

**Examination Orientation and the Opportunity
Structure in Chinese Education:
Case Studies of Kunming High Schools**

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A thesis submitted for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy
in the
Contemporary China Centre
Research School of Pacific and Asian Studies
The Australian National University

November 2000

Statement

I hereby declare that this dissertation has never previously been submitted for any degree, and is the result of my own original work. The thesis contains no material previously published or written by another person except where due reference is made in the dissertation itself.

Louise Simon

20 November 2000

Acknowledgements

Many thanks to my supervisor, Dr Jonathan Unger, for his sound advice, excellent editorial skills and patient encouragement. His direction and guidance is greatly appreciated. I also wish to thank my advisor Dr Frank Lewins, who provided unfailing support, encouragement, guidance and direction. My thesis has benefitted greatly from our discussions and his reading of my work. Thanks also to my other advisors, Dr Lawrence Saha and Dr Andrew Kipnis, for their interest in my topic and willingness to provide timely advice and additional food for thought.

I am greatly indebted to Zhu Xiaoyang at the Australian National University's Contemporary China Centre, who with his family in Kunming went out of his way to help organize my teaching and observation in two of the four schools. Without his help I would not have had the same depth and breadth of research opportunities in Kunming.

I am truly grateful to the four Kunming schools, their leaders, teachers and students for allowing me to teach, observe and become involved in their lives, and for giving me such cheerful help and friendship. Their willingness to provide information, clarify issues and share their thoughts resulted in the depth and scope of fieldwork data that has made the writing of this dissertation possible.

I wish to express sincere thanks to those Kunming academics, in particular Li Laoshi, who spent much time with me discussing my findings, providing additional information and alerting me to aspects of education which I may have otherwise missed. Thanks go also to those officials and academics in Beijing and Kunming who gave up some of their time for interviews and who furnished me with printed information. In addition, I am very grateful for other contacts and friends in China who assisted with my fieldwork in some way but who are too numerous to mention.

My most heartfelt thanks goes to my husband Mark, who was always patient and encouraging and who spent the whole fieldwork year in China with me. Without his unfailing support I probably would not have embarked on such a project, and certainly would have never seen it to completion.

Abstract

This dissertation examines the nature of education at the senior high school level in Kunming, China, through a participant observation study in four high schools. It discusses Ronald Dore's theory of a "diploma disease" in the context of the four schools, and the variants which affect it at the level of participants. The dissertation illustrates that the "backwash effects" which are generated by the National University Entrance Examination are entrenched in the education system and have significant adverse effects on students and teachers. The academic and vocational streams of education are compared and contrasted as providing different paths through the opportunity structure and different outcomes for social mobility. The dissertation analyzes the selective and social distributive functions of senior high school education in Kunming, and suggests that informal methods outside of entrance examinations, such as the use of *guanxi* and monetary payments, are gaining influence in these realms. As these methods become more widely utilized in the face of increasing competition to enter university, expressions of discontent from those educational participants who are adversely affected are also becoming more apparent.

Table of Contents

Chapter 1	Introduction: The State of Schools and the State of the Field	1
1.1	The Diploma Disease and China	
Chapter 2	Historical Background	20
2.1	Structure of Urban Secondary Education at Present	
Chapter 3	The Fieldwork Setting	47
3.1	Snapshots from Four Kunming Senior High Schools	
Chapter 4	Why Undergo “Examination Hell”?	70
4.1	Job Aspirations	
4.2	“Non-Monetary” Reasons for Job Choices	
4.3	“Monetary” Reasons for Job Choices	
4.4	Realism in Job Aspirations	
4.5	University Study Commensurate with Job Aspirations?	
4.6	Qualification Escalation	
4.7	University Choice	
Chapter 5	Backwash Effects of the Diploma Disease	108
5.1	Hierarchy and Evaluation of Schools	
5.2	What Makes for a “Good” School: Participant Views	
5.3	Streaming	
5.4	In-Class Ranking	
5.5	Feelings of Superiority/Inferiority Among Students	
5.6	Backwash Effects on Teaching and Learning	
5.7	Undesirable Social Effects	

Chapter 6	Other Routes to an Education	157
6.1	Enrolment in Basic Education	
6.2	Bypassing Exam Results to Enter Good Senior High Schools	
6.3	In-School Practices Influencing the Competition	
6.4	Corrupt Practices in University Entrance	
6.5	Alternative Formal Paths to Further Education	
6.6	Money – The All-Important Variable	
6.7	The Social Distribution of Education	
6.8	Discontent and its Possible Consequences	
Chapter 7	Vocational Education	191
7.1	Problems Facing Vocational Education	
7.2	Teacher Morale	
7.3	Perceptions of Vocational Education	
7.4	Specialized Schools – A Better Option?	
7.5	Reasons for Attending Vocational Schools	
7.6	The Social Composition of Vocational Education	
Chapter 8	Reducing the Effects of the Diploma Disease	213
8.1	“Studying is Useless”	
8.2	Quality Education	
8.3	Quality Education – The Answer?	
8.4	Examination Reform	
8.5	Private Education	
8.6	Whither Reform?	
Chapter 9	Conclusion	248
	Bibliography	270