

Disparity between Rural and Urban Education in China

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Abstract

By asking two groups of students respectively from a rural school and an urban school in Yunnan Province in Southwest region of China, this research provides a mini-empirical picture of disparities between rural and urban education in the background of the imbalanced eco-social development between rural and urban area in People's Republic of China.

All the variables in the empirical studies are observed in the field visits, interviews and questionnaire surveys administrated in two lower secondary schools (one rural and one urban school). Field visits and interviews to school leaders provide the visible disparities between two schools and disparities between rural and urban students perceived by school leaders. The analysis of the questionnaires which are completed by selected students from two schools is conducted in two stages:

Stage one compares rural and urban students' home background, social capital, parents' expectation for their education and their own educational aspiration. Students' own perception of disparities between rural and urban students in home environment and schooling is also highlighted in the survey. The findings of the questionnaire survey reveal that urban students have more advantages in most of the factors investigated in the questionnaire compared to their rural counterparts. Rural and urban students also perceived that urban students are more advantaged in their home and school environment than rural students.

In stage two, the correlation between rural and urban students' educational aspiration and most of the variables of interests in this survey are examined respectively to explore the factors associated with the rural and urban students' educational aspiration. The factors correlated to rural and urban students' educational aspirations also show some disparities, e.g. gender and mother's educational attainment are only significantly correlated with rural students' educational aspiration.

Key Words: rural students, urban students, disparities, inequity, perceptions

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Abbreviation:

IMF: International Monetary Fund.

NBSC: National Bureau of Statistics of China

GDP: Gross Domestic Product

PRC: People's Republic of China

SPSS: Statistical Package for Social Science

UN: United Nations

UNESCO: United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization

WFS: World Food Summit

DEDICATION

This thesis is dedicated to my parents who have both been teaching rural children for more than 25 years, and their beloved students.

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Chapter 1 Introduction to the Study

1.1 Introduction

This thesis investigates the disparities between rural and urban education in China by asking two groups of students respectively from a rural school and an urban school in Yunnan Province in Southwest region of China. This chapter introduces the purpose, the aim and objective of the research, and organization of the thesis.

1.2 Rationale of the Study

Difficulty in striking a balance between rural and urban areas in social and economic development is a common policy dilemma in the whole world, especially among developing countries that “must balance the need for economic development against an inherent political agenda of reducing class inequalities” (Hannum, 1999).

Accompanying the robust economic growth, China has become one of the countries with the largest urban-rural gap in the world (Yang, 2005). While Shanghai and Beijing have reached the development level of countries such as Cyprus and Portugal, provinces such as southwestern Guizhou province are only comparable to Namibia or Botswana (Tania, 2008).

In 1996, the World Food Summit in Rome stressed increasing access to education for the poor and members of disadvantaged groups, including rural people, as a key to achieving poverty eradication, food security, durable peace and sustainable development (WFS, 1996).

Underdeveloped education system in rural areas constrains rural people’s ability to upgrade the skills of rural labors and the level of human capital. Without well-educated labor force, rural areas are unlikely to prosper (Han, 2000).

Moreover, today's governments are becoming increasingly attuned to the fact that high achieving schools and related human capital investment strategies are key ingredients in the promotion of sustainable development at the local level (Chen ,1999).

1.3 The Aim and Questions of the Study

The aim of the study is to reveal the existing disparities between rural and urban education and how people involved in rural and urban education perceive these disparities. The Research questions are as follows:

1. How do the rural and urban students differ in the terms of home background, social capital, parents' expectation and students' educational aspiration?
2. How do people involved in rural and urban education perceive the inequity and disparities between rural and urban education, precisely students and teachers?
3. Among all the variables of interests in this study, what are the factors respectively associated with rural and urban students' future educational aspiration?

1.4 Significance of the study

In China and abroad, most of the approaches that have been employed to measure the educational gaps exist between rural and urban areas include educational attainment, student-teacher ratios, teacher professional development and allocation of educational resource (Zhang, 2005; Li and Min, 2001; Robinson, 2008). Very little research deals with students' own opinions and perceptions. This study highlights rural and urban students' own perceptions on the disparities between them, and intends to provide a mini-empirical picture of disparity between rural and urban education and between rural and urban student.

1.5 Organization of the Study

Chapter 1 introduces objective of the study, research questions, significance and the organization of the study. Chapter 2 examines the background of the study. The background will cover the facts about educational system, fiscal decentralization on compulsory education in China and rural-urban disparities existing in Chinese society and education. Chapter 3 introduces various theories from the literature to explain how the relevance between the variables of interests in this study and students' educational attainment, academic achievement and educational aspiration. Chapter 4 will focus on data collection procedures and methodology used in analyzing the data. Chapter 5 will present the analysis and discuss of the findings in the empirical study.

The final chapter, Chapter 6, is the conclusion. It includes a summary and discussion of the main research issues. In addition, this chapter provides a number of general recommendations for policymaking and suggestions for parents.

Chapter 2 Background of the Empirical Research

2.1 Introduction

The chapter presents the facts about the social and economic imbalanced development and educational disparities between rural and urban areas in China. The social-economic gap between rural and urban area is shown in the disparity between rural and urban people's income, home assets and medical care. The disparities in education are measured by the inequity in educational attainment of rural and urban people in education, especially in higher education, Student-teacher ratio and the allocation of educational resource. The changes of the fiscal decentralization on compulsory education will be presented as the main reason for the inequity in the allocation of educational resource.

2.2 Social and Economic Disparities in Rural and Urban China

Since 1950s, urban and rural areas in China are mainly separately administrated under the different level of government. Rural and urban dwellers are strictly defined by the "House Registration System" in China. Under the separately administration of urban and rural areas, many public policies tend to be city-centered. The social welfare such as provision of rice and oil in 1980s, medical insurance, housing, employment all aims at satisfying the urban citizens first.

Although Chinese economy has witnessed rapid development for nearly three decades, people living in western China's vast, impoverished countryside have not benefited from recent economic growth as much as the urban dwellers. The imbalance in rural-urban development is worsening and taking on many forms. The following are statistics about the gap between China's rural and urban areas.

- **Income:** Despite a national rise in income levels, Table 2.1 revealed an increase in income inequality between rural and urban areas. The average income of urban residents was 2.57 times that of rural residents in 1978, the gap has widened markedly since then. In 2007, the income gap between rural and urban area increased to 3.33.

Table 2.1 Comparison of Per Capita Annual Income of Rural/Urban Households (Yuan)

Year	Urban	Rural
1978	343.4	133.6
1985	739.1	397.6
1995	4283.0	1577.7
2005	10493.0	3254.9
2006	11759.5	3587.0
2007	13785.8	4140.4

Source: NBSC(2008). China Statistical Year Book (2008)

- **Home Assets:** The possession of home assets is an important indicator to people's living standard. Table 2.2 present the disparity of the rural and urban people's possession of major durable home assets. Urban dwellers own more of all the home assets compared to their rural counterparts.

Table 2.2 Ownership of Major Durable Consumer Goods per 100 Urban and rural Households in 2007

Item	Urban Households	Rural Households
Computer	53.77	3.68
Refrigerator	95.03	26.12
Black and white TV	---	12.14
Color TV	137.79	94.38
Camera	45.06	4.3
Washing Machine	96.77	45.94
Telephone	90.52	68.36
Mobile Phone	165.18	77.84

Source: NBSC(2008b). China Statistical Year Book

- Medical Care: A report by the Chinese Academy of Sciences in 2006 revealed that almost two thirds of the health funds was spent on urban areas covering only one third of the country's population. Health care services in rural areas, have failed to keep pace as medical facilities are mainly concentrated in urban areas. Poorly-equipped rural clinics and a shortage of medical staff have restricted the quality and availability of medical care for farmers (Xinhua, 2008).

The statistics show that economic and social development of rural areas lags far behind that of the urban areas. According to 2002 census, China's rural population is 810 million, as much as 64 percent of the country's population (NBSC, 2002b). Therefore, developing the vast and impoverished rural areas plays an essential role in achieving nationwide prosperity and social justice.

Due to the imbalanced social and economic development in the rural and urban areas, many rural people migrant to the urban areas to search for job opportunities. The social context of migrant workers will be further discussed in the next subsection.

2.2.1 Migrant Workers in China

It is an inevitable trend of industrialization and modernization for surplus rural labor to move to non-agricultural industries and to cities and towns (Michael, 1970). There are 110 million migrant workers in China aged between 16 and 40 years old. Migrant workers can usually only get poorly paid and physically demanding jobs in China. According to a survey by the National Bureau of Statistics, the average monthly income for migrant workers in 2004 was just half the national urban average income (NBCS, 2005b). A study of three central provinces found that although migrants worked 50 percent longer than urban workers, they earned less than 60 percent of their average salary, with migrants' actual hourly wage about one-quarter of urban residents (NBCS, 2008b).

Moreover, when the parents migrant workers begin to work and live in the city, they are faced with a stark choice; either take their children to the cities and subject them to institutionalized discrimination, or leave them behind in the countryside in the uncertain care of relatives. In the cities, the children of migrant workers usually attend sub-standard schools and illegal clinics because of their "inferior" status and low household income. As their parents have to work excessively long hours in arduous jobs leaving little or no time for their families, migrant children in cities consequently develop psychological problems disturbingly similar to those left behind. Therefore, most of the parents choose to leave their children in the countryside at home.

Recent research has shown that the number of children left behind is about 58 million, three times higher than previously estimated. It was not until 2007, after an All-China Women's Federation research team conducted an in-depth study based on the 2005 Bi-Census of one percent of the national population that a better picture of China's left-behind children emerged. (People's Daily) The research team estimated that there were about 58 million children below 18 years of age left behind by parents in the countryside, accounting for 21 percent of all children in China, and 28 percent of all rural children. The survey found that more than 40

million left-behind children were under 15 years of age, and that more than 30 million were aged between six and 15 (Wang et al., 2008).

Separation from parents causes some form of mental distress for the majority of left-behind children. She Mao, a professor at Central South University, conducted a field survey in Hunan, Anhui and other provinces and concluded: "Very few left-behind children are healthy and lively...less than 20 percent." On the contrary, he said: "Deprived of love, more than 60 percent of children manifested mild to moderate psychological disorders (Wang et al., 2008).

2.3 Educational Inequality between Rural and Urban Areas in China

Lack of education, especially the quality education for rural people is a crucial reason that contributes to the imbalance in social and economic development in China. Before introducing the educational inequality between rural and urban education, it is necessary to clarify some essential facts about educational system and funding policies in China.

2.3.1 Facts about Educational system in China

In China, education is divided into three categories: basic education, higher education and adult education (Chinese educational system, see Annex 1, figure A1.2).

Basic education in China includes pre-school education, primary education and secondary education. Compulsory education is stipulated to include six-year primary schooling and three-year lower secondary schooling. Secondary education is consisted of lower secondary and upper secondary education. Upper secondary education is divided into academic upper secondary education and vocational and technical secondary education. Academic upper

secondary schools offer academic (university preparatory) courses for the students who intend to study in the university. The graduates will take the university entrance examination. Those who failed the examination usually need to take some job training before they can enter the labor market. Vocational and technical secondary schools offer programs ranging from two to four years and train medium-level skilled workers, farmers, and managerial and technical personnel. The graduates can directly enter the labor market.

In the level of basic education, both the rural students and urban students use the same curriculum and textbook. The current system of curriculum and textbook focuses on the basics-reading, writing, math and discipline-based subject. The major goal of the learning and teaching emphasize the academic knowledge and urban development in China rather than present rural technological and economic development (Huang et al., 1996).

After 9-year compulsory education, both rural and urban students within a province must take the same standard exams if they want to enter a higher-level school. In China, University entrance examination determines who can enter the university. Students face a choice - a test either focused on humanities, or science. The exam is administered for three days. Three subjects are mandatory everywhere: Chinese, Mathematics and a foreign language -- usually English but may also be substituted by Japanese, Russian or French. The other six standard subjects are three sciences Physics, Chemistry, Biology, and three humanities History, Geography and Political Education (Harry, 1994).

The “Key school” system is a specific characteristic in education system which reflects the inequity in the allocation of educational resource between rural and urban education. Because educational resources were scarce, some schools are selected to give the priority in the assignment of teachers, equipment, and funds. They also were allowed to recruit the best students for special training to compete for admission to top schools at the next level. Those schools are called “key school” in China. The Key schools are usually selected from those with records of past educational accomplishment ranging from basic to higher education. It is

a typical urban-oriented policy that strengthens the imbalanced distribution of educational resources. Geographically, at least 90% such schools are located in the cities. This contrasts sharply to the fact that major work of China's basic education should be in rural areas since 80 percent of primary schools and 64 percent of lower secondary schools are in rural areas (NBSC, 2002b).

2.3.2 Review of Changes in Funding Policy for Compulsory Education

Policies of educational equality are a kind of social action that needs to be observed within certain social and historical environment (Dessler, 1989). The current educational resource disparities between rural and urban area resulted from its long-term educational policies. Therefore, it is necessary to review the changes of education policy.

The inequity in funding of education is a historical problem highly relative to the compulsory education funding policies in the rural areas. Rural and urban education have been traditionally under the separated administration in China. (Chinese administrative system, see Annex 1, figure A1.3). While the state has been the primary financial supporter for urban children, rural children have been, for the most part, left to the sponsorship of their families and local collectivities (villages, townships and counties) (Jean, 2003). Table 2.4 presents the brief changes of funding policies in the rural area of China.

In 1986, the National People's Congress promulgated the compulsory Education Law of the People's Republic of China. Six years primary and three years lower secondary education was made compulsory in 1986 and the Chinese government made "9-year compulsory education for all" a top priority in the overall educational development.

From 1986 to 1999, township-level governments were mainly responsible for the provision of compulsory education. However, without sufficient financial input from the centre or higher-

level governments, township governments largely resorted to the farmers for funding their children’s compulsory education through the charges of tuition fees and “additional educational fee”. Farmers were burdened with different kinds of fees in the name of educational expenses. The sum of “additional educational fee” was over 110 billion yuan (16 billion US dollars) from 1985-1999 (Yang, 2007). This financing system also led to such problems as rural teachers’ salaries being unpaid and illegal charges being levied against students due to lack of funds and loose management.

“The tax-for-fees” reforms in 2002-2003 eliminated all but two of the previous local fees and taxes (agricultural tax and a surcharge on the new agricultural tax) collected by village and township officials (Jean, 2005). In 2001, education offices at the township level were to be abolished, salaries for school teachers were to be distributed by the county governments, and rural schools were also to be managed by the counties. “One-fee system” began to be implemented nationwide in 2004. Provincial government is to assess and determine the cost of educational fees, and students are to be charged only one fee (the cost of their education). The collection of additional fees is prohibited (Sun, 2007).

In 2007, “one fee system” is replaced with “no charge” for compulsory education in some areas. By 2009, rural schools have nationwide implemented this policies. Due to the nine-year free compulsory education, mere access to schooling is no longer a critic problem in rural education. Meanwhile, provincial government takes the main responsibility for the rural education.

Table 2.3 The main changes of Chinese funding policy for and school fees for compulsory education in the rural area

Time	Content	Aim	Result
1986	Education was made compulsory, Township is responsible for the	To universalize compulsory education	Rural urban education is administrated separately. Local township-level government

	investment of rural education		could not afford the compulsory education alone. The school fees were mainly imposed on peasants.
1999	Tax for fee reform(eliminated all but two of the previous local fees and taxes (agricultural tax and a surcharge on the new agricultural tax) collected by village and township officials)	To reduce the burdens on farmers	Reduced the burden on farmers but the income of the township and village administration was reduced. Fund for rural education dropped dramatically
2001	County-level governments took over the management of personnel and finance for compulsory education	To shift the main responsibility to a higher level government and reduce the burden of township-level government	Most of the educational funds are still from the local (county-level) government in rural areas, whose fiscal capacity is also limited.
2004	One-fee system(Central government set one fixed price for compulsory education)	To further alleviate farmers' burdens and prevent additional collection of education fees from the students	Reduced the additional collection of education fees from the students. While the school self-assistance fundraising was undermined, the fund from the government did not increase.
2006	Compulsory Education Law was amended. Students are entitled to an education free from all tuition charges and incidental fees.	To make sure everyone in rural areas nine years of compulsory education free from all charges	Central, provincial, municipal and county-level government co-sponsored the funds for rural education. "No charge" policy for compulsory education was gradually replacing the "one fee system"

Note: Based on the description in "The effects of fiscal decentralization on compulsory education in China: For better or worse?" (Sun, 2007)

After years of focus on urban schools and higher education, Chinese authority has realized the importance of developing basic schooling in rural areas. Therefore, rural compulsory education has recently received a great deal of consideration and attention. From 2006 to 2007, the government has led a successful effort in improving access substantially for rural children to 9-year compulsory education, including the abolishment of tuition at the compulsory level of education in the nationwide. Since spring 2007, Local governments began to provide subsidies to cover the living costs of boarding students from poor families.

Meanwhile, the central government has been trying to enlarge the financial transfer payment and assistance to poverty stricken regions to solve the problem of insufficient educational resource after the foundation of county-level administration. In 2002, the central government transferred 24.35 billion yuan (US dollars 2.94 billion)¹ to local government for rural education (Yuan, 2003).

All these measures are expected to have a positive influence on educational development in rural areas, thus gradually reducing the inequality. Nevertheless, in view of the deeply rooted causes of educational inequality in the China, positive effects can only be expected in the medium term (Yuan, 2003). The money transferred to the local government from the central government can merely meet the basic needs of the education in poverty-stricken counties. The investment in rural education is still less than that in urban education. The access to the compulsory education for rural students does not assure rural students equal opportunities in education. Inequalities still exist in many aspects of rural and urban education nowadays.

The following subsection will introduce the disparities of rural and urban students' educational attainment in all the levels of education.

¹ 1 Us dollar=6.83 Yuan

2.3.3 Disparities in Educational Attainment

The disparities in educational attainment exist in all the levels of education. Very high proportion of the rural population (about 90 percent) only received primary and lower secondary education, while in urban areas 85 percent of people have received upper secondary education or above (Zhang, 2004).

As an even more scarce resource and watershed for social mobility, competition for higher education in China is far tougher. Despite the rapid social and economic development in China, rural children did not accordingly get more access to higher education like their urban peers. On the contrary, it is found in 2009 that the ratio of rural students in colleges has been falling (China Daily, 2009). Although the system of university entrance examination promised that every student has the equal opportunity for entering the universities, those urban students who are politically, economically and culturally advantaged are endowed with more power to win such a competition (Zhang and Liu, 2005).

Inequalities in higher education have also been repeatedly confirmed by surveys especially since the 1990s. A large scale of study undertaken jointly by the World Bank and the Chinese Ministry of Education in April 1998 surveyed 70,000 students enrolled respectively in 1994 and 1997 at 37 universities at various level (Zhang and Liu, 2005). It builds an overall picture: on average, the educational opportunities of urban students are 5.8 times more than the rural students nationwide, with 8.8 and 3.4 times respectively in national key universities and provincial universities.

It demonstrates that the gap in higher education opportunities between rural and urban students is much more dramatic in the relatively more prestigious universities, and tends to reduce a little in provincial higher education institutions (Zhang and Liu, 2005). In the most prestigious Beijing and Tsinghua Universities which own the best national higher education resources and produce “the elite of the elite”, the urban-rural disparity is even more striking.

The two institutions together recruited 5,080 undergraduate students. Among these, 17.8 percent were from rural areas, while the proportion of urban population was 70 percent (Zhang, 2004).

2.3.4 Rural Teacher Quality and Teacher Professional Development Activities

Teacher quality is one of the key factors determining the participation rates of children in schooling and the quality of their education (Verspoor, 2004; OECD, 2005; Hanushek, 2005). There is broad consensus that it is the most important school variable influencing student achievement; It is also an important element in promoting social justice in terms of educational quality in rural and remote areas, where teachers tend to be less qualified than their urban peers and less well resourced and supported (Darling-Hammond, 2000; Rivkin et al., 2005). While urban schools are usually staffed with enough well-trained teachers, schools located in remote rural areas often find it difficult to recruit and retain qualified teachers.

Teacher's continuing professional development is highly related to improve the quality of teachers in many countries. The in-service teachers' trainings are very necessary to improve teachers' quality (Jiang and Fen, 2002). In China, schools in rural areas, often find it difficult to offer professional development activities to teachers. Rural teachers tend to be recipients of lower quality in-service training provision than their urban peers (Robinson, 2008).

Professional development activities available for rural teachers are mostly taken in their own school—such as through the peer experience exchange within a *jiao yan zu* (teaching research group that are composed of the teachers teaching at the same grade). While in urban areas, besides the utilization of ICT, teachers can often participate in activities conducted at another school, even schools abroad or conducted by someone outside their own school. In this case, ICT and distance education may be solutions for limits on the availability and quality of rural teachers' professional training. Although ICT and distance learning has been developed by government in some rural areas, but access for the more remote teachers remained restricted by their location and more limited communications infrastructure (Robinson, 2008).

2.3.5 Teacher-student ratio

There is also a gap in student-teacher ratio between urban and rural areas. Figure 2.2 shows the student-teacher ratio in urban and rural primary school and lower secondary schools. Both figures confirm that the numbers of primary and lower secondary school pupils taught by one teacher in rural areas were higher than those in urban areas between 1996 and 2001.

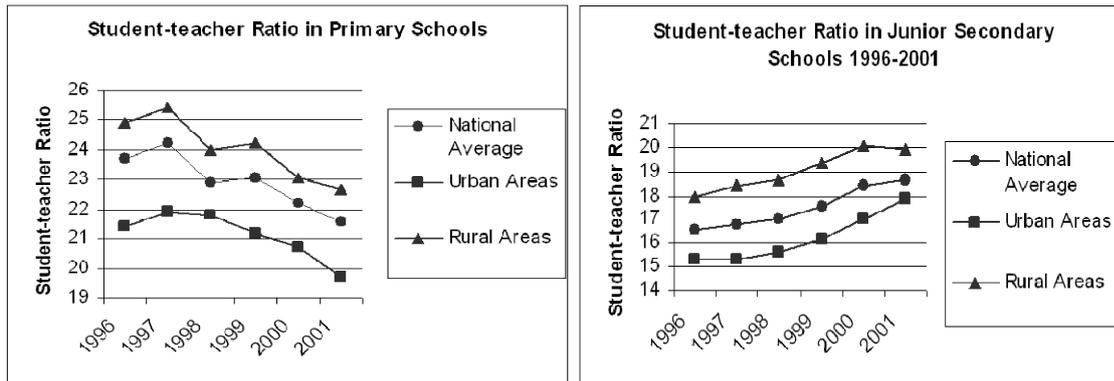


Figure 2.1 Student-teacher Ratios in Urban and Rural Primary and Lower Secondary Schools between 1996 and 2001

Source: Wang (2004)

Urban-centered policy is one of the factors that contribute to the high student-teacher ratio in education. According to the Ministry of Education, the ratios of teacher and students in city, county or town, and village should be respectively: 19:1, 21:1 and 23:1, in primary school and 13.5:1, 16:1 and 18:1 in lower secondary school (Wang, 2004). The regulation indicates that each teacher should teach fewer students in urban school and teach more students in rural school

The other reason is the lack of teachers in poor rural areas in China. Many rural teachers lack incentives to remain in poor and remote villages that cannot even guarantee their basic living expenses. They are willing to move to the urban areas as soon as they found the opportunities (Meng, 2004).

Due to the lack of teachers in rural schools, some rural schools have to hire those who are unqualified without proper credentials. They are called “daike” teachers and usually are

locally appointed and funded. In China, “daike” teachers are not recognized by the government or eligible for inclusion in professional development provision, though they may be qualified and teaching in government schools (Robinson & Yi, 2008). Those “daike” teachers account for just a small portion of the national total. But in poor, rural areas in northwestern China, they can be up to half. They usually need extra income from farm work to make a living because they earn as little as seven or eight US dollars.

In 2006, aiming at improving the rural education quality, The Ministry of Education announced it determined to gradually replace all 448, 000 thousand “daike” teachers with qualified teachers. A few of them got the certificate of teaching after getting formal training and passing the exam that are demanded to get teachers’ certificate, but most of them left their jobs of teaching. After a large number of “daike” teachers leaving school within a short time, many western rural schools find difficulties in recruiting people to take the vacancies of teaching jobs. In some remote area schools which staffed most with “daike” teachers, this policy leads to the lack of teachers for the normal schooling for students because no government-appointed teachers are willing to take the jobs.

With enough financial support, rural schools can attempt to retain or attract teachers by expanding the availability of better paying, higher-quality working environment in the locality. However, in far too many rural places, the necessary infrastructure and fiscal resources needed to attract qualified teachers are simply limited.

2.3.6 Educational Expenditure Per student

With the rapid increase rate of GDP (no less than 7 percent every year), China’s education budget has never exceeded 4 percent of GDP. Since 2006, the government has pledged to increase spending on education from 2.7 percent to 4 percent, but the actual expenditures have not yet to reach that level (NBSC, 2008b). The investment in education will have to rise to at least the average level of industrialized western countries in order to be really effective, i.e. 5% of GDP.

The budget for education has so far been limited in China, but still a big portion of money flows to higher education and urban schools. In China, the educational expenditure on each student in developed eastern areas is six to seven times more than in impoverished rural areas. For example, in Shanghai, the per pupil cost is 6000 to 7000 yuan(878-1025 US dollars)every year, while in some western province like Guizhou, it is less than 1000 yuan(146 US dollars) (NBSC, 2008b). Table 2.3 compares the educational expenditures per students in rural areas with that of the national level. It reveals that rural students' educational expenditures per student are lower than the national level and the disparity is enlarging every year.

Table 2.4 Educational Expenditures per student, 1999-2003

Year	<u>Primary Education (Yuan)</u>		<u>Lower secondary Education (Yuan)</u>	
	National	Rural	National	Rural
1999	414.78	345.77	639.63	508.58
2000	497.58	418.97	779.81	533.54
2001	645.28	550.96	817.02	656.18
2002	813.13	708.39	960.51	795.84
2003	931.54	810.07	1052.00	817.79

Source: Yang (2007).

When rural schools are under-funded and educational expenditure per student is low, basic school facilities are not available, and teachers cannot be provided, rural children will have to struggle to compete with their urban peers in the standard examinations for the entry of upper secondary schools or universities.

Chapter 3 Theoretical Issues

3.1 Introduction

This chapter will introduce the theoretical concepts relevant to the study. This section provide the theories and studies about the influence of parents' education attainment, parents' expectation, students' educational aspiration and social capital on adolescence's education.

3.2 Parental Educational Attainment

Many studies have demonstrated the importance of socio-economic status in the prediction of differences in students' educational attainment and child's development (Everette and Ben, 1967). Parents' educational attainment has been identified as one of the most common indicators of a person's socio-economic statues (Keeves and Saha, 1997; McMillan and Western, 2000). Empirical studies have shown that parents' educational attainment is related to the educational attainment of their children. Students with college or university educated parents are more likely to attain higher levels of education than students of parents with lower levels of education. Children of parents with less than upper secondary education are much less likely to proceed beyond upper secondary school than the children of parents at higher educational level. Past research has suggested it is because parents with higher educational would offer greater availability of educational resources for their children (Choi et al., 2005).

In China, a study was carried out to investigate the parents' educational attainment of 179 students who achieved the best achievement on university-entrance examination in different provinces (Yu, 2009). The result shows that parents who had college or university education amount to 41 percent. Given the fact that less than 10 percent of the Chinese population aged above 16 has higher education, the result of the study implies that parents' high educational attainment has a positive influence on students' achievement.

“Rather than having a direct association with children's academic achievement, parents' level of education is part of a larger constellation of psychological and sociological variables influencing children's school outcomes (Hoover-Dempsey and Sandler, 1997). Attendant on higher levels of education may bring more access to resources, such as income, time, energy, and community contacts, that allow for greater parental involvement in a child's education.

The literature also suggests that level of education influences parents' knowledge, beliefs, values, and goals about childrearing, so that a variety of parental behaviors are indirectly related to children's school performance (Seefeldt, 1999). For example, higher levels of education may enhance parents' facility at becoming involved in their children's education, and also enable parents to acquire and model social skills and problem-solving strategies conducive to children's school success. Thus, students whose parents have higher levels of education may have an enhanced regard for learning, more positive ability beliefs, a stronger work orientation, and they may use more effective learning strategies than children of parents with lower levels of education (Hess and Holloway 1984).

3.3 Parents' Expectations

The influence of parents' expectation and students' perception of parents' expectation on adolescence's education was examined in the National Educational Longitudinal Study (NELS) in the United States (Epstein, 2001). It is an extensive longitudinal study, which has been constructed to follow a cohort of students from the eighth grade through high school, college, and into the workforce. In this study, the first wave of data was collected in 1988 when participants were in eighth grade and they have been followed and questioned four times (in 1990, 1992, 1994, and 2000). Parents' expectation measured when the adolescents were in eighth grade had significant and lasting effects on the academic achievement in later grades in upper secondary schools, as well as on post-secondary attainment. The paths of the influence of the parents' expectation are as follows:

Parents' Expectations → Achievement (The further in school parents believed their adolescents would go, the higher the adolescents' academic achievement).

Parents' Expectations → Perception of Parent Expectations → Student Expectations → Achievement (The further in school parents believed their adolescents would go, the clearer the adolescents' perception of such expectations, the higher their own academic expectations, the higher their academic achievement).

In agreement with findings from other studies (Catsambis, 2001), high educational expectations constitute a powerful way through which parents can encourage continuously the educational attainments of their adolescents in secondary school and beyond.

3.4 Educational Aspiration

The concepts of aspirations are rooted in psychology and guided by the theory of achievement motivation (Quaglia and Cobb, 1996). From a social psychological perspective, educational aspirations are defined as an individual's desire to obtain a certain level of education (Kuvlesky and Bealer, 1966). The aspirations developed by students have a profound impact on learning. Young people's aspirations guide what students learn in school, how they prepare for adult life, and what they eventually do (Walberg, 1989).

Some literature reports that rural youth have lower educational aspiration than their urban peers (Breen and Quaglia, 1991; Cobb *et al.*, 1989; Elliott, 1987; McCracken *et al.*, 1991; Schonert-Reichl *et al.*, 1993). Breen and Quaglia (1991: 223) reported that rural students "... aspire to lower levels of higher education, express lower levels of self-confidence in completing the degree requirements, and expect to pursue higher education for a shorter time than urban students." Haller and Virkler (1993) found that the difference between aspirations

of rural youth and non-rural youth existed because of the lower socio-economic status of many rural families. Youth aspire to what they know or can imagine. Due to the lack of role models and career diversity, the aspirations of rural youth are limited by the geographical and cultural context of their communities (Haller and Virkler, 1993).

Elliott (1987) identified isolation as a factor inhibiting the aspirations of rural youth: “this isolation translates into limited exposure and limited access to needed educational services...; in turn students fear new experiences and they are unwilling to risk exposure to unfamiliar surroundings”. A considerable body of research has demonstrated the factors influence adolescents’ educational aspiration with empirical support. They are personal and educational factors, socioeconomic status, parental influence, religious influence, and student perceptions (Breen and Quaglia, 1991; McCracken, Barcinas and Wims, 1991; Schonert-Reichl *et al.*, 1993). Sex differences in decision-making processes are also manifesting (Williams, 1972).

3.5 Social Capital in Education

Social capital as an influential predictor for children’s educational achievement was first introduced by James Coleman (1988). Coleman notes that within the context of family background, in addition to parental educational attainment and family income which have been titled financial and human capital respectively, another equally important determinant of the wellbeing and educational development of children is the level of ‘connectedness’ between the child and his or her family, friends, community and school. According to Coleman, this connectedness – a product of social relationships and social involvement – generates social capital. He introduced the concept of social capital as a resource inhering in the relations between and among actors and argued that resources that facilitate the wellbeing and development of children are borne of these relationships (Coleman, 1988).

3.5.1 Social Capital within a Family

Coleman also identifies that the social capital which generates from the children and parents' interaction serves as a mechanism to transmit the effects of family human capital from parents to children. As human capital is transferred, at least partly, through interaction between parents and their children, families with high levels of human capital but low levels of interaction do not necessarily lead to a child's success in school. Teachman *et al.* (1996), using data from the National Educational Longitudinal Survey (NELS), also found some evidence that human and financial capital are more easily translated into success in school when social capital is also present. Therefore, the main function of social capital is a complement to human capital and financial capital.

According to Coleman (1988), “. . . if the human capital possessed by parents is not complemented by social capital embodied in family relations, it is irrelevant to the child's educational growth that the parent has a great deal, or a small amount of human capital.” Therefore, at the family level, parents' cultural capital and financial capital become available to the child only if the social connection between the child and the parents is sufficiently strong. Without the high quality of social capital the benefits of human or financial capital would be lost or greatly reduced (Coleman, 1988).

Social capital within the family that gives the child access to the adult's human capital depends both on the physical presence of parents in the family and on the attention given by the adults to the child. The physical absence of adults may be described as a structural deficiency in family social capital (Coleman, 1998). The most prominent elements of structural deficiency in modern families are the single-parent family and the family in which one or both parents work far away from home.

Parents' presence is a foundation for information exchange between parents and students. However, even if adults are physically present, there is a lack of social capital in the family if

there are not strong relations between children and parents. In addition to parents' presence, interaction with parents is another source of social capital in the context of home. Several researchers have examined measures of parent-child interaction and found a positive relationship to children's education and wellbeing (Thomson et al., 1994; McLanahan and Sandefur, 1994; Furstenberg, et al., 1998). Teachman *et al.* (1996) find that parents who interact with their children have children who are more likely to avoid one educational setback – dropping out of school– than children who have little or no meaningful interaction with their parents. In this analysis, parent-child interaction is treated as an indicator of assistance that in turn facilitates academic achievement.

The quality of relationships within the family can lead to parental involvement in and assistance to their child's schooling. By interacting with their children, parents can provide assistance in the form of advice and information. A strong, communicative relationship between parents and their children is a conduit for transfers of information and advice (Teachman *et al.*, 1996, Colman 1998).

3.5.2 Social Capital in the Context of School

Children connect and interact not only with their parents but also with others outside the home, especially peers and teachers at school. These outside relationships are also found to influence a child's development (Harding, 2003; McDonough, 1997).

At a school, teacher and students relationship is an important source for social capital. Teachers may provide even more assistance than parents in terms of academic achievement since this is their primary relationship with students. Good relationships between teachers and students facilitate the transfer of valuable information regarding educational opportunities, scholarships, etc. (Teachman *et al.*, 1996)

Relationships with teachers can provide access to information and opportunities that enhance the educational performance of children (Hill and Rowe, 1996, 1998; Rowe, 1997; Meier, 1999) and the same can be said about relationships with friends and/or peers (Stanton-Salazar and Dornbusch, 1995). But the function of this relationship can be negative or positive. Relationships with friends can assist children in attaining outcomes it can also generate

negative outcomes for children. For example, belonging to a peer group that is involved in self-destructive behavior may “assist” the individual in self-destruction (Sandefur and Edward, 1999).

3.6 Conclusion

The study investigates the disparities between rural and urban students in home background, social capital, parents’ expectation, students’ educational aspiration, as well as students’ perception of disparities between them and perception of their future. The theoretical concepts of factors that are relevant to the investigation are parental educational attainment, parents’ expectation, social capital in education and educational aspiration. Those factors are found in previous research to have influence on students’ achievement or students’ aspiration.

Chapter 4 Data and Methods

4.1 Introduction

This chapter introduces the conceptual framework of the study, choice of methodology, data site and process of data collection. The methodological approaches taken in measuring the concepts of the interests and data analysis are also presented.

4.2 Methodology

I chose the mix-method of combining both qualitative and quantitative approaches to accomplish the purpose of the research. Qualitative research and quantitative research are two major paradigms applied in the social science research. Qualitative method offers possibilities of interaction between the researchers and the subjects under study and provides a deeper understanding of a problem being observed. However, it is subjective and uncontrolled due to the researchers experience through interaction with individuals, so findings cannot be measured by validity. As opposed to qualitative research, some of the characteristics in favor of quantitative research are that it is objective, controllable, systematic, valid and reliable (Bryman, 2004).

In this research, one rural school and one urban school are chosen as research sites. The field work in each school combines a site visit, an interview to a school leader, and a questionnaire survey completed by students. The site visits and interviews were carried out the day before the questionnaire survey to provide background information about the schools and students. Both of the rural and urban students were asked to answer the same questionnaire so that same variables about their education can be measured and compared.

4.3 Analytical Framework

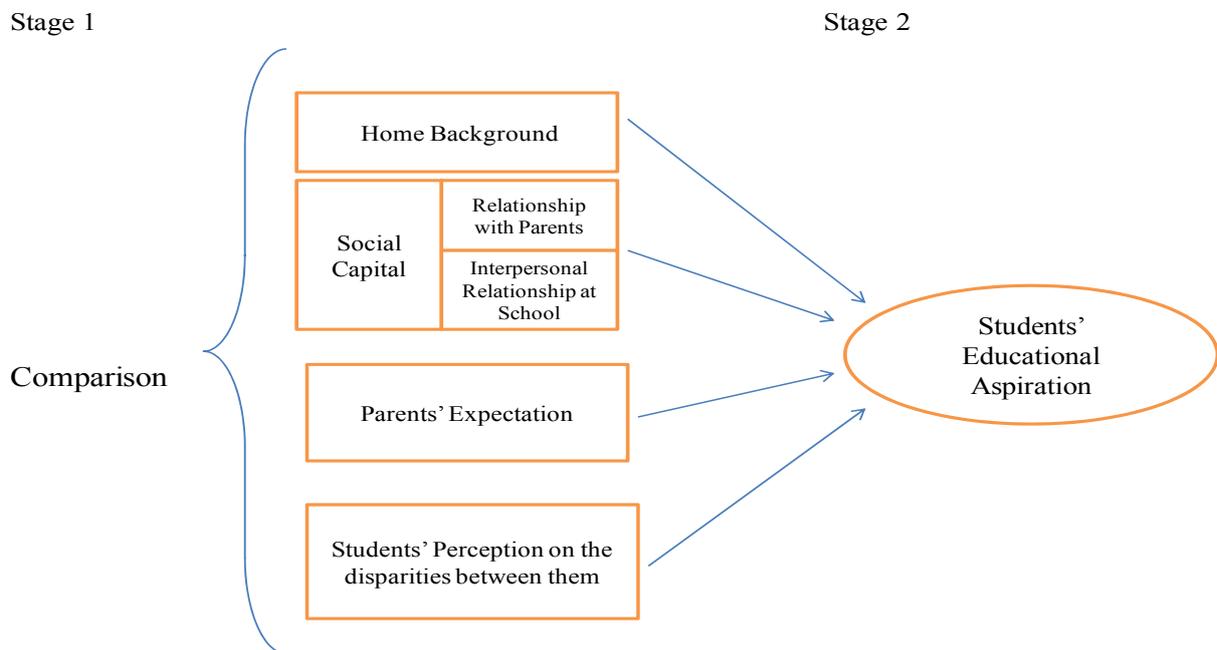


Figure 4.1 The Analytical Framework of the Study

This study takes two steps to analyze the results of the questionnaire. The conceptual framework presented in Figure 4.1 illustrates the two-stage analytical framework of this study. Stage one makes a comparative analysis of rural and urban students' home background, social capital, expectation of parents, students' educational aspiration, students' perception of the disparities between rural and urban students and perception of their future.

In stage two, educational aspirations of the students are analyzed taking a social psychological approach. Also in this stage, the hypothesized links between the variables investigated in stage one and students' educational aspiration are statistically tested and explained.

4.4 The Data Site: Yunnan province, Southwest China.

Yunnan Province is located in the southwestern frontier of China. Yunnan is one of the poorest provinces in China. Ten percent of China's poor population lives in Yunnan. In 2008, GDP per capita in Yunnan was 1,842 US dollars (NBSC, 2008b), much lower than the national GDP per capita of 3,315 US dollars (IMF, 2008).

Furthermore, Yunnan has the highest number of ethnic groups among all provinces and autonomous regions in China. Rural areas in Yunnan province thus represent not only rural China, but also the impoverished rural China where minorities inhabit. Among the country's 56 ethnic groups, 25 of them live in Yunnan with population over 5000. Most of the 15 million of 25 minorities are living in mountainous rural area. Due to the poverty and mountainous surroundings, the education level in many of the regions where minority groups live lags far behind that in cities.

Moreover, Yunnan is also quite a representative of present-day China, which is characterized by big disparities between rural and urban areas. Although it has a vast mountainous and poverty-stricken areas in this area, the provincial capital Kunming is as modern as most of the other cities in China.

4.5 The Data Collection

The data collection for the study was carried out during February 2009. The subjects of the study consist of students and school leaders from two lower secondary schools in Yunnan Province (one rural and one urban school). The data in this empirical study is collected by site

visits, interviews to school leaders and questionnaire survey completed by students from 2 schools.

The distance between two schools is 500 kilometers. The survey was carried out first in the urban school in Kunming. Upon the site visit, researcher went to the office of educational administration at school where she presented the permission letter from her faculty to an administrator working there. After an introduction to the research purpose and methods, Researcher got permission to make an interview to this administrator and to do the questionnaire survey with the students.

The questionnaire survey was conducted on the next day after the interview. The interview with the administrator was carried out in his office during working hours. The questionnaires were answered by the sampled students in the classroom during their lunch break. Following the same procedure, the data collection in the rural school was carried out 4 days after the field work in the urban school.

In the questionnaire survey, both the rural and urban students who answered the questionnaire are last year students in lower secondary schools, that is, they are at the end of compulsory education in China. They face the choice to either further study in upper secondary school or finish their schooling.

4.5.1 The Urban School

The field study started in Middle School Affiliated to Yunnan Normal University which is located in Kunming, the provincial capital of Yunnan Province. Kunming is the political, economic, communications and cultural center of Yunnan, and is the location of the provincial government. It is also home to several universities, museums, galleries and other important economic, cultural, and educational institutions. Kunming is known as the “city of

eternal spring” with the annual average temperature of 22 degrees. Located in China's west underdeveloped area, city of Kunming is still as modern as many big cities in middle or eastern China with its prosperous tourism, tobacco industry and active trading with Southeast Asian. The wide streets, towering office blocks, and big shopping centers convey the impression of a modern, 21-century city.

The selected urban school is the only provincial key middle school in Yunnan which administered by the Provincial Education Commission (PEC). The school is consisted of both a lower secondary and an upper secondary department. The facilities, teachers’ qualification and student’s performance in the college/university entrance examination of this urban school can represent the level the high-rank middle schools in the urban areas in China.

There are 1300 students and 96 teachers in the lower secondary department of the urban school. The students in the lower secondary level can be admitted favorably by the upper secondary department at the same school with much lower scores compared with students from other schools. Therefore, more than 90 percent of the students can enter the upper secondary department at this school which may also assure them an easy access to the universities since more than 90 percent of the upper secondary-level students from this school can enter the university every year.

4.5.2 The rural school

The rural school, Dazhai Middle School is located in Dazhai village Yunxian County in western Yunnan. It is 500 kilometers away from Kuming and takes about 7 or 8 hours by bus from Kunming to this village. Dazhai has a population of 4127, among which 1969 undertake farming. Most of the peasants are still living on the primitive farming which uses many labors and farm cattle rather than machinery. The average annual income per peasant is 1863 yuan(273 dollars),much lower than the below the national level 4761 yuan (604 dollars) (NBSC, 2008b).

Dazhai Middle school is a lower secondary school with 700 students and 57 teachers. If the students want to go to upper secondary schools, they have to move to bigger towns or cities. The closest upper secondary school is 80 kilometers away in the town of county.

4.6 Site Visits and Interviews

“The observation can range from formal to casual data collection activities”. The direct observation is often “useful in providing additional information about the topic being studied” (Yin, 1994). Researcher made a site visit at each school before the interview and questionnaire survey and observed the layout of classrooms, teaching buildings, sports facilities, students’ accommodation and students’ daily life etc. The site visits provided background information about 2 schools and reveal the visible disparities between 2 schools.

Upon the site visit, the researcher interviewed an administrator in urban school and a principal in rural school. Both of the interviews last about 30 minutes. The main questions of the interview are as follows: 1). Give a brief introduction to the school conditions. 2). Tell your perceptions of the disparities between rural and urban students. 3). How the students might perceive the disparities between them and their rural/urban counterparts? Notes were taken during the conversations to help record the answers to the questions.

Since this study mainly deal with students’ opinions and perceptions, the major part of the empirical data source is the questionnaire survey which is completed by rural and urban students. The interviews offer background information about the schools and disparities between rural and urban students from the school leaders’ views.

4.7 Questionnaire

100 students were randomly selected at each school to answer the questionnaire. The total number of last-year lower secondary students is 500 in urban school and 220 in rural school. Questionnaires were mostly delivered by hand to students by the researcher herself. There were a few occasions where the teachers in the school help to distribute and collect the questionnaires. Each student was given about 20 minutes to answer the questionnaires. 92 valid questionnaires were collected in rural school and 87 in urban school. The return rate in each school is 92% and 87%. Both are at the satisfactory level.

The data were coded and processed by the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS). Descriptive statistics will be used to make comparative analysis between rural and urban students while bivariate analysis techniques will be employed to examine the factors which are related to rural and urban students' educational aspiration.

4.8 The Variables and Measures

This section introduces the variables and measures investigated in the study. Five subsections offer descriptions and explanations of the variables measuring rural and urban students' home background, social capital, parents' expectation, educational aspirations and their perceptions of the disparities between them and their future.

The variables chose in the research are the main determinants of the students educational attainment, academic achievement and aspiration based on the theories and past empirical researches. The disparities on these determinants between rural and urban students will thus reflect the disparities of rural and urban education.

4.8.1 Variables and measures of students' home background

The variables listed and coded in Table 4.1 have been investigated in terms of their relation to the rural and urban students' home background. Parents' years of schooling and school level completed conditions are examined by the question about parents' educational attainment. Parents' educational attainment is considered as an important indicator of home background. Mother's educational attainment is taken as an equally important indicator of a students' home background. All the variables listed in Table 4.1 are used in the comparative analysis in Chapter 5 to examine the home background of rural and urban students.

Table 4.1 Approach taken to measure variables of home background of rural and urban students

Variables	Observed(questions)	Coding
Ethnicity(ETHNIC)	Which ethnic group	Dichotomous coding, '0' if Han, '1' if any minority
Gender(GENDER)	Sex of the students	Dichotomous Coding, '0' if male, '1' if female
Father's educational attainment(EDUFA) Mother's educational attainment(EDUMO)	Schooling completed	0. no school 1. not completed primary school 2. completed Primary school 3. did not complete lower secondary school 4. completed lower secondary school 5. upper secondary school 6. vocational, technical high school 7. been to college or university

4.8.2 The Measures of Social Capital

Table 4.2 summarizes the variables measuring students' social capital. The quality of social capital is also an important measure to explore the disparities between rural and urban students in this thesis. My approach is to use Coleman's original definition of social capital as "inhering in the relations between actors and among actors" (Coleman, 1988) as referring to the forms of social capital.

Table 4.2 Approach taken to measure students' social capital

Variables	Observed(questions)	Coding
Interaction with Parents	frequencies of the different kinds of interaction with their parents	1. never, 2. seldom 3. sometimes 4. often
Perceptions of relationships	Home: Relationship with Parents School: Relationship with teacher and students	-1. if it is my disadvantage 0. if it is irrelevant to my education 1. if it is my advantage
Parents presence(PRCE)	Parent(s) are far away from home due to work	-1. Both parents are far away from home 0. Parents are both at home 1. One parent are far away from home
Guardian(GURD)	Which adults live with you and take care of you at home if your parent(s) are working away	1. mother 2. father 3. grandparents 4. other family member or relatives 5. I live without adults care

The forms of the social capital discussed in this thesis are the relationship with parents in a family and the relationship with teachers and other students at school. The measures taken to examine the quality of the relationships are to ask the frequency of students-parents

interaction, parents' physical presence at home and students' perception of their relationships with parents, teachers and other students.

In the questionnaire, there are 4 questions assessing the frequencies of students' interaction with parents (Question No. 2-No.5, see Annex 2). All the four questions deal with different forms of interaction between parents and students. Question No.2 "My parents ask me how it is going at school" and Question No. 3 "My parents know the result of my examination" reflects their parents' attitude to their kids' schooling. Question No. 4 "my parents know who I am with when I am out in my free time" can be used to test parents and kids' closeness in relationship. Question No. 5 "my parents help me with my home work" is about the parents' direct assistance on study. Students were asked to use a four-point scale (1=never, 2=seldom, 3=sometimes, 4=often) to describe the frequencies of the interaction.

Question No.6 measures students' perception of their relationship with parents, teacher and students by asking whether these 3 forms of relationships in the context of home and school are their advantage or disadvantage compared to their rural/urban counterpart. The option of the question is coded as 1 when it is "my advantage over rural/urban counterparts", or coded as -1 when it is "my disadvantage", and 0 when it is "irrelevant to my education".

Question No.7 "whether students have parents far away from home due to work (parents' presence)" and question No. 8 "which adult live with them" is arranged based on the Chinese context of migrant workers. In Dazhai, the rural targeted school in this research, the local government encourages or even organizes surplus rural labor to work in the cities which offer more job opportunities and thus increase the family income.

4.8.3. Parents' expectation

The variables of parents' expectation in the future are measured by the questions "how much education the parents expect the students to get" and "How much do you think your parents care about your education" (Question No. 9 and No. 10). As shown in Table 4.3, parents' expectation is coded differently in stage one and stage two of the research. In the stage one, all the educational levels are pacifically coded from one to four so the disparities can be demonstrated in details. In stage two, variable are recoded dichotomously (0 as no higher education and 1 as higher education) to examine whether parents' expectation for their higher education is related to their educational aspiration.

Table 4.3 Approach taken to parents' expectation for students' education

Variables	Observed(questions)	Coding
parents' expectation(PAREXP)	How much education your parents expect you to get	Stage 1. 1. lower secondary-level education 2. upper secondary education(academic) 3. Vocational and technical education 4. college or university
		Stage 2. Dichotomous coding 0.if not higher education 1. if higher education
PCARE	How much do you think your parents care about your education	1. Not at all 2. a little 3. very much

Question No. 10 asks about students’ perception on how much their parents care about their education. Students were asked to respond on a three-point scale (1 = not at all, 2=a little, 3=very much).

4.8.4 Students’ Educational Aspiration

As shown in Table 4.4, students’ educational aspiration is coded in the same way of coding parents’ expectation. The coding is different in the two stages of the research. In the stage one, all the educational levels are pacifically coded from one to four. In stage two, variable are coded dichotomously (0 as no higher education and 1 as higher education) to examine whether students’ aspiration for higher education is correlated to other variables of interests in this research.

Table 4.4 Approach taken to examine students’ educational aspiration

Variables	Observed(questions)	Coding
Students’ Educational Aspiration	How much education you want to get?	Stage 1. 1. lower secondary-level education 2. upper secondary education(academic) 3. Vocational and technical education 4. college or university
		Stage 2. Dichotomous coding 0.if not higher education 1. if higher education

4.8.5. Variable and Measures of Students' Perceptions of the Disparities between rural and urban students and Perception of their Future

The perception of students is highlighted in this study. Silverman & Subramaniam (1999) stated that students' attitude is important because teachers, coaches and the society often regard attitudes as a form of assessment for them and for assessing other people's strengths.

Question No. 12 explore students' perceptions on the disparities of home environment and schooling between rural and urban students. The sampled students are asked to define each of the choices below the question as their own advantage or their rural/urban peers' advantage in education. The options regarding their home environment are "equipments for study at home" "Parents' education" and "parents' expectation". The choices probes their schooling are "teachers' teaching quality" and "relevance between curriculum and everyday life". The option of the question is coded as 1 when it is "my advantage over rural/urban counterparts", or coded as -1 when it is my rural or urban counterpart's advantage, and 0 when "it is irrelevant to my education".

The question "what do you worry most for your future" deals with student's perception about their future. The listed worries covered students' worry about getting a job or their further education. The anxiety about their further education is further specified as "cannot enter a higher level school" or "cannot enter a university" or "cannot enter a key upper secondary school or a key university". This is considered to be relevant to the "key school system" in the Chinese social context.

The sampled students are all in the last year of compulsory education, they need to take the entrance examination if they aspire to enter higher level school. The key schools own better educational resources than the ordinary schools, thus are considered as a guarantee for students to enter a university, especially a "key" university which would ensure a good job in the Chinese context. Since entering a key school or university demands high academic excellence, it might exert pressure on students.

Table 4.5 Approach taken to explore students' own perception of the disparities in home and school environment between rural and urban students and perception about their future

Variables	Observed(questions)	Coding
Perception of disparities about home environment and schooling	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. Home assets for study at home b. Parents' education attainment c. Expectation from parents d. teacher's teaching e. relevance between curriculum and everyday life 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -1. if it is my rural/urban counterpart's advantage 0. if it has no influence on our education 1. if it is my advantage
Perception about future	What do you worry most for the future?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 1. I cannot get a good job 2. I cannot enter an higher level school 3. I cannot enter a university 4. I cannot enter a key upper secondary school or key university 5. Other

The next chapter focuses on data analysis and empirical findings following the steps presented in chapter 5.

Chapter 5. Data Analysis and Discussion

5.1 Introduction

This chapter presents and analyzes the data obtained through the site visits, interviews and questionnaire. The interview was conducted with an administrator in the urban school and a principal in the rural school, while the questionnaire is completed by the students.

5.2 Site Visits

Before the interviews and questionnaire surveys, researcher made a visit to the campus of each school to view the teaching buildings, classrooms, sports facilities, and students' accommodation etc. The site visits give a direct visual sense on the disparities between two schools and some details of students' daily life.

5.2.1 Teaching Buildings



Figure 5.1 Teaching buildings of rural school (right) and urban school (left)

In the left picture of the figure 5.1 are 2 three-storey teaching buildings which are in use now in urban school. While in the left picture is one of the 3 teaching buildings in urban school. The teaching buildings are up to 7 floors in the urban school. Next to the teaching building are an artificial lake and a green house.

5.2.2 Classroom



Figure 5.2 Classroom of the rural school (left) and Classroom of urban school (right)

The classroom in rural school was very crowded. The rural classroom in figure 5.2 contained about fifty students. Blackboards and chalks were the only teaching tools for the teacher at the class. The classrooms at urban school which are much bigger than rural classroom are only for forty-five students and some of the classrooms are equipped with computers both for teachers and students.

5.2.3 Students' Dormitory

Figure 5.3 shows the disparities between the dormitories of the rural and urban students. The rural students' dormitory is much more crowded since as many as fifteen to eighteen students share one room without bathroom. There are 9 bunks and one desk in each dorm. In the urban students' dormitory, 4 students share one room which is equipped with a telephone and a bathroom. Each student has a desk, a bookshelf and a wardrobe under the bed.



Figure 5.3 Interior of rural Students' dormitory (left) and urban students' dormitory (right)

5.2.4 Sports Facilities

As shown in the figure 5.4, the playground in the rural school consisted of a concrete rectangle with 4 basketball hoops. The urban school has an athletic ground with high-standards synthetic retinoic tracks. Besides, 2 swimming pools and a gym can also be found in the urban school.



Figure 5.4 sports facilities of rural (left) and urban schools (right)

5.2.5 Canteens

The food available in the canteen of the rural school is usually cabbage and rice. Meat is served a few times every week since not many students can afford to eat it often. There is no place for students to sit and eat in the canteen. After getting their food, students usually sit outside of their classroom and eat. The canteen in the urban school, as shown in the figure 5.5, is spacious and can hold hundreds of students. It offers about 40 different kinds of dishes every meal to assure students enough nutrition from food.



5.5 canteen of rural school (right) and canteen of urban school

5.2.6 Teacher's Residential Area

Unlike the urban school which does not provide residential area for the teachers, nearly all the teachers and administrators in the rural school live on campus (see Figure 5.6). This is because they have to keep an eye on the students all the time, especially those who live in the dorms. While the urban school provides caretakers to administrate the students live in the dorms.



Figure 5.6 teachers' residential area on campus in the rural school

The site visiting reveals two different pictures on the school conditions for rural and urban students: The modern, fabulous, well-equipped urban school, and old, plain, poor-conditioned rural school. Urban students enjoy much better school facilities both for study and daily life than their rural counterpart.

5.3 Interviews

The interview questions include: 1). Give a brief introduction to the general condition of the school, including students' school performances, the difficulties are faced by students in study at school, government financial support to the school. 2). Tell your perceptions of the disparities between rural and urban students. 3). Do you know how your fellow students think about their urban/rural counterpart?

5.3.1. Interview in the Urban School

The research started with the interview to an administrator (Mr. Ma) in the urban school. Talking about the students' school performance in the past years, Mr. Ma was very proud. "Our students have ranked top three many times in such competitions as Robot Designing Competition, Physics, Mathematics or Writing Competitions at National or even Asian level. The students from our senior department have also achieved good results in the National Higher Education Entrance Examination. 50 percent of the students enter the key universities in China, including Beijing University and Tsinghua University which rank the best in China."

About the difficulties students have in study, Mr. Ma think urban students have various accesses to support and educational resource for their study. The only difficulty they might have is the difficulty to deal with the pressure from teachers and parents since they all hold high expectation on their education. As to the financial resources from the government, Mr. Ma said that provincial government and the state government took the main responsibility in financing of the school. Since his school is a "key school" in Yunnan, it is given priority in the assignment of teachers, equipment, and funds.

When asked about the disparities between rural and urban students, Mr. Ma proposed that besides the visible difference in school facilities, a big disparity might be the motivation for study. Urban students are hard working because of external influences, such as pressure from parents and teachers. Whereas rural students are hard working because of internal influences—for example a desire to get rid of the poverty or leave their hometown for cities.

Asked about how the urban students might perceive the disparity with their rural peers, Mr Ma answered: "I think most of them realize that they obsess educational resource compared to their rural peers. But I heard a few students said their rural peers can at least work on farming if they are not willing to get educated, while they have no other choice but pursuing higher education since the diploma is the key in the labor market in urban area."

5.3.2 Interview in the Rural School

In Dazhai Middle School, I was able to talk with the principal Mr. Shi. The interview also started with an introduction to the general condition of the school. Mr Shi said, “Our students are not competitive in the standard examinations taken by both rural and urban students, including the examination for the entry of upper secondary school. It is not due to students’ lack of smartness or efforts. Rural students are just faced by more barriers in schooling than their urban peers.”

For example, due to the lack of English teachers, rural students start to learn language of English as a subject three years later than the urban students. Urban schools start the teaching of English in Grade 3 while in many rural schools rural students are not able to begin until grade 7. English is one of the most important subjects in the university entrance examination, starting the learning of English much later than their urban counterparts must be one of the biggest reasons that rural students are disadvantaged in access to higher education.

Although Mr Shi presented the difficulties school is facing such as lack of funding for the lab equipments, books in the library and computers, he still have a favorable impression of the government and the efforts it has made to promote rural education: “We still need more support, but the government is trying, and much progress has been made” .

He cited the central government’s 500 yuan(73 dollars) per year help for the poorest students. About 5 poorest students in each class can enjoy this assistance. “Besides, 80 yuan(12 dollars) per month assistance is also offered by the government for each student living in dormitories. It has covered all the 200 students living in the dormitory in this school. This assistance can nearly cover students’ basic expenses such as food and stationary for one month.”

Disparities between rural and urban students, Mr. Shi recalling some experience he during his visiting to one urban school and conclude that rural students' cognitive to the world is much simpler compared urban students due to the relative isolation of the countryside. Rural students also show more respect to their teachers. "It is partly due to the difficulty in recruiting and retaining qualified teachers in rural school. Children appreciate and respect teachers who stay with them."

When talking about how rural students think about urban students, Mr. Ma said they admire the urban life and the good condition of the school for urban students. Many students take "moving to the city" as a motivation for study. He also talked about the perceptions of students who went to urban school during their parents staying in the city as migrant workers. They need to pay high extra fee for schooling since they are not urban dwellers. Some also have unpleasant experience of being discriminated and expelled in the urban schools and cities.

The interviews to Mr. Shi and Mr. Ma offered some basic disparities between rural and urban students. Firstly, rural students have much less access to educational resources compared to their urban counterpart. Moreover, there might be a big disparity in students' motivation for study. Urban students are hard working because of external influences, such as pressure from parents and teacher, whereas rural students are hard working because of internal influences. Thirdly, rural students' cognitive to the world is simpler than their urban peers. They also show more respect to their teachers since they understand the difficulty of recruiting and retaining qualified teachers in the rural school. The interview also shows a gap between rural and urban students' perceptions of each other. Urban students think they have more pressure on study while their rural peers are more relax. Rural students admire urban students' access to various educational resource and support, and sensed discrimination from them.

5.4 Analysis of Data Obtained from Questionnaire

This section reports the results of the analysis of the questionnaire survey. The subsections are organized around rural and urban students' home background, social capital, parents' expectation, students' educational aspiration, students' perception of disparities in their home and school environment, and students' perception of their future.

5.4.1 Home Background of the Students

In this subsection, the rural and urban students' ethnicity, age, gender and parental education and whether parents are far from home due to work are examined. No significant difference is found in the age of the rural and urban students. Both of the rural and urban students' age range from 14 to 16.

As shown in Figure 5.7, among the sample students, rural girls make up 42.9 percent of the total sample students in rural school while rural boys 57.1 percent. While in the urban school, 55 percent of the sampled students are girls and 44.8 percent are boys.

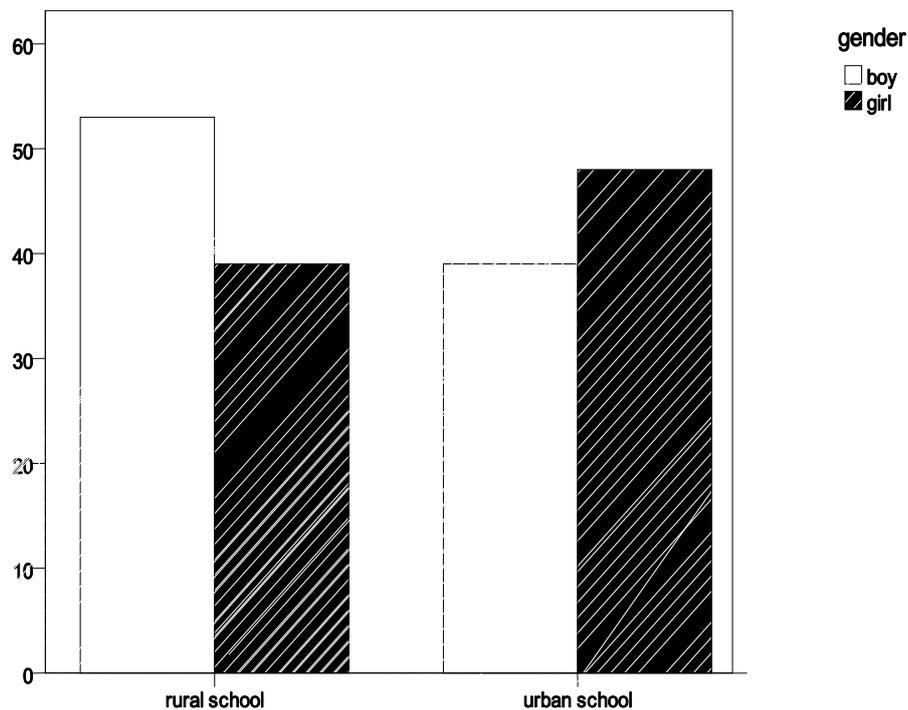


Figure 5.7 Gender distribution by rural/urban origin (percentage)

Parental educational attainments between rural and urban students appear remarkable difference as shown in table 5.1. Urban parents tend to have higher levels of education attainment than rural parents in general. Mothers tend to have less education than fathers in both rural and urban areas and rural mothers are the most poorly educated group of all. 1.1 percent of rural parents and 3.3 percent of rural mother are illiterate while none of the urban parents are illiterate. Urban parents who get higher education account for 20.7 percent while none of the rural parents have higher education.

Students of minority ethnicity represent 29.3 percent of the rural students and 19.5 percent of the urban students. No significant differences were found in the ethnic students' home background in this research.

Table 5.1 Rural and urban students’ parental educational attainment (percentage)

<i>Father’s educational attainment</i>								
	No school	Not completed primary	Completed primary	Not completed lower secondary	Completed lower secondary	Upper secondary	Vocational	Higher edu
rural	1.1	22.8	20.7	21.7	22.8	5.4	5.4	0
urban	0	2.3	4.6	4.6	8.0	34.5	32.2	13.8
<i>mother’s educational attainment</i>								
rural	3.3	48.9	19.6	21.7	5.4	1.1	0	0
urban	0	1.1	4.6	2.3	10.3	42.5	32.2	6.9

5.4.2 Disparity of Social Capital

In this study, rural and urban students’ social capital is measured by “parents and students’ interaction, parents’ presence, parents’ perception of student-parent relationship, student-teacher relationship and student-student relationship”.

5.4.2.1 Students’ Interaction with Parents

Table 5.2 presents the mean score of the four questions (question No. 2 to question 5) about interaction with parents of rural students, urban students and all the students. A four points scale (1=never, 2=seldom, 3=sometimes, 4=often) is employed to describe the frequencies of the interaction. Compared with rural students, urban students have slightly higher mean score in “parents asking about how is going at school” and “parents knowing who I am with at free time”.

Table 5.2 Mean Score of Students' Interaction with Parents

	(All Students)		(Rural Students)		(Urban Students)	
	Mean	s.d.	Mean	s.d.	Mean	s.d.
ASK	3.17	0.730	2.79	0.603	3.56	0.642
EXAM	3.45	0.663	3.09	0.487	3.83	0.605
FREE	3.13	0.789	2.74	0.709	3.55	0.643
HOWORK	2.39	1.051	1.73	0.697	3.09	0.897

Keys: ASK: Parents ask about how it is going at school(Question 2)

EXAM: parents know the results of exams(Question 3)

FREE: Parents know who you are with at free time(Question 4)

HOWORK: parents help with homework(Question 5)

Rural students get the least mean score for the “my parents help me to do my homework”, 1.73 as opposed to 3.09 for urban students. It means that urban students get more assistance from their parents on home work than rural students. The responses to “My parents know the results of my examination” show the highest mean score for both rural and urban students among the four questions (3.83 and 3.09 for urban and rural students, respectively). It means results of children’s examination received much attention from both rural and urban parents. The result suggests that urban students’ parents try to follow up their kids’ examination results closer than rural students’ parents.

The findings reveal that urban parents follow their children’s schooling and personal situation better than rural students than rural parents do. Urban students have more frequent interaction with their parents and are more bonded to their parents than their rural counterparts.

5.4.2.2 Students' Perceptions of Social Relationships at Home and School

Students' perceptions of relationship with their parents, teachers and students are asked in the analysis of social capital at home and school. They are asked to define these three relationships as “advantage, disadvantage or irrelevant term to their education”.

Table 5.3 Students' perception of social relationships at home and school (percentage)

Relations	Schools	My advantage	My disadvantage	irrelevant to my education
Relation with parents	Rural	27.2	67.4	5.4
	Urban	48.3	46.0	5.7
Relation with teacher	Rural	64.1	35.9	0
	Urban	24.1	59.8	16.1
Relation with other students	Rural	83.7	16.3	0
	Urban	46.0	54.0	0

As shown in the Table 5.3, urban students hold a more positive view of relationship with parents than their rural counterpart. Only 27.2 percent of rural students as opposed to 48.3 percent of urban students consider “relationship with parents” as their disadvantage. 5.4 percent of rural students and 5.7 percent of urban students do not think “relationship with their parents” is relevant to their education.

Compared to urban students, rural students have a more positive view of “relationship with teachers”. Rural students who chose it as their advantage to education account for 64.1 percent while only 24.1 percent of the urban students think it is their advantage. 16.1 percent

of the urban students as opposed to none of the rural students think “the relationship with teacher” is not relevant to their education. The result confirmed what the principal of the rural school expressed in the interview about rural and urban students’ disparities: teachers’ working is appreciated more by rural students than their urban peers since they know the difficulties of recruiting and retaining qualified teachers in a rural school. Besides, the pressure existing at urban school might also make the teacher-student relationship tense.

“Relationship with other students” is considered as their own advantages by 83.7 percent of rural students and 46 percent of urban students. None of them deny the relevance between “relationship with other students” and their education. The result demonstrates that urban students are less likely to perceive relationship with other students as their advantage. This might also partly due to the bigger pressure and competition existing in the urban school.

The results reveal that urban students have a more positive view of the relationship with their parents and think they benefited from this relationship, but they are less likely to perceive their relationship with teacher and other students as advantages for their education compared to their rural counterparts.

5.4.2.3 Parents’ Presence

Table 5.4 shows the result of the question “whether you have parent(s) far away from home due to working”. Among rural students, those who have one parent far away from home account for 35.9 percent, those with both of their parents far away from home, 7.6 percent. Only 6.9 percent of urban students have one of their parents far away from home. None of the urban students have both parents far away from home due to work.

Table 5.4 The result of question “whether parents are far away from home due to working”

school	Both of them are far from home		One of them are far from home		None of them far from home	
	percentage	Number	Percentage	Number	percent	Number
Rural	7.6	7	35.9	33	56.5	52
urban	0	0	6.9	6	93.1	81

The question “which adult do you live with” is supposed to be answered by the students who have parent(s) far away from home due to working. Among 40 rural students who have at least one parent away, 33 percent of them live with one of their parents, usually with mothers (26 percent of them live with their mothers and 7 percent of them live with their father). 36 percent live with their grandparents and 11 percent of them live with other relatives, none of them live without care of adults.

Table 5.5 Correlation of parents’ presence and students-parents interaction and perception of the relationship with parents

	ASK	FREE	HOWORK	EXAM	PPR
PRCE	0.457**	0.408**	0.287 **	0.359**	0.324**

Keys: PRCE: parents presence (whether parents are far away from home due to working)

PPR: Perception of relationship with parents

Note: All significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed)

Table 5.5 reveals parents’ presence is positively correlated with parents-students interaction and the perception of the relationship with their parents. It indicates that students with parent(s) working far away from home have less interaction with their parents, and are less likely to perceive the relationship with their parents positively.

Table 5.6 provides the results of the analysis of the questions dealing with rural and urban students’ social capital. The assessment of rural and urban students’ social capital shows that urban students have better parents’ presence at home which can provide the foundation of information exchange between children and parents. They also have more interaction with their parents which assure effective communication. Accordingly, urban students have a more positive view of the relationship with their parents. Rural students perceive the relationship with their teachers and other students more positively than their urban peers.

Table 5.6 comparison of social capital

	Parents’ presence	Parents-students interaction	Perception of relationship with parents	Perception of relationship with teachers	Perception of relationship with other students
Rural Students	More have parent(s) far away from home due to work	Less interaction	negative	positive	positive
Urban Students	Few has parent(s) away from home due to work	Better interaction with their parents	positive	negative	negative

5.4.3 Parents’ expectation

As to the level of education which parents expect their children to get, the most frequently selected answer for both rural and urban students is the same: higher education (see figure 5.8). As high as 95.4 percent of the urban parents and more than half (59.8 percent) of the rural students’ parents want their children to take higher education. Despite the lower

education attainment and less parents-children interaction compared to urban parents, many rural parents still expect their children to get higher education like urban parents.

Although a similar tendency is shown on the educational attainment expected by parents, more urban parents want their children to get higher education. Only 2 options are considered by students’ parents in urban school: “college or university and vocational and technical school”. None of them think lower secondary or (academic) upper secondary education is enough education for their children. There are a few more choices on rural students’ answers. 9.8 percent of the rural students chose lower secondary and 1.1 percent of the students chose high school as the education expected by parents.

Vocational schools are more popular among the rural students’ parents than the urban students’ parents. Amounted to 28.3 percent rural parents compared to 4.6 percent of the urban parents want their children to take vocational education.

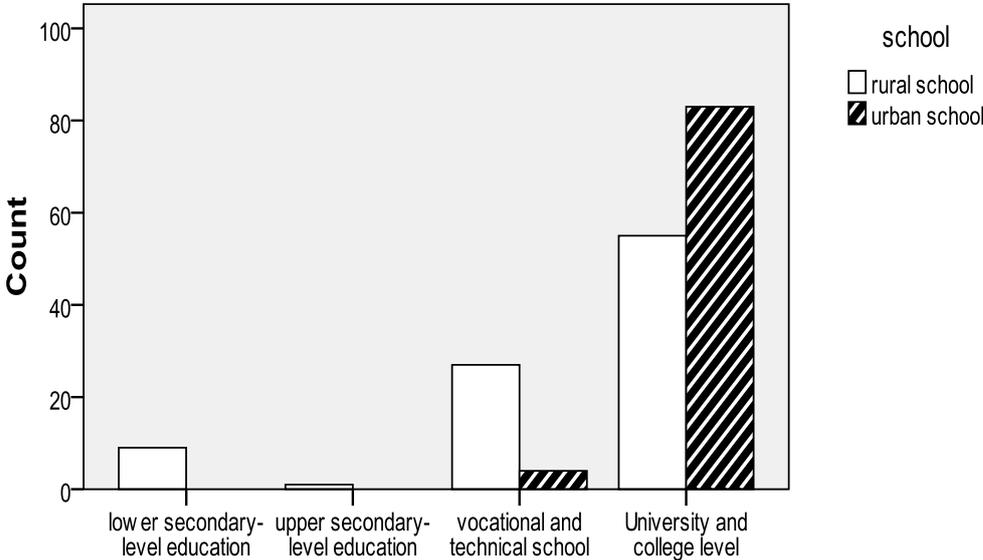


Figure 5. 8 Level of Educational Attainment that Parents Expect their Children to Get

9.8 percent of the rural parents as opposed to none of the urban parents expect their children to have lower secondary education. Since all the sample students are last year students of the

lower secondary schools, it means that a few rural parents think that this is the end for their education.

Students’ perception of their parents’ care on their education is also examined as a factor of parents’ expectation for their education. A one to three scale (1. Not at all 2. a little 3. very much) is used to measure this item. Table 5.7 reports that urban students have a higher mean score about “how much your parents care about their education”. The mean score of rural girls is lowest among all the students.

Table 5.7 Comparison of perception of parents caring about their education

	All Students		Rural Students		Urban Students	
	Mean	SD	Mean	SD	Mean	SD
Boy	2.49	0.584	2.26	0.560	2.79	0.469
Girl	2.33	0.757	1.77	0.583	2.79	0.544
Total	2.41	0.676	2.05	0.618	2.79	0.509

In general, the rural students perceive less care from their parents on their education than urban students do. Among them, rural girls feel they get the least attention from parents on their education. Only 15.4 percent of the rural girls think their parents care very much about their education while 26 percent of the rural boys think they received much care on their education from parents.

Gender has also an impact on rural parents’ expectation to students’ education. Strong negative correlations are found between gender and parents’ expectation for rural students. It means that rural parents tend to have lower expectation on girl’s education than boys. This correlation is not significant for urban students.

5.4.4 Students' Educational Aspiration

Students' educational aspiration is examined by questioning students how much education they want to get in the future. Figure 5.9 shows that the general tendency of the both rural and urban students' educational aspiration is similar although more urban students want to get higher education. "Higher education" is still the most frequently selected answer for both rural and urban students. Half of the rural students (50 percent) and 75.9 percent of the urban students in this study aspired to get high higher education. A few urban students (9.2 percent) chose lower secondary education as all the education they want to get. "Vocational and technical schools" is more popular among rural students than urban students.

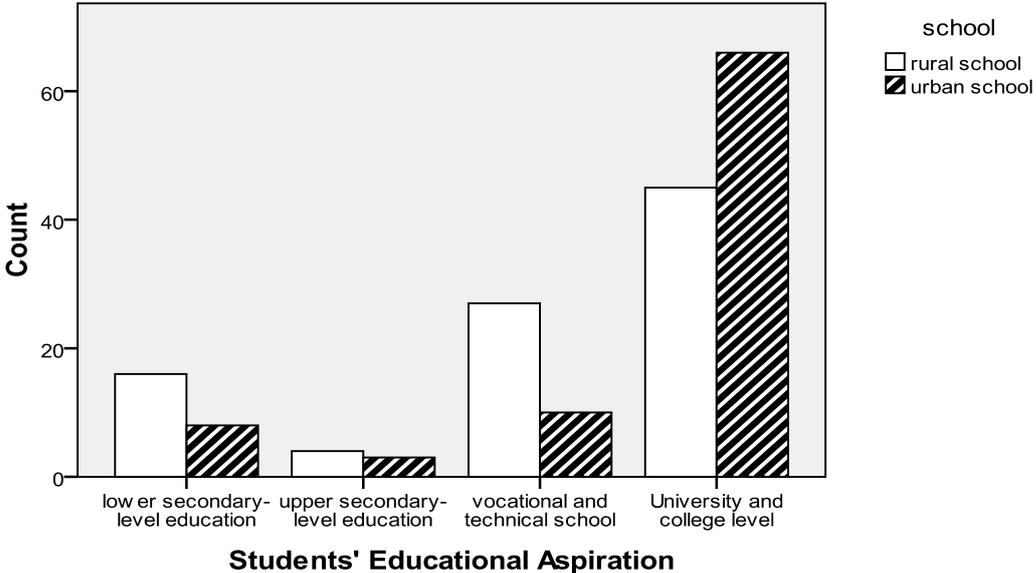


Figure 5.9 How much education do the rural and urban students want to get?

High school education is not a popular choice for both rural and urban students (3.4 percent for urban students and 4.3 percent for rural students). According to an empirical study about the returns to education in urban China, academic upper secondary school education in China

mainly serves as a mechanism to select college students, and has zero returns in terms of earnings. In contrast, both vocational school education and college education have a large return that is comparable to that found in rich Western countries (Liu *et al.*, 2005). This might be the reason why academic upper secondary school is not a popular choice for both rural and urban students. The students group in this study, regardless their rural or urban origin, together with their parents, all aspire for higher education which is looked up by the Chinese people in general as the best way to improve their social standing and the ticket to secure employment (Huang, 2005).

5.4.5. Perception of the Disparities about Home and School Environment and Perception of the Future

This section probes rural and urban students' perceptions of the disparities between them by asking their advantages and their urban/rural counterpart's advantage in education compared to their urban/rural counterparts. Their perception for the future is also examined in this section.

Table 5.8 presents the students' perception of their advantages and rural/urban counterpart's advantage in home and school environment. On the perception of "equipment for study at home", only 5.3 percent of rural students as opposed to as high as 83.9 percent of urban students think they have advantage in "equipments for study at home". 11.7 percent of urban students and 11.5 of rural students think "equipment for study at home" is not relative to their education.

About the variable "parents' educational attainment", only 5.4 percent of rural students compared with 75.9 percent of urban students think it is their advantage over rural/urban counterpart. Some rural and urban students believe that "parents' educational attainment" is not relevant to their education (21.7 percent for urban students and 10.3percent for rural students).

Table 5.8 Students’ perception of the disparity of home environment and schooling (percentage)

	School	My advantage	My rural/urban counterpart’s advantage	Irrelevant to my education
Equipments for study at home	Rural	5.3	83.0	11.7
	Urban	83.9	4.6	11.5
Parents’ education	Rural	5.5	72.8	21.7
	Urban	75.9	13.8	10.3
Parents’ expectation	Rural	31.5	65.2	3.3
	Urban	35.6	63.2	1.1
Teacher’s teaching quality	Rural	42.7	57.3	0
	Urban	65.2	44.8	0
Relevance between curriculum and daily life	Rural	25.0	75.0	0
	Urban	85.1	13.8	1.1

As for students’ perception of parents’ expectation, majority of rural and urban students think it is their counterpart’s advantage (65 percent of the rural students and 63.2 percent of the urban students). It seems that neither rural students nor urban students think their parents’ expectation have positive influence on their education.

About teacher’s teaching quality, 42.7 percent of the rural students as opposed to 65.2 percent of the urban students think teachers’ teaching quality is their advantage over their urban/rural counterpart. It implies that urban students are more likely to think their teachers are better at teaching than rural teacher. Only 25 percent of the rural students as opposed to as high as 75 percent of urban students think they have advantage in “relevance between curriculum and

daily life”. More urban students think their education benefits from the relevance between curriculum and their daily life.

More than half of the rural and urban students perceive that urban students have advantages in “equipments for study at home”, “parents education”, “teacher’s teaching quality”, and “relevance between curriculum and daily life” compared to rural students. Meanwhile, none of them have a positive view about their parents’ expectation. Both of them think their counterpart have advantage in this issue.

The question “what you worry most for your future” explores how students perceive their future. As shown in the figure 5.10 , while the entrance to the “key university” is the biggest anxiety to more than half of the urban students (58.6 percent), the highest percentage of rural students indicated that they are worried most that” they cannot enter a university” (39.1 percent). Only a few rural students (4.3 percent) worried that “they cannot enter a key upper secondary school or university”. 35.9 percent of the rural students compared with 23 percent of urban students are worried that they cannot get a job.

Regardless the disparities in home background, social relationship etc., rural and urban students have the similar educational aspiration: higher education. The difference is that while rural students care more about entering a university, the urban students consider more about whether the university is “key university” or ordinary university.

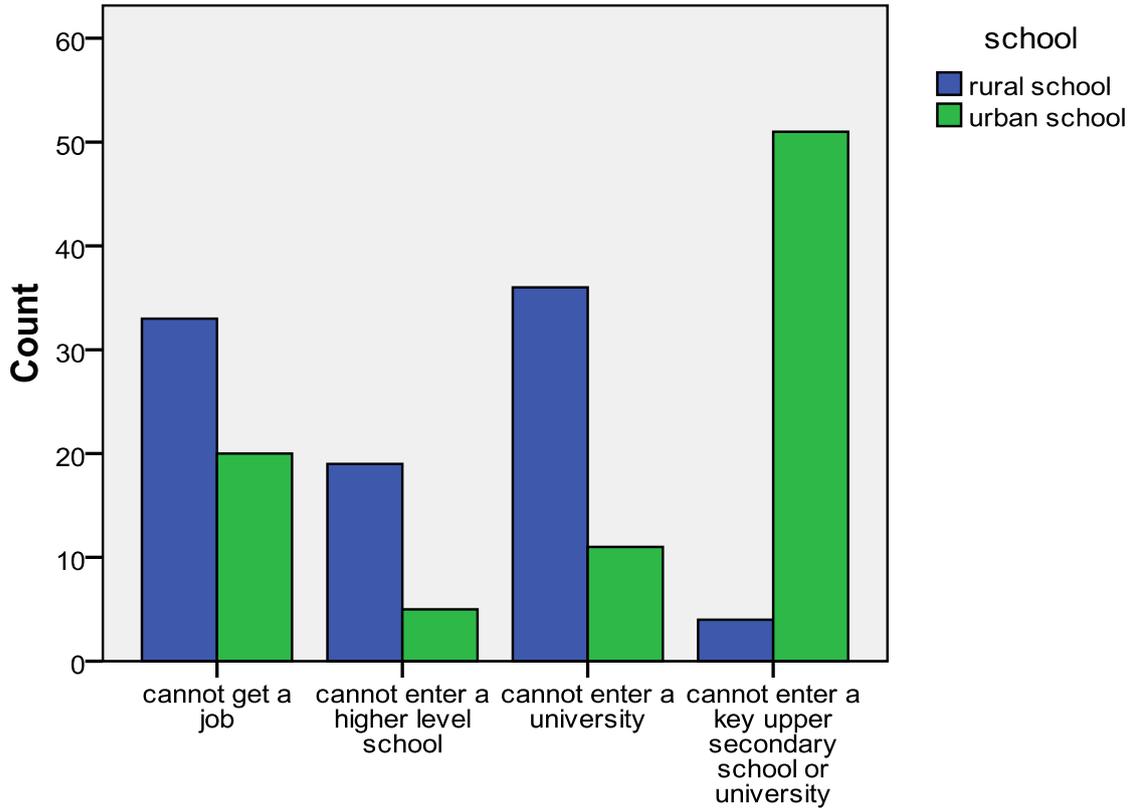


Figure 5.10 What do you worry most for the future?

5.4.6 Factors Related to Students' Educational Aspiration

Many disparities exist in the home background, social capital in the context of home and school, parents' expectation and students' perception of their disparities in home and school environment. Some of the factors also differ in the relation to the students' educational aspiration.

This section explore the relation between rural/urban students' educational aspiration and the main factors of students home background, social capital, parents expectation and students' perception of their disparities. The main approach is to examine the correlation between

students' educational aspiration and students' home background, social capital, expectation of parents and students' perception on the disparities between them.

Table 5.9 Correlations between students' aspiration and home background

	Aspiration (All Students)	Aspiration (Rural Students)	Aspiration (Urban Students)
gender	-0.029	-0.267**	0.029
ethnicity	-0.094	0.087	-0.051
FAEDU	-0.036	0.093	-0.184
MOEDU	0.008	0.239**	-0.055

Note: **. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

Keys: FAEDU: father's educational attainment

MOEDU: mother's educational attainment

Table 5.9 shows the correlation between students' home background and students' aspiration. For rural students, a moderate negative correlation exists between gender and educational aspiration. It indicates that rural girls tend to have lower educational aspiration than rural boys. However, gender does not have significant correlation with educational aspiration for urban students.

A positive correlation is also found between mother's educational attainment and rural students' aspiration. It indicates that students whose mother with higher educational tend to have higher educational aspiration. Neither rural students nor urban students' aspiration is significantly correlated with ethnicity and father's education.

Table 5.10 Correlations between students' aspiration and social capital

	Aspiration (All Students)	Aspiration (Rural Students)	Aspiration (Urban Students)
ASK	0.685**	0.555**	0.782**
EXAM	0.575**	0.618**	0.369**
FREE	0.763**	0.794**	0.686**
HOWORK	0.070	0.002	0.043
PRESENCE	0.220**	0.468**	0.288**
PRP	0.084	0.503**	-0.043
TEASTU	0.194**	0.641**	0.134
STUSTU	0.296**	0.432**	0.516**

Note: **. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed)

Keys: PRESENCE: parents' presence (whether parents are far away from home for working)

PRP: Perception of relationship with parents

TEASTU: relationship with teacher

STUSTU: relationship with other students

Table 5.10 shows the correlation between students' aspiration and factors of social capital examined in this research. Both rural and urban students' educational aspiration is strongly positively correlated to 3 forms of interactions with parents (parents' asking about school, knowing who they are with for free time, and following the results of their examination) rather than the assistance on homework from parents. It means that students who have more communication with parents about school and examination and personal issue tend to have higher educational aspiration than those who are lack of such interactions. Assistance on homework from parents does not significantly correlate with either rural or urban students' educational aspiration. It demonstrates that parents' following up school performance and

close communication with their children affects more on students' aspiration than direct assistance on home work.

Both rural and urban students' educational aspirations have positive correlation with parents' presence. The correlation is stronger for rural students. It indicates students who have parent(s) far away from home due to work tend to have lower educational aspiration than students who have both of their parents at home.

Positive and strong correlation is found between rural students' educational aspiration and how they perceive the relationship with their parents, teachers and students. It indicates that for rural students, those who have positive perception about the interpersonal-relationship at home tend to have higher educational aspiration. For urban students, the educational aspiration is only significantly correlated with how they perceive the relationship with other students rather than the relationships with parents and teacher.

Table 5.11 Correlations between students' educational aspiration and parents' expectation

	Aspiration (All Students)	Aspiration (Rural Students)	Aspiration (Urban Students)
Educational attainment			
Parents expected	0.301**	0.403**	0.083
PCARE	0.406**	0.366**	0.316**

Note: **. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

Key: PCARE: How much do you think your parents care about your education

Table 5.11 provides the correlations between parents' expectation and students' educational aspiration. Educational attainment expected by parents is strongly and positively correlated with rural students' educational aspiration but does not correlate with urban students'

educational aspiration. It demonstrates that for rural students, the higher education their parents expect them to get, the higher educational aspiration they have.

It also shows that students' perception about how much their parents care about their education is moderately correlated both to rural and urban students' educational aspiration. It indicates that for both rural and urban students, the more they think their parents care about their education, the higher educational aspiration they have.

Table 5.12 Correlations between students' educational aspiration and students' perception of disparities between rural and urban students' home environment and schooling

	Aspiration (All Students)	Aspiration (Rural Students)	Aspiration (Urban Students)
PEQUIP	0.101	-0.086	0.139**
PPEDU	0.184	-0.073	0.130
PPEXP	0.067	0.058	0.071
TEACH	0.082	0.042	0.486 **
CURRI	0.096	0.408**	0.010

Note: **. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

Keys: PEQUIP: Do you have advantage in equipments at home for study

PPEDU: Do you have advantage in parents' educational attainment

PPEXP: Do you have advantage in expectation from parents

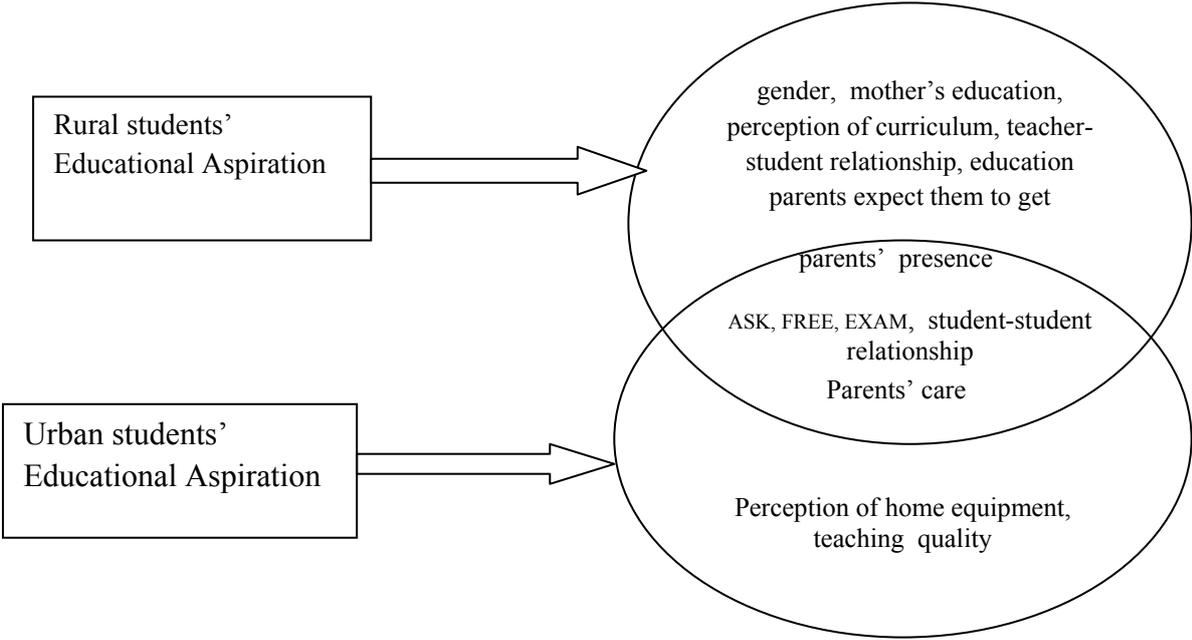
TEACH: teachers' teaching

CURRI: relevance between curriculum and daily life

As to the perceptions of the disparities between rural and urban students, as shown in Table 5.12, rural students' educational aspiration is strongly positively correlated to how they perceive the relevance between their daily life and curriculum. It means that for rural students, those who think curriculum is relevant to their daily life tend to have higher educational aspiration. Urban students' educational aspiration is strongly positively correlated to their

perception of the home equipment for study and teachers teaching. It suggests that for urban students, those who feel they benefit from equipments for study at home and those who have a positive view to their teachers’ teaching quality tend to have higher educational aspirations.

The results show that factors related to rural students’ educational aspiration are partly different from those related to urban students’ educational aspiration. As shown in figure 5.11, Factors found to be only correlated with rural students’ educational aspiration are gender, mother’s education, educational attainment that parents expect students to get, how students’ perceive their curriculum, and their relationship with their teacher. Factors only related to urban students’ educational aspiration are their perception of equipments for study at home, and teacher’s teaching.



Keys: ASK: Parents ask about how it is going at school
 EXAM: parents know the results of exams
 FREE: Parents know who you are with at free time

Figure 5.11 Factors Related to Rural, Urban students’ Educational Aspiration

Both rural and urban students' educational aspiration are correlated to parents' presence at home, three forms of parents-students interaction (asking about school, knowing who they are with for free time and following the results of their examination), how much parents care about their education, and the relationship with other students. It means these factors are related to students' educational aspiration in general.

Chapter 6 Conclusion

6.1 A Summary of the Empirical Findings

The summary follows the order in which the variables were investigated in the empirical studies, i.e. home background of students, students' social capital, parents' expectation, students' educational aspiration and students' perceptions of the disparities between rural and urban students in home environment and schooling, and perception of their future. The study also identified whether those variables respectively related to rural and urban students' educational aspirations. All the variables in the empirical studies are observed in the field visits, interviews and the questionnaire survey.

6.1.1 Disparities between Rural and Urban Students

For the first place, as to students' home background, urban students tend to have better-educated parents than rural students. Moreover, in the comparison of social capital between rural and urban students, urban students have more frequent interaction with their parents than their rural counterpart. Their parents ask more frequently about their general situation at school and the results of examinations at school and know better who they are with at their free time. They also get much more assistance from parents on their homework than rural students.

Urban students also have better parents' presence at home, while many rural students' parent(s) are far away from home due to work so that they have to live with one of the parents or relatives. Rural and urban students also perceive the relationships with parents, teacher and students differently. Most of the urban students have more positive view to the relationship with their parents than their rural counterpart, while rural students are more likely to perceive their relationship with teachers and other students positively.

Rural and urban students also differ in their parents' expectation on their education. Urban parents expect more educational attainment for their children than rural parents. Urban students also perceive more care from their parents on their education than their rural counterpart. Moreover, more urban students aspired to get higher education than their rural peers.

As for the students' perceptions of the disparities between rural and urban students in home environment and schooling, rural students perceive all the five options (equipments for study at home, parents' education, parents' expectation, teacher's teaching and relevance between curriculum and daily life") as urban students' advantage. Except the expectation of parents, urban students are more likely to view all the other four factors as their advantages.

Rural and urban students' responses also differ greatly on the perception of their future. Most of the urban students and a few rural students are worried that they "cannot enter a key university or a key high school", While "cannot enter a university" is a worry for most of the rural students. It indicates that while rural students only worry about the access to a university, urban students have started considering about the "fame" of the universities they want to enter.

6.1.2 Factors Related to Rural and Urban students' Educational Aspiration

The factors related to rural and urban students' educational aspiration also show some disparities. The examination of the correlations between students' educational aspirations and main factors discussed in this survey indicate that gender is negatively correlated with rural students' educational aspiration. It implies that rural girls tend to have lower aspiration for education than rural boys, while the same correlation is not found significant for urban students; Mother's educational attainment is positively correlated to rural students' education rather than urban students.

The forms of interaction with parents that influences urban and rural students' educational aspiration are similar. Strong and positive correlations are found between rural and urban students' educational aspiration and the frequency of parents asking about their school, knowing who they are with at free time and following the results of their examinations. Moreover, both rural and urban students educational aspiration have positive correlations with parents' presence.

As to parents' expectation, education attainment that parents expect their children to get is only correlated with rural students' educational aspiration. While perceptions of parents' care about their education and students' educational aspiration is found moderately correlated with both rural and urban students.

Among the factors of perceptions of rural-urban students' disparities in home and school environment, none of the perceptions is significantly correlated with educational aspiration of the whole students group. The perception of curriculum is positively correlated with rural students' educational aspiration while how students perceive "home equipments for study" and "teachers' teaching quality" is correlated with urban students' correlation.

6.2 Concluding Remarks

The study makes comparative analysis of rural and urban students' disparities in home background, social capital, parents' expectation for their education, students' own educational aspiration, and students' perception of the disparities between them and perceptions of their future. In addition, the relationship between the main factors in this research and students' educational aspiration are further analyzed.

The findings of the study show big disparities between rural and urban students in all home and school variables and suggest the urban students have overwhelming advantages in most of the items. Both urban and rural students are fully aware of the disparities between them and

agree that urban students have overwhelming advantages in home and school environment. They have more or better equipments for study at home, their parents have better educational attainment, urban teachers are better at teaching and curriculum is more relevant to urban life.

The findings of the research also suggest that disparity between rural and urban students in access to higher education is a cumulative result of the inequity in basic education rather than a result of different educational aspiration. Although urban students show higher educational aspiration in general, most of the rural students still aspire to higher education despite the disadvantages and obstacles in their way of getting higher education. Nevertheless, rural students have to struggle to develop to their full potential and compete with their urban peers in the standard examinations for the entry of universities.

In this study, urban parents show higher expectation on their children's education than rural parents, at least perceived by students. Neither rural nor urban students perceive their parents' expectation on their education as an advantage in their education. Instead, they both think their counterpart have advantage in this issue. It means there is a gap between educational expectation of students and their parents.

It is proved in this research that parents' presence at home is positively correlated to parents-students' interaction and students' educational aspiration, and thus plays an important role in children's education. To rural children, the family disintegration which mainly caused by parents' migration work lead to less interaction with parents and less positive perception of the relationship with their parents, thus resulted in the loss of social capital. While the higher quality of the urban students' relationships with parents indicates a higher social capital in family and thus further strengthens their advantages in their education.

The examination of the correlation between most of the factors in this research and the educational aspiration also reveal the factors which are important for students' aspiration. For the whole students group, "parents' presence at home", "relationship with other students" and

“perception about how much parents care about their education” plays an important role in their educational aspiration. In addition, it is revealed that the exchange of information about school and personal life between the children and parents is more important for both rural and urban students’ educational aspiration than direct assistance on their homework. Besides the factors correlate to the whole students group, “mother’s educational attainment”, “how much education their parents expect them to get” and “relationship with teachers” are also important factor for rural students’ educational aspiration. While for urban students, how they think about their teachers’ teaching quality is essential for their educational aspiration.

In this study, the gender disparity is shown in the rural school. Rural girls tend to get lower educational expectation from parents than all the urban students and rural boys. Accordingly, they perceive less care from their parents about their education and have lower educational aspiration than rural boys do. Additionally, rural mothers have the lowest educational attainment among all the parents. These findings imply that rural women are the most disadvantaged group in education in China.

Although urban students show overwhelming advantages in education compared to their rural counterpart. Rural students are also more likely to perceive their relationship with teacher and students positively than their urban counterpart. The relationships with teacher and students are also positively correlated with rural children’s educational aspiration.

6.3 Implications of the Study for Policy and Students

The study raises some issues which deserve further consideration for the policy makers and parents. First, more rural students-favored policies should be made to help rural students get the equal opportunities in all the levels of education and achieve their education aspiration. Considering the huge work burden and insufficient financial support from provincial and county government to rural education, central government should increase its spending in rural schools, especially those in undeveloped regions.

Second, since rural students have less interaction with their rural parents and perceive less care from their parents on their education than urban counterpart, rural parents should have more communication with their children and emphasize more on children's emotional development and school performance.

Last but not the least, more attention should be given to the rural children whose parents are working in the cities as migrant workers. The government should promote the further opening of schools in the cities to migrant parents' children.

6.3 Limitations of the Study

Due to financial and time constraints, the study was only conducted in two schools within one province of western China. The information cannot be extrapolated nationally since China is a country with a great diversity in terms of culture, ethnicity, geography etc.

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Annex 1: Map of China, administrative structure and educational system of China



Figure A1.1 Map of China showing the location of Yunnan province

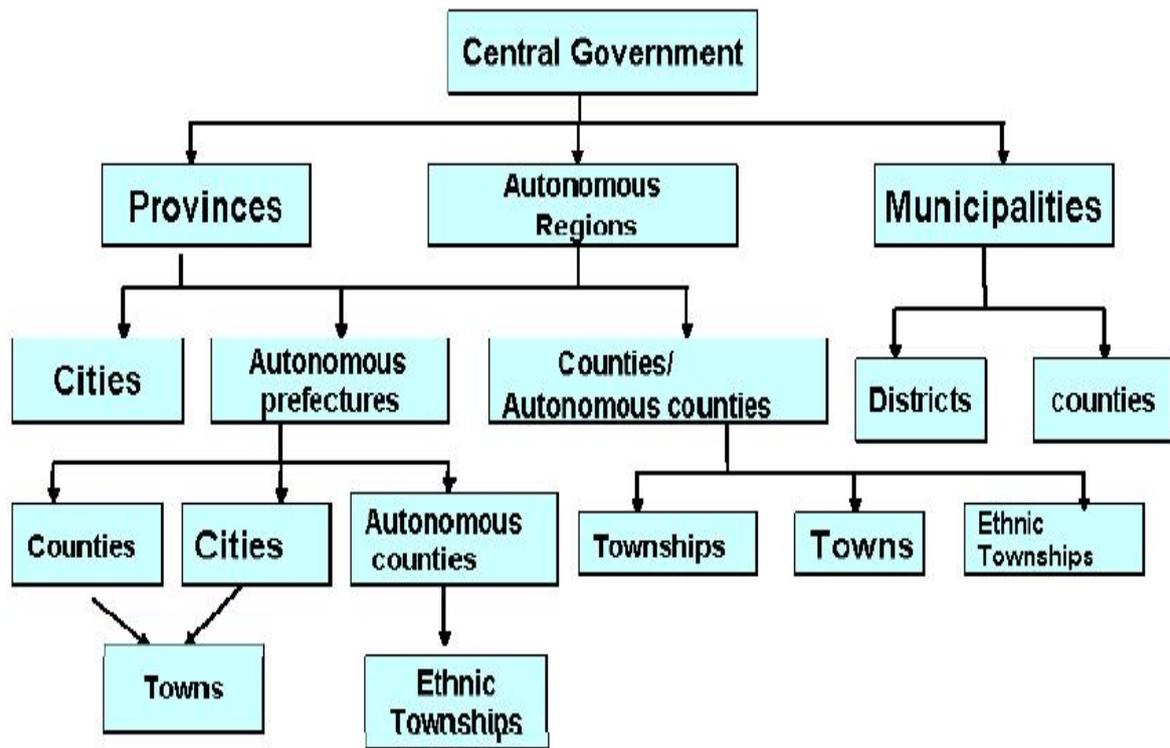


Figure A1.2 Administrative structure of China

Source: Sun (2007)

		Postgraduate, Master's Degree (3-4 Years), Doctoral Degree (3-4 Years)		
23	Grade			
22	17	Bachelor's Degree (4-5 Years University)	Short-Cycle Vocational Diploma (2-3 Years college)	Adult education Examples: TV, Radio, Vocational and higher learning
21	16			
20	15			
19	14			
18	13			
17	12	Upper Secondary level general (3 Years)	Secondary level Vocational Diploma (3-4 Years)	
16	11			
15	10			
14	9	Lower Secondary level (3-4 Years)	Compulsory 9 Years	
13	8			
12	7			
11	6	Primary Level (5-6 Years)		
10	5			
9	4			
8	3			
7	2			
6	1			
5		Preschool		
4				
3				
Age				

Figure A1. 3 Schematic presentation of the general education system in China, 2001

Source: Huang (2005)

Annex 2

Questionnaire

Part 1. The following questions deal with your home environment.

Ethnicity_____

Gender: _____

1. What is the highest level of education of your parents? Write down the letter before the right answer on the line. **(please choose only one answer for each of your parents)**

Father _____

Mother_____

- A. No school at all
- B. Did not complete primary school
- C. Completed Primary school
- D. Did not complete lower secondary school
- E. Completed lower secondary school
- F. Upper secondary school
- G. Vocational, technical high school
- H. Been to college or university

Part 2. The following questions are about the relationship between you and your parents, teachers and students.

Do you think the following descriptions are true for you? Please circle the letter under the right answer.

	Very often	Sometimes	Seldom	Never
2. My parents ask me how it is going at school	A	B	C	D
<hr/>				
3. My parents know the results of my examinations	A	B	C	D
<hr/>				
4. My parents know who I am with when I am out in my free time	A	B	C	D
<hr/>				
5. My parents help me with my homework	A	B	C	D
<hr/>				

6. Which interpersonal relationship you have at school are the advantages for your **education** compared to your rural/ urban counterpart? Please tick the box under the appropriate term. If you do not think it is relevant to your education, then tick “it is irrelevant to our education”.

	My advantage	My disadvantage	It is irrelevant to my education
Relationship with Parents	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Relationship with teachers	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Relationship with other students	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

7. If your parent(s) are far away from home due to working?

- A. both of them are out working far away
- B. one of them is out working far away
- C. No, both of them are at home

8. Which adult usually take care of you if your parent(s) if your parents are far away from home due to working? (who is your guardian?)

- A. Mother
- B. Father
- C. grandparents
- D. Other family member or relatives

Part 2. The following questions ask about your parents' expectation on your education.

9. How much education do your parents expect you to get?

- A. Lower secondary-level education
- B. Upper secondary-level education
- C. Vocational and technical school
- D. College or University

10. How much do you think your parents care about your education?

- A. Not at all
- B. A little
- C. Very much

Part 3. The following question is about your own educational aspiration.

11. How much education do you think is enough to you?

- A. Lower secondary-level education
- B. Upper secondary-level education
- C. Vocational and technical school
- D. College or Universities

Part 4. The following questions deal with your perception about the disparities between you and your rural/urban peers and perception about your future.

12. Students perception of the disparities in home environment and schooling

Among the four items listed below, what are your advantages and your counterpart's advantage in **education** compared to your rural/ urban counterpart? Please tick the box under the appropriate item. If you do not think it is relevant to your education, then tick "it is irrelevant to our education".

	My advantage	My rural/urban counterpart's advantage	It is irrelevant to my education
Equipments for study at home	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Parents' education	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Parents' expectation	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Teacher's teaching quality	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Relevance between curriculum and everyday life	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

13. What do you worry most for the future?

- A. I cannot get a job
- B. I cannot enter a higher level school
- C. I cannot enter a university
- D. I cannot enter key a upper secondary school or university
- E. I am not worried
- F. If other, please specify _____