

The Case Study of Ningbo Foreign Language School

Privatized Education in China

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Abstract

Since 2003, China has deregulated its education system: the curriculum and textbooks have been diversified; there is no more national standardized admission test for colleges; and more types of schools are allowed, including private schools. This project focuses on the development of private education in China and the trend of privatizing public schools or running the public schools in private schools' way. A case study of Ningbo Foreign Language School was undertaken to analyze how recent education reform policies influence a middle school.

The Ningbo Foreign Language School (Hereinafter as Ningwai, as how it is pronounced in Chinese) is a foreign language school established by the government of Ningbo City that operates as a private school. A three-hour interview with a current English teacher is the major method to dig deeper into the stories took place in the past ten years. In general, Ningwai followed the national trend toward privatization, deregulation, and school autonomy. It separated from its original school and became a fully independent public school in 2011. A greater autonomy on the curriculum was also noticed, leading to a diversification of electives and instructional strategies. The school has research groups for each subject to design curriculum and coursework and has joined a national association of foreign language schools to share best-practices and advice. At the same time, the school has experienced challenges in how teachers and parents perceive the rigor and quality of the school.

Keywords: Privatized Education in China, Ningbo Foreign Language School

1. Background

The central government of China (Chinese Communist Party) has the absolute power to control every aspects of the country after the founding of the People's Republic of China in 1949. Education was unexceptional. The private schools (primarily schools, middle schools and high schools) all over the countries were replaced by the public schools. The government has the major power to decide the educational policies, curriculum, personnel management and school finance (Jing Lin, 1999).

The turning point of China's development in the modern era is the China's Economic Reform and Open Up led by Xiaoping Deng in 1978, which was right two years after Chairman Mao's death in 1976. The largest shift from planned economics to the market-oriented economics deeply affected the whole country. Private schools were established and public schools were privatized after 1978. The policy goal was to enrich the educational resources and gradually provide alternatives to the parents for school options. The private education market developed relatively slowly in the 80s. Firstly, as a new mechanism of education, private education needs time to adapt to the circumstance in China. More importantly, the government only regarded it as a supplement to the public education and did not expect it became the cornerstone of China's education system (Xie, 2003). In 1992, Deng's south tour showed the determination of the central government on the economic reform and opening. It also became a watershed for the development of the private education in China.

Since China has experience a series of dramatic social changes, reforms and revolutions after its establishment in 1949, the definition of private education changes in the different eras. According to the Green-Book of China's Education 2001, the public understand the private education in four periods. During 1940s to 1970s, the private education refers to the schools

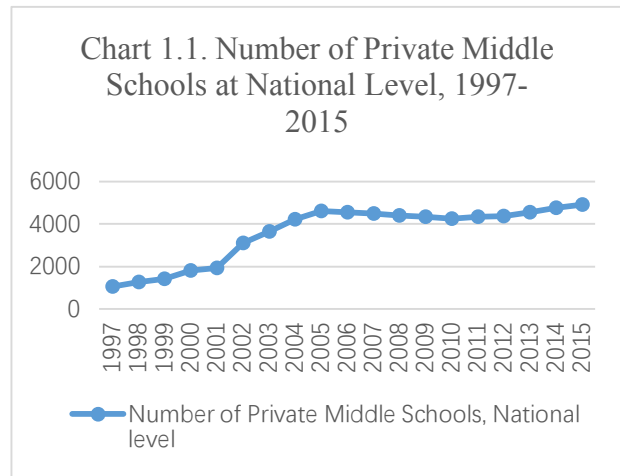
established by the farmers and collective economic organizations, which functioned as the pilot business organization before China started its opening and reform. After 80s, the private education has become a corresponding definition to the public education. The private schools in this period refer to the schools funded by the non-government organizations and institutions including the state-owned enterprises and group-owned enterprises. In late 90s, the private schools only include the schools funded by the non-government organizations. According to the Regulation on Education Run by Social Forces, instituted since 1997, the private schools are regarded as schools run by “business and governmental organizations, social groups and other social organizations and individuals, using nongovernmental educational financial resources, to provide schooling and other forms of education to the society”. Terms like “nongovernment schools”, “schools run by social force”, “people-run schools” are all used to refer to private schools. Some Chinese scholars like Qiu Chen (1996), and Rongri Li (1996) argued that it was necessary to use the term “private schools” to demonstrate its largest difference to the public school: autonomy. Ideally, private schools should have its power and right to decide its “educational goals, curricula, teaching approaches, program development, internal management and administrative structure”. (Lin, 1999)

1.1. Statistics

Tracking the number of private schools at national, provincial and city level can provide a macro view on the status of private education in China. The China’s Ministry of Education publishes the national data from 1997 to 2015, but the data at provincial and city level only starts from 2007. The Chart 1.1. below has shown the number of private middle schools at the national level. It indicates a dramatically increase from 1065 schools in 1997 to 4608 schools in 2005.

After 2005 the private education market has gone through a relatively stable period of development with a slightly increase to reach its historical peak of 4903 schools in 2015.

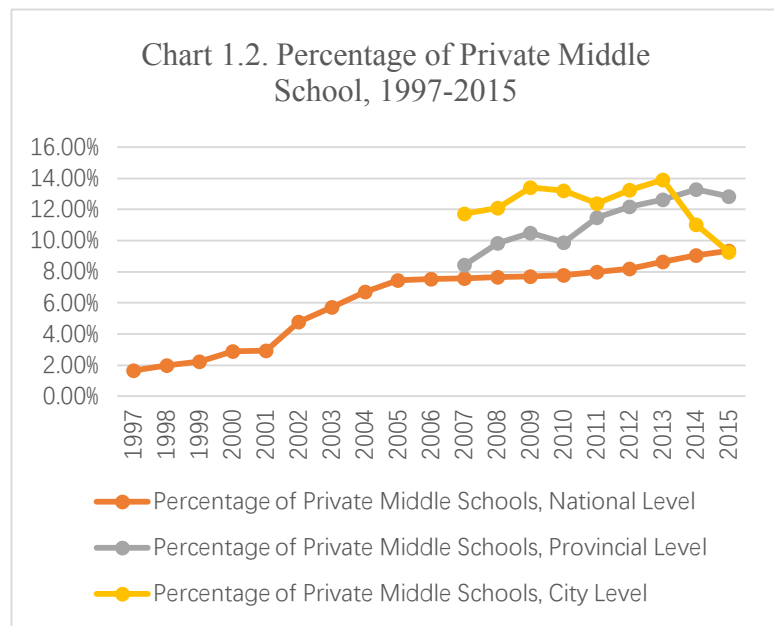
The booming development of private education is closely related to the implementation of 1997's Regulation on Schools Run by Social Force, which encourages more investment in private education.



Source of data: China's Ministry of Education

Chart 1.2. has shown the percent of private middle schools. The percent of Ningbo city is about two percent higher than the provincial average, and the percentage at the provincial level is also about two percent higher than the national average. The difference in the private education market is mainly due to the status of

development: Ningbo has the second largest GDP and disposable income per capita in Zhejiang Province and Zhejiang is one of the most developed provinces in China. Seven unqualified private middle schools were forced to shut down in 2013 by the city council of Ningbo.



Source of data: China's Ministry of Education

Since there were only 30 private middle schools in 2012, the decrease of seven schools caused a dramatic drop on the chart.

In general, we can see that the development of private education (on the basis of the number of students enrolled and the number of private middle schools.) in Ningbo is above the average.

2. Literature Review

2.1. Policy Changes: Government Documents and Statements

It is always necessary to look at the policies as an essential part of the social context, especially when people are doing the research about China where the government have strong and direct influence. The following sections chronicle the major policies and regulations on the fields of curriculum reform, private education, and public schools operating as private schools.

2.1.1. Timeline: major education policies. Since mid-1980's, more than eighty educational laws and major regulations have been developed and under implementation (Zhou and Zhu, 2007). The development of education law guarantees the development of education market in the past decades. The major regulations include:

- 1986, Compulsory Education Law: The law stipulated that 9-year compulsory education should be basically universalized in all urban and rural areas of all provinces for all ethnic minorities, and illiteracy among young and middle-aged (15-45) should “basically eradicated” (Zhou and Zhu, 2007).
- 1986, Education Law. The Law constitutionalized the right of education.
- In 1993 the Chinese government issued Chinese Educational Reform and Development Program, which placed highest priority on 9-year compulsory education in the national strategic goal of educational development.

- In 2001, in view of new developments since 1986, the central authority issued the State Council and Development further defined objectives and fundamental tasks of universalizing 9-year compulsory education.
- In 2003, Regulations on China-Foreign Joint Educational Institutions and Programs was implemented by the State Council to standardized the rules on developing China-Foreign Joint institutions.

2.1.2. Timeline: major policies on curriculum reform. The curriculum reform in China started in 1980s. In general, the reformers try to implement a more liberal and comprehensive education method. They encourage the educators to move away from pure knowledge transmission, from discipline-based knowledge, and from repetitive rote learning. In addition, the reform also emphasis on diversifying the textbook and coursework design. The major policies are listed below:

- In 1985, Decentralization of finance and administration from the central government to the regions.
- In 1988, The Pilot Experiment of Teaching Plan of Compulsory Education firstly encouraged local production of textbooks.
- In 2001, Education Ministry published Notification on School Evaluation and Examination System Reform. Generally, it required each province to redesign the curriculum to respect for diversity and personal needs.
- In 2003, Senior High School Curriculum Reform Program as an extension to 2001's Reform. It also highlighted the development of school textbooks.

- In 2005, the 2001's reform has been expanded to a nation-wide reform. The reform comprises of not only the adjustment on the textbooks, coursework and curriculum, but also on the teaching method.
- 2014, Ministry of Education, Implementation Opinions on Examination Deprivation in Junior School Enrollment, this document focuses its work focused on 19 major cities. This is a further attempt to alleviate the pressure from test preparation.

2.1.3. Timeline: major policies on private education. Private education in China was boosted with the introduction of the Regulations on Schools Run by Social Force in 1997. A series of regulations on the privatized public schools and public schools operated as private schools have been published since 2011. It expressed the determination of government to enhance their supervision on the private education market.

- 1982, Chairman Peng Zhen's report of the draft amendment to the Constitution of the People's Republic of China. In the conference, he said: "We need two legs to do the policy of education and we need to promote the private sector approved by the state". The report indicates the raised awareness of the private education among the highest leaders in China.
- February 1993, The China Education Reform and Development Program. It pointed out the goal to establish a system with the core of government run schools, complemented and cooperated by the social forces. It also declares that the government should actively encourage, support, correctly guide and strengthen the management policy. Private schools were then institutionally included in the school system in China.
- 1997, Regulations on Schools Run by Social Force. The main purpose of the regulation was to encourage the social force (such enterprises, individual investors, non-

governmental organizations and etc.) to establish schools, and to protect the benefits of the investors.

- December 2002, the National People's Congress passed the Law of the People's Republic of China on Promotion of Non-Government Private Schools (hereinafter referred to as the Promotion Law). Based on the former regulations, the law clarifies the standard of running private schools, rights and obligations of private schools, and financial management (Xie, 2003).
- April 2004, Regulations on Implementing the Promotion Law (Hereinafter referred to as the Implementation Regulations). The regulation enriched the details and the specific standards of implementing the Promotion Law. The 6th clause of the regulation clearly indicates that the private schools should have independent corporate capacity, separated campus and facilities, if they are co-established by the public schools. In addition, they also need to have independent fiscal system, admission administration and credentials.
- In 2011, The Ministry of Education, National Price Bureau, National Development and Reform Committee and other related Ministries have jointly published the Suggestions on the Implementation of Regulating the Improperly Charges on Tuition Fees. The Regulation conveys a signal of strictly regulating the privatized public schools and public schools operating as private schools.
- In 2012, The Ministry of Education, National Development and Reform Committee and National Audit Committee published Eight Measures of Arbitrary Charges on School Selection. It explicitly prohibited any public school from charging higher tuition fees in the name of “public school operating as private school”.

- In 2014, the City Council of Ningbo introduced the Suggestions on Encouragement of Private Investment in Education Industry. Sheng, the director of Ningbo Educational Committee, explained it as an echo to the trend of further development of private education lead by the central and provincial government.

2.2. The Development of Private Education and Extant Problems.

The priorities of private education and public education has always been open to debate. In China, Private schools have been instituted and regarded as a complement to the public schools after 1978 when Deng launched the reforming and opening. Some scholars worry that high tuition fees make private schools inaccessible to low-income families, while the quality public schools have limited space with the incredibly competitive admission. The potential policy problem is intensified disparity and inequality of education (Xiong, 2014)

The inequalities in China's education have their own features to differ from the inequalities in the democratic countries and other socialism countries. The first feature is the strong influence of the long history of feudalism, and the second one is that educational policies often change when the political policies of the Communist parties change (Niu, 1992). With the developing of private schools, there are also some voices saying that it will increase the inequalities of education in China. Krebs (1997), based on his own experience in China, also pointed out that the private schools would exacerbate the economic and social disparities emerging in China. His research shows that the tuition for an international private school could be several times higher than the average annual salaries at that time.

Wu (2007) concludes three disadvantages of the private education in China. Firstly, the method of running private schools is immature. There are two major ways of establishing a private school. The first way is running schools by donation. The second way is running schools

by investment which is the most common method in China but uncommon in most other countries. Investors expect to make profit through investing on running schools. Currently, the major source of schools' profit is the tuition fee. Lacking of other sources of gaining profits, private schools in China are easily stuck with financial risks since it is hard to operate a school by only relying on collecting tuition fee. Secondly, the purposes of investors and governors are contradictory. The government expects the private schools to play a role as complement to the public education to increase the literacy rate, rich the education resources, improve the education equity and fairness, and reduce the pressure of providing education. However, investors are seeking profit. The government is willing to see the stable development of private schools with excellent education quality, while schools want to expand the school size in order to gain more profit through collecting tuition fees. Thirdly, running schools by investment was originally expected to be a temporarily practice to face the trend of marketization of education industry. However, people did not foresee that running schools by investment became the only method of implementing the private education in China. Therefore, since the government has no experience and preparation for regulating such method of running school, private education lacks support in policies and finance.

Wu also pointed out that with a more comprehensive and stable regulation, running schools by investment could be a stable and sustainable way of developing the private education in China (2006). Nowadays, private schools can only rely on expanding the school size to ensure enough capital for operating schools. There exist many examples of private schools did not expand quickly enough and than went into bankruptcy. It is necessary for the government to redefine the private education. By either having a clear direction of developing the private schools by contribution and donation which is mainstream in the world, or explicitly defining the

method of developing private education into profitable and non-profitable, private schools can develop in a more sustainable way.

Besides of the foregoing problems, private education in China is also in the risk of a “systematically decline” (Wu and Gao, 2006). The golden period of developing the private education seems to end in 2006 (See National Data in Appendix). The increased salary of public school teachers, and the trend of “key public schools run or involve in running the private schools (Wu and Gao)” have intensified the pressure of private schools. Meanwhile, the decreased school age population and lacking of stable financial resources also challenged the private education in China (Wang, 2008).

The private education market was expected to develop with public education in a dual track. However, there exists a phenomenon that private education moves forward at the cost of public education especially since the legislation to encourage the private education enacted in 2002 (Zhong, 2006). Without proper regulation, the blindly development of private education purely for making profits will disturb the current education system. The conflictions mainly focus on the limited resources of teachers and students. Zhong found that in Hunan Province, Haopiqiao public middle school and Shanmuqiao public middle school, were shut down because almost all of its teachers were poached by neighbored private schools. In addition, the improper competitions among private schools and public schools such as exaggerated and even deceptive advertisement, bribing the government officers for privileges, also lead to the waste of education resources and damage the parents’ right to choose school reasonably.

Legislation of the private education base on the regional demand has also attracted people’s attention (Wu and Gao). In the early period of time, the teachers hired by the private schools were mainly retired or part-time teachers from the public schools. As the salary of public

school teachers has increased in the past decade, the positions in private schools gradually became not attractive as it was. It then broke the equilibrium of the demand and supply. Therefore, teachers from private schools are willing to go back to the public schools. Private schools' teachers are also not guaranteed for the insurance of staffing of government affiliated institutions. It is necessary to notice that in some cities in Zhejiang Province like Hangzhou, has legislated the relevant policy to provide the social security insurance for the teachers in private schools since 2005. The right of private schools' students is also not guaranteed, especially in applying for student loans, scholarships, and student discount. Last but not the least, the 2002's legislation confirmed the legalization that public schools have the right to establish new private schools or involve with running private schools. It quickly became a prevalence that public schools started to run private schools. This type of mixed school has not only the existed advantages in education resources, reputation, government relationship, but also has the chance to act like private schools to gain more profits and become more competitive in the educational market. It directly led to the close of many regular private schools.

2.3. Curriculum Reform

In China, examination preparation is still the most significant effect to the curriculum (Kennedy, 2008). Even if the curriculum reform since 2008 has resulted in a relatively more liberalized curriculum, the pressure of examinations has never been eliminated. Schools and parents still expect their students/kids to work harder and get a good score in the examinations. As the actual executors of curriculums, teachers always find it difficult to meet the expectations from both parents and government.

Li and Ma have generalized three major characteristics of the core values of curriculum design in China (2012). Over-emphasis on "two basics" is a remarkable feature to the curriculum

design in China. Two basics here refer to the training on basic knowledge and basic skills. The concentration on two basics can be traced back to the 1960s when China suffered from a rudimentary economy. The government tried to focus on basic trainings to maximize the efficiency and effectiveness of elementary education. Over-emphasis on the two basics led to the problem of ignoring the personalities and individuality of students. The curriculum designers have also traditionally focused more on the logical training rather than perceptual ability. Accordingly, Chinese students are usually successful on standardized tests but lacking in skills such as creativity, communication and cooperation. Also, the curriculum in China emphasizes traditional education rather than secular education. The neglect on cultivating viabilities leads to the fact that Chinese students lacks relevant skills for social intercourse and job preparation.

Curriculum change and curriculum policy are mutually affected in China (Zhong and Tu, 2013). China has experienced a process of decentralizing the policy power from the Central Government to the local government. The original polarized structure now has moved toward to a more closely cooperated system among the central, provincial and local level governments. The general critiques on the prior curriculum reforms implemented in 1992 and the social transformation toward a more liberalized environment have set up the context for the further curriculum changes. Zhong and Tu has published a detailed research about the curriculum policy change in Mainland China. They divided the process of curriculum change into four key stages:

1. Initiation and Conceptualization (1997-1999)
2. Policy development and deliberation (1999-2001)
3. Pilot experiment and promotion of new curriculum policy nationwide (2001-2005)
4. Continuation of new curriculum policy (2005-present)

The Basic Education Curriculum Reform Outline (trial) promulgated in 2001 specified six

objectives as follows (Guo, 2012):

1. Change from a narrow perspective of knowledge transmission in classroom instruction to a perspective concerned with learning how to learn and developing positive attitudes;
2. Change from the subject-centered curriculum structure to a balanced, integrated, and selective curriculum structure to meet the diverse needs of schools and students;
3. Change from out-of-date and extremely abstruse curriculum content to essential knowledge and skills in relation to students' lifelong learning;
4. Change from a passive-learning and rote-learning style to active and problem-solving learning styles to improve students' overall abilities of information processing, knowledge acquisition, problem-solving, and cooperative learning;
5. Change the function of curriculum evaluation from exclusive identification and selection to the promotion of student growth, teacher development, and instructional improvement as additional functions;
6. Change from centralization in curriculum control to a joint effort between central government, local authorities, and schools to strengthen the relevance of the curriculum to local situations.

To summarize, recent curriculum reform tries to move away from a Rote memorization with the focus on past and future examination questions (Pepper, 1996) to a quality liberal education which respect to the interests and needs of individuals. Education reformers also have attempted to learn from and borrow from Western educational methodologies such as self-expression and confidence (Belinda, 2008).

2.4. The Development of Foreign Language School and Critiques.

Foreign language schools are a new type of school that has specialty on the education of foreign languages (mostly English). Their history can be traced back to the 1960s when the government leadership realized the important of foreign languages to meet the demand of international communication and cooperation. Foreign language schools had turned into an essential part of the basic education in China especially after the implementation of Deng's Opening and Reform policy in 1980s when the global communication became more and more frequent.

Some critics have questioned the waste of government recourses, high tuition, and quality of foreign language schools. Problems such as lack of qualified teachers especially for foreign language teachers and incomplete curriculum remain in private foreign languages schools (Long, 2013). Foreign teachers are regarded as an essential feature in the model of foreign language schools. Currently, no standardized rules of hiring and managing the foreign teachers have been set. In some cases, foreign teachers are hired simply because they are foreigners. They can be hired without teacher permission and prior working experience. In addition, some qualified foreign teachers are not familiar with Chinese, which leads to the misunderstanding and inefficient work in the process of teaching (Wang, 2016). A report from Guangming Daily argues that the foreign language schools are severely challenged by the prevalence of English education and the development of international schools. The report urges foreign language schools to transform from language education to liberal education.

Nevertheless, foreign language schools have been a sought-after option by the parents. Foreign language schools usually have strong government sources and experienced faculties.

Their popularity was also boosted by the implementation of the policy that students who have specialty in foreign language can get extra scores in the university admission test.

2.5. Public School Operating as Private Schools

Public schools operating as private school is originated from the pilot reform of autonomously operating public schools in Beijing (Zhang 2007). This new method allows the new privatized public school to take the advantages of the reputation and education resources owned by the key public schools. Private schools quickly spread throughout China.

Luo, China and Song (2015) argue that privatization increases inequality in education since the process of privatization diminishes the access to the quality education with higher tuition fees. In addition, the mixed system of public and private education is detrimental to the development of private education. Since these new type of public schools usually hire the managers and faculties from its origin key public school, the experienced teachers make them extremely competitive to the regular private schools. According to Luo et al, the reasons behind the chaos on the education market are Lacking of clarification on the boundary between private schools and public schools operating as private schools, and inefficient supervision and regulation.

Profit is the connection among the stakeholders behind the public school operating as private schools (Zheng, Zhang, Chu, 2013). Public schools run as private schools provide enable themselves to collect higher tuition fees at private school standard. At the same time the profits will be redistributed in proportion to private enterprises, other non-government investors, education departments, and schools which united closely as interest groups. The fact that government also gain profit via this method obviously increases the difficulty of regulating the market.

The central government has realized the existed problem since 2004 and a series of regulations have been implemented (See major policies on private education in section 2.1.2). There is no report or research to track how efficient are those regulations. At least, the changed policy background is one of the essential causes to the separation of Ningbo Foreign Language which will be discussed later.

3. Methodology

To obtain as comprehensive of information as possible, I did the research through mainly three approaches: statistical analysis, documentary analysis, and interview. The project starts with the analysis of broad and national statistics and policies, then narrows down to the data and policies at provincial and municipal level, and finally aim at the case study of the Ningbo Foreign Language School. In the end, all the findings are used for the later analysis. I constructed three questions below as a guide for the research:

1. What is the trend of national/provincial/municipal education policies and regulations on private education and curriculum? (Specifically focus on the policies on privatized public school, and public school operating as private schools)
2. How does the school respond to the change of policies and regulations? (The changes here can be referred to the changes on teachers, students, curriculum, school system, and management.)

3.1. Statistical Analysis

To explore how the national educational policies have affected the development of private schools, it is necessary to start the research with the statistical background of the public and private education in China. The purpose of the statistical analysis is to paint a broad picture

of the private education, visualizing the trend of how private education has developed in the past decades. The research collects the data at three levels: national statistics from the Ministry of Education, provincial statistics from Zhejiang Provincial Department of Education, and municipal statistics from Ningbo Education Bureau. The major categories of the data include the number of public high/middle schools, the number of private high/middle schools, and the number of students registered in the private/public schools. The national data is from 1997 to 2015. The provincial and city level data are from 2007 to 2015. Since the Ministry of Education has changed its standard of counting the number of schools due to the adjusted definition and title of secondary schools, it is necessary to standardize the measurement and re-organize the old-type data to fit into the current standard.

3.2. Documentary Analysis

To understand the opportunities and constraints that China has faced in regulating developing private education market in the past decades, it is essential to look at the government papers. The research mainly focuses on the public policy on private middle school education, with an emphasis on the regulation of privatized public school and public schools managed by private method, as it is a relatively new trend and closely related to the case study of Ningbo Foreign Language School latter. Besides of the government papers, publications, academic papers, dissertations, reports, and newspaper articles are also accessed to gain a comprehensive understanding.

The database is made up of three parts. The websites of responsible departments in China including the Ministries of Education, the National Development and Reform Committee, and the China's State Council provided the government notifications and policies from the past to current. The library of the University of Washington offers an abundant collection of

publications, report, dissertations and newspaper articles in English including researches done by both Non-Chinese scholars and Chinese scholars. The National Knowledge Infrastructure (NKI) is the National online database in China, which has covered the published academic periodicals, dissertations of master and PhD. graduates, and also the newspaper articles. It is also the primary source to look at the indigenous research on the private education. The additional sources include the Ningbo Documentary Bureau, the website of Xiaoshi Middle School, Ningbo Foreign Language schools, and Ningbo Education Committee. In general, the source of documentary analysis is comprised of both international and Chinese databases to avoid any bias.

3.3. Interview

Interviewing a current teacher at Ningbo Foreign Language School (Ningwai) is the most efficient way to collect the first-hand information. Depending on the sensitivity of questions, Z is used as pseudonym instead of the real name.

Choose the Interviewee: Z, a current English teacher, started her career at Ningwai in 1994. She is the witness to the independence, reform, and re-developing of the new school. One of the reasons to interview Z is that she is an English teacher. Since the study on foreign language schools is one of the concerns of this project, interviewing an English teacher might be helpful than interviewing the teachers of other subjects. In addition, Z has been working as a class advisor for over ten years that she is able to notice the change on the quality of students by each year.

Question Design: The interview consists of nine questions (See Interview Questions below). In the interview, all the questions mainly emphasis on the changing period which is before and after 2005 and 2011. The interview was in Chinese, and all the questions have been translated to Chinese (See Interview Questions in Chinese in Appendix). Questions 1-4 focus on the general

changes take place on students, teachers, and the campus before and after the separation. The purpose of asking those is to better understand the influence of the separation which is caused by the changed policies and regulations. Questions 5-6 relate to the research question of how does the curriculum reform affect the school. Question 7 was designed to find the transformation of the education market that Ningbo city underwent. Question 8 is to see how Ningwai has been involved in the national trend of more frequent cooperation among foreign language schools. The last question is trying to get access to other potential interviewees. By collecting valuable feedbacks from Z, I can therefore compare the status of Ningwai before and after the separation to see how does the changed regulation influence on the school.

Interview Questions in English:

1. What changes have you noticed after Ningbo Foreign Language School separated from Xiaoshi High school? Do you think other teachers also notice these changes? (Such as how teachers thought about the separation.)
2. What changes have you noticed to the students? (Ex. Quality of students when admitted, the performance of the students)
3. How many teachers left schools and since when? Do you know why?
4. Why you choose to stay since changes.
5. Xiaoshi High school has a green-card policy. Does foreign language school or other schools have any similar policy and what do you think about it.
6. Many other schools use the last year for exam preparation, how do you think about it?
7. The number of private schools has increased; what effects has it on our school? (Ex, quality of students, admission, curriculum)
8. How do foreign language school cooperate to each other?
9. Last question: Who do you recommend me to talk to?

4. Findings: Case Study of Ningbo Foreign Language School

Xiaoshi High School was established as a private school in 1912. Due to the state-wide education reform, it became a public school and changed its name to the Ningbo's Fifth High School. In 1980, it changed its name back to the Xiaoshi High School and remained as a public School. The prevalence of foreign language school in the 1980s pushed the musicality of Ningbo City to established its own foreign language to meet the demand of foreign language education in the secondary education. In 1991, the Ningbo's Education Bureau (Now is called the Ningbo's Committee of Education) established the Ningbo Foreign Language School. Ningbo Foreign Language (Hereinafter referred to as "Ningwai" as its abbreviation in Chinese) was supposed to be a complete public school, which means it was certified to have its own middle school and high school. However, it became an affiliated middle school to Xiaoshi. On the one hand, the Educational Bureau wanted to take the advantages of the reputation, facilities, experienced staff, and stable source of students that Xiaoshi High school has. On the other hand, decision makers found it too risky and impetuous to establish a new-type school without any former experience. Using the mature system of Xiaoshi School then became a feasible approach.

After developing over 10 years, the school had gradually gained the reputation on its own brand, and some newly hired teachers began to identify with Ningwai rather than Xiaoshi. The 2003's Promotion Law and associated regulations have clarified the standard of public's involvement in running private schools and how a public school can be running in a private method. The changed policy background stimulated the ambition of Educational Committee and the school board of Ningwai. In 2004, the rumor about the separation pervaded among the teachers and students, and it became the truth in 2005. In China, the reform or regulations on

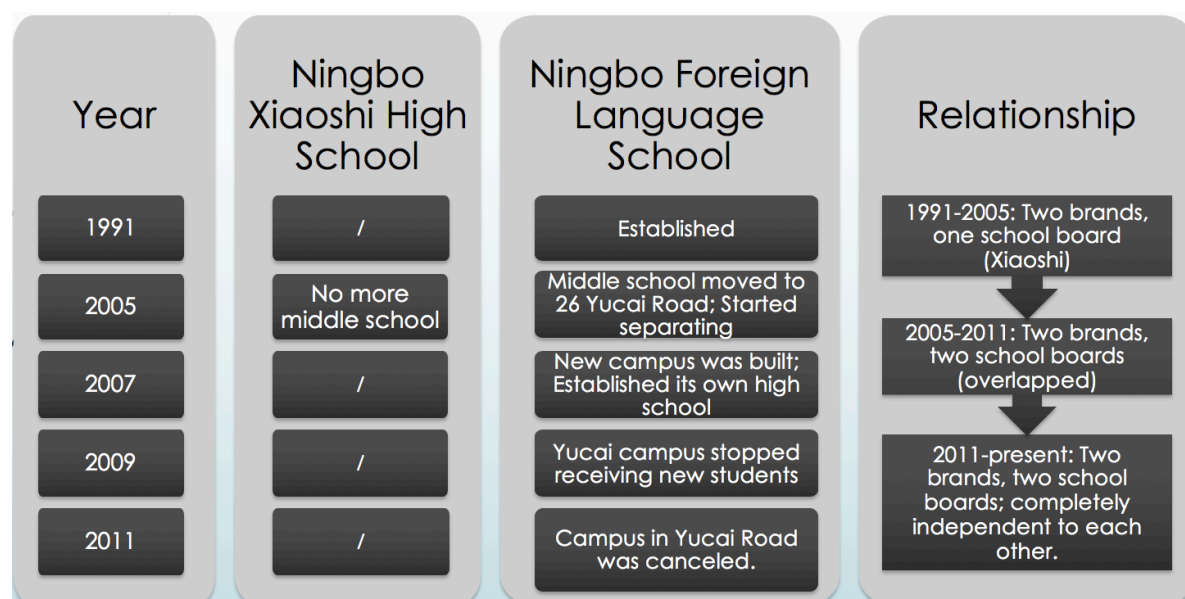
organizations usually start with the adjustment on personnel, so does the school. Before the physical separation, the new school board members were assigned to the “new school”. In addition, the affiliation of middle school teachers to Xiao has now been transferred to Ningwai. June to September is the summer vacation period in China, and Ningwai used the break to move to its temporary campus in 26th Yucai Road.

Ningwai has a lofty aspiration to increasing its influence. It established its own High School with only two classes after it moved to the temporary campus, recruiting all its high school teachers from the Xiaoshi. In 2007, the new campus was built. Since then, students admitted by Ningwai started to learn in the new campus. In 2011, the temporary campus was abandoned. Figure 4.1. below chronicles major changes to the affiliation between Ningwai and Xiaoshi. The most representative part of the changes that present the changed relationship is the personnel of the school members. In the period 1991 to 2005, there were two brands, Ningwai and Xiaoshi. The two schools almost shared everything except for the name, even though the public may refer to Ningwai when they were using the name of Xiaoshi. There was only one school board for two schools, which means that the principal of Xiaoshi was also the principal of Ningwai. In the period 2005 to 2011, even if Ningwai launched its separation, the school members for two schools were overlapping. For example, the principal of Ningwai was also the vice principal to Xiaoshi at that period. After 2011, regardless of the fact that the public always recognized Ningwai as an inheritance to Xiaoshi, Ningwai was completely separated from Xiaoshi. Since then, Ningwai has its own school members.

Based on the interview, there are essentially four trends that took place in Ningwai. Two are internal changes: Ningwai moved its location of campus and got more autonomy after the separation. Two are external changes: challenges from increased competitive education market

and cooperation with other foreign language schools across the country to face the challenges through enhanced cooperation and communication. Unless otherwise noted, the teacher interview is the source of information for the remainder of this chapter.

Figure 4.1. The Changed Affiliation Between Two Schools



4.1. New School, New Campus, and New Goals

Changed affiliation: After Ningwai became completely independent in 2011, it was directly under the management and supervision of the Ningbo Educational Committee. It means that Ningwai no longer shared the facilities, reputation, and governmental resources with Xiaoshi anymore. The relationship between two schools began to turning tense especially after Ningwai established its own high school in 2007, simply because two schools became rivals in the education market. But the collaboration remained among teachers in discussing teaching methods and sharing the teaching experiences.

New campus: Ningwai has moved its campus twice since 2005. Essentially, it moved from the downtown area to the rural area, and transferred from a day school to a boarding school.

Figure 4.2. has shown the changes in location. Ningwai moved from the Haishu district to the Jiangbei district and then to the Yinzhou District. Even if Ningwai moved to a brand new, bigger, more advanced campus with better facilities and environment, the attractiveness to parents and students actually decreased. Firstly, the changed location of campus led to the change on the school district, and the changed school district led to the reduction in quality of admitted students. Additionally, the current campus in the Yinzhou District is about 25 miles away from the central city. Some parents are reluctant to send their kids to a boarding school located in such a rural place. Even three teachers resigned in 2011 because the working place is too away from their home.

Figure 4.2. The Changes in Campus Location



Chemistry among teachers: When Z tried to remember the how teachers and other staff felt at the point when the school was separated from the Xiaoshi and moved to the new address in 2005, her response was surprising. In terms of the chemistry of teachers, it was better in the temporary campus (2005-2009) than it in the new campus (2009- present). Teachers encouraged to each other and cheered up quickly. Z believed that the six years they spent in the temporary campus, which they did not even know it would only be a temporary campus, was the most memorable and cherished time they had. Z believes much of this was due to the principal of the new school at that time. The former vice principal of the Foreign Language School was appointed as the new principal of the new Ningwai. He was recognized as a young and smart leader with a good personality. Z remembered the atmosphere as close, equal, and friendly among the colleagues and superior and subordinates. “We were just united as a family to strive for our shared goal of developing our new school. And we all had a dream of having our own high school”, she said.

4.2. Increased Autonomy on Curriculum

As an English teacher, Z might be one of those who are most sensitive to the curriculum reform. The curriculum and textbooks used to be designed by the central government. The curriculum reform after 2000 allowed each province to design their own textbooks and curriculum. According to Z, Ningwai has had a greater autonomy on designing curriculum and choosing textbooks for three reasons. The general trend of decentralization on curriculum design surely provided a free policy background. However, having its own high school is a more considerable factor for Ningwai to quickly and efficiently follow the shift from a test preparation based education method to a freer and practice based way. Based on the school policy, the students graduated from Ningwai’s middle school who have achieved certain qualification (such

as grade and reference from teachers) can be admitted by its own high school without taking the admission test. Even though some of the best students would still like to take the risk of taking the admission test in order to get admission to better schools, this policy dramatically released the teachers and students from the pressure of test preparation. What is more important on implementing the curriculum reform is the quality of teachers. Only the experienced teachers have the ability to find the balance in test preparation while respecting to students' habits and needs. Z is proud of herself and her colleagues that on the one hand, they can keep the students' performance on the admission test in an acceptable level; and on the other hand, they respected to the students and followed the government's guide to move away from pure knowledge transmission. She commented on the implementation of curriculum reform that in fact, only those schools with good quality of education are capable to follow the policy. The rest of the schools might still be reluctant to move away from the method of repetitive rote because they need to face the pressure of admission test.

Teaching and Research Groups: Z introduced that each subject has its own teaching and research group in Ningwai. Each group consists of the best teachers for that subject. Those groups take charge of setting the goal of teaching, adjusting the structure of curriculum, selecting the textbooks, and evaluating the academic performance of students.

English: Ningwai used to use the standardized textbook designed specially for the foreign language schools. Now they are using a textbook designed by the Provincial Educational Bureau because they find the original textbook is too discipline-based. The teaching group also decide to use a lot English novels and newspaper as the supplement to the textbook.

Chinese: Teachers of Chinese subject use Chinese literature including novels, proses, and classic pieces as the major textbook. They also have a list of books as the required reading for students

in each semester. The coursework design is pretty flexible, and the subject of Chinese looks like best follows the national reform.

Math: According to Z, Ningwai is the only school in the Ningbo area that uses its self-designed math book. All of the other schools use the practice book designed by the Educational Bureau or textbook companies. The advantage of doing this is that teachers can precisely adjust the depth of teaching and progress based on the feedback from students' performance on the homework everyday. She pointed out that only Ningwai has so many experienced and excellent math teachers to complete such a time-consuming work.

Electives. To better implement the curriculum reform, Ningwai has set up electives including photography, software programming, flower arrangement, sports, music, astronomy to enrich the student experience on the campus. The class hour for electives has been adjusted from twice a week with 45 minutes for each class to once a week with 90 minutes. Electives have played a more important role than they used to, but generally electives comprise a relatively small portion of the total class hours.

Green-Card policy: There is a school policy that permits students who qualify the certain academic requirements to self-arrange the class hours. They need to get approval from both teachers and parents, but then received a "Green Card." This sounds like a very creative policy that allows students to better allocate their time. However, at least Z has never heard of any application or approval. She indicated that there are no specific measurements on whether students have been qualified, and she also seriously doubted that if there would be students dare to apply for a "Green Card."

4.3. Increased Competition in Education Market

From the perspectives of students and parents: According to Z, the perceived quality of admitted students generally went down. “Student quality” here refers to three levels: where do students graduate from, what is their ability to recognizing and accepting new knowledge, and what is their willingness to learn. On all three levels, student quality decreased over the past decade. Z concluded two reasons behind this change. First, some good students were admitted by other schools. Second, the pool of admission changed due to the changed, more rural school district. In general, students from city areas have better learning skills than those from rural areas. Parents also became reluctant to send their kids to the new school based on two reasons. Some of them are worrying about the decreased quality of education and some of them are not willing to send their kids to a boarding school in rural area. Z frankly admitted that this is a good signal since it conveys the information that the education resources have been more fairly redistributed and students and parents have more options on school attending. However, as a Ningwai teacher, she felt that the best time of Ningwai has come and gone.

Recruitment of teachers: From Z’s perspective, the independence of Ningwai, to some extent, does not equal to the increased autonomy on school management. She used the example of teacher recruitment. Since Ningwai is now supervised by the Municipal Educational Committee, it needs to get approval from the committee to start its recruitment. It is usually inefficient and takes a long period to process. Since it has become independent, Ningwai usually starts its recruitment in July while other schools usually start in early May. The weakened attractiveness (remote location and impaired school reputation because of separation) and the late timing to the recruitment make Ningwai a less competitive employer in the job market.

Influence of the key individual: As Z has mentioned, the first principal of the new Ningwai successfully led the the school through the toughest period after its separation and independence. He was then promoted as the director of Education Bureau in Haishu District. He knows well on how to run a foreign language school and how to operate a public school in private school way. In 2012, he established a new public foreign language school operating as private school, which is called the Second Ningbo Foreign Language School. The purpose is to fill the blank of Ningwai’s moving out of the Haishu District. The new Second Foreign Language School quickly became a major rival to Ningwai in Ningbo area.

The quality of education: The number of students admitted to the top universities from Xiaoshi High school has declined since 2010. Though Ningwai is no more related to Xiaoshi theoretically, the public have already get used to recognizing the foreign language school as a part of the Xiaoshi High school. Therefore, the worse performance of Xiaoshi on the university admission test indirectly affects the reputation of Ningwai. In addition, the increased quality of education of other schools including the key public schools in the city area and private schools has intensified the competition in attracting the students. “Ningwai was definitely the first choice for all the prospective students ten years ago,” Z said, “But now, there are too many options for the parents, and Ningwai is not as competitive as it used to be anymore.”

4.4. Expanded Communication among Foreign Language Schools.

How does Ningwai respond to the continuous critiques on the foreign language Schools: As an English teacher, Z repetitively pointed out her recognition on the mode of Foreign Language. She admitted that the quality of foreign language schools is guaranteed in China, but she argued that Ningwai has done a good job on improving its foreign language subjects. According to Z, Ningwai has added German and Spanish Subjects and students are

mandated to choose one of the two as their second foreign language class, in addition to English which is a compulsory subject mandated by the central government. Ningwai also hired several native language teachers to provide their students with the best experience of learning foreign languages. In addition, both teachers and students can only speak English in the English class in order to simulate a native environment of language. In general, Z regarded Ningwai as a responsible foreign language school.

Expanded cooperation and communication: Ningwai and other foreign language schools across the country have realized the importance of cooperation and unity because of the continuous queries from the public. The Research Center of Basic Education of the Ministry of Education has convened the Annual Meeting of China's Foreign Language Schools (AMFLS) since 2005. AMFLS tries to accelerate the cooperation among the different level of education better faculty training. The conference will be held in different cities to expand its influence each year. By 2015, over 300 foreign languages schools had been qualified as members for the meeting. The purpose of this meeting is to share the experience of teaching and management, and discussing the strategies for the development of foreign language schools in the future. Ningwai is a member of the standing committee of the meetings and assisted in convening the 2016 meeting in Ningbo.

In addition, Ningwai is the member of Zhejiang Provincial Association of Foreign Language Schools (ZAFLS) which was proposed and found by the Zhejiang Foreign Language College in 2016. Unlike the AMFLS, ZAFLS currently has 67 members including not only the foreign language middle/high schools, but also the universities. Z has attended both conferences and she said the conferences do offer a stage for schools and teachers to learn from each other.

5. Conclusion

By comparing the timeline of the changed of Ningwai and national policies, we can see that the government regulation does have a strong influence on schools. Ningwai followed the path of the changed policy to take advantage of its affiliation to Xiaoshi. It was like the other thousands of the key public schools around the state that operated as private schools until the Promotion Law in 2004 clarified the standard of private schools run by public schools. When a series of stricter regulations have been published by the central government since 2011, Ningwai has completely separated from its original school to avoid any violation of the policies. As one of the top middle schools in Ningbo, Ningwai keeps the high sensitivity on the policies. On the one hand, Ningwai has its sources of information in the municipal government and even officials from the government at higher level that it can always react quickly and sometimes make the right decision in advance. On the other hand, the regulators in Ningbo cherished the established reputation of both Xiaoshi and Ningwai. They would like to use the “excellent performance” – here referred to the timely response to the national policies- on two schools to prove their ability on supervising the education market. In general, the national policy is the major cause to the separation of Ningwai, but how does the school execute is more guided by the municipal government.

It seems like the ultimate goal of curriculum reform should be reducing the stress from admission test. Having its own high school, experienced and outstanding faculties, and relatively quality students guarantee Ningwai to continue doing well in the admission test of High schools while implementing the curriculum reform. Based on the case of Ningwai, the implementation of curriculum reform performed better in middle school than in high school, simple because of the pressure of the university entry exam is much higher than the high school admission test. If a

school was not promised to have a high admission rate in exams, it would reluctantly reform its curriculum. To sum up, the performance on the admission test is the decisive factor to how the public recognize a school. In other words, the education quality of schools decides whether the curriculum reform can be well acted.

Facing the similar challenges difficulties, thousands of foreign language schools in China thus seeks to unite together the future development. Unlike the passive change caused by the regulation, this trend is more like a proactive way for the foreign language schools to save themselves. The funding of associations at different levels accelerate the communications and cooperation among the schools. However, the loose organization and the vague prospect of foreign language school leave the future of associations in question.

One of the limitations of my research is that it might be personal biased since the findings rely heavily on the feedbacks from Z who is the current English teacher at Ningwai. It would be better to interview more teachers to increase the size of samples and avoid any objective or biased feedback. Having no access to the decision makers including the members of the school board, or the officials at Ningbo Education Committee, I am not capable of knowing details about the process of decision making. In addition, neither Ningwai nor the Educational Committee does not disclose the performance of students on the general examinations operated by the Educational Committee. According to an interview to the principle of Ningwai in 2015, the data of the scores will only be used as an internal source to track and analyze the performance of students to improving their teaching method, curriculum, and coursework. Lacking transparency thus increases the difficulties for me to follow the change on the quality of students by analyzing their scores. In general, to better understanding the effectiveness of the national policies on private education, I need to have a cross-sectional comparative study on

more foreign language schools/ public schools operating as private schools to prove the representativeness of Ningwai.

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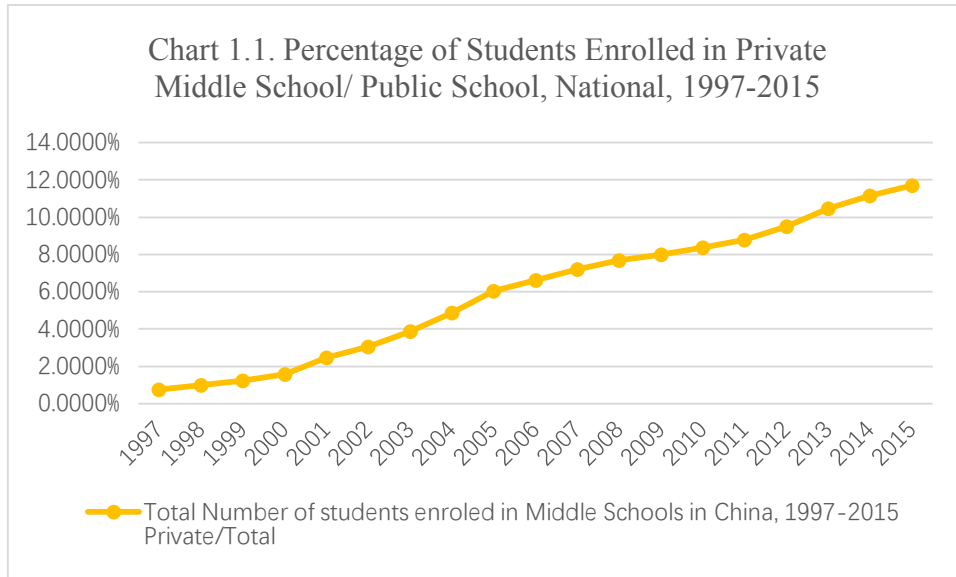
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Appendix

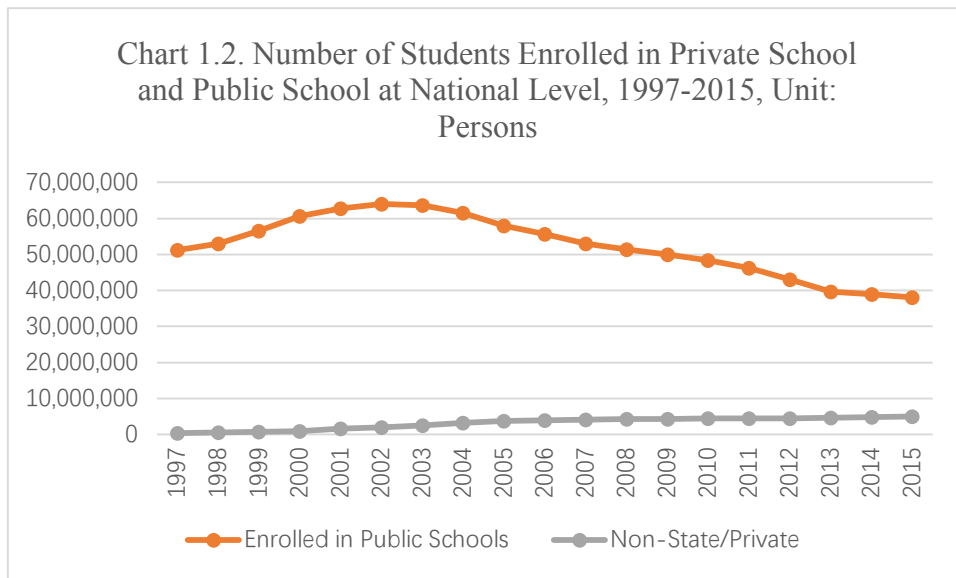
1. Interview Questions in Chinese. (采访问题)

1. 在宁外独立之后之后，整体上感受到了哪些变化？（随便哪些方面，特别是在 2005 年搬到育才，以及 09 年正式独立的时候）
2. 在独立之后，录取的学生有什么变化？（例如整体生源质量有没有变化？学生在不在意宁外和效实中学的分离？特别实在 09 年正式独立之后。）
3. 在 09 年正式独立之后，有没有老师离开宁外？有的话为什么？
4. 效实中学有一个叫绿卡政策的东西，允许成绩到达一定标准的学生自由选择选修课。宁外有类似的政策么？
5. 作为一脉相承于效实中学的宁外，在说教学理念上更偏向于综合素质发展还是说应试？教改和课改在校园内的执行力度和情况如何？（比如减负情况如何？）
6. 作为一脉相承于效实中学的宁外，虽然在机制上已经实现了完全独立，在教学和其他方面还有和效实中学的合作吗？（比如两校学生间的交流，老师在教研上的交流合作，或者老师在两校间流通之类的。）
7. 作为公办按民办机制运营的学校，有没有受到近年来其他民办学校崛起的影响？
8. 作为外国语学校的一员，全国范围内的外国语学校有哪些程度上的合作？
9. 您认为我还需要采访谁？

2. Tables and Figures



Source: Ministry of Education



Source: Ministry of Education

Year	Number of Public Middle Schools	Number of Private Middle Schools	Total Number of Middle Schools	Percentage of Private Middle Schools
2007	203	27	230	11.7391%
2008	196	27	223	12.1076%
2009	194	30	224	13.3929%
2010	191	29	220	13.1818%
2011	191	27	218	12.3853%
2012	190	29	219	13.2420%
2013	186	30	216	13.8889%
2014	186	23	209	11.0048%
2015	186	19	205	9.2683%

Source: Ningbo Educational Committee

Year	Number of Regular Middle Schools	Private Regular Middle Schools	Number of Private Regular/Middle Schools
2007	1801	152	8.4398%
2008	1783	175	9.8149%
2009	1771	186	10.5025%
2010	1745	172	9.8567%
2011	1745	200	11.4613%
2012	1735	211	12.1614%
2013	1727	218	12.6230%
2014	1719	228	13.2635%
2015	1712	220	12.8505%

Source: Zhejiang Education Committee

Table 1.3. Total Number of middle Schools in China, 1997-2015				
Year	Public	Non-State/Private	Total	Private/ Total
1997	63697	1065	64762	1.6445%
1998	62668	1272	63940	1.9894%
1999	61670	1416	63086	2.2446%
2000	60905	1799	62704	2.8690%
2001	56747	1915	65525	2.9225%
2002	61572	3089	64661	4.7772%
2003	60060	3651	63711	5.7306%
2004	58841	4219	63060	6.6905%
2005	57277	4608	61885	7.4461%
2006	56000	4550	60550	7.5145%
2007	54627	4482	59109	7.5826%
2008	53293	4408	57701	7.6394%
2009	51836	4331	56167	7.7109%
2010	50564	4259	54823	7.7686%
2011	49793	4324	54117	7.9901%
2012	48855	4361	53216	8.1949%
2013	48245	4559	52804	8.6338%
2014	47854	4769	52623	9.0626%
2015	47502	4903	52405	9.3560%
Source of Data: China's Ministry of Education				

Table 1.4. Total Number of Students Enrolled in Middle Schools in China, 1997-2015, Unit: Persons				
Year	Public	Non-State/Private	Total	Private/ Total
1997	51280606	397262	51677868	0.7687%
1998	53103251	526996	53630247	0.9826%
1999	56507139	708532	57215671	1.2384%
2000	60696537	979921	61676458	1.5888%
2001	62726987	1583552	64310539	2.4624%
2002	64015922	2024687	66040609	3.0658%
2003	63618439	2565747	66184186	3.8767%
2004	61593169	3156837	64750006	4.8754%
2005	57993921	3724158	61718079	6.0341%
2006	55635518	3943973	59579491	6.6197%
2007	53083507	4125485	57208992	7.2113%
2008	51457762	4283780	55741542	7.6851%
2009	49997568	4338852	54336420	7.9852%
2010	48337998	4421129	52759127	8.3798%
2011	46212335	4455689	50668024	8.7939%
2012	43098184	4532423	47630607	9.5158%
2013	39760697	4640551	44401248	10.4514%
2014	38963458	4882839	43846297	11.1363%
2015	38080340	5039160	43119500	11.6865%
Source: China's Ministry of Education				