



# Education and Urbanization

## An Analysis of the Differences in Education Between the Village and City

Jingchen Xue<sup>(✉)</sup>

Experimental High School Attached to Beijing Normal University, Beijing 100032, China  
eric\_xjc@126.com

**Abstract.** With the development of the economy in China, the author found that though the urban and rural families hold similar ideologies in education, the urban students nearly monopolize all the educational resources, thus creating a large social gap between the urban and rural regions in terms of education. Social inequality is reproduced in the educational system: the rare opportunity for rural students to receive cross-district education and the rise of education as a commercial industry has blocked out the potential prospect for rural students and the future of “Small-Town Swots,” students from lower social class who strive to enter elite universities.

**Keywords:** Urbanization · Education · Urban · Village · Elite

### 1 Introduction

Due to the rapid development of urban regions, Chinese education based in cities is gradually becoming more aligned to the elite education in the United States. Shamus Rahman Khan described about the top private schools in the United States, which, through opening a variety of courses, upholding advanced education methodologies, teaching nuanced means of dealing with others in society, and imperceptibly imparting the notion of class distinction to elite students, enable students at these schools to outcompete students from less funded schools and to monopolize nearly all educational resources. Anthony Abraham Jack stated that though more “Doubly Disadvantaged” students in the United States are able to enter prestigious universities via their endeavor, they will soon be driven out by the “Upper Income” in school due to their lack of experience in interacting with wealthy students and reaching out professors for help. The author found that the educational resources for urban students in China likewise have overall supremacy over the rural educational resources. This paper aims to explore the impact of urbanization on education, by exploring the differences in education between downtown Beijing and Beijing suburbs (JinPoLuo Village) in terms of educational ideals, educational opportunities, and educational objectives.

Located in the Miyu district of Beijing, JinPoLuo was known for its millet and has relied on the traditional farming industry for decades. The villagers in JinPoLuo village

suffered from poverty for decades. It was not until a decade ago when Yi Shuhua, the secretary of JinPoLuo village, graduated from university and led villagers to develop new industries, mainly in the form of ecotourism and rural cooperatives, that made most of the villagers affluent. Obviously, though it is located in a suburb of Beijing, the education in JinPoLuo village still lags behind the key regions in Beijing, such as Haidian or Xicheng district, and persists in the traditional rural education ideologies. However, through statistics online and field research as well as interviews with villagers, the author found that, to some extent, the ideology of village parents has something in common with urban parents and is no longer the product of the past era. For instance, the elders in the village do care about children's grades, even more caring than my grandparents. Also, parents do not exert too much pressure on deciding their children's future major in school and career; instead, they encourage their children to explore for themselves. Nevertheless, because of the geographical gap and mechanism between rural and urban education, the gap in terms of education continue to increase.

## 2 Education Ideology

With the development of the economy, poor villages, especially those outside the cities, have received more attention from government institutions. To encourage educational participation especially for university students, the government distributes allowances to students: in JinPoLuo Village, 3000 RMB per year for undergraduates and 6000 RMB per year for PHDs. In addition, the secretary of the village puts an extra premium on education, giving students who enter Miyun No.2 High School, one of Beijing's top schools, an allowance of 600 RMB to encourage students. Adjacent to a big city, and not far from the downtown of Miyun, JinPoLuo has a subtle geographical advantage. Therefore, compared with the remote and poor mountainous areas, people in JinPoLuo village no longer hold traditional ideas about education.

The author interviewed a breakfast shop owner; a mother of two children. One of her children (daughter) is in grade nine and the other (daughter) is still in primary school. When asked about her children's education, the shop owner said, "My daughter is currently in grade nine at Reservoir Middle School (in Miyun) and preparing for the high school entrance examination. The whole family hopes that she can enter Miyun No. 2 High School." When talking about her children's future aspirations, she said, "My daughter has no clear orientation at the moment. My husband and I are not pushing her too hard to choose a major that will make more money. We just want her to find a subject or direction that she is truly interested in." This is quite similar to the ideology of education in the city, in which parents encourage children to find the major they love instead of compelling them to select the popular majors.

The author also conducted an interview with a senior who was in her 70s in front of her house. "My granddaughter is currently in grade twelve. She studies at Miyun No. 1 High School, which is second only to Miyun No. 2 High School in the district. In the third year of junior high school, my granddaughter almost got into Miyun No. 2 High School by one point. Her parents and I felt it was a pity," she said. When asked about her granddaughter's learning situation, she said, "My granddaughter lives in the school. I can only talk to her on the phone when she is not busy with her studies. These

days children are arduous! Her parents often care about her learning situation in school in order to supervise her study. Alas, I hope that she can enter a better school outside Miyun. Get into a good university and find a high-salary job in the future.”

### 3 Education Opportunity

However, the education gap between the countryside and the urban area in Beijing is largely determined by the education model. Due to the limited educational resources, only a few very top students in the suburbs can be admitted to the nuclear district such as Haidian, since the core area of the city would prioritize the students within the district to receive the best education. Accordingly, the admission conditions for cross-district are particularly rigorous; almost no students in Miyun District can directly enter distinguished schools in Haidian and Xicheng Districts. For example, Haidian District stipulates that if students have a household registration in another district and actually live in Haidian District, it requires their parents or other legal guardians to have legitimate real estate certificates in Haidian. If students do not own a house in Haidian, their parents have to work and live in Haidian District for more than 3 years, and further pass the approval of relevant institutions. According to the data of the top schools (located in Haidian, Xicheng, Dongcheng, and Chaoyang) for the 2022 Beijing High School Entrance Examination, only 2.8 percent of students in Miyun and 0.7 percent in Tongzhou can successfully enter cross-district high schools.

It was difficult especially for students in JinPoLuo village to enter the other key district's elite high schools, in which they have to compete with students across Miyun District. According to the interview, only 600 out of 3900 students can finally enter a key high school in Miyun. If they want to get into universities, the prerequisites for rural students are even tougher. They have to compete with the top students throughout the country, and only if their scores on the College Entrance Examination are high enough can they enter the 211 key universities throughout the country. Statistics reveal that fewer than 10 people at JinPoLuo village enter college in the year 2022. To conclude, it is a fairly difficult task for suburban students to enter the key schools in central districts, and they are certainly lagged behind at the starting line.

On the contrary, it is much easier for students in urban areas to receive education by crossing the district. According to the interview, for Beijing National Day School, a key high school in Haidian, 180 out of 240 students in the international department are resident students, which means that most students come from other districts (Chaoyang, Xicheng, Dongcheng...). The author found that many students live in Chaoyang and Xicheng Districts, and some of them live in Haidian District. This suggests that it is much easier to move and get a better education in urban areas than in rural areas.

### 4 Education Objective

Through interviews with people in JinPoLuo village, the author learned that the village's primary school holds extracurricular classes such as calligraphy and dancing. As long as the students are interested in these subjects, they can attend classes with their friends after class. Most extracurricular classes in villages are funded by the government directly

and other public sectors. The purpose of these classes is not to make profits, but to make children relaxed in their spare time and develop comprehensive hobbies.

Education in the cities has become a commercial industry, with parents making more investments and setting a higher goal for students. Extracurricular classes are not only aimed to promote students' interests, but also related to practical development in the future. In the urban regions, since people's average propensity to consume is relatively high, many private enterprises run training courses. Their purpose is to accumulate capital and be lucrative, rather than to improve the education level of the public. By linking extracurricular classes with practical future and careers, parents are willing to make more investments in this respect. According to the Annual Report on Chinese Children's Development (2019), the average annual expenditure on extracurricular classes for each child in China is 9211 RMB, accounting for 12.84 percent of the total family income.

It is common that many piano teachers in the city not only teach students piano but help them to schedule future piano competitions and win piano awards. In addition, there are loads of private sports training institutions in cities with complex systems. Take football as an example. There are physical trainers, skill trainers, goalkeeping trainers, and a series of coaches who plan daily training. The nature and essence of extracurricular classes have changed. They are no longer simply about developing personal interests, but about planning a series of achievements for the future.

Currently, studying abroad is a hot topic, and the consultant industry for studying abroad is competitive. Many parents spend millions of dollars to sign with consultants from different facets to aid students studying abroad. For example, there are teachers responsible for the overall planning of activities, teachers in charge of academics, and foreign teachers who are responsible for essay writing and publishing... Many professionals plan for their future. They acquire formal training, and furthermore, most of them have returned from abroad so that they are familiar with foreign countries and applications. This is unimaginable in the countryside. While parents in JinPoLuo Village are trying to figure out which excellent high school to get into, the parents in urban regions are thinking about which top universities worldwide to attend and even which career to pursue.

## 5 Education and Urbanization

Urban education in Beijing is similar to elite education in the United States as both aim to give the best educational resources to elite families, for Beijing, the superior urban families. Shamus Rahman Khan uses St. Paul High School as an example to illustrate the huge gap between elite and mediocre education in the United States. St. Paul High School is well-funded private school with the best educational resources in the country. At St. Paul, with its liberal arts programs that span multiple disciplines (history, literature, art, etc.), the faculty has a more cutting-edge approach in transferring knowledge. Unlike other public schools, that focus more on the details and accuracy of knowledge, St. Paul High School teaches student making connections across disciplinary lines and imparts them how to relate to the world.

The children from the elite families can not only learn a wide range of profound subjects, but more importantly, they can learn how to behave as a social elite in advance.

For example, the first class in the school is about finding the seats (social class) where students belong to and learning how to “eat” properly, which seems to be a basic skill that everyone grasped. During their time at St. Paul, the school inculcates the concept of class divisions and creates an elite competitive environment. St. Paul is a talent pool that continues to provide talents to the Ivy League. Shamus notes that admissions officers from Harvard and other prestigious universities in the United States come to St. Paul to admit students directly, and they even devise clever admissions methods to maximize the influx of talents in the prestige private high schools.

To some extent, Beijing’s education in the urban region is more and more similar to the elite education in the United States. A few decades ago, in China, it was not difficult to outcompete other students by working hard, even if students without a prestige family background. “Small-Town Swots” were common: these students came from poor families, worked hard by their own efforts to study for exams, and spent decades studying hard to enter the outstanding universities in China. However, according to the trend, “Small-Town Swots” have gradually been eliminated by the society without a potential future. Elite students in cities gather together to compete for and monopolize educational resources in a reasonable and legal way. Elite students from the urban regions are currently weeding out students from the countryside. There is no potential future for “Small-Town Swots”: they may strive to enter the top universities (such as Tsinghua or Peking University in Beijing) of their dreams by chance, but this is often the destination of their efforts and glory. For those who have received elite education in cities, they have higher and further personal plans: the top universities are merely a step for them to seek for supreme overseas universities and internship opportunities.

Because the people in power are elites, they tend to consider more for the elites when making policies. In this sense, it is even harder for “Small-Town Swots” to receive a better future. The original selection and admission methodology were fairly simple: it was based on the ranking of all students. In order to enter a good university or get a decent job, all you had to do was to improve your grades in the significant examination. The situation has changed dramatically in recent years, as people always emphasize comprehensive ability. For example, the admission methodology of American universities is rather complicated. It not only considers the SAT scores, but also examines students’ comprehensive skills, such as the achievements of scientific research projects, competition results, club leadership, and even the development of various hobbies. Universities pay more attention to the comprehensive development of students, which means that only high GPAs are not enough. At present, the selection method of many Chinese schools is also based on the consideration of comprehensive ability. To some extent, it can only show that the procedure is fair for all students nominally, but absolute fairness can never be guaranteed. Due to the mediocre family background of the “Small-Town Swots”, it can be difficult for them to pass the “comprehensive” examination devised by the elites.

## 6 Conclusion

In fact, information cocoons both occur in the countryside and in the city. Even under such favorable conditions, people in the city are still not satisfied with the status quo and aimed to make a breakthrough. The education ideology in rural areas has indeed

been improved, which is mainly due to the government's aid in rural poverty relief and the development of the information age. But the gap between rural and urban education will only widen in the coming decades, because of the social class constraints and the difference in information. There are three primary schools, a middle school, and no high school, not to mention a college in the vicinity of JinPoLuo village. According to this rule, the number of students participating in a higher level of education is gradually decreasing, which also reflects the difficulty of getting into college. However, in this case, we need to continue to pay attention to rural education: in the implementation of rural revitalization, more children are able to see the open world.

## References

1. Shamus Rahman Khan. *Privilege*, Princeton University Press (2011)
2. Anthony Abraham Jack. *The Privileged Poor: how elite colleges are failing disadvantaged students*, Harvard University Press (2019)
3. Originated from the inter-district policy of Beijing in 2022, <https://www.woyoujk.com/k/212815.html>
4. Originated from cross-district policy for Beijing High School Entrance Examination, 2022, <https://baijiahao.baidu.com/s?id=1745919339556830334&wfr=spider&for=pc>
5. Yi Wei & Wei Lu. "The Urban and Rural Difference of Extracurricular Training Participation and Expenditure for Primary and Middle School Students." *Chinese Education Fiscal Policy Consultation Report*, 2019–2021
6. Feng Tian & Danni Liang. "Cultural Capital Cultivation Strategies and Class Differences in Chinese Urban Families." *Youth Studies*, 2019 (05)
7. The data comes from the "Chinese Children Development Report (2019) – Children's Off Campus Living Conditions" jointly released by the China National Children's Center and Social Sciences Academic Press in Beijing. Nearly 15000 children and parents in 10 cities across the country were sampled through multi-level stratification in typical cities.
8. Huibing Qin. "The Influence of Youth Amateur Football Training." *Youth Sports*, 2019 (04)
9. Jianghan Tian. "Advantages of Choosing a study abroad Institution." *Study Abroad*, 2022 (13)
10. Shamus Rahman Khan. *Privilege*, p. 169
11. Shamus Rahman Khan. "Learning Beowulf and Jaws," *Privilege*, Princeton University Press (2011), pp. 158
12. Shamus Rahman Khan. *Privilege*, p. 45
13. Shamus Rahman Khan. *Privilege*, p. 175
14. Tao Yin. "An Autobiography of a 'Small-Town Swot'." *Contemporary Educator*, 2022 (06)
15. Yuqi Dai & Jiyuan Li. "Analysis of the Phenomenon of 'Small-Town Swots'." *China Youth Research Association*, 2021 (07)
16. Yuling Zhang. "A Study on the Diverse Undergraduate Enrollment System of America's Top Universities." *Shaanxi Normal University*, 2020 (07)

**Open Access** This chapter is licensed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial 4.0 International License (<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc/4.0/>), which permits any noncommercial use, sharing, adaptation, distribution and reproduction in any medium or format, as long as you give appropriate credit to the original author(s) and the source, provide a link to the Creative Commons license and indicate if changes were made.

The images or other third party material in this chapter are included in the chapter's Creative Commons license, unless indicated otherwise in a credit line to the material. If material is not included in the chapter's Creative Commons license and your intended use is not permitted by statutory regulation or exceeds the permitted use, you will need to obtain permission directly from the copyright holder.

