *QAE*, first appears in the national document *Medium- and Long-Term Educational Reform and Development 2010–2020*. This official document, though, does not give an operational definition of QAE but only loosely introduces it as a new umbrella concept encompassing all aspects of reforms related to educational quality. This vaguely defined concept leaves much room for researchers and educators to interpret what QAE means. Academics are still exploring the connotations and implications of *zhìliàng bǎozhàng yǔ píngjià*. Some researchers use it to refer it to examination (e.g., Liu, 2009), some to discuss better school funding systems, and some to talk about ES (Mu, 2005). Another popular use refers to curriculum reform (Huang, 2004). *Zhìliàng bǎozhàng yǔ píngjià* (QAE) seems to mean everything related to making education better.

In China, policy change also involves shifts in the central administrations. When discussing Chinese state, it should be noted that we refer to a political entity whose central administration changes every 10 years since the Deng time. Each central administration has differing and similar preferences for education agendas. For instance, over three decades, several governments have consistently implemented nine-year plans for compulsory education and promoted the Two-Basic project. Regarding inconsistencies, the central administration supported the key-schools project that invested more to the already good schools to make them the most competitive in one area from basic to higher education in the 1990s, while the next government in the 2000s abandoned the key-school policy and emphasised a harmonious society and education equilibrium. Notwithstanding shifts in the central administration, a heritage of meritocratic elitism to some extent upholds the governing logic grounded on consulting and valuing educated persons' opinions and suggestions in planning educational reforms. For instance, the researchers from top universities serve as an important think-tank for the state, and many are actively

involved in policy-making. Common belief holds that educated persons know better how things work and what can benefit China.

This dissertation picks up the suggestion from Simola et al. (2009). Instead of trying to define Chinese QAE, this approach shifts the research tasks to the studying of how the Chinese state's educational politics have been changed in order to ensure the quality of basic education. The process of producing a theory of the politics of educational transformation, therefore, is the process of describing Chinese QAE. Under China's authoritarian regime, the state's reforms are the primary instrument of educational changes. As a means of governing, the Chinese state implements educational plans and reforms to promote what it considers to be necessary in its agenda. Different central administrations have initiated various reforms which usually aim at nationwide, profound and comprehensive updates of practices. In Chinese political discourse, national policies or any documents that contains the term national means these are nationwide applicable, or expected by the state that all provinces, areas and cities would apply regardless of local disparity. However, in order to make the national policies fit for all places, many terminologies, goals are made vague, neutral and giving space for local adjustment. Given this context, the first step is to identify the means to evaluate, inspect and appraise the quality of basic education. I map all the possible national systems considered to be relevant to the quality of education through an extensive literature review and careful scrutiny of the institutional organisations existed in the educational system. As shown in Table 2, substantial systems are identified based on their roles, official functions and jurisdictive affiliations as official organs. This table expresses the parallel rather than the hierarchical relationships among the categories. The first category represents the inspection system, which performs meta-evaluative practices to appraise and judge the qualifications of schools and other responsible educational units. The second category consists of what we call supportive practices that provide input to educators, commonly considered to be an important factor determining the quality of education. The third category represents activities on the school level that ensure and improve the quality of teaching and learning in accordance with the requirements of national, provincial and local regulations and policies.

However, planning and carrying out research are two different stories. In the original research plan, this dissertation includes three articles analysing chronological changes in each category. Due to limited time and research resources and difficulties in accessing the field (as detailed in section 4.2), the final objective is to focus on the top level of policy designers in the Chinese hierarchy of power, those who have the authority to make and influence changes in educational policies. Although the impacts on the school level (the category of school quality management system) are important, this dissertation must exclude them but does briefly address

them as background knowledge in Chapters 2 and 3. In the future, an independent study exploring the school level is necessary to remedy this deficiency.

Table 2.   The structure of Chinese Quality Assurance and Evaluation.

Dimensions	Branches	Nature	Targets
Inspection system	Supervision	Tarditional quality control education	Educational governments, departments, schools
	Assessment	Quality control by standardized testing	Sampling students, teachers, and headmasters
Institute of education science	Teacher training	In-service education	Teachers
School quality management system	Exam	Traditional knowledge based tests	Students
	Comprehensive self-evaluation	Quality measurement of schooling	Students
	Academic achievement evalution	Systematic measurement of graduation of middle school	High school students
	Office of teach and research	Professional improving community	Teachers

Sources: The author made this table based on the information from MOE's official website and an extensive literature review (e.g. Lee et al., 2008; National Supervision Office, 2011; Wang & Zhang, 2013; Xu, Ji & Wang, 2013).

The next task is to contextualise the research questions to the case of China. Focusing on the top level of policy design, the sub-objective of each study was adjusted over time throughout the consortium research project to make the operational questions 'reflect better the types of questions needed to understand the research problem' (Croswell, 2007. p. 19). The departure questions are what Chinese QAE were and are, and what new possibilities and dynamics of politics are due to the change of QAE, and how to deposit or network different actors in constituting the changes of Chinese QAE policies. Article I explores the institutional changes in the name of improving educational quality through the lens of historical institutionalisation (see Table 2). Kauko et al. (2018, p. 9) suggested that focusing on the impacts of QAE, in addition to the institutional changes, could also direct attention to the related 'possibilities happen[ing] through the dominant discourses'. Article II, therefore, focuses on the shifts in political discourse of problematizing educational quality. Since the late 2000s, the state has expanded the inspection scale to ensure the quality

of education, and the official discourse has articulated equality as an important aspect of education quality, introducing various terminologies in response to the global discourse. Article II tackles this discourse shift through the topic of education equality and equity. Article III shifts attention to the political space of actors (Kauko et al., 2018) to study the effects on their status forming the politics of Chinese QAE in relation to the changes of decentralisation, evidence-based policy-making and construction of actors' networks. Article III focuses on one particular group of actors –the academic experts. Through analysing their scope of action in transnational learning and policy indigenisation, Article III shows that QAE has shifted policy decision-making process to a more dispersed network in which academic experts share a restrained discursive power of defining educational quality via their expertise, their academic scholarship and international connections.

4.2   Data Collection and Analysis

The decision to use qualitative methods to collect data conforms to the bigger project but, more importantly, is suitable for answering the research questions. This research is aimed at gaining an in-depth understanding on this topic rather than numerical explanations of patterns of change. The empirical data from interviews are drawn the interview data from the same pool of the consortium project.

    The data collection described as follows the same process as the research project. All three research teams had the same general guidelines for conducting interviews with key actors in QAE, including the selection of interviewees, but detailed selections were up to each team's discretion. I was assigned the task of identifying potential Chinese interviewees that fit our profile i.e. key actors. The so-called key actors are those closely involved in and related to the production process of QAE policies and practices because they knew what happened and how it happened. Therefore, the population of interviews are those politicians from educational bureaus involved in QAE, non-politician actors including experts and think tanks worked/working with/for those politicians, headmasters and teachers who participated in QAE. Politicians in specific are the inspectors from the inspection offices on the four administrative levels (national, provincial, city and county/district); specialists who had participated in the establishment of large-scale standardised testing; heads of teacher training programmes; and principals and teachers from medium level of schools in a medium sized city. To do so, I first mapped the key systems related to QAE (see Table 2) and then pinpointed the directors, vice-directors and leaders indicated as having primary responsibility for QAE activities on their websites. This process produced a list of 35 potential interviewees constituting a network of key actors including policy-makers, inspectors and experts who held leadership positions in various systems.

Surprisingly, the list was dominated by academic researchers from prestigious Chinese research institutions and universities, in addition to bureaucrats. However, we ultimately did not use this list. Due to the denial of an introductory letter from the MOE giving official permission to conduct field work in China (for details, see the next section), the research team had to choose the alternative approach to select interviewees based on the principle of accessibility and relatedness.

The alternative means was to enter the field through connections. We contacted the Chinese French Centre for Innovation in Education and obtained its support and contacts with faculty members at BNU. With the assistance of this centre, we undertook two trips for data collection from June 2015 to March 2016 and conducted 40 interviewees with academic experts, inspectors, politicians, non-governmental organisation employees, principals and teachers. Meanwhile, we used snowball recruiting to contact more potential interviewees through interviewees (Noy, 2008). Compared to drawing the interview list, snowball recruitment based on the interviewees' profiles was more efficient at finding more potential interviewees, which was especially useful in a context such as China where social connects are important. For the larger research project, the research team also interviewed teachers and principals at seven schools in a city to collect local input on the question of how the QAE environment has changed. To maintain the participants' confidentiality as requested, all their names and identifying information are kept anonymous. This dissertation focuses mostly on the state level, so the data collected on school levels and the interviews are excluded in this dissertation (for more information, see the project book edited by Kauko et al., 2018). The interviewees (N=17) discussed in this dissertation were Chinese academics at BNU, Beijing Institution of Educational Science and Central Teaching Science Institute; representatives from the *China Teacher Paper* and the Chinese *Journal of Educational Evaluation and Assessment* (translated from its Chinese title); and one politician from each educational bureau on the national and the city and county levels. From the perspective of centralisation, the shortcoming of the interview focus was evident as I did not have access to politicians and other key actors in QAE network. Due to this limited access, we did not conduct many interviews with the key actors in the MOE and provincial-level educational bureaus. Some key actors working on large-scale assessment also rejected our interview requests.

The same interview guideline for the same types of interviewees were used following the technics of semi-structured interview (Harrell & Bradley, 2009). In this dissertation, I included three interview guidelines (see. the Appendices). One is the consortium interview guideline for the consortium research project, and the second one is for Chinese national level actors, and the third one is for local level actors. In general, the interviews were aimed at delineating the transformation of

Chinese educational politics from the perspectives of different stakeholders. The interviews lasted from one to two hours, and the interviewees picked the language of the interviews, most of which were conducted in Chinese. As mentioned, QAE is a loose concept, so the interviewees were allowed much room to define what they considered to be fundamental changes in order to improve the educational quality, particularly in education evaluation and assessment and the reasons and consequences. This interview strategy was drawn from grounded theory, which calls for leaving the definition of the key concept open for renegotiation throughout the process (Strauss, 1987). During and after the fieldwork, I made reflections on the fieldwork, as presented in sub-section 4.3. All the interviews were recorded with permission, and after the interview, I transcribed them from audio to text format in the original language used during the interview. Those transcripts were translated into English only when necessary. As mentioned, the research design was to interview all actors holding key positions in these institutions (Table 2), but due to access problems, the research team changed the target group of interviewees to researchers involved in policy-making on quality assessment and evaluation. Interviewing experts is an efficient way to access 'practical insider knowledge' and 'gain access to a particular social field' (Bogner, Litting & Menz, 2009, p. 2).

The coding of each interview followed the same process as in the larger comparative project. Although country codes were not necessary as this dissertation was a single-country study, I used the country code in this dissertation, following the style of the larger project. As shown in Table 3, each interview was assigned a name code consisting of the country abbreviation (CN=China), genre letter (E=Experts) and number, and order of the interview (01, 02, 03 …). The genre code warrants explanation. For instance, take interviewee CN-E-01 for example. CN represents the nation of China, E represents the profession of an expert, and 01 represents the order of the interview. In the category of profession, MD represents media, N represents national politician, and M represents municipal politician. To define *expert*, I followed Hitzler, Honer and Maeder's (1994, cited by Meuser & Nagel, 2009) formulation of people who hold the institutionalised authority to construct reality. Those identified as experts were either professors or associate professors at prestigious research institutions or held high-ranking positions influencing public discourse, such as newspaper editors. Although the professional title of the editor of the *Journal of Educational Evaluation and Assessment* was unclear, I categorised her as an expert based on her comprehensive knowledge of assessment and evaluation in China and on the assumption that academic editors should acquire comprehensive professorial knowledgeable in their areas. The final interview list was very different from the initial intended list, but they served as highly informative interviewees, knowledgeable about broader political and social topics of China.

The next main data source were policy documents, which provided valuable secondary materials. The documents revealed not only the full trajectory of the national plans for educational reforms over recent decades but also served as a starting point for becoming familiar with Chinese discourse and terminologies. Collection of documents started as early as in 2014 when the project was initiated. For this analysis of the transformation in education since China's reform and open-up policies in 1978, the documents selected included all the national documents, policies, regulations and plans for basic education published from 1978 to 2017 when the research project ended. The sample included 89 national-level documents, including policies, instructions, notifications and guidelines related to basic education; 37 documents from the selected province; and several school documents. However, for this dissertation only the national documents are used, and local and school documents collected for the project are excluded. Copies of most policies were available on the institutions' official websites. Thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006) was performed to code and analyse the policy documents and interview data in order to identify themes and patterns in the data. In the time period covered by this research, there are four central administrations (See section 3.1 in Chapter 3) that have each initiated rounds of educational reforms, including education evaluation and assessment. Drawing from critical discourse analysis, the coding used a genealogical strategize to follow the keywords of quality, quality education, quality inspection, quality evaluation, quality assessment and the ES (Fairclough, 2010). However, one deficit is that English copies of Chinese government policy documents were not available.

In the data analysis, the author employed two paradigms of analysis: thematic analysis (Articles I and III) and discourse analysis (Article II on the official discourse of education equality). This research has made both theoretical and methodological contributions to the political study of China in the contexts of globalisation and internationalisation. For instance, Article II provides new entry to study political discourse. No study has used critical discourse analysis scrutinizing state discourse through meta-analytical framework of equality-equity over four decades of time span. It shows the possibilities of critical genealogical discourse analysis. As a qualitative researcher, I have attempted to keep distant from the ideological dichotomy as introduced in the ending section of chapter 3 and to maintain a neutral, critical stance regarding the claims and findings from all sides. In the publications, I have used different theories from political studies to analyse the Chinese case. The intention was not to judge whether China fit the model of a specific theory but, instead, to show that any given specific theoretical model might be insufficient to explain China and to highlight the need to theorise China studies.

4.3   Research Challenges and Reflectivity

This section is written in a reflective style and synthesises methodological, theoretical and ideological reflections on doing research in China and comparative research with China. Sociologist Margret Archer (2017) proposed that reflexivity is a universal human activity and the key means to explain the causality of changes in humans and societies (Archer, 2017). Reflexivity indeed has been widely used in qualitative social research (Berger, 2015; Finlay, 2002; Jootun, McGhee & Marland, 2009) and increasingly recommended by qualitative researchers to improve the transparency and reliability of research (Arthur, Waring, Coe & Hedges, 2012; Denzin & Lincoln, 2011; Silverman, 2009). Embedded in the constructivist paradigm of doing research, I have attempted to cautiously draw conclusions and generalise my findings. Bearing in mind the deficiencies of the data set and the contextualisation of the research topic, I aim to use this section to describe my journey from the beginning of the consortium research, how and why decisions were made, and how I changed and handled challenges, which all served the goal to conduct ethical and reliable work.

As mentioned, it was not easy to proceed with this research, as might be the case in any other social research. The first and foremost crisis came in the early stage when the Chinese central administration rejected our interview request, which made fieldwork and data collection inaccessible. Due to the senior researchers' fortunate and wide social connections, the team managed to develop an alternative solution to seek assistance from Chinese research institutions. Eventually, through cooperation from BNU, this project reached a wide Chinese audience and groups of experts for data collection. One Chinese informant also shared their knowledge of why the original request was rejected, which seems to be a random accident. This informant said that our research request was delivered to the wrong office whose staff misunderstood our request then rejected it. If it had been delivered to a different office and handled by a different officer, then our research journey might be a different story. The problem of communicating with political departments was that there was no communication. We were only informed of the decision and given no reason beyond rational guessing.

The challenge of inaccessibility extended beyond the access to China. Although we had a list of interviewee candidates, as explained in previous section of 4.2, accessibility was not determined by the Turku team. We later learned that interviewing politicians who represent the country is highly sensitive. Whereas Western politicians like to clearly deliver their stances and ideas to the public, the situation was the opposite in China. Chinese politicians do not casually talk, especially to foreigners, unless they articulate the image of the government they represent. The research team, therefore, decided to use the snowball recruiting strategy and let the Chinese partners introduce more interviewees. Such flexibility

in selecting interviewees turned out to be fruitful and promising. Most interviewees were researchers, an important social group with connections to the government, foreign institutions, schools and teachers. Many served on various education committees and thus were stakeholders in important educational decisions.

In qualitative research, authors critically reflect on their positions throughout the research (Cresswell, 2007) and are aware of their own transformations. As Patton (2002, p. 14) stated, the 'researcher is the instrument'. In other words, the qualities of the researcher shape the knowledge of the project, and the researcher's reflectivity and awareness of their axiology, background and mentality significantly influence the credibility of qualitative research (Creswell, 2007). Chen (2000) suggested that qualitative researchers should reflect on the question of 'who I am' and be aware of how their own experiences and preconditions might influence the research process. Throughout the research for this project and dissertation, I reflected on how my own culture, knowledge background and stances might have influenced my work, such as the presentation of the findings (Ben-Ari & Enosh, 2011), and my decisions, such as to the selections of the perspectives of this study. When starting this project, I experienced a strong cultural shock as I encountered Chinese ways of thinking and Finnish way of doing research with which I was unfamiliar. Archer (2017) stated that people learn through self-reflection and making sense of the unknown, and the following passages describe my way of making sense of a world unknown to me. I give a simplified description to make a point, which may seem stereotypical. However, this section is written to share my self-reflection as a Chinese female doctoral student studying and working in Finland, and neither of the following examples are the absolute truth about Finland or China.

Differences manifested in the relationships between groups members. For instance, in group discussions for the project, the sense of a hierarchy of group members was less visible. In China, I was educated in a hierarchical environment where professors displayed their authority in knowledge production and discourse, and students learned from professors who had better knowledge. For example, after students' discussion during a regular Friday workshop in my master programme in China, the professor was expected to and did comment on and evaluate students' arguments, pointing out that some were summaries, others were naïve or brilliant, and some could be developed further. I relied on the professors' in-depth philosophical input. In contrast, group discussions in Finland were more equal and liberal, and for a long time, I was mentally uncomfortable speaking before professors, post-doctoral researchers or anyone else whom I thought should talk more as they might know better than me. What I did not recognise then were the differences in the mentalities of Western individualism and Chinese collectivism (Cheng, 1998). In Finland, when I was given complete freedom do research alone, I felt lost and confused at first. The professors in Finland did not show off their

knowledge, maintain an atmosphere of academic orthodoxy or intervene in doctoral students' research topics, which was the opposite of what I was used to. In contrasting these situations, I do not support or criticise either styles; my point is to make these differences visible. After a long time of struggling, learning and observing in the project, I started to adapt to the Finnish style of doing research, became more critical of China and did research for the sake of knowledge rather than solutions. The old version of myself tended to judge people by their knowledge (e.g. degrees, information and ideas), but I have learned to appreciate individuals' unique ways of thinking and perceiving as no one can know everything about everything. This process has been long, painful and filled with self-doubts, questioning, confusion and reconstruction after self-de-construction. Through my personal experiences in this study, I realised the depth of the constitutional impacts of a person's background and origin. If we are to study China in a transitional context, then we should not overlook either the transnational or the cultural context. If we do so, we cannot fully understand the phenomenon and reasons behind. Cross-cultural working and studying experiences have built my dual identity as a native Chinese with some awareness of the Western logic of thinking.

This dual identity might have affected my research. The interviewees (e.g. experts) almost naturally took me for an insider who could bridge the knowledge gap between Chinese and foreigners (i.e. my Finnish team members). To some extent, my identity as Chinese might have created trust with the interviewees as a Chinese who might know China and not hold blind Western views on China. However, this trust brought negative dynamics to the interview process when some interviewees felt that my bridging work failed. In a typical example, when some interview questions seemed 'too simple' or 'too foreign', they suggested that I should have better informed my Finnish colleagues. My identity as a female doctoral student could have also influenced the interview dynamics. As Chen (2009) explained, Chinese female researchers sometimes face social doubts due to their gender identity, especially when their objects are people in high, powerful positions. Many of the interviewees held high positions and might have doubted the reliability of a female student. However, our team conducted most interviews with Finnish senior researchers, which might have eased some doubts about our research capacity and credibility.

The next concern then was how truthful their answers to foreign interviewers were. Were they giving official answers? After a few interviews, I felt that the interviewees preferred to provide detailed information about positive changes rather than negative changes. As a Chinese, I suspected this was due to the Chinese culture of face (*miàn zi*). The interviewees gave positive answers to protect their face to foreign researchers who are *wài rén* (someone unfamiliar or from the outside). Moreover, Chinese do not like to share negative things with outsiders, just as the

very popular Chinese idiom saying that what happens inside the family stays inside the family and should not be made known to the outside world (*jiāchǒu bùkě wàiyáng*).

My self-reflection and the choice of this perspective for this study also contributed to my reflections on the literature. Given my dual identity as a Chinese expatriate in Finland and my self-reflection, elaborated earlier, I noticed that some publications by sinologists from the West interpreted China in a certain way, criticising the country from a Western universalism. Many were widely cited, but I frequently could not fully agree with their criticisms or their absolute presentations of China. A sense that they did not fully explain China began to grow, along with doubts about publications in Chinese. As I read many of them, I started to doubt their pragmatic, solution-oriented approach to conducting research. My disagreement sometimes was less with their findings than their methods and theoretical contributions. Notwithstanding these disagreements, I understood the logic of why both sides have come to their conclusions. Problematically, these two paradigms do not communicate. An unprecedented exchange of information, ideas and knowledge is under way due to transnational cooperation and educational globalisation, but these two sides have deeply divided mentalities they show little sign of bridging. Put differently, the knowledge gap of knowing what others look like is best bridged by knowing why others look different. Driven by such motivations in all three studies, I have attempted to create a merged approach to studying China that stresses the importance of culture, history and the context of globalisation.

The presentation of findings in the next chapter follows the orientation of challenging this division of paradigms. My presentation is intended to acknowledge both Western concepts and theories and a sensibility of cultural heritage (Schram, 1993), which de-objectifies the established imaginary of Chinese educational politics. According to Schram (1993, p.250), a postmodern sensibility in political studies does not take identity as given but interrogates the social 'construction of the representations of truth'. Similarly, Bacchi (2009) has raised similar questions about how policy analysis should focus on the representation of the problem. What issues are turned into public problems by public policies? This dissertation, therefore, is aimed at not only critically analysing the case of China but also examining the established paradigm of employing Western theories to analyse China.

5 Overview of the Articles

This dissertation includes three articles analysing the transformation of educational politics in three different dimensions: the institutional level, political discourse and actors' scope of action.

5.1 Article I: Zhou, X., Kallo, J., Rinne, R., & Suominen, O. (2018). From restoration to transitions: delineating the reforms of education inspection in China. *Educational Assessment, Evaluation and Accountability, 30*(3), 313–342. doi:10.1007/s11092-018-9282-8

Regarding transformation, this article focuses on the first manifestation of changes in the appearance of the institutions responsible for organising education assessment and evaluation. This article investigates how Chinese evaluation practices in basic education have changed on the institutional level over time. More specifically, changes in appearance are understood as referring to aspects of educational apparatus, such as the power configuration, institutional structures, networks and extent of development of institutional culture and policies. Among the various evaluation practices for teachers, students and schools in the Chinese education system, one particular system—education inspection—is chosen for analysis for two reasons. First, education inspection has a long history in China, which enables chronological analysis of institutional development. This article considers two main driving forces of institutional changes: global influences and traditional ideas. Educational transformation results from negotiations to accept and resist such driving forces. Second, education inspection has a dual apparatus with a governing organ and an educational institution, which illustrates the common struggles faced by many other institutions searching for socially and politically accepted identities.

To investigate institutional change, this article analyses the rounds of reforms over the past four decades through the lens of historical institutionalism (Pierson & Skocpol, 2002; Pollitt & Bouckaert, 2011; Zucker, 1987). Historical institutionalism traces the configuration of an organisation and its development for survival. Time,

among other causes, plays a central role in this approach, which holds that the sequence of time affects and shifts the path. Pierson (2000) suggested that institutional changes are subject to path dependency which are prone to self-reinforcement and survival. According to this theory, institutional changes, especially of political institutions, serve only one purpose: institutional survival. Educational reforms, in this case, reforms of educational inspection, are considered to be deliberate changes and therefore official actions by the government. Analysing these actions can reveal not only the path of but also the motivations for changes in the institution of education inspection. This article, therefore, proposes a periodisation of change based on thematic analysis of documents and interview data and verifies to what extent the historical institutional approach explains the case of China, a consultative authoritarian regime (Teets, 2013).

The empirical data for this article came from policy documents on education inspection and six semi-structured interviews conducted with key actors working in or related to education inspection. The policy documents included various official decisions and regulations issued by the MOE, State Council, ministry-based Supervision Bureau and NAEQ. These documents were accessed and downloaded from the official website of MOE, which had archived all education policies since the 1980s. The analysis also included three laws on basic education considered to be landmarks in the institutionalisation of organisations, signifying jurisdictive changes in the status of education inspection. Data were collected from interviews to overcome the limitations of policy documents outlining the presumed changes expected by the authorities. This analysis also explored how these expected changes were perceived and whether these expectations have been met. In this way, the analysis thus moved to the level of actual change and the tensions generated by changes.

This analysis of the content of policy documents and interview data suggests that the transformation of education inspection has been periodic and imprinted with the Chinese political signature of centralised authoritarianism along with influences from globalisation. The process of transformation is also the process of institutionalisation as over time, education inspection has expanded from an informal, minor organ in Chinese basic education into a fully equipped institution endorsed by law as a highly important system. The changes in Chinese education inspection from 1970 to 1990 demonstrate the effects of self-interest-oriented enhancement but also the limitations of historical institutional theory in explaining the case of China. To some extent, this article shows that the intentionally selected positive feedback on the effectiveness of education inspection aided the development of basic education, which the government used to boost reforms to education inspection. However, according to this study, the primary driving force of continuous reform has been the ineffectiveness of education inspection. Many reforms in the 1990s and the 2000s were intended to solve the problems caused by the initial

ineffectiveness of the education inspection. In this way, this study shows that the sequence of time matters; as suggested by Pierson (2000), the past decides the present, and institutionalised organisations resist change. However, government reforms are different as they are a more powerful force initiating change than the efforts of one institution. Education inspection is institutionalised or intentional development by the government to overcome problems and flaws in the institutional structures set up along the initial path. This article presents the conclusion that 'the educational inspections were not resistant to change; on the contrary, they endeavoured to further develop the system by eradicating problems which might hamper the system' (Zhou et al., p. 336). One agreement is that the institutional change serves survival, and the path matters relatively less in the Chinese context.

5.2 Article II. Zhou, X., Rinne, R., & Kallo, J. (2018). Shifting discourses of equality and equity of basic education: an analysis of national policy documents in China. *Nordic Journal of Studies in Educational Policy, 4*(3), 168–179. doi:10.1080/20020317.2018.1554021

This investigation of the transformation of education evaluation and assessment moves to the dimension of political discourse to analyse one topic considered to be essential in the field of education by transnational organisations and many nation-states: equality and equity. Since 1978, when the Chinese central government decided to introduce a marketed-oriented economy, as shown in Article I, the combined driving forces of political reforms and the economy, although not the sole causes, have brought about dramatic changes in China on different levels. Historical institutionalism suggests that organisations institutionalise ideas, concepts and norms of how things should and should not be (Goldstein & Keohane, 1993; Pierson, 2000). Goldstein and Keohane's (1993) observation from decades ago remains valid: institutional changes also imply changes in underlying ideas. The relationship between change and ideas, though, was not clarified until Peters, Pierre and King (2005) suggested that political conflicts over ideas initiate policy change. In their argument, conflicts arise from the tensions between centripetal forces pushing towards the same path and centrifugal forces pushing change. This article, therefore, analyses discursive changes and interrelationships between the manifestations of changes in political discourse and the underlying ideas of social and historical contexts. More specifically, this article critically examines the Chinese official discourse's formulation, justification and problematization of the issue of education equality and equity amid changing social and historical contexts. This study investigates whether the underlying ideas and perceptions of education equality and

equity have changed from the past given the widespread assumption that institutional differences also indicate different ideas. Moreover, this article sheds light on what has been changed and what has remained unchanged in content—the continuity of politics (Peters et al., 2005). More specifically, this article explores what aspects of education equality and equity the Chinese state is discussing, how these messages are delivered through policy documents and why discourse shifts happen.

Political discourse is defined as 'representations and imaginaries of diverse fields and domains of social life which are subjected to government' (Fairclough, 2010, p. 382). Critical discourse analysis is aimed at de-normalising what is officially naturalised and made common sense (Manchin & Mayr, 2012) to reveal 'what kinds [of] definitions of events are being promoted … and what kinds of ideas, values and identities' are being accepted (p. 3). Fairclough (2003) made similar comments suggesting that critical discourse analysis decodes the contracted social meaning in texts. Concerning the Chinese hierarchical political system and government institutions, this analysis adopts a concept of official state discourse to narrow the analysis to written, formal language on the state level. The analysis draws on the meta-analytical framework of education equality and equity and three methodological approaches to education equality and equity (Benadusi, 2002; Espinoza, 2007; Lynch, 2000).

The empirical data analysed consisted of 12 policy documents published from 1980 to 2017. Many sources such as official media, newspaper and national leaders' speeches could also have been used to analyse political discourse, but they were excluded as Chinese policy documents are the key source of officially authorised political messages that better articulate the state's agenda. In addition, in the Chinese history of education, formal documents have been better archived and written, and although not law, these policy documents lay out changes mandated by the state. Moreover, Chinese politicians are unlike Western politicians who seek opportunities to talk in public about the political agenda they support. In contrast, Chinese politicians talk only within the framework of policy. From 1978 to 2017, the government published three blueprints drawing plans for one decade, six blueprint documents for five-year plans, two laws on basic education and one document specifically addressing education equality (see Appendix 1 in Article II).

This article presents a positive association between the discursive shifts and changes of political ideas. First, shifts in discourse have evident manifestations on the terminology, semiotic and contextual levels. During the shifts in the political agenda from the 1980s to the 2000s, three major discursive shifts described the Chinese central government as alternately normalising, rupturing and prioritising issues. While normalising, the government adopted an agenda subordinating the issue of education equality to the issue of national poverty during the 1980s, which normalised inequality in education. The official discourse normalised the situation

of inequality and unfairness as unproblematic. The discourse in the 1990s started to treat educational inequality as necessary in the Chinese socialist market economy. This shift revealed by the lens of critical discourse analysis showed that recognition of inequality did grow. In the 2000s, the state came to view the issue as urgent and in need of prioritisation. The meta-analytical framework of equality and equity revealed that the underlying ideas embedded in the state's official discourse had fluctuated among egalitarianism, structural-functionalism and critical theories.

In formal, official discourse, the construction of meaning is highly context dependent; that is, which topics, forms and aspects of the topic that appear all depend on the political context. The Chinese official state discourse denies fixed conceptualisation. It might be true that through policy-learning and globalisation, policy-makers' understanding of ideas of educational topics are changing. For instance, this research shows that the Chinese state's official discourse increasingly uses global terminology promoted by transnational organisations (e.g. the World Bank), such as Education for All and equality of education opportunities. Interestingly, for all the vocabulary adopted, the state emphasises their locally contextualised meanings. Notwithstanding the ongoing debating on such complicated, global challenges, the Chinese official discourse precisely indicates which aspects of equality the state promotes. This article reveals that changes in the political imaginary (Fairclough, 2003) of political representations, to some extent, substantiate the constructionist and historical institutionalist arguments that social norms are constructed intentionally and limit change. Changes might result from political conflicts, but these conflicts cannot be detected through discourse analysis of formal documents as they are the outcomes from the conclusion of these conflicts. What we can see is what the state has decided.

This conclusion leads to the next topic—the scope of action in influencing the educational changes (Kauko et al., 2018), which influences whether political conflicts lead to change. Based on the findings in Articles I and II, global and local contexts both play roles in shaping domestic changes, so analysis of local cases should not overlook either level. Article III, therefore, studies a group of actors who play multidimensional roles in policy-making and policy research in Chinese educational assessment and evaluation. As transnational learners and policy brokers, they stand at the intersection of the local and the global. Analysing their scope of action is intended to explore the third level of transformation: the dynamics of changes in the policy-making space and the contributions of global and local conflicts to changes or continuity in policy.

5.3 Article III. Zhou, X. & Rinne, R. In the name of pursuing international standards: a critical reflection on the role of Chinese academic experts in establishing large-scale assessment in China.

The role of academic experts in the reproduction of the global education agenda is drawing increasing attention as their rising importance in policy-making tells a compelling story of the shift of educational politics from government to governance (Lawn, 2014; Meyer, 2010; Ozga et al., 2011; Thrupp, 2017; Verger & Parcerisa, 2018). For instance, new theories concern how educational governing changes into governance through evidence and data (Meyer, 2010), accountability of quality indicators and large-scale assessment (Ozga et al., 2011), and parallelisation of the power hierarchy through decentralisation and network governance (Ball & Junemann, 2012; Ehren et al., 2017). The global knowledge society encourages the transnational circulation of knowledge and shares a range of opportunities promoted by global elites whose knowledge, skills and expertise endow them with the power of discourse to influence the directions and processes of globalisation (Pakulski, 2016; Turner & Holton, 2015). Turner and Holton's (2015) found these opportunities are situated in the neoliberal paradigm supporting deregulation, minimal government and the global market. A neo-colonial constellation is re-created as the core countries define the global rules and norms of what is good and bad, and the peripheral countries follow these norms and rules (Deem, Mok & Lucas, 2008; Mok, 2007; Steiner-Khamsi, 2014; Verger, 2012; Wallerstein, 2006). Many arguments and publications have contributed to the literature on neo-colonialism (Rizvi, 2007; Steiner-Khamsi, 2014; Takayama, 2015; Wallerstein, 2006). Put simply, the global elites consciously or unconsciously promote a selected agenda that reproduces the hierarchical constellation of the core and the periphery, though not in the conventional geopolitical sense but largely overlapping, as their agenda is generally westernised. Even without realising it, elites have become tools creating a hegemonic regime of global knowledge (Hurrell & Woods, 1995; Mundy, Green, Lingard & Verger, 2016).

Pursuing pro-globalisation policies since the announcement of the reform and open-door policies in 1978, China has gravitated towards the global education agenda (Wang, 2013). Keeping in mind the cultural tradition of elitist governing, the cooperation between the Chinese government and academic experts has created a consultative policy-making style that allows room for experts to manoeuvre in China's authoritarian regime (Rinne et al., 2018; Teets, 2013). Studies in various disciplines, including transnationalist studies (e.g. Steiner-Khamsi, 2014), world system analysis (e.g. Wallerstein, 2006) and post-colonial studies (e.g. Rizvi, 2007), have shown that local actors have important, essential roles filtering which ideas are

introduced as they possess wide international connections and have high knowledge about how others work in the education system. In the Chinese context, Chinese academic experts (CAE) have been found to play similar roles building connections between the West and China and between academic researchers and policy-makers (Rinne et al., 2018). However, studies on CAEs are far from sufficient to understand what they do, why they are support or oppose Chinese educational internationalisation and what attitudes towards the global education agenda they hold. This study is intended to draw attention to the universalism and global knowledge hegemony in the process of knowledge travelling and brokering. This study analyses how local experts in China perceive global knowledge, what reasons they have to support their action of knowledge brokering, whether they acknowledge the universalism in global knowledge and, if they do, what attitudes towards the neo-colonial effects of globalisation they hold.

In this study, academic researchers are considered to be those who work full time at highly ranked, top Chinese universities, have experiences of global collaborations of research projects and have been involved in policy-making through various research projects, government consultations and educational committees. A total of 13 interviewees in on the category of professional experts were selected from the data set for the research project (see Table 1 in Article III). The interviewees were professors and associate professors working full time at Chinese top universities and two senior editors at a nationwide newspaper and an academic journal. The interview data were transcribed by the first author of this article and coded separately by both article authors to increase the consistency of the coding (Schreier, 2012). The analysis adopted the theoretical framework of global inequality in knowledge production (Deem et al., 2008; Mok, 2007; Rizvi, 2007; Takayama, 2015; Wallerstein, 2006), taking inequality in knowledge production and circulation as the context within which CAEs' transnational learning is embedded.

This article shows that the CAEs representing Chinese top intellectuals have shown exclusive acceptance of international educational assessment on the technical level and have recognised advancement with little criticism, as reported in previous studies (e.g. Nguyen, Elliott, Terlouw & Pilot, 2009). This acceptance manifests in a) mimicking the Western way of assessing and evaluating the quality of education (the periphery mimics the core, as argued by Rizvi, 2007; Samoff, 1999); and b) supporting transnational organisations' agenda not through full cooperation but through recognition of their ideas and superiority in the technical aspects of education assessment and evaluation. CAEs' acceptance of large-scale international assessment on the technical level has led directly to the establishment of Chinese large-scale assessment. Notwithstanding the divergence of QAEs' political and academic agendas and the far from unified identify of Chinese intellectuals, CAEs have sought to create the impression that they are flowing with the tide of the history

and perceive globalisation as a matter that simply exists (Rizvi, 2007). Behind the exclusive acceptance of the global education agenda of QAE in the name of educational globalisation and internationalisation is a hidden but strong, nostalgic, nationalist agenda to restore China as a strong nation respected by all countries, as it used to be.

6 Discussion

The classical paradigm of sociology has an overt underlying logic of causality that nothing happens without causes. This logic gives rise to linear, fragmented, fixed understandings of the relationships between the causes and consequences of human actions and interactions. In this section, I propose an alternative entry point of analyzing social changes and reflecting the insufficiency in the classical paradigm in cultural studies on China-related topics. As one contribution of this dissertation, this alternative perspective is an attempt of suggesting a relational paradigm that understands the change as a relational dynamic (Emirbayer, 1997). In this section, I review briefly the overall objectives before presenting the main theoretical and methodological implications, followed by possible directions for future studies.

6.1 Overview of the Study

This dissertation investigates the transformation of Chinese basic education through educational reforms focused on quality evaluation and assessment. Analysing transformation is intended to understand the manifestations of changes, the subjects that initiate change (i.e. the state and other policy-makers) and how their roles in educational politics differ and how are they subject to change, and also to examine the objects of being changed and unchanged, in other words, the continuity and discontinuity of state's policies. This research engages in and contributes to multidimensional, relational approaches to studying Chinese educational politics and establishing how cultural, global and political forces influence the politics of change.

Regarding the 'what' question, the three studies explore two manifestations of change. The dissertation analyses firstly the content of what has been changed in policy and practice, and secondly the unpinning ideas of making changes. Regarding the 'why' question, it explains the underlying forces that drive or impede the process of change. Centring on the topic of the politics of change, the studies draw on a variety of theories in socio-political, sociological and educational publication. The dissertation makes the theoretical contribution that it is important for China related researches to distinguish between the subject and the object in educational politics to reduce confusion about what causes, and outcomes are in the dynamics of change. To do so, this dissertation analyses educational reforms initiated by the Chinese state

in the inspection and evaluation of educational quality, using multiple resources including policy documents, literature and interviews. This research covers three dimensions (changes in institutions, political discourse and actors' positions in policy-making) to answer the research questions of what is differently manifested in educational politics and why those are different. More importantly, this dissertation makes an attempt of suggesting an alternative scenario of describing educational transformation.

6.2 Main Contributions

6.2.1 The Scenario of Educational Transformation

This research shows that changes in educational assessment and evaluation are incremental and continuous. Much discussion of three studies of this dissertation focuses on the state's model of governing, reasons of making educational reforms, and external forces upon the Chinese state (i.e. globalisation) and internal forces (i.e. solving the problem within the educational systems). What has not been emphasised enough is the idea of considering the state as the initiator of change. Understanding the mechanism of change requires us to distinguish the object being changed from the subject of initiating change. For instance, the objects being changed are educational policies and practices, inspection and assessment institutions and political discourse, among others. This dissertation shows that many manifestations of changes on educational institutions and discourses are closely related to state's reforms. However, as the initiator of change, the Chinese state is also subject to change. For instance, regardless the different focuses, articles in this dissertation all allude to the idea that the Chinese state fits the model of rational actor who is able of learning and adjusting according to the contexts. This study shows that the fundamental logic of the state's self-updating is to safeguard its governing position, and to maintain the authoritarian regime and big government. Articles I, II and III show the Chinese state's extraordinary learning capacity to adapt its role in education and its relationships with domestic and international actors, to employ modern technologies and to flexibly select elements from history and other countries to serve what it thinks is the best decision. The distinction of object and subject differs from cause and consequences in the causal logic which has a clear indication of a linear relationship. The object and the subject are correlational, and both could be changeable and unchangeable. The subject's action on an object leads to various consequences as a totality of a correlational universe, but the object is not necessarily the outcome of subject's action.

However, the question is how to understand these intertwined dynamics? This dissertation thereby suggests as I call a theory of transformation. But, I intend to apply this theory only to the case of the relationships between the Chinese state and Chinese

educational assessment and evaluation. If I compare the change in education and the change in the state to the orbits of the moon and the earth, the moon has a synchronous rotation around the earth, which rotates on its own axis and orbits the sun. This metaphorical comparison makes the point that objects in space influence each other, and their orbits are subject to the interactions of the forces between them. Therefore, transformation is correlative, concurrent and transactional. In correlative relationship, causes and consequences are hard to distinguish because they are concurrent, cause could be consequence while consequence is cause for another change, and all of which are open for interpretation. If applying causality logic, it is unavoidable to deposit correlative events in a linear sequence with undermined capacity of explaining relational and transactional changes, while correlative stance emphasises the un-linear and referential relationship between events, explaining the transformation as an entity of transactional exchanges between them. If applying causality logic, the initiator of changes and the object of being changes have to be conveyed in methodological dichotomy as if there is one in domination and the other in subordination[23]. The one in dominate position i.e. the Chinese state is unavoidably linked to the idea of classic institutional theory that hegemonic power strives for more power and refuses the deprivation of its authority and rejecting changes. However, in correlative stance what is clear is state's changes can be considered as inevitable and as responses to the compelling environment in dynamic, while educational changes which seems being initiated by the Chinese state in appearance are a manifestation of another totality in dynamic. For instance, the correlative logic understands the Chinese state and Chinese QAE are concurrent changes that influence each other, re-enforce each other's evolvement or undermine each other from transformation.

The theory of transformation requires certain level of comparison to visualize the differences and similarities between two entities. This study shows many evidences in the transformation on appearances that QAE has become very different in many aspects, including instructional structures, quality measurements, educational agendas and decision-making strategies. These changes have resulted from multiple forces but primarily the state's agenda. For instance, Article I shows that the institutional differences on the structure, network and responsibility for education inspection rotates around the interactions between the state and the institution of inspection, but the state determines the trajectory of the institutional development of education inspection. Articles II and III show that other forces, including global–local interactions, influence the state's agenda, but the state remains the filter, allowing only acceptable ideas and influences to enter the atmosphere of education. This study shows that the sociological perspective on

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[23] If more events are discussion,

transformation (e.g. Bretherton, 2018) has few implications for China's case today as the state leads most potential changes in education. The state's agenda thus remains the starting point for changes in the status of any entity, which has also been found in other political studies on agenda setting (e.g. Jones & Baumgartner, 2004). This study shows that the state's agenda setting relies on different pattern of information collection than in the Western democratic context (e.g. Stockmann & Gallagher, 2011), where the media's agenda and social movements force governments to change. However, this study indicates that the Chinese state's agenda setting is embedded in an elitism-based political system that draws on many sources of information, including think-tanks, experts, the Internet and intra-party information flows (see, e.g., Article III).

As for the state, it is adaptive facing the compelling pressure of keeping up with the global agenda and stabilizing its domestic position. This study supports the argument that the global agenda is an important reference for the state when deciding how to arrange the priorities of local educational agendas, and to some extent, the state tries to keep up with the global agenda. For instance, Article II shows that the state has shifted local attention to education equality and equal education opportunities in response to the global agenda promoted by some transnational organisations. Article III reports that the Chinese state has displayed little hesitation about internationalising education, but this study finds that it is inaccurate to suggest the global agenda of QAE hollowing out the role of the state, as being found in many other contexts, including European countries (Ozga et al., 2011; Rhodes, 1994) and even China (Mok, 2002). This study confirms and stresses what other studies have emphasised (e.g. Ngok & Huang, 2014): the Chinese state shows little intention of allowing itself to be hollowed out. On the contrary, to maintain a strong governing apparatus, it has shown a strong, flexible learning capacity to adapt and make policies and employ multiple sources to enhance its governing capacity and performances. The Chinese state uses various strategies (e.g. indirect interventions, evidence-informed policy-making, consultative decision-making, decentralisation and futurist legitimacy) to increase its governing capacity and stabilise its governing position. Steiner-Khamsi (2014, p. 157) argued that in policy borrowing, the nation-state might adapt 'ideas from outside. … In short, globalisation is not an external force, but rather a domestically induced rhetoric that is mobilised at particular moments of protracted policy conflict to generate reform pressure and build policy coalitions'. Aligning with this argument, this study shows that China follows the global agenda but always adjusts the content to fit the local agenda.

6.2.2 The Unchanged Governing Logic: Pragmatism, Incrementalism and Improvementalism

As mentioned many times, another aspect of the theory of transformation is the unchanged. This dissertation suggests that regardless the manifestations on differences, the similarities as called the unchanged should be found because it reserves the transformation of one entity from changing into another new entity. Chinese educational governing logic has not changed as much as the manifestations. This dissertation suggests that the unchanged part is the governing logic which is closely related to Chinese cultural schemas. Transformation means the new is connected to the old and is a dynamic incrementally spin around an axis over time. The axis in this dissertation is a cultural spin. For instance, this dissertation argues that Chinese educational politics manifest differently as if it is changing into a new entity but what is not noticed much is, in contrast with the differences on appearance, the governing logic, the underlying ideas and logic of governing remain largely the same, including political pragmatism, incrementalism and improvementalism (Guthrie, 2012; Hawkins, 2000; Huisken, 2009; Kolodko, 2018; Mann, 2012; Van Bruggen, 2010).

This dissertation shows that the state's logic of introducing new reform remains political pragmatism, a solution-problem paradigm in which policy-makers introduce educational reforms as solutions to identified problems to effect positive changes and embedded in a simple idea of meritocracy. The state's pragmatic political approach to transformation aligns with the rationalist stance holding that the state can learn to improve and be a better governing body, making its decision-making more rational and reliable. For instance, Articles I and III show that the NAEQ's establishment following the logic of increasing rationality in the state's decision-making. In addition, pragmatic political rationalism holds that political institutions and policies can be improved by accumulating knowledge to inform decision-making. Here arises another perspective in the underlining logic of policy innovation—one of the key elements in solving problems through policies. Developmentalism places a strong emphasis on advancing the process of development to a different level. Improvement is more about the expectations of change. Quite often, these terms are used interchangeably and lack concise, careful definitions. In China, as well as in many other places, government educational reforms are the most important contributors to educational changes. Some policy reform documents might have informal titles, such as 'trial plan', 'outlines' and 'the decision', but they are the most relevant sources guiding different actors (e.g. schools) to make changes. The planned changes i.e. educational reforms have embedded in the idea of improving conditions. People expect changing to a better situation, not the opposite. Change itself is often treated as synonymous with becoming different. Jeffreys and Sigley (2009) suggested that the governing party

(the CCP) had transitioned from being a revolutionary party to a ruling party. This dissertation sees that from ruling party to revolutionary party the ruling logic remains largely the same, and the hierarchical power structure remains state centralised. Articles I and II illustrate the state's determining role in deciding what to changes to make and how to make them, although implementations of its decisions are not always as expected. For instance, the restoration of the inspection system in the late 1970s (Article I) and the shifting of the agenda to education equality in the 2000s (Article II) were subject to the state's decisions on its judgments of how to deal with educational issues. This dissertation suggests that the transformation is directional, happening towards a direction over the spin-axis.

The overall conclusion, therefore, is that the Chinese state remains the most powerful actor initiating educational changes according to its political agenda, and educational reforms are subject to the state's overall institutional adjustments to the political system according to a relational approach. Taking the state as the subject actor initiating educational reforms demands considering its understanding of the role, problems and goals of education, the global context, history and the future as these all could contribute to the state's reasons for making change.

6.2.3   The Role of History in Educational Reforms

Transformation requests the time span. This dissertation employs a historical approach to analyse educational reforms by the state. This section presents the study findings on the role of history in educational transformation in correlative sense. History matters in these state-initiated educational reforms, but how history matters differs from the perception of how time matters to the theory of path dependency, how the survival of organisations relies on the established path and positive feedback, and how the sequence of time matters as it affects what happens in the future (Pierson, 2000). For instance, historical influences could refer to how the structure of an institution is decided by its original formulation and how its developing trajectory is constrained by past events to some extent. In this sense, history matters as sequence matters. However, how history matters in the Chinese case is different as it concerns less the chronological and sequential impacts from past events and more the collective intellectual achievements accumulated from the past. History represents the totality of Chinese achievements in past centuries and manifestations of the nation's wisdom, identity and pride. The current literature generally acknowledges the visible influences of history on educational policies and practices but rarely considers how the state has used history as a tool to serve the purposes of governance and educational reform.

This dissertation shows that history matters as it is often cited as an inspiration or warning regarding educational reform. For inspirations, history matters as it used

as a political rationale to restore old practices. For instance, Article I shows that the first justification for the restoration of ES is its past use. Article II details the similar logic applied to the connection between the IE (*kējǔ*) and the CEE. Other studies (e.g. Wang, 2012; Zheng, 2000) have also shown that the CEE is a continuation of the IE under a different name in a different time. The functions and underlying logic of the two systems remain nearly the same. History can be used as shield against the challenges of globalisation and identity crises in an era of internationalisation. Reflecting many other findings on how history shapes national identity (e.g. Billioud, 2007), this study shows that the Chinese state has tried to gain the people's trust through re-appreciating and revaluating traditional culture. The political discourse of Chinese characteristics reintroduces history, making it a shield for the state against Western attacks. As Article III shows, historical matters is also because of the victimization which has deeply shaped Chinese scholarship' epistemology of globalisation and internationalisation. Combined together with Chinese Confucianism of *xué yǐ zhì yòng* (learning for practical purposes), Chinese scholarship has developed a paradigm of academic pragmatism to use Western knowledge to develop China (Alatas, 1993; Mok, 2007; Wang 2013) for the ultimate goal of revitalization of China.

This dissertation makes no claims of historical determinism but, rather, suggests that the state and shared by Chinese pragmatically, flexibly and selectively uses history as a tool to promote its agenda depending on its needs. Unlike historical intuitionalism, pragmatic history does not trace the origins of events but treats history as a pool of collected wisdom with many different, even controversial and conflicting philosophies and ideas packaged into the concept of history. Responding to Ryckmans's (1986) statement that history is perceived as a repository of values, this study suggests that employing history gives the state more than the historical legitimacy of restoring old practices to continue the Chinese story; more importantly, it offers a futurist visionary that legitimises the state's governing position as it aims to make a modernised, powerful, respected state again in the future.

6.3   Possible Directions for Future Studies

This dissertation shows that state reforms have prompted educational transformation, the Chinese state has had a dominant position in generating changes, and the state itself is self-evolving through learning and activating various resources. Transformation is a valid description of the development of ideas about education, education quality and their measurements. The study, though, raises doubts about the suggestion that the state has performed a transformation based on the fundamental logic of protecting the governing status. It would be beneficial to continue studying the Chinese state's role in the domain of education using different

sources of empirical data, such as interviews discussing how the different local levels of government interact in deciding education issues and the extent to which state's determining role influences the local changes is worth further exploring. This study gives little insight into power struggles within the state and tensions within the governing machine and does not discuss governments on different levels. It, therefore, is important to analyse how the state manages emerging internal conflicts and tensions.

This dissertation also suggests that state shows an impressive learning capacity to use historical, cultural and international resources. The state's self-evolvement has led to the changes in its perceptions and stances on many educational issues (see, e.g., Article II) and influenced the organisation of educational reform. The transformation of education, therefore, is partly a manifestation of the state's capacity to govern and increase its performance legitimacy, proving that the state is better for China. The state needs to demonstrate its capacity to handle problems in education (e.g. pragmatism and improvementalism). This study offers the new suggestion that the state employs a futurist vision to increase its legitimacy. This futurist vision combines with various comparatively stable the governing logic to establish a narrative that the state can create a brighter, better future for China. It, therefore, would be theoretically significant to continue developing this finding to determine how futurist legitimacy contributes to the stability or instability of the state's governance.

The methodological implications of this dissertation call for awareness of the limitations of methodological individualism (Emirbayer, 1997) in cultural studies on China. As this dissertation shown the limitation in employing Western theories and approaches to study China, it might be more fruitful to use Chinese logic, culture and philosophy to study Chinese issues, to employ different mind-set of a relational, collective and pragmatic approach to Chinese topic (Ruan, 2016; Zheng, 2000). Employing individualist approaches to analyse China might lead to fragmented interpretations, and causal explanations cannot fully explain the politics of change in Chinese education. One confusion of such methodology is that some take education policies as the cause of changes, but another body of literature considers the policies themselves to be the outcomes of other actors seeking to make changes, such as the government or the state. The Chinese political discourse, in particular, has its own terminologies and rationales differentiating from Western academia. This study shows that these differences arise not so much from language and translation but more of the underlying logic and mind-set. Given this context, this study suggests that to analyse China-related topics in future, it might be more beneficial to employ the relational approach and the transactional theorist stance (Emirbayer, 1997), to reject any pre-given paradigm and to analyse the 'changing pattern created by the

players as a whole, … the totality of their dealings in their relationships with each other' (Elias, 1978, cited in Emirbayer, 1997, p. 281).

Future research on Chinese educational reforms can also focus more on the tensions between Chinese culture and globalisation as China balances borrowing of ideas to handle local problems and the impacts at the school level. Regarding the renegotiation of the global–local space in policy-making, this research has shown that the state's agenda for educational reforms is influenced by globalisation to some extent. Facing globalisation, China sees itself as a developing country in an inferior position to the Western and other developed countries. However, the Chinese state has strong leverage to renegotiate the local space as it decides what ideas to borrow. Future studies could focus on the state's motivation to follow global trends, its criteria and methods for selecting global ideas and how global ideas are translated, reformulated and implemented in China.

Abbreviations

AATHS	Academic Achievement Tests in High School
BCR	Brazil, Russia and China
CAEs	Chinese academic experts
CCP	Chinese Communist Party
CEE	College Entrance Examination
ES	Inspection System (*dū dǎo xì tǒng*)
IE	Imperial Exam
MOE	Ministry of Education
NAEQ	National Assessment Centre of Education Quality
NNCBEQ	National Innovation Centre for Basic Education Quality
OECD	Organization of Economic Co-operation and Development
PISA	Programme for International Student Assessment
QAE	Quality Assurance and Evaluation

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Appendices

1. General introduction of the project

Transnational Dynamics in Quality Assurance and Evaluation Politics of Basic Education in Brazil, China and Russia (BCR) project is one of the ongoing projects of the Future of Learning, Knowledge and Skills (TULOS) Programme financed by the Academy of Finland in 2014-2017. The selected case countries Brazil, China and Russia are rapidly developing, but still highly economically segmented, heterogeneous regional leaders. These countries belong to the group of BRICS (Brazil-Russia-India-China-South Africa). The selection of country cases was motivated by the scarcity of previous research into the local level education policies and practices in general and educational evaluation in particular, in rising world powers, and the expertise of the consortium researchers in these matters. This consortium research project is organized by researchers at three Finnish universities; the University of Helsinki, the University of Tampere and the University of Turku.

The overall research objective is to investigate the entanglements between transnational, national and sub-national actors and the policies and practices resulting from these interactions.

2. Themes

Each interview scheme has four parts:

1). Introduction
2). Actors
3). Change dynamics
4). Future

Overarching themes are relations with actors on different levels, transnational influences, key questions regarding performance testing (e.g. international tests like PISA, TIMMS, PIRLS) and influential standardized testing procedures on the national and local levels.

3. Ethical aspects

All research participants (policy makers, experts and teachers) will be kept fully informed about the research project and its purpose. The policy maker and administrator interviewees are anonymous in order to preserve confidentiality. Recordings, interviews and data collection will be made by researchers and shared only within the team. The digital material will be owned by and stored in a protected site on the servers of the Universities of Helsinki, Tampere and Turku, access protected with personal passwords and prints stored in a locked

cabinet. A regular backup of the servers makes database shadowing possible as a data backup strategy. If moved on mobile platforms (for example when transferred from the case countries to a university server), the research material will be strongly encrypted with passwords.

4. Participants

1) National level: Leading figures at the national level from the Ministry of Education, the Department of Supervision（Dudao 督导) and center of National Assessment of Education Quality (NAEQ 监测), National Institute of Educational Sciences, International Organizations (e.g. OECD, WB, IADB, UNESCO).

   A. Ministry of Education of China
   Administrative office of MOE: Minister and Vice-Ministers
   B. Dudao (3 interviewees)
   National Education DuDaoTuan office:
   C. NAEQ (3 interviewees)
   National Assessment of Education Quality centre

2) Local level: Leading figures at the Department of Education, the office of local supervision（Dudao 督导办公室) and X Provincial Assessment of Education Quality (NAEQ 监测), X Provincial Institute of Education Science. X city Bureau of Education, the office of X Supervision（Dudao 督导办公室), X institute of education science. Office of teaching and research on local level.

   A. Department of Education in X province (1 interviewee)
   B. Dudao (2 interviewees)
   C. NAEQ (2 interviewees)
   E. X city Bureau of Education, Dudao office, NAEQ, office of teaching and research

5. Interview questions

1). Introduction

   - What are the most pressing issues in Chinese basic education at the moment, and why?
     o How does your work or your organization contribute to solving them?
   - What is "quality education" in your idea?
   - How has the concept of quality of education changed in China?
     o Should quality be assessed? If yes/no, why and how?
     o How do you see the relationship between quality and evaluation?
   - In Program 2010-2020, the state requires to establish a Quality Assurance and Evaluation System. What is Quality Assurance and Evaluation system in China?
     o What is the present situation of QAE?
     o Who is involved in the strategic design of blueprint of QAE?
     o In decision-making, what evidence do you draw on, where does it come from?
   - What do you think Chinese QAE is similar or different with other countries?
   - In the Program 2010-2020 or lots of other Chinese policies, we can see that the Chinese government is encouraging in the international or transnational cooperation, and taking lessons from other advanced countries. Regarding Chinese QAE, what are the lessons or experiences drawn from abroad?
     o Could you give a further explanation how it happened?

- Has the quality assurance and evaluation developed evenly in different provinces?
  - o Could you give a further explanation (or examples) of the different situations?
  - o How about the role of Sichuan province in the development of QAE?

2). Actors
- How many actors are involved in QAE?
  - o Could you name the institutions as much as possible?
  - o Could you describe the division of labor between those actors?
- What about other interest groups in policy making and practices of QAE, such as parents, communities or NGO?
- Could you rank the actors descending the importance in the policy making?
  - o Does this vary with the policy issue?
  - o Has this changed in the last decades?
- How long have you been in your current position?
  - o What is your role in QAE now?
  - o What can you do or cannot do on your position?
- What is the role of your institution in QAE policy making and practice?
  - o Have there been any changes in the responsibilities and tasks? If yes, what changes and why were they introduced?
- How do you or your institute interact with other national level actors in QAE?
  - o In what respect are these interactions consensual, and in what there are differences in opinion and practices?
  - o If possible, give concrete examples of both consensual and conflictual situations.
  - o Have there been changes in your relations with other QAE institutions? What and why?
- How do you or your institute interact with provincial level or local level actors in QAE?
  - o In what respect are these interactions consensual, and in what there are differences in opinion and practices?
  - o If possible, give concrete examples of both consensual and conflictual situations.
  - o Have there been changes in your relations with other QAE institutions? What and why?
- From some of the national policies such as Program2010-2020, or Revitalization project 2003-2007, Chinese government shows the willingness of being more active in international stage including education. How is the cooperation with any international organizations such as UNESCO or OECD?
  - o Please give some examples of governmental programs that may justify your answer.
    - ▪ How was it initiated and how it is funded?
    - ▪ What is your (or your institution's) role in the cooperation?
    - ▪ On which level the cooperation involved?
  - o In what respect are these interactions consensual, and in what there are differences in opinion and practices?

- ▪ If possible, give concrete examples of both consensual and conflictual situations.
  - How do you compare Chinese QAE with other international standardized testing, such as PISA, NAEP, and TIMSS and so on?

3). Changes
- Which reforms have been adopted and changed QAE in basic education?
  - ○ Who influences QAE related policy in China?
  - ○ What were the reasons for adopting those policies and practices?
  - ○ What is your personal view of these reforms?
  - ○ How different groups have reacted to those reforms?
    - ▪ Who supported and who criticized the reform, and on what grounds?
    - ▪ What happened to those criticisms?
- Which changes do you consider as essentially necessary in the basic education in general and QAE in particular?
- Program 2010-2020 is the framework of education. Regarding the policies and practices of QAE, how has the implementation plan been made?
  - ○ Who approve or disapprove the implementation plan and on what grounds?
- What influences have been produced by PISA or any other international standardized testing?

4). Future
- How do you envision the future trajectories of Chinese basic education in general and with respect to QAE in particular?
  - ○ Are there changes waiting to be introduced with respect to QAE, e.g. the division of labour between different actors, the share of responsibilities between national and local levels and the measures and contents?
  - ○ Who pushed for changes, and for what reasons? Who resists them, and why?
  - ○ Who could decide to change or don't based on what grounds?
  - ○ Would you change anything related to the evaluation in policies and practices?
- How do you envision the interactions with international actors in the future with respect to basic education in general and QAE in particular?
  - ○ On which level will the cooperation be increased or receded?
  - ○ How about changes in policy making and practices with respect to QAE?

Appendix II: Contextualised Interview Guidelines for National Level Actors (访谈提纲)

1. General introduction of the project

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The overall research objective is to investigate the entanglements between transnational, national and sub-national actors and the policies and practices resulting from these interactions.

2. Themes

Each interview scheme has four parts:

1). Introduction
2). Actors
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4). Future

Overarching themes are relations with actors on different levels, transnational influences, key questions regarding performance testing (e.g. international tests like PISA, TIMMS, PIRLS) and influential standardized testing procedures on the national and local levels.

3. Ethical aspects

All research participants (policy makers, experts and teachers) will be kept fully informed about the research project and its purpose. The policy maker and administrator interviewees are anonymous in order to preserve confidentiality. Recordings, interviews and data collection will be made by researchers and shared only within the team. The digital material will be owned by and stored in a protected site on the servers of the Universities of Helsinki, Tampere and Turku, access protected with personal passwords and prints stored in a locked cabinet. A regular backup of the servers makes database shadowing possible as a data backup strategy. If moved on mobile platforms (for example when transferred from the case countries to a university server), the research material will be strongly encrypted with passwords.

4. National level actors

National level actors refer to interviews with politicians from national government, national supervision assessment office, and experts working in national level university and research institutes involved in QAE activities.

5. Interview questions

1) **Introduction (引入)**

1.1. Could you give us a definition of quality assurance and evaluation system in basic education? (您能就您了解的或者理解的对 QAE 下一个定义么？)

1.2 Could you give us a general description about the role your department/ organization/ school in policy-making and quality related works?

1.2.1 What kind of task do you/ your department do when supervision inspection, assessment activities etc., are conducted? (您/您的部门在教育质量督导, 监测, 评估中所承担的角色或者具体工作是什么呢？)

1.2.2 Have you or people in a similar professional position been involved in the local/school policy-making/decision making? (您或者跟您处于相同位置/ 角色的人有机会参与到一些教育政策或者学校决策的制定么？)

1.2.3 How are you involved in the local/ school policy-making/decision making in terms of QAE? (您是如何参与到教育质量监测，测评等的教育政策 的制定/学校/部门决策的制定中的呢？)

1.3 How do you understand the quality in basic education? (您如何理解基础教育的 质量问题？)

1.3.1 What is "quality of education" "quality education" in your idea? (以您之见 ，什么是素质教育?)

1.3.2 Should quality be assessed, why? (您认为教育质量是可测的么, 为什么?)

1.3.3 How do you see the relationship between quality and evaluation? (您如何 理解教育质量与评估测评等手段的关系呢?)

1.4. From your perspective what are the most important problems and challenges in Chinese basic education, why? (您认为，对于中国基础教育来说，目前最重 要的问题和挑战是什么呢？)

2. **Changes (变化)**

There has been a lot of changes happening in the Chinese QAE at least at the policy level. For example the division of evaluation is becoming more and more exquisite Changed QAE in basic education. (教育质量保障系统&教育质量监测，教育督导系统，教育评估系 统....较为显著的变化是分工越来越精细，系统越来越完善。)

2.1 Could you tell us about your understanding of evaluation of education, inspection and assessment of education? (您理解里的教育评估，教育测量，教育监测， 教育测评是什么呢, 以及您如何评价这些体系?)

2.1.1 How have the practices of evaluation of educational quality changed according to your experience? (依您的经验看，近年来衡量基础教育质 量的手段和方式有什么变化呢?)

2.1.2 How do you or your institute interact with other national level actors in QAE? (您的部门是如何质量保障体系中的其他单位是如何互动的呢?)

2.1.3 In which respect is these interactions consensual, and in what there are differences in opinion and practices? （您能分别讲讲这互动过程中协调互助的案例和矛盾冲突的案例么？）

2.1.4 Have there been changes in your relations with other QAE institutions? What and why? (您所在的部门/系统与其他质量保障系统的关系有没有发生变化?)

2.1.5 What are the main challenges in your own particular work? (就您的工作而言, 您认为要做好教育质量/教育评估/教育督导/教育监测最大的挑战是什么?)

2.1.6 How have the changes influenced the school in general and teaching and learning in particular? E.g. school in general means philosophy of schooling, the learning and teaching environment in general, the relationship between headmaster, teacher, students and parents, the relationship between school and community…by teaching and learning in particular, we mean how have those changes influenced your teaching concept, methods and your relationship with students and parents? (那这些变化, 您认为对学校比如学校办学理念, 学校风气, 校长与老师, 家长的关系, 学校与社会的关系等方面有什么影响? 那收回到教室, 这种教育评价手段的变化又是如何影响教与学, 老师与学生, 学生与学生的关系的呢?)

2.2 Which changes do you consider as essentially necessary in improving the quality of education? (在所有促进教育质量的改革和变革中, 您认为哪些是对推动教育质量最为必要的?)

2.2.1 Have the changes solved the problems in basic education, why? (这些改革有解决基础教育的问题么, 为什么?)

2.2.2 The framework for education is the Program 2010-2020. It alters many of the education assessment and evaluation policies and practices, what changes have this Program 2010-2020 had on your work? (中长期规划纲要提出了关于教育质量保障的一些新理念。教育改革纲要对您的工作产生了哪些影响呢?)

2.2.3 What are the positive and negative effects of these changes? Could you provide us with some examples and why is this case? (能就改革中的一些好和不好的措施, 简单给我们举例讲讲么? 为什么会这样?)

2.2.4 In which respect is these interactions consensual, and in what there are differences in opinion and practices? （那遇到这种, 上面要求的跟实际情况相差甚远或者完全背离的情况, 您是如何解决这种矛盾的呢? 能讲一两个案例么? ）

2.3 Regarding the comprehensive evaluation system, what are the jobs you department/school doing? (那能具体谈谈现在国家正在试验建立中小学质量综合评价体系。您部门或者学校就此要求正在做哪些方面的工作?)

    2.3.1 How have this comprehensive system influenced your work? (那这个系统给您工作方面带来的具体影响是什么?)

    2.3.2 Can you summarize how comprehensive evaluation system is different from or similar to the rest systems? (这个体系与之前提到的督导监测，不同和相同之处是什么？)

    2.3.3 How does the comprehensive system and examinations coexistent in school? (那在学校里，考试和教育质量综合评价体系是什么样的一个并存模式？)

    2.3.4 What are the positive and negative effects in your opinion of the present situation from this coexistence? (这种现状带来的好处和难处分别是什么？)

2.4 In your opinion, have the concept and attitude of examination change in China, why? (那这些年您认为中国，还有当地考试的观念，理念有没有发生变化？为什么会这样?)

    2.4.1 How should we interpret the impact from evaluation, standardized testing to exam and the other way around? (我们该如何理解，不同教育督导评估体系对考试的影响以及考试对于督导监测评估等的影响？)

    2.4.2 Have you heard different voices from different actors regarding the previous question? (那您是否知道来自各方的不同的声音是什么?)

2.5 Does your organization/department/school or other schools on your level have any international cooperation program or chance of international cooperation in terms of QAE? (您单位或者学校/或者其他跟您单位同级的部门或学校,是否有关于质量测评，评估等的国际合作，或者国际交流学习的机会和项目呢?)

If yes：

    2.5.1 Please give some examples of those programs? For instance, how was it initiated and how it is funded? What is your (or your institution's) role in the cooperation? On which level the cooperation involved? (如果有，能够具体说一两个案例，比如是谁发起的项目，资金是如何运作的，您单位在这个项目中担任的角色是什么，以及这个项目都是有哪些层面或者机构参与的?)

If no：

    2.5.2 According to your understanding, why has your organization had no such transnational cooperation? (如果没有，那您认为为什么从来没有国际合作的项目或机会呢?)

2.6 Are you familiar with PISA or other similar transnational standardized testing regimes? (您知道 PISA 或者其他标准化测验么?)

If yes:

    2.6.1 What influences have been produced to your school? (您认为以 PISA 为代表的国际标准化测试的风行，对你学校以及您的工作带来哪些影响？)

If no:

    2.6.2 Do you know the difference of assessment system and supervision system? (那您知道新的教育监测系统和督导系统的异同么？)

    2.4.3 What do you think is the reason, Chinese government employ a new assessment system? (您认为中国教育部为什么要建立一个新的教育监测系统?)

2.7 Do you know of any cases in which Chinese developments and policies in education assessment and evaluation have inspired or have been used by others nation-states or by intergovernmental or non-governmental organization? If so, how and why? (那据您所知，中国基础教育质量保障的一些政策或者措施有没有被其他国家或者国际组织或者非政府组织学习效仿？能举例么？)

    2.7.1 What do you think is the reason that those experiences have been noticed by foreign countries and international organization? (您认为为什么中国基础教育质量保障中的这些特点会被国外关注到?)

2.8 What are Chinese characteristics in your point of view in policy making and practices with respect to QAE? (您认为在基础教育质量保障的教育政策和具体措施中，所体现的中国特色的内涵是什么？)

3). Actors (因子)

3.1 Which actors would you consider the most important in making basic education policy? Please describe who they are. (您认为在基础教育质量相关政策的制定过程中，哪些部门或者哪些人发挥着决定性作用？能讲讲为什么这么解读么？)

    3.1.1 Does their importance vary according to policy issue? Could you give one or two examples? (您认为这种重要性会随着问题的不同而变化么？能举例说明么?)

    3.1.2 How is the policy-making/decision-making model in your organization? (能介绍下您单位制度制定以及决策决定的模式么？)

    3.1.3 How do you think about this policy-making/decision-making model? (您如何看这种教育政策制定模式?)

    3.1.4 What sources of information do they use for decision-making and is this data reliable? (您觉得在决策的时候，他们/您佐以的考量是什么呢？如何判定这些依据是可靠的呢？)

3.2 How does your institute interact with other national level actors in QAE? (您的部门是如何质量保障体系中的其他系统互动的呢？)

3.2.1 In which respect is these interactions consensual, and in what there are differences in opinion and practices? （您能分别讲讲这互动过程中的协作和冲突的案例么？）

3.2.2 Have there been changes in your relations with other QAE institutions? What and why? (您所在的部门&系统与其他系统的关系有没有发生变化?)

3.3 How do you or your institute interact with provincial level /local level actors in QAE? (您所在的部门&系统是如何同下一级教育机构，监测评估机构互动的呢?)

3.3.1 In which respect is these interactions consensual, and in what there are differences in opinion and practices? (您能分别讲讲这互动过程中的协作和冲突的案例么?）

3.3.2 Have there been changes in your relations with other QAE institutions? What and why? (您所在的部门&系统与其他系统的关系有没有发生变化?）

4). Future (展望)

4.1 How do you envision the future trajectories of Chinese basic education in general and with respect to QAE in particular? (您觉得从整体上来讲，中国基础教育发展的的方向是什么，以及具体到基础教育质量保障系统未来发展的动向是什么？)

4.1.1 Would you change anything related to the evaluation in policies and practices? （就您个人而言，如果要您改变现状中的某一部分，您会希望如何改革中国目前的基础教育保障系统，或者某一系统。）

4.2 How do you envision the interactions with international actors in the future with respect to basic education in general and QAE in particular? (您认为在未来，您部门需要如何加强或者是否需要加强同国际组织或者其他国家就基础教育，以及基础教育质量保障方面的交流和合作？)

If yes:

4.2.1 On which level will the cooperation be increased or receded? (如果需要，那您认为那些层面需要进一步加强，哪些可以减弱？)

If no:

4.2.1 What is the reason? (为什么您认为不需要这样的国际方面的合作呢？)

4.3 Are there any other comments you would like to add? (就今天的话题，您还有什么想要补充的么？)

Appendix III: Contextualised Interview Guidelines for Local Level Actors (访谈提纲)

1. General introduction of the project

Transnational Dynamics in Quality Assurance and Evaluation Politics of Basic Education in Brazil, China and Russia (BCR) project is one of the ongoing projects of the Future of Learning, Knowledge and Skills (TULOS) Programme financed by the Academy of Finland in 2014-2017. The selected case countries Brazil, China and Russia are rapidly developing, but still highly economically segmented, heterogeneous regional leaders. These countries belong to the group of BRICS (Brazil-Russia-India-China-South Africa). The selection of country cases was motivated by the scarcity of previous research into the local level education policies and practices in general and educational evaluation in particular, in rising world powers, and the expertise of the consortium researchers in these matters. This consortium research project is organized by researchers at three Finnish universities; the University of Helsinki, the University of Tampere and the University of Turku.

The overall research objective is to investigate the entanglements between transnational, national and sub-national actors and the policies and practices resulting from these interactions.

2. Themes

Each interview scheme has four parts:

   1). Introduction
   2). Actors
   3). Change dynamics
   4). Future

Overarching themes are relations with actors on different levels, transnational influences, key questions regarding performance testing (e.g. international tests like PISA, TIMMS, PIRLS) and influential standardized testing procedures on the national and local levels.

3. Ethical aspects

All research participants (policy makers, experts and teachers) will be kept fully informed about the research project and its purpose. The policy maker and administrator interviewees are anonymous in order to preserve confidentiality. Recordings, interviews and data collection will be made by researchers and shared only within the team. The digital material will be owned by and stored in a protected site on the servers of the Universities of Helsinki, Tampere and Turku, access protected with personal passwords and prints stored in a locked cabinet. A regular backup of the servers makes database shadowing possible as a data backup strategy. If moved on mobile platforms (for example when transferred from the case countries to a university server), the research material will be strongly encrypted with passwords.

4. Local actors

Local actors refer to interviews with politicians from local government, supervision assessment office on provincial/city/county, and educational department from city/community, and experts working in under-national level universities and research institutes involved in QAE activities.

5. Interview questions

1) **Introduction (引入)**

    1.1. Could you give us a definition of quality assurance and evaluation system in basic education? (您能就您了解的或者理解的对 QAE 下一个定义么？)

    1.2 Could you give us a general description about the role your department/ organization/ school in policy-making and quality related works?

        1.2.1 What kind of task do you/ your department do when supervision inspection, assessment activities etc., are conducted? (您/您的部门在教育质量督导,监测,评估中所承担的角色或者具体工作是什么呢？)

        1.2.2 Have you or people in a similar professional position been involved in the local/school policy-making/decision making? (您或者跟您处于相同位置/角色的人有机会参与到一些教育政策或者学校决策的制定么？)

        1.2.3 How are you involved in the local/ school policy-making/decision making in terms of QAE? (您是如何参与到教育质量监测，测评等的教育政策的制定/学校/部门决策的制定中的呢？)

    1.3 How do you understand the quality in basic education? (您如何理解基础教育的质量问题？)

        1.3.1 What is "quality of education" "quality education" in your idea? (以您之见，什么是素质教育?)

        1.3.2 Should quality be assessed, why? (您认为教育质量是可测的么,为什么?)

        1.3.3 How do you see the relationship between quality and evaluation? (您如何理解教育质量与评估测评等手段的关系呢?)

    1.4. From your perspective what are the most important problems and challenges in Chinese basic education, why? (您认为，对于中国基础教育来说，目前最重要的问题和挑战是什么呢？)

2) **Changes (变化)**

There has been a lot of changes happening in the Chinese QAE at least at the policy level. For example the division of evaluation is becoming more and more exquisite Changed QAE in basic education. （教育质量保障系统&教育质量监测，教育督导系统，教育评估系统....较为显著的变化是分工越来越精细，系统越来越完善。）

    2.1 Could you tell us about your understanding of evaluation of education, inspection and assessment of education? (您理解里的教育评估，教育测量，教育监测，教育测评是什么呢, 以及您如何评价这些体系?)

        2.1.1 How have the practices of evaluation of educational quality changed according to your experience? (依您的经验看，近年来衡量基础教育质量的手段和方式有什么变化呢?)

        2.1.2 How do you or your institute interact with other national level actors in QAE? (您的部门是如何质量保障体系中的其他单位是如何互动的呢?)

2.1.3 In which respect is these interactions consensual, and in what there are differences in opinion and practices? （您能分别讲讲这互动过程中协调互助的案例和矛盾冲突的案例么？）

2.1.4 Have there been changes in your relations with other QAE institutions? What and why? (您所在的部门/系统与其他质量保障系统的关系有没有发生变化?)

2.1.5 What are the main challenges in your own particular work? (就您的工作而言, 您认为要做好教育质量/教育评估/教育督导/教育监测最大的挑战是什么?)

2.1.6 How have the changes influenced the school in general and teaching and learning in particular? E.g. school in general means philosophy of schooling, the learning and teaching environment in general, the relationship between headmaster, teacher, students and parents, the relationship between school and community…by teaching and learning in particular, we mean how have those changes influenced your teaching concept, methods and your relationship with students and parents? (那这些变化, 您认为对学校比如学校办学理念, 学校风气, 校长与老师, 家长的关系, 学校与社会的关系等方面有什么影响？那收回到教室, 这种教育评价手段的变化又是如何影响教与学, 老师与学生, 学生与学生的关系的呢？)

2.2 Which changes do you consider as essentially necessary in improving the quality of education? (在所有促进教育质量的改革和变革中, 您认为哪些是对推动教育质量最为必要的？)

2.2.1 Have the changes solved the problems in basic education, why? (这些改革有解决基础教育的问题么，为什么？)

2.2.2 The framework for education is the Program 2010-2020. It alters many of the education assessment and evaluation policies and practices, what changes have this Program 2010-2020 had on your work? (中长期规划纲要提出了关于教育质量保障的一些新理念。教育改革纲要对您的工作产生了哪些影响呢?)

2.2.3 What are the positive and negative effects of these changes? Could you provide us with some examples and why is this case? (能就改革中的一些好和不好的措施, 简单给我们举例讲讲么？为什么会这样？)

2.2.4 In which respect is these interactions consensual, and in what there are differences in opinion and practices? （那遇到这种，上面要求的跟实际情况相差甚远或者完全背离的情况，您是如何解决这种矛盾的呢？能讲一两个案例么？）

2.3 Regarding the comprehensive evaluation system, what are the jobs you department/school doing? (那能具体谈谈现在国家正在试验建立中小学质量综合评价体系。您部门或者学校就此要求正在做哪些方面的工作?)

2.3.1 How have this comprehensive system influenced your work? (那这个系统给您工作方面带来的具体影响是什么?)

2.3.2 Can you summarize how comprehensive evaluation system is different from or similar to the rest systems? (这个体系与之前提到的督导监测，不同和相同之处是什么？)

2.3.3 How does the comprehensive system and examinations coexistent in school? (那在学校里，考试和教育质量综合评价体系是什么样的一个并存模式？)

2.3.4 What are the positive and negative effects in your opinion of the present situation from this coexistence? (这种现状带来的好处和难处分别是什么？)

2.4 In your opinion, have the concept and attitude of examination change in China, why? (那这些年您认为中国，还有当地考试的观念，理念有没有发生变化？为什么会这样?)

2.4.1 How should we interpret the impact from evaluation, standardized testing to exam and the other way around? (我们该如何理解，不同教育督导评估体系对考试的影响以及考试对于督导监测评估等的影响？)

2.4.2 Have you heard different voices from different actors regarding the previous question? (那您是否知道来自各方的不同的声音是什么?)

2.5 Does your organization/department/school or other schools on your level have any international cooperation program or chance of international cooperation in terms of QAE? (您单位或者学校/或者其他跟您单位同级的部门或学校,是否有关于质量测评，评估等的国际合作，或者国际交流学习的机会和项目呢?)

If yes：

2.5.1 Please give some examples of those programs? For instance, how was it initiated and how it is funded? What is your (or your institution's) role in the cooperation? On which level the cooperation involved? (如果有，能够具体说一两个案例，比如是谁发起的项目，资金是如何运作的，您单位在这个项目中担任的角色是什么，以及这个项目都是有哪些层面或者机构参与的?)

If no：

2.5.2 According to your understanding, why has your organization had no such transnational cooperation? (如果没有，那您认为为什么从来没有国际合作的项目或机会呢?)

2.6 Are you familiar with PISA or other similar transnational standardized testing regimes? (您知道 PISA 或者其他标准化测验么?)

If yes:

  2.6.1 What influences have been produced to your school? (您认为以 PISA 为代表的国际标准化测试的风行，对你学校以及您的工作带来哪些影响？)

If no:

  2.6.2 Do you know the difference of assessment system and supervision system? (那您知道新的教育监测系统和督导系统的异同么？)

  2.4.3 What do you think is the reason, Chinese government employ a new assessment system? (您认为中国教育部为什么要建立一个新的教育监测系统?)

2.7 Do you know of any cases in which Chinese developments and policies in education assessment and evaluation have inspired or have been used by others nation-states or by intergovernmental or non-governmental organization? If so, how and why? (那据您所知，中国基础教育质量保障的一些政策或者措施有没有被其他国家或者国际组织或者非政府组织学习效仿？能举例么？)

  2.7.1 What do you think is the reason that those experiences have been noticed by foreign countries and international organization? (您认为为什么中国基础教育质量保障中的这些特点会被国外关注到?)

2.8 What are Chinese characteristics in your point of view in policy making and practices with respect to QAE? (您认为在基础教育质量保障的教育政策和具体措施中，所体现的中国特色的内涵是什么？)

3). Actors (因子)

3.1 Which actors would you consider the most important in making basic education policy? Please describe who they are. (您认为在基础教育质量相关政策的制定过程中，哪些部门或者哪些人发挥着决定性作用? 能讲讲为什么这么解读么?)

  3.1.1 Does their importance vary according to policy issue? Could you give one or two examples? (您认为这种重要性会随着问题的不同而变化么? 能举例说明么?)

  3.1.2 How is the policy-making/decision-making model in your organization? (能介绍下您单位制度制定以及决策决定的模式么？)

  3.1.3 How do you think about this policy-making/decision-making model? (您如何看这种教育政策制定模式?)

  3.1.4 What sources of information do they use for decision-making and is this data reliable? (您觉得在决策的时候，他们/您佐以的考量是什么呢? 如何判定这些依据是可靠的呢？)

3.2 How does your institute interact with other national level actors in QAE? (您的部门是如何质量保障体系中的其他系统互动的呢？)

       3.2.1   In which respect is these interactions consensual, and in what there are differences in opinion and practices? （您能分别讲讲这互动过程中的协作和冲突的案例么？）

       3.2.2   Have there been changes in your relations with other QAE institutions? What and why? (您所在的部门&系统与其他系统的关系有没有发生变化?)

  3.3   How do you or your institute interact with provincial level /local level actors in QAE? (您所在的部门&系统是如何同下一级教育机构，监测评估机构互动的呢?)

       3.3.1   In which respect is these interactions consensual, and in what there are differences in opinion and practices? (您能分别讲讲这互动过程中的协作和冲突的案例么?）

       3.3.2   Have there been changes in your relations with other QAE institutions? What and why? (您所在的部门&系统与其他系统的关系有没有发生变化?）

4). Future (展望)

  4.1   How do you envision the future trajectories of Chinese basic education in general and with respect to QAE in particular? (您觉得从整体上来讲，中国基础教育发展的的方向是什么，以及具体到基础教育质量保障系统未来发展的动向是什么？)

       4.1.1   Would you change anything related to the evaluation in policies and practices? （就您个人而言，如果要您改变现状中的某一部分，您会希望如何改革中国目前的基础教育保障系统，或者某一系统。）

  4.2   How do you envision the interactions with international actors in the future with respect to basic education in general and QAE in particular? (您认为在未来，您部门需要如何加强或者是否需要加强同国际组织或者其他国家就基础教育，以及基础教育质量保障方面的交流和合作？)

If yes:

       4.2.1   On which level will the cooperation be increased or receded? (如果需要，那您认为那些层面需要进一步加强，哪些可以减弱？)

If no:

       4.2.1   What is the reason? (为什么您认为不需要这样的国际方面的合作呢？)

  4.3   Are there any other comments you would like to add? (就今天的话题，您还有什么想要补充的么？)

Appendix IV: Requesting for access to collection data and data collection plan (in English)

Plan for data collection in China as part of the project Transnational Dynamics in Quality Assurance and Evaluation Policies of Basic Education in Brazil, China and Russia (BCR)

Research team:

Professor Risto Rinne (Responsible Head of the Team), University of Turku, Finland

Professor Fan Yihong (Advisory Professor), Xiamen University, China

Johanna Kallo, Ph. D, University of Turku, Finland

Olli Suominen, Ph D Student, University of Turku, Finland

Zhou Xingguo, Ph D Student, University of Turku, Finland

Suvi Jokila, Ph D Student, University of Turku, Finland

The objectives of the data collection:

To collect data for the case study on China as a part of the consortium project Transnational Dynamics in Quality Assurance and Evaluation Policies of Basic Education in Brazil, China and Russia (BCR) funded by the Academy of Finland (2014-2017).

The methods and foci of data collection:

The research team would request opportunities to conduct approximately twenty interviews with leading figures who have been playing important roles in policy making and implementation of quality assurance and evaluation (QAE) in China at the four administrative levels (national, provincial, city county) and school level. In addition, we hope to have an opportunity to utilize the statistical data produced by the National Assessment Center for Education Quality (NACEQ, 教育部基础教育质量监测中心) and possibly by National Education Assessment Center (NEAC, 教育部基础教育监测中心) as well as the data produced by sub-national (N)ACEQ and (N)EAC offices:

1. Three to five interviews with leading figures at the national level from the Ministry of Education's Department of Supervision (督导) and Department of Quality Assessment (监测).

2. Four to six interviews with leading figures at the provincial level from the Supervision section (督导), Quality Assessment section (监测) and the Office for Teaching Research (教研) at the provincial education department, as well as the leader of the Provincial Institute of Education Science.

3. Four to six interviews with leading figures at the city level from the Supervision section (督导), Quality Assessment section (监测) and the Office for Teaching Research (教研

) at the city-level education department, as well as the leader of the city-level Institute of Education Science.

4. Four to six interviews with leading figures at the county or district level from the Supervision section (督导), Quality Assessment section (监测) and the Office for Teaching Research (教研).

5. Three to five expert interviews with leading academics in the field of Chinese QAE issues.

6. School observations in two school districts at local level where the schools are thought to be appropriated for the case studies of this project.

7. Statistical QAE data produced by NACEQ and NEAC as well as statistical data produced at the provincial and city level and for the Student Performance and Achievement Test developed locally.

Start of the data collection: The research team would like to start the organization of interviews and school visits as soon as possible.

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Risto Rinne

Professor, director, vice dean

CELE (Center for Research on Lifelong Learning and Education) and

Department of Education (TuDe)

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Appendix V: Requesting for access to collection data and data collection plan (in Chinese)

芬兰图尔库大学课题组主持的芬兰科学院重大研究基金项目

巴西、中国、俄罗斯三国基础教育质量保障与监测体系与机制比较研究

<u>在中国的调研计划</u>

一、芬兰图尔库大学中国基础教育质量保障及监测体系与机制研究课题组成员：

瑞内教授（Risto Rinne），课题组负责人, 芬兰图尔库大学教育学院教育系

范怡红教授:项目顾问，中国厦门大学教育研究院

约翰娜（Johanna Kallo），博士, 芬兰图尔库大学教育学院教育系

欧力（Olli Suominen），博士生, 图尔库大学教育学院教育系

周兴国, 博士生, 芬兰图尔库大学教育学院教育系

山夏玮（Suvi Jokila），博士生, 芬兰图尔库大学教育学院教育系

二、课题的研究目标、主要内容及意义：

本课题旨在通过文献综述、政策梳理、实地调研了解巴西、中国、俄罗斯三国的基础教育质量保障与监测体系与机制，并对三国基础教育质量保障与监测政策的发展演变和实施的历程和现状的共性与特点进行比较研究。在中国的调研部分包括关键人物访谈、有关数据研究、抽样实地考察、典型个案研究等。中国的教育督导、质量监测、教研教改相结合三足鼎立的教育质量保障体系在国际上独树一帜，我们希望本研究在与巴西和俄罗斯的比较中能够全面反映出中国基础教育质量保障体系的面貌与特色。

三、在中国调研部分恳请获得的支持：

（一）人物访谈

课题组诚恳希望得到中国教育部门与领导的支持在四个行政层面访谈在中国基础教育质量保障与监测政策的发展演变和实施的历程中起到重要作用的人员，包括政策制定者、实施者、和有关研究专家。四个层面包括国家、省、市、县（区）。我们拟调研的单位有各级的教育质量政策制定部门（如教育部基础教育司、省教育厅基础教育处及市和县级的相应部门）、教育督导部门（处、办、室）、教育质量监测部门（教育部基础教育质量检测中心及省市相应部门）、各级的教研室和各级的教科院。初步计划在每个层面访谈 5-6 位关键人员。选点方面课题组计划选择一个能够代表中国整体水平和普遍特点的地区，县区级和具体个案学校待和当地有关部门领导协商后再确定。

（二）数据研究

为了多角度、立体化地分析中国教育质量保障与监测体系的演变历程和现实状况，我们希望可以获准使用由教育部基础教育质量监测中心搭建的中国基础教育质量监测数据库的数据和各年度教育质量检测报告，省市级基础教育质量监测数据库的数据和报告，以

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及学生学业质量监测数据和报告。如果各级有教育督导的报告，我们也希望能够用来进行综合研究。

（三）实地考察

课题组希望可以获准在全国基础教育质量监测评估期间，以及在教育督导工作督导检查期间，在选取的省市选择两所适合的学校进行考察。如果在调研的过程中发现某一地区或学校比课题组预选的地区和学校更富普遍性与代表性，我们希望获准保留对该地区进行访谈和观摩的机会。

（四）个案研究

在对国家、省、市、县（区）及学校各级落实教育质量保障与监测的整体研究基础上，课题组还计划对两个案例学校进行综合研究。希望在案例学校能够访谈校长、教师、学生和家长，了解不同人员对教育质量保障和监测的体会和看法。

四、调研拟开始时间

我们希望能够得到中国教育部基础教育司以及各地政府和上述各级教育质量保障与监测单位相关领导的全力支持，尽快展开本研究项目在中国的调研工作。

Risto Rinne

芬兰图尔库大学教育学院副院长

教育学系主任，终身学习研究中心主任(CELE)

UNIVERSITY OF TURKU