A Critical Examination of Claims Made by Shadow Schools and the *Buxi Ban* in China

by

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Abstract

Shadow schools are paid, private tutoring institutions that offer training to students after regular school hours. The intended purpose of the majority of these schools is to improve student test scores while attending school and also to help students prepare for university entrance exams. In China, shadow schools are called, *Buxi Ban*, which literally means, "private tutoring, [after] class." With the development of the economy in China over the past three decades, enrolment in shadow schools has surged. Parents certainly expect positive results when investing time and finances to send their children to shadow schools. In order to attract more clients, shadow schools compete with each other and make advertising claims, such as lower tuition fees, shorter terms but intensive courses, and employment of star tutors. However, the claims they make may not be as valid as indicated. This Project examines, through the framework of persuasive communication techniques, whether the most popular and common claims made by top shadow schools in Shanghai, China and examines whether these claims are valid or not. The project will also present research-based considerations for parents when choosing a shadow school.

Keywords: shadow education, private tutoring, *Buxiban*, effectiveness, determinants, persuasive communication.

Introduction

The term "shadow education" first appeared in the 1990s in an investigation by the Singapore office of Canada's International Development Research Centre about off-campus private tutoring (Stevens on and Baker, 1992); this term also first appears in research on the education systems of Sri Lanka (de Silva et al., 1994) and Malaysia (Marimuthu et al., 1991). These researchers and others noted in these countries that private tutoring "was so prevalent that it could be considered as a 'shadow educational system'" (Bray, 1999). In 1992, Stevenson and Baker (1992) defined shadow education more broadly as, "a set of educational activities that occur outside formal schooling and are designed to enhance the student's formal school career" (p. 1639). Paid supplementary education or paid private tutoring is also called "shadow education" in a large number of research studies. "Shadow education" stands for the additional paid assistance for students after school (Stevenson & Baker, 1992; Bray, 1999; Zeng, 1999). Among all the studies of shadow education, "shadow education," "private tutoring," "supplementary education" and "cram school" are usually used interchangeably while "after-school program" generally stands for free tutoring given by public school teachers after regular school hours. In this project, the term "shadow education" refers to all of the above forms of supplementary education.

Generally, a child's shadow education is paid for by the child's parents. In China, adolescents younger than sixteen are not allowed to work either part-time or full-time, so

financing shadow schools commonly falls to a child's parents or grandparents. However, even after 16, parents usually continue to pay for the fees for children until the children graduate from post-secondary schools.

Paid private tutoring or supplementary education has long been popular in East Asian countries such as Japan, South Korea and Taiwan (Kwo & Bray, 2014; Byun, 2014; Dang & Rogers, 2008). South Korea is reported to have the largest paid private tutoring system in the world (Bray, 2009; Park et al., 2016). Although not as intense as in East Asia, there is also a rapid growth of the paid private tutoring market in other regions of the world, such as Eastern Europe, Southeast Asia and North America (Dang & Rogers, 2008; Tansel, 2013). China is thus not the only country in which shadow schools exist but the continuous and great increase of the shadow school market in China attracts the attention of researchers (Zhang, 2013; Zhang & Bray, 2016). Meanwhile, the current education system in China provides space for the growth of this shadow market and the popularization of shadow schools (Song, 2016; Wang, 2013).

The Education System in China

The basic education system in China is divided into the following levels: infant school education, primary education, secondary education and higher education (college or university) (Ministry of Education, 2016). After completing junior high school (conclusion of a 9-year "compulsory education" system), there are three streams from which students may choose: public academic high schools, secondary specialized school and vocational schools. In China, if students would like to be admitted to an academic high school, they must first write a High School Entrance Exam (HEE); students need to choose a public senior high school if they want to take the National College Entrance Exam (NCEE, also called *gaokao* in Chinese) in order to pursue higher education. Students who would like to take a job as early as possible usually go to

secondary specialized school or vocational schools (MOE, 2016). Meanwhile, if students would like to return to education after taking a job, they could also go to universities designed for adult education (MOE, 2016).

To better prepare for HEE and NCEE, many parents invest in shadow school education in the hopes of improving their child's academic performance. These private institutions offering supplementary tutoring may not only help students prepare for HEE or NCEE, but may offer other test-preparation services, such as preparing for the International English Language Testing System (IELTS) and Test of English as a Foreign Language (TOEFL). Additionally, these institutions may provide interest-oriented classes for children, such as specialty classes in music, arts and sports (China Society of Education, 2016). Although interest-oriented paid private tutoring and other test preparation tutoring are available in China, preparing for the HEE and NCEE still leads the shadow education market because gaining an academic background and degree are the top goals in the job market (China Society of Education, 2016). These test-oriented shadow schools account for 42% of the whole shadow education market, interest-oriented only shadow schools occupy 39.07% of the market and others who attend both classes occupy 18.93% (Sohu, 2015). It is also noted that the average spending on shadow schools in Shanghai is 5,500 RMB (about 1,100 CAD) every term, accounting for 10% of the total income among 61.28% families (Sohu, 2015).

For a large number of Chinese students, private tutoring can start early in their childhood. If students would like to have the access to higher education, the best choice for them is to learn in a senior high school with good reputation and high percentage of success of graduates gaining access to higher education. In China, the official ranking of high schools within provinces, municipalities and cities was available up to 1990. Schools were divided through this ranking

into different categories from the highest level to the lowest level: provincial/municipal key schools, city key schools, district key schools and general schools. However, now within each category, an official ranking no longer exists. The official ranking ceased in the late 1990 because the government intended to reduce the competition for key high schools (Song, 2013). Even though such official rankings are no longer used, there is still a bias towards previously higher-ranked schools in some regions. Previously higher-ranked schools are also still dominant in terms of education resource distribution and have higher enrolment compared to lower ranked schools (Yang et al., 2014; Ye, 2015). If students previously learned in junior high schools with good teaching quality, or they paid a large amount of money for shadow schools, they are more likely to be admitted by top-ranking senior high schools (there is typically no official ranking of junior high schools compared to senior high schools). “East Asian entrance exams are seen by East Asians as measures not only of achievement and intelligence, but also of character, determination, and the drive to succeed” (Zeng, 1999; p. v). Besides, parents are busy working and may not have enough time to look over students’ learning. Parents cannot help their children with their homework or help them achieve higher test scores on the HEE and NCEE (Bray, 2012; Xue & Ding, 2009). Thus, shadow schools appeal to parents and students by advertising their efficiency and quality of tutoring.

Obtaining a degree from top-ranking universities in China is viewed as ensuring career success in the future (Song, 2016). Some leading companies only hire students graduating from top-ranking universities (China Society of Education, 2016). Despite the large population in China, the number of spaces in excellent universities is limited. Parents believe that investing in shadow schools can improve the likelihood of admission by top universities and thus parents spend a lot on the tuition fee of shadow schools to help their children get ahead of their peers

(Qian, 2008). If there is a shadow school claiming the highest efficiency and best tutoring, parents with a sufficient budget will definitely look for it. As a result, shadow schools spare no effort to advertise themselves to attract such investment.

***Buxiban*: Shadow Education in China**

Shadow schools in China provide various forms of training and tailor the curriculum to meet what students need (Bray & Lykins, 2012; Zhao, 2015). Generally, shadow schools encompass the following forms: one-on-one private tutors; group lessons (one tutor with 2-4 students); small class size (ranging from 10-20) and regular school class size (about 40) (China Society of Education, 2016). With the rapid progress of high technology, more and more students choose online private tutoring to save time on transit and thus shadow schools have more access to students through online classes. The reasons for choosing between these forms are determined by personal need and sometimes budget for private tutoring: one-on-one instruction requires a high concentration of students but usually costs more; small groups bring proper interactions between group members; larger class sizes are more economical and students may have better adaptation for tutoring because classes in public school are usually large; online tutoring offers convenience for students living in remote areas or for students who are not able to attend classes given by "star tutors" (Xue & Ding, 2009; China Society of Education, 2016).

Shadow school tutors in China are mainly retired and experienced public school teachers (also called "star tutors" to attract attendance), full-time general tutors (scarce working experience in public schools) and part-time postsecondary school students (China Society of Education, 2016). However, in 2015 the Ministry of Education in China made six prohibitions to ban regular school teachers from providing paid private tutoring: "public schools are not allowed to provide venues for private tutoring enterprises or organize paid private tutoring; public

schools and teachers could not promote students to attend shadow education in public schools; public school teachers are not allowed to give paid instruction in shadow schools; public schools and teachers could not recommend shadow schools to students" (Ministry of Education, 2015, pp.1). Despite these prohibitions, experienced public school teachers are still regarded as star tutors and are still welcomed by parents and students secretly but this may not be truly reflected in research on shadow schools. Hence, shadow schools make use of various types of tutoring and different styles of tutors to cater to the needs of students.

Persuasive Communication Techniques

Making claims to advertise shadow schools is actually marketing. Schools use persuasive communication techniques to persuade customers to choose their service. Shadow education is a highly competitive market and that means that schools market aggressively in order to attract customers. In other words, the schools are trying to manipulate the thinking of potential customers so that those customers will choose that school. This project will point out and describe the most frequently used persuasive techniques in the selected claims that are utilized by shadow schools to influence parents to choose the 'right' school for their budget and for their child's success.

Miller (1980) first demonstrated how communicative activities could be potentially persuasive. Stiff and Mongeau (2016) define persuasive communication as "any message that is intended to shape, reinforce, or change the responses of another, or others" (p. 4). Persuasive communication techniques are applied with the intention to influence people's behaviours and if marketers utilize these in promotions, they try to persuade customers to accept their service or products.

Companies and marketers try to use effective tools to attract customers and increase profits and researchers also make efforts to analyze the tactics of marketing and persuasion. A major scholar who contributes to the marketing strategies was Cialdini (2007). In his seminal work *Influence: The Psychology of Persuasion* (Cialdini, 2007) Cialdini identified six widely recognized persuasive techniques (reciprocity, commitment and consistency, social proof, liking, authority and scarcity). *Yes! 50 Scientifically Proven Ways to be Persuasive* (Goldstein, Martin & Cialdini, 2008) breaks the overarching persuasive methods into sub-categories, but all fit within the major techniques of persuasion. The six identified persuasion principles led to research on consumer behaviour and marketing strategies; these principles have proved to be effective in different scenarios (Goodman-Delahunty & Howes, 2016; Rosenthal & Mckeown, 2017; Shu & Cheng, 2012; Stenstrom & Haycock, 2014). Rosenthal and Mckeown (2017) stated that the six principles proposed by Cialdini explain the influence of social media/online marketing on customer behaviour, and they also indicated that all of the six principles are "most indicative of influencers in each online genre" (p.12). Shu and Cheng (2012) used the six principles to analyze consumers' attitudes toward online credit card use and concluded that a combination of two of the principles (authority and scarcity) was the most persuasive strategy to affect consumer's decision making.

In the context of this Project, I examined how persuasive communication methods persuade parents to purchase paid private tutoring in the hope of increasing their children's test scores. These schools build up the claims on their websites to persuade potential customers to pay for the service provided. However, persuasive communication is based on a set of techniques, so customers may be persuaded but the content of the persuasive communication may not be valid (Cialdini, 2007; Stiff & Mongeau 2016).

When I studied the claims made by shadow schools, I quickly realized that the claims fell within four of these persuasive categories from Cialdini's work but I also added two more common approaches fit the sub-categories more, so the total six principles used in the project are: social proof, authority, commitment and consistency, scarcity, promising quality and fear appeal.

The reason why I chose these six principles is that among the claims I collected in this project and browsed on other shadow school websites, those were the most common approaches. It is also because of my understanding of Chinese culture (attention to top senior high school and universities, the wish of jumping over the dragon gate and tendency to trust authority) that those principles would work as persuasion. I used four principles from Cialdini and found specific claims that fell into particular categories. The technique of *social proof* means that, "one means we use to determine what is correct is to find out what other people think is correct… We view a behavior as more correct in a given situation to the degree that we see others performing it" (Cialdini, 2007, pp. 88). In the context of the shadow education market, parents may be persuaded by claims made by shadow schools if these claims demonstrate that a large number of students are attending a shadow school and that these students all improve their scores quickly after receiving tutoring. So the claims made by school A to F, school M and I fit into this category. The principle of *authority* adds extra credit to the service provided by companies (Cialdini, 2007; Nodder, 2013). Nodder (2013) provided this tip as one of the key techniques of persuasion, saying that such expert endorsement would make customers more inclined to make the decision and then defend their choices. School H, J and P describe in their claims that their schools have long earned good reputations for their effectiveness or functioning at improving test scores and sending students to top ranking universities, then these schools may receive more students. Cialdini (2007) also describes the rule *commitment and consistenc*y that humans all

have a deep desire to be consistent and thus once we have committed to certain things, then we tend to follow through with these things. Consistency fits with the star tutors described by school J in its claim because parents will believe that those star tutors will be good based on their past behavior and experience. The promise of a refund stated in claims made by school K and L helps the school guarantee commitment as well as the other reasons you've given. Finally, the *scarcity* principle is that "opportunities seem more valuable to us when their availability is limited" because "people want more of what they cannot have" (Cialdini, 2007, pp.179). For example, School P makes claims that encourage people to believe that good resources of tutors or high-quality tutoring are scare. The claim tells parents and students what they will lose if they do not access the school. Such description adds more credit because people are afraid of losing a good resource so they are attracted to attend these schools.

I also found two approaches that were used by the other shadow schools as persuasion techniques. The first one is *promising quality*. The quality of product or service mentioned in a claim is one of the important elements of persuasion communication (Dillard & Shen, 2013). Although it is not one of the principles identified by Cialdini (2007), he does mention the importance of promising quality at the beginning of the book *Influence: The Psychology of Persuasion* (2007). Cialdini pointed out that people would buy things if they thought that these things were more expensive. It is true that customers would prefer to buy products with quality or top quality. However, we can talk about products being expensive but it is harder to talk about a service being expensive and still be persuasive. School G to J and school N are trying to convince potential customers that they offer high quality and they demonstrate what high quality is within the claims they make in expressions such as 'top ranked universities' or 'best four high schools.' These claims promise high quality of their tutoring by stating good admission results

achieved by previous students who attended their schools. Another principle I used is *fear appeal*. "A fear appeal is a persuasive message that attempts to arouse fear in order to divert behaviour through the threat of impending danger or harm. It presents a risk, presents the vulnerability to the risk, and then may, or may not suggest a form of protective action" (de Hoog et al., 2005; p. 27). Fear appeals actually rely on a potential threat to the audience that drives them to take actions and avoid risks. Shadow schools sometimes use this technique to promote "reflective message processing" (de Hoog et al., 2005, p. 27). For example, in anti-smoking advertisements, we usually see expression such as 'smoking will cause serious lung diseases.' You realize the harm of smoking because of your fear of diseases. School O arouses fear from parents to promote their service, emphasizing the fear from the competition with peers.

I did not use the principle of reciprocity and liking from Cialdini because it was not in evidence in the claims collected in this project. Reciprocity means that people usually respond actively to a favour and in marketing strategy, the use of free samples is a good example of reciprocity. However, there is no claim clearly stating that schools will provide free classes to attract customers, so this principle was not used in the analysis. Liking refers to a kind of preference that "people are easily persuaded by other people that they like. We most prefer to say yes to the requests of someone we know and like" (Cialdini, 2007, pp. 126). The claims collected in this project focus on the general public so marketers are not able to know whether potential customers know students from their shadow school. As a result, the condition that people may be affected by the surrounding cannot be realized so this principle is also not applied in the project. It should also be noticed that some of the claims fall into more than one category and this will be specified in the validity review section.

Social and Personal Background

According to the 2016 Status Investigation Report of the Private Educational Industry and Teachers, over 36.7% of the total surveyed students in China were receiving off-campus supplementary lessons. The total revenue of the shadow education market in China will have been reached over 40 billion USD (about 52.85 billion CAD) by 2021 (Business Wire, 2017). Forbes also estimated data on the shadow education market, saying that by 2018 the global private supplementary tutoring market will likely exceed 102.8 billion US dollars (137.6 billion CAD) (Crotty, 2012). The report concluded that the shadow market in China would steadily increase in the future. Owing to the high demand for shadow education, shadow schools have sprung up rapidly in the past decade in China. These private for-profit schools advertise heavily and make claims about their effectiveness as a shadow school. They make claims and engage in marketing techniques in order to expand their source of students. As a result, choosing the school that claims to be the best will be one factor of choice—however, each school claims they are the best. For this reason, this project examines the claims of effectiveness made by shadow schools.

The claims examined in this project are entirely sourced from shadow schools in Shanghai, China. I come from Shanghai so I chose claims made by top shadow schools in Shanghai as my project because I am familiar with the city and I have experience with the marketing there. Shanghai is the biggest city in Mainland China in terms of economic development, so the claims of these schools cover the mainstream of the current shadow market in China; almost all the leading shadow schools in China have branches or headquarters in Shanghai (China Society of Education, 2016). My desire to research this topic started from reviewing hundreds of similar claims and marketing promotions on websites, or even earlier, when I was still a senior high school student in Shanghai. I took a job as a part time IELTS (International English Language System) tutor (also a form of private tutoring to help students

pass the exam) in Victoria so when I searched relevant materials online, the websites would make promotions based on my searching habit. Therefore, it was hard for me to ignore these claims. Reading the expressions used on sites such as, “Hurry up! Or you will miss the opportunity once in a life only!”; “XXX (name of the school)—the key to the best universities in China”; or, “Improve your test scores by 100 in 20 days! You come and we will let you know!” Even though I knew they were just promotion and marketing, I thought that if I were a parent, at least, I would click the link and see what was truly behind the claims. But how could I tell the difference between these attractive advertisements and choose the best and the most appropriate shadow school from them? I was confused about the validity of these claims and would not decide which school to attend so soon. All of the shadow schools claim to have the best tutors and outstanding test-preparation skills. I assumed that at the very least, shadow schools could help students to increase test scores, but could I know which school would be the best for me? How could I learn from the claims made by shadow schools? Is there any evidence to support the claims made by schools on their websites?

Analyzing the Claims of Shadow Schools

In this section I will state my research questions and path. Also I will explain how I collected and categorized the claims made by top *Buxiban* in Shanghai. More importantly I will specify how I determined the criteria for the analysis of the validity of these claims and its limitations.

My general research question is “Are claims made by shadow schools valid?” The project will discuss this question from the following perspectives:

1. Is there any evidence to support the claims made by schools on their websites?

2. What are the useful criteria and how should the criteria be used for examining the validity of the claims?

3. What should be considered carefully when choosing shadow schools?

Research Path

Research resources were collected through the University of Victoria library online websites and search engines, including the University of Victoria Library search engine, Web of Science and Google Scholar. In addition to the key term, "shadow education," I also tried to search using its synonyms, including "private tutoring," "supplementary tutoring" and "cram school." At first, I limited my research scope by applying the key word, "China" and then I expanded the range to worldwide situations. To find empirical studies to support my analysis, I used the word, "effectiveness."

To better explain the claims as part of the marketing by shadow schools, I also read relevant books and journals and studied the theory of persuasive communication. The claims made by shadow schools are techniques of marketing so it is also useful to apply the techniques of marketing analysis to critique these claims. One important theory that can explain the building of these claims is persuasive communication (Bettinghaus, 1968). Persuasive communication is the ability of marketers to persuade their customers to purchase their products. Marketers use visual messages, body language and written messages for persuasion (Gass & Seiter, 2015). Nonverbal messages are as important as verbal messages. Gass and Seiter (2015) emphasize that, "we can use nonverbal behaviour to create certain impressions of ourselves" and through these behaviours "people can establish intimate relationships" (pp. 168-169). In this project, the claims of shadow schools are themselves attempts to be persuasive. Persuasive communication techniques will be categorized as to how they are used in claims of various categories. If parents

and students, as customers of shadow schools could pay attention to the skills and techniques marketers use to persuade customers, they may be better able to understand the claims made and know how to choose the ideal *Buxiban*.

To collect the claims for the project, I searched Google by the key terms of top-ranking shadow schools in Chinese. There is no official ranking of shadow schools but some large online websites such as *Sina* and *Sohu* do release their survey and rankings of shadow schools with the best teaching quality and largest revenue every year. I compared various rankings and selected top shadow schools located in Shanghai. However, some of these schools focused on IELTS or TOEFL preparation or interests-orientation (sports, music etc.) so I excluded them from my rough list because my research aimed only at HEE and NCEE preparation. After reviewing the websites of these particular schools, I found that some of these schools provided various types of services such as online-learning, and primary school tutoring. Then I narrowed the scope into HEE and NCEE preparation only. Some of the shadow schools created similar claims so I just picked up one of these similar schools as a representative the same type. In this way, I collected fourteen major claims made by the top shadow schools in Shanghai.

These claims have been collected on the official online websites of these fourteen shadow schools and are directly translated from Chinese into English and therefore there may be grammar errors within each claim. Here I used letters to represent the name of each selected shadow school (school A, school B…) instead of the names of these shadow schools to maintain anonymity.

School A: “Help every student to get high test scores in college entrance exam and help students to obtain high competencies (confirmed by 90% surveyed students).”

School B: “It is impossible that you could not increase your scores in our school. If you can’t, it means that you do not know how the questions in exams are designed and we will help you.”

School C: “Small classes: 50% more efficiency than large classes”

School D: “Before entering our school: 460; after receiving our mathematics tutoring: 502”

School E: “Top English class in our school: through three-years’ learning you will be able to get full marks in the English subject of college entrance exam”

School F: “Our school has widely been recognized as “effective” by clients.”

School G: “You will definitely be admitted by top 4 ranked public high schools in Shanghai!”

School H: “the number of students from our school admitted by top senior high school ranked 1st in the consecutive 10 years”

School I: “91% students increased their test scores after learning in our school (43% students of our school were admitted by top 100 universities in China)”

School J: “Tutor A: 100% of his students have made progress; 93% have been admitted by top 100 universities; tutor B: 85% of her students have been admitted by top 100 universities”

School K: “*Baofenban* (sign contracts with us that if your child does not reach a certain score in the exam after taking our course, we will return 2/3 of the tuition fee.)”

School L: “You only need 30% of the regular tuition fee but reach 80% efficiency of regular classes; if not satisfied, you will get 50% refund of tuition fee.”

School M: “You only need a summer to get higher scores in exam.”

School N: “60 days’ speed-up classes and you will be admitted into best high schools in Shanghai”

School O: “Do you want your children fallen behind by their peers at the start line of preparing for college entrance exam?”

School P: “Do you know that best tutors/teachers have been tutors/teachers of your peers? Hurry up or you will miss the best teachers!”

I categorized these claims into five groups according to the persuasive communication techniques mentioned above and some of them fit into two categories: 1) social proof (schools A-F, school M and I); 2) promising quality (school G, H, I, J and N); 3) power of authority (schools H, J and P); 4) commitment and consistency (school J, K and L); 5) scarcity (schools G-J, school N and P); 6) fear appeal (school O).

Determining the criteria for the examination of validity

The number of studies related to shadow education has been gradually increasing with the expansion of the shadow education market in China (Liu & Bray, 2017; Zhang, 2013). Empirical studies are conducted based on various scales and levels; some focus on regional development or even only a single city or province, because there are not a larger number of national surveys specifically on shadow education or paid private tutoring (Liu & Bray, 2017; Zhang & Liu, 2016); others discuss shadow schools as an issue of NCEE so the coverage is limited to senior high school students (Chu, 2015; Zhang, 2011; Zhang, 2013). Besides, although the nine-year compulsory education has been implemented in China for a long time, the quality of the compulsory education varies between rural areas and cities/towns (MOE, 2010). As a result, a number of researchers narrowed their research scope to focus on rural areas or cities/towns only (Deng & Xue, 2014; Xue & Ding, 2009; Zhang, 2013). This project analyzes

the claims made by shadow schools in Shanghai (a big city in China) so I have only used research on shadow education in the city or studies that have clear classifications of city, town or rural areas.

There has also been a large amount of research on the effectiveness of shadow education in China and other regions of the world (Kwo & Bray, 2014; Zhang, 2013; Zhang & Liu, 2016). The studies examine shadow education from a variety of perspectives, including the differences of class size of these shadow schools, the participation rate of shadow education, the differences between subjects, and so on. Mark Bray (Bray, 2010; Kwo & Bray, 2014) undertook a careful and detailed analysis to demonstrate the challenges of attempting to conduct research on the effectiveness of shadow education. His studies state that research on shadow schools should pay attention to the clear definition of shadow education, the classification of various subjects, the length of tutoring and the proper design of surveys. As a result, even though it is difficult to conduct research on shadow schools, it is still possible to examine the effectiveness of shadow education if researchers take into account the qualities and quantities of tutoring and split the broad exploration of the effectiveness into various categories (Kwo & Bray, 2014; Myers & Grosvenor, 2011). Following this advice, in this project, I split the claims of shadow schools into various categories and used empirical studies to analyze these categories.

General Challenges of Examining the Effectiveness of Shadow Education and Solutions to These challenges

Much more research on shadow education has sprung up with the proliferation of the worldwide shadow education market although there are original problems and within some of the relevant research (Kwo & Bray, 2014; Myers & Grosvenor; Zhan et al., 2013). Regardless of this

fact, I found specific solutions to meet these challenges; the following part will list these challenges and offer solutions to these challenges.

Inconsistency of the definition of shadow schools in various studies. This issue is more frequently seen in research specializing in education expenditure with the comparison between shadow education and public schooling (such as tuition fees and expense of textbooks).

The most confusing issue is the type of private tutoring: free or paid, academic-oriented or interest-oriented. Free private tutoring usually exists on campus and is given by public school teachers. There are various types of shadow education including test-oriented and interest-oriented ones. The interest-oriented tutoring aims to increase students' skills in arts, music and sports. Thus, it is very challenging to research the effectiveness of interest-oriented private tutoring because there is no public school baseline from which to measure the increase in student understanding and thereby the effectiveness of the schooling. Deng and Xue (2014) conducted research on an estimation of household income and education investment in urban areas of China. They adopted data from the China Urban Household Surveys 2007 and 2011 conducted by the Chinese National Bureau of Statistics. The survey in 2007 included 5000 families from twenty-one cities from Eastern, Western and Central China. The aim of this study was to explore how household income might affect investments in education. Researchers also implied that education expenditure on shadow education in China was academic-oriented by stating the fierce competition for higher levels of education. However, the study did not demonstrate the separation of academic-oriented shadow education and interest-oriented shadow education, making the investment on shadow education a mixed result of these two types and private tutoring, which did not meet the researchers' hypothesis and focus on shadow education for exam preparation. Their conclusion that family income had a positive effect on the education

expenditure for shadow education might be weakened because parents' wishes for children may drive families with lower income to spend more money on shadow education to improve test scores in HEE and NCEE.

To avoid the confusion of the definition of shadow schools, I only selected empirical studies that clarify a focus on paid supplementary tutoring among all the research on the effectiveness of shadow education. Even though some of the studies intended to provide results relevant to shadow education, they failed to split free tutoring provided by public school teachers after class, and thus studies that did not make this distinction were not used in this project (Baker et al., 2001; Coniam, 2013).

Differences in the types of shadow schools. There are currently many different types of shadow schools in China, including offline ones such as one-on-one instruction, group discussion size (2-4 students with one tutor), small class size (about 10 students with one tutor) and regular class size (20-30 students with one tutor) as well as online instruction (China Society of Education, 2016). The size of shadow education classes may be an important variable in the research on effectiveness (Kwo & Bray, 2014). Zhang and Liu (2016) conducted research on shadow education with a focus on class-size; their sample was 5766 Grade 12 students in Jinan province. The questionnaire designed in this study was divided into "participate or not," "one-to-one type," "small group," "middle size" and "large size" (p. 37). The researchers found a statistically positive impact of shadow education on mathematics for students who chose large classes but no obvious evidence supported such impact on Chinese and English. Although the clear classification of shadow schools helped researchers to reach reliable findings and results, in recent years there is a rapidly developing new type of shadow school that could not be neglected: online private tutoring (China Society of Education, 2016). As reported by the Chinese Society

of Education (2016) in their survey on shadow education in 2016, offline tutoring was still dominant in China, with 96% surveyed students attending offline tutoring in 2016. However, among students who received offline tutoring, 43.8% of them said that they had received online tutoring before. Therefore, online instruction has become an unavoidable trend that should receive more attention from researchers and the public.

In most research on the effectiveness of shadow education, online-tutoring is neglected or not split by offline-tutoring (Byun, 2014; Kwo & Bray, 2014). The claims selected in this project do not include online-tutoring so this factor is not considered. Besides, some of the claims selected in this project emphasize the high efficiency of specific class sizes, so when it comes to the analysis of these claims, I have only used studies focusing on class size to analyze the validity of these claims.

Differences in sample selection. The selection of samples is very important in the research of shadow education. Researchers may still use surveys with some limitations because of the limited number of national/international surveys on private tutoring. Zhao (2015) examined the causal effect of shadow education on primary school students' Chinese and mathematics test scores. The data was sourced from the longitudinal survey of Rural-Urban Migration in China (RUMiC) Project 2008, 2009 and 2010 by the Australian National University. The researcher only utilized the urban survey. As reported in the study, samples of the data experienced changes in these three years: the survey included 5,000 households from nineteen cities in the first year but data of 285 households was lost in the second year; the third year survey met with the exit of two cities, leading to the loss of two hundred households. Meanwhile, the standard for "effectiveness" also varied: in the first year students' academic performance was self-reported by their parents while in the next few years the final exam scores of Chinese and

mathematics were also required. Besides, the original RUMiC survey did not categorize the questions of shadow education into subjects, so Zhang conducted a survey on shadow school participation and expenses on various subjects, which covered two primary schools in urban areas. The researcher had an overall consideration of many variables, such as sampled students' learning stage (primary school only), feature of data (longitudinal so the results could have been tracked through the time cycle) and assessment method (self-reported and test scores). However, the inconsistency of the survey and surveyed samples added enough ambiguity that the researcher could not make a convincing conclusion.

Some of the research on the effectiveness of shadow schools in China is conducted based on national and longitudinal surveys while other studies use datasets with smaller scales. The number of national surveys is limited so the surveys will more or less have similar inconsistent samples to Zhao's (2015) study. The regional surveys provide more detailed data but the results from the selected regions may not be the same as other regions. However, since the context of research is the same in China—students need to prepare for HEE and NCEE and this project merely includes shadow schools preparing for HEE and NCEE, studies with the regional surveys can be seen as case studies giving insights into researching shadow education in China (Zhang & Bray, 2013).

Difficulty of analyzing the quality of shadow education. Research on the effectiveness of shadow education involves various methods to analyze the efficacy of this paid private tutoring. Some researchers used academic achievement (usually self-reported by participants) (Dang, 2007; Chu, 2009) while others found measurement of cognitive tests or high-stake exam scores more persuasive, such as the national college entrance exam in China, South Korea, Japan and Russia (Byun & Park, 2012; Zhang, 2013). Self-reporting is regarded as less trustworthy

because it appears to reflect feelings more than measurable results. However, when it comes to the assessment of high-stake exam scores, some studies only focus on the scores of participants without the comparison with non-private tutoring participants.

Although self-reported results and test scores are inconsistently used as the criteria for the effectiveness of shadow education between various studies, both types of analyses will be useful for this project because some of the shadow schools use self-reported results from students to prove their efficiency. Thus, I will use results from studies specifically discussing the self-reported results to analyze the claims made by these schools.

This section introduces how the claims will be analyzed and introduces the reasons why research on the effectiveness of shadow education may meet with a couple of problems, and also suggest work that could be done in the future. However, the research findings and empirical results from these studies could still be used to analyze the validity of these claims made by shadow schools with the appropriate application of the above solutions. In the following section, I will analyze these claims by examining the effectiveness of these claims and by providing recommendations for each category.

Limitations

This project uses the research on effectiveness as evidence to analyze the validity of claims made by shadow schools. However, studies of some of the indicators of effectiveness usually have conflicting results in the research. This inconclusive characteristic of the research on effectiveness calls for more longitudinal and national surveys on shadow education in the future.

This project only discusses claims made by shadow schools oriented test preparation for HEE and NCEE because that is the main tutoring of shadow schools in China. The most

traditional tutoring form is offline instruction so the project does not include online instruction. With more research on online instruction, future research could be undertaken specifying the online service. However, it may be difficult to collect information such as how long students truly learn through online shadow schools because it may be hard to monitor students' actual online learning since they usually undertake online learning at home. Some of the students who choose online tutoring might not focus on tutoring but be distracted by other things. For example, one may be browsing game webpages when they open the website of a shadow school to receive the tutoring.

The Validity Review of Claims Made by Top *Buxiban* in Shanghai

The 14 selected claims are categorized into 5 lists and useful suggestions will also be given after the analysis of each category. Based on the fourteen collected claims, social proof is the most frequently used persuasion principle (7 out of 14, 50% rate of use), followed by promising quality (5 out of 14, 35.7%), then power of authority and commitment and consistency (both 3 out of 14, 21.4%). The least used principles are scarcity and fear appeal, both 1 out of 14, with the use rate of 7%. The categories are listed according to the frequency of use from high to low.

Category 1: Social proof

School A: "Help every student to get high test scores in college entrance exam and help students to obtain high competencies (confirmed by 90% surveyed students)."

School B: "It is impossible that you could not increase your scores in our school. If you can't, it means that you do not know how the questions in exams are designed and our school will help you."

School C: “Small classes: 50% more efficiency than large classes.”

School D: “Before entering our school: 460; after receiving our mathematics tutoring: 502.”

School E: “Top English class in our school: through three-years’ learning you will be able to get full marks in the English subject of college entrance exam.”

School F: “Our school has widely been recognized as “effective” by clients.”

School M: “You only need a summer to get higher scores in exam like most of previous students in our school.”

School I: “91% students increased their test scores after learning in our school (43% students of our school were admitted by top 100 universities in China).”

In the first category, these shadow schools try to persuade readers that many other students around them have proven increases in test scores by attending tutoring given by these schools. If the effectiveness of tutoring is “proved” by other students then the claims turn to be more convincing. For example, school A specified that their claim was confirmed by 90% surveyed students. It attracts readers because people often base their beliefs and understanding on what others around them do or what others believe.

These shadow schools also demonstrate the exact extent that they could help students to improve on the exam; the extent here tells the difference before a student receives shadow education and after receiving the instruction. The big difference in the claims such as school D will quickly catch a reader’s eyes and then readers would have interest to further know more about the shadow school. However, the improvement of test scores demonstrated in these claims may be persuasive but is not validated.

Reading through this set of claims, school D seems the most attractive because it sets an example to prove that its tutoring is effective. Here 460 and 502 are both the total score of NCEE in Shanghai (the total score of the exam in Shanghai is 630). However, the content within the brackets shows that this student only took the mathematics course at this school. If we add one more step to the analysis, we could find that the improvement of the test scores may not only be caused by the increase of mathematics scores but also the increase of scores of all subjects (the rest of the examined subjects including Chinese, English, a selective subject and a comprehensive test; the total score of Chinese, English and selective subject is 150 points respectively but the total score of the comprehensive test is only 30 points). From this point, we can see that the claim tries to promote their mathematics tutoring but the improvement could be confused with other possible improvements. Besides, another important consideration is the validity of the test score improvement. Suppose that the score difference before and after the exam was all caused by the improvement of mathematics scores, the huge difference of 42 points may not totally be the effect of this shadow school. According to Zhao (2015), the expenditure on private tutoring only had a slightly positive effect on the mathematics test, not for all the surveyed students but students with relatively lower academic performance (before taking private tutoring). Zhang and Xie's (2015) research reached a similar conclusion that although private tutoring could be predictive of academic performance in mathematics, the effect was quite insignificant statistically. Zhang's (2012) study even proved that shadow education generally had no effect on the mathematics test. The surveyed students in this study only included students from Jinan City, Shandong Province but the total number accounted for 71% of public senior school students in the city with 15 urban schools, 8 county schools and 2 rural schools. He compared the 2010 NCEE scores with the students' average level of academic

attainment. The average NCEE score was 486.44 of students who attended shadow schools while for those who did not participate in shadow schools, the average score was much higher (505.66). He concluded that among the three examined subjects (Chinese, mathematics and English) in this study, shadow education did not have an impact on any of them but it implied the potentially positive effects on English scores. Besides, all of the above studies mentioned that the attendance at shadow schools might influence the effectiveness of private tutoring among those who had paid for shadow schools. As a result, the claim made by school D, as well as school E who even claims "full mark" in three-year learning, is not valid and should be carefully considered when parents and students choose *Buxiban*.

Similarly, school A tries to persuade potential customers that no matter how you performed before, once you have chosen this school you would absolutely have an excellent performance in NCEE. However, a large number of research studies that have found a positive correlation between shadow education and improvement of educational attainment indicate that such insignificant positive links only exist for certain groups, some high-achievement students and some low-achievement students (Byun, 2014; Dawson 2010). Zhao (2012) reviewed the 2010 NCEE scores of 6,643 senior high school students in Jinan including both students taking and not taking paid private tutoring. He also combined the results of surveys and interviews with self-reports and analysis of how the interviewees felt about the effects of shadow schools. The results demonstrated that 42.5% students attended shadow schools for enrichment and 41.0% for remediation of what they had learned in public schools. For the self-report results respectively, more students with lower academic performance stated that they benefited from shadow schools.

The claim made by school B and I was written to emphasize the huge possibility of increasing students' test scores and demonstrated the key to improving scores—learning how to

write exams. The study by Zhao (2012) found the negative result of this claim. From the surveys and interviews collected in the research, he pointed to the reason why overall shadow schools might not be effective on each subject was that many shadow schools oriented for NCEE preparation (such as school B) only helped students do exercises to get familiar with the exam, which was also what those non-shadow school attendees would do.

School C does not focus on the effectiveness of their service but tried to persuade customers that smaller classes are more efficient than large classes. In general, the smaller the class size is, the more expensive the class will be (China Society of Education, 2016; Zhang & Liu, 2014). With the development of shadow education throughout the world, there have been many small classes in Chinese shadow schools (Ge, Xue & Zhang, 2016; Hong & Zhao, 2015). However, according to the current research, the small class size may not ensure higher efficiency compared to large classes (Liu, 2012; Zhang, 2012; Zhang & Liu, 2014). Zhang and Liu (2014) used the same dataset as Zhang (2012) but researched with a focus on the class-size of shadow schools. The examined subjects included Chinese, Mathematics and English. From the surveys and other self-reported information, they found that tutors of one-on-one classes had the lowest rate of bachelor degrees (65-71%) while the highest rate of being undergraduate students (9-12%). On the other hand, large classes had the highest bachelor degree tutors (80-84%). Besides, 31-48% tutors of large classes are experienced teachers (over 3-year teaching experience) but only 14-18% of the tutors of small classes have prior experience. We can see from this fact that although the fee for small classes is much higher than other types of tutoring, the tutors of small classes are, at least, not superior to others in terms of education and experience. From the above research, we can tell that small classes do not ensure the best tutors so the “50% higher efficiency” claimed by school C is not convincing.

School F implies their effectiveness by introducing comments from current students and previous customers. Here school F used reputation as a marketing technique. This makes customers feel persuaded because this also implies that the school may be trustworthy so that it attracts a large number of students. The self-report reviews from students also applied as one of the analysis criteria for the effectiveness of shadow schools in some research (Dang, 2007; PISA, 2009; Zhan et al., 2013). Based on the different designs of surveys, self-estimated analysis of private tutoring may provide details of student experience with shadow schools, and not only the final scores on their exams. Ge, Xu and Zhang (2016) conducted a self-report survey to explore whether parents were satisfied with shadow schools. Among 622 surveys in Chifeng, Neimenggu Province of China, 35.7% parents thought it helpful to some extent, 52.8% considered the shadow schools as "neutral." 62.6% of the parents stayed with students during their learning for more than one hour. The study demonstrated that over half of the surveyed parents found the tutoring "neutral." For parents, the "neutral" means they paid extra fees and students spent extra hours to improve scores while the exam results were not as effective as they had expected. However, the results of self-report findings are inconsistent among the research on the effectiveness of shadow education partly owing to the design of surveys (Kwo & Bray, 2014). For example, Dang (2007) analyzed the household expenditure on private tutoring and asked whether students were satisfied with the quality by grading the effects as excellent, good, average or poor. For participants, it was hard to analyze by these grades because learning in shadow schools did not merely include test results but also the process. Some might be satisfied with the service provided by schools, and with instruction from tutors but found their scores did not improve greatly. Others might only take the tutoring for a while and therefore it is hard to judge efficacy. Such confusion of standards leads to unclear findings and results. Besides, when

people do self-report analysis, most of them tend to give a more positive assessment compared to reality (Groot, 2000; Lokshin & Ravallion, 2008). To reduce the controversies of the standards for assessment of the effectiveness, German researchers Guill and Bos (2014) used both self-reporting and the results of test scores to analyze the effectiveness of shadow education in mathematics in a secondary school based on a longitudinal study KESS ("Competencies and Attitudes of Students") (p.1). According to the self-report results as well as interviews from both parents and students, the data stated that over 80% parents and students strongly agreed that tutoring from shadow schools was helpful to improve test scores. On the contrary, after controlling the variables of school levels, motivations and prior academic knowledge, researchers' analyses of marks revealed there were no significant effects of shadow education on students' mathematics test scores. From this study, we can see the conflict between self-report results and the data from test scores in terms of the research on effectiveness of private tutoring. Considering this, school F's claim is somewhat correct; however, parents could make a deep-exploration to see if there are online rankings by recognized institutions. If school F ranks top on some of these rankings, the efficiency of school F may be more persuasive than others but other objective information is still needed for assessment.

School M claims that they could use fewer tutoring hours to reach high efficiency of the test preparation. The tutoring hour is also estimated as one of the determinants for the effectiveness of private tutoring (Liu, 2012; Morgan & Rose, 2013; Liu & Bray, 2017). Liu (2012) controlled other variables and considered the tutoring hours only. He found that the general test scores of the participant increased to a statistically significant extent. However, he also illustrated that with the cram school hours extending, such positive function decreased gradually so the result was "positive" but this did not mean that there is a causal relationship

between the improvement of test scores and the tutoring by shadow schools. For the subgroups, the extent of the mathematics score improvement was more significant within the female group. So from Liu's (2012) study, the longer the tutoring hours are, the more effective the tutoring might be. Liu's conclusion contradicts the conclusion of Morgan and Rose (2013) that tutoring hour has slightly positive effects on the efficacy of shadow schools, but at least these two studies demonstrate that the amount of tutoring hours is considered as a key factor that affects the efficacy of shadow schools.

Recommendation 1 for parents and students: Considering the cost of shadow schools, small class size is the most expensive but it does not necessarily equal the "best" or the "most efficient" tutoring. When reviewing similar claims to school C's, parents and students could ask for more details, such as the qualifications of the tutors of small classes (educational background and tutoring experience). Besides, the online rating websites are also popular in many countries and regions. Parents and students could search for comments on shadow schools on these websites especially for small classes. However, these comments may also be subjective so they could only be considered as one of the standards for choosing an ideal shadow school.

Recommendation 2: Parents should first figure out what their children need through a comfortable and kind conversation with their children. School E provides a good promotion for their English classes, so that clients could learn from this claim that English tutoring may be one of the strongest subjects of this shadow school. If students need tutoring for English urgently, then school E looks more appropriate than other options on this list. Shadow schools have a range of options for tutoring among various subjects. They may claim the efficiency of all the subjects and types of tutoring. However, children may only need tutoring in specific subjects. In most senior high schools in China, students will not learn new knowledge in Grade 12 but only

do the revision and preparation for NCEE. Similarly, junior high school students usually spend the last year (Grade 9) on preparing for HEE. This means that students have already reviewed the subjects in classes lead by public school teachers. As a result, students are more willing to learn different learning techniques in shadow schools. Meanwhile, the time after public school is important because students also need to have good rest. The overload of private tutoring may add more pressure on them and then the academic performance may not be improved efficiently. If students only have a weakness in English, perhaps then the students could attend English classes in Shadow schools instead of enrolling in every subject.

Category 2: Promising Quality

School G: "You will definitely be admitted by top 4 ranked public high schools in Shanghai!"

School H: "The number of students from our school admitted by top senior high school ranked 1st in the consecutive 10 years" (also in category 3).

School I: "91% students increased their test scores after learning in our school (43% students of our school were admitted by top 100 universities in China)."

School J: "Tutor A: 100% of his students have made progress; 93% have been admitted by top 100 universities; tutor B: 85% of her students have been admitted by top 100 universities" (also in category 3 and 4).

School N: "60 days' speed-up classes and you will be admitted into best high schools in Shanghai."

In this category, schools promise the high quality of their tutoring service through the description, such as access to the top 100 universities and best high schools. As a result, school H

and J also falls into this category. They understand that all customers would like to buy high-quality service, so they specifically describe the quality within the claims.

The word “top” is highly attractive to both parents and students, because of the determinants for shadow schools in China. The determinants of taking supplementary tutoring vary from culture to culture; for example in East Asia countries such as China, Japan (to a lesser extent) and Korea, Confucian values believe that individual success is built on the basis of receiving a good education (in modern societies, this means having higher education) (Choi & Nieminen, 2013); this influences East Asians that higher education is the key to jump over the “dragon gate” (Zeng, 1999, p. 1) that can confirm future success in one’s life: “ ‘Carp jumping over the Dragon gate’ is commonly used as an allusion to a candidate who succeeds due to enormous effort” (p. 1). “*Qin* (hard-working)” is also a golden rule from Confucian values that continuously influences students and people from all walks of life in East Asia (Lu, Gilmour & Kao, 2001). Students have long been taught to be both hard working in their studies and in their future in careers. This golden rule drives some students to work even harder and seek additional instruction after public school hours. As a result, words such as “top” or “best” will be extremely appealing to parents and students.

But how did 91% of students in school I get admitted by top ranking universities? Since the average admission rate of top ranking universities in Shanghai senior school was only 21.8% in 2016 (Sohu, 2016), if 91% students in school I were admitted by top universities, students who attended school I were likely to be originally high achievers in public schools. There are many questions behind these claims because the effectiveness of these claims and shadow schools is not merely decided by one or two factors, but a mixture of subjective and objective reasons (Kwo & Bray, 2014; Choi & Park, 2016; Yung, 2015). Some studies indicate that the

participation rate of private tutoring may have effects on the test scores, either negative or positive (Morgan & Rose, 2013; Liu, 2012; Entrich, 2015). Morgan and Rose conducted research on private tutoring as well as its impact on students' eye health. They used the dataset from PISA (Program in Secondary Assessment) by OECD (the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development) in 2009 because this set contained not only the test scores from surveyed students of certain countries, but also included a self-report survey asking details about private tutoring. Students from Shanghai ranked first in all the tests in PISA and the researchers also found that over half of these students got engaged in shadow education and over 15% of them spent more than four hours every week in shadow schools. The study implied that the long hours spent in shadow schools might have positive effects on the improvement of test scores. On the contrary, Liu (2012) stated that the positive impact of private tutoring on mathematics declined with the accumulation of tutoring hours in his study (13,978 Grade 7 students in Taiwan). Similar to Mainland China, Taiwanese students also take 9-years of compulsory education and students need to take the college entrance exam for higher education (Liu, 2012). Liu analyzed data from the Taiwan Education Panel Survey of 2001 to track Grade 7 students' cram schooling and academic performance. The tested subjects included Chinese, English, Mathematics and Science. The researcher found a positive relation between shadow education and the improvement of academic scores. However, with longer tutoring hours, there was a decreased positive change but still a change in the efficiency of shadow education. Findings from Zheng and Xie (2015) also made similar conclusions that after controlling the variable of family background, they discovered that the positive effect of the attendance rate of private tutoring decreased dramatically in terms of mathematics scores and was no longer significant.

School N also mentions tutoring hours in their claim. However, as described in the analysis of school M's claim, shorter tutoring hour does not ensure better quality of tutoring. Kim, Paik and Ihm (2016) also found that the results of either male or female group had no big difference with the total number of private tutoring hours in English achievement, so tutoring hours had no significant effect on English learning. For mathematics, there were mixed results in different groups, demonstrating that the overall influence from tutoring time was significant at 1% in most estimation models. Furthermore, the influence was more obvious in the male group than with female students. The researchers then concluded that the English achievement might be more affected by the quality of tutoring instead of the length of tutoring while the mathematics performance was more a result of accumulation and quantity, saying that it needed more time to improve test scores even with high-quality instruction.

Based on the above studies, we can see that tutoring hours could be an important indicator of the effectiveness of mathematics tutoring, while language learning depends on the quality of tutoring. So for school N, the claim is only partly valid because the admission exam for high school requires the examination of all the subjects (Chinese, English, Mathematics, Physics and Chemistry). This means that claims of shorter time for test preparation do not necessarily ensure the higher efficiency of improvement. Besides, both school M and N are confident that they can provide high-quality tutoring in a short time, and this implies the relatively higher expense of these two schools. Generally, the higher the quality of tutoring, the higher the expense will be for the service of the shadow school. Kim, Paik and Ihm (2016) explained this in their study that "the effect of private tutoring time and cost in English on achievement of male students was not significant while private tutoring time in Mathematics significantly influenced that of female students" (p. 1).

The reason why such claims are so attractive may be that students need to finish a heavy load of homework and the setting of short-term learning looks easier to finish than a mountain of homework and review test papers (Hu & Wang, 2013). Secondary school students in China usually need to finish a large amount of homework, especially in the academic year of HEE and NCEE preparation (Zhao, 2015; Chi & Qian, 2016). As a result, some students expect tutors to conclude golden rules of getting higher scores in the exam and all the students need to do is just to repeat exercises by applying these golden rules. Generally, the biggest attraction behind these claims is that at the end of the short-term tutoring program, tutors will give their prediction of questions in the exam and analyze the golden rules behind these questions (Sohu, 2015). Shadow schools then make use of such feelings from students and claim the short-term of program but high-efficiency of the learning results.

Recommendation 3: Do not get lost with these attractive descriptions. As part of their general marketing skills, shadow schools will only post positive and what they claim to be significant results on their websites to attract students. Always remember that higher education is not compulsory education in China and the admission to top universities is still limited to a certain number. For schools, such as school I, parents and students should pay attention to the enrolment of these shadow schools: Who attends this school? Is it because the students enrolled into this shadow school are originally high achievers who likely would be admitted by top universities without tutoring? If a student is not a high-achiever in public schools, then this shadow school may not fit him/her unless the shadow school specializes in low achievers.

On the other hand, readers from other countries except for East Asian may have difficulty in understanding the description of the claims because of the cultural difference. Although there are rankings of world universities by *Forbes* and other international magazines, many non-East

Asian students and universities will not consider this as the only aim to pursue higher education and future career. However, in China, the ranking of universities is important for students and they will go to attend the best university no matter if it is located near their hometown or not. The preference for top-ranking universities is also mainly led by the reaction of the job market (Chu, 2015; Li, 2011). The job market prefers students from top-ranking and renowned universities. In some recruitment advertisements, a number of big companies even clearly display that "only students from Beijing University, Tsinghua University, Fudan University, Jiaotong University and Zhejiang University will be considered for this job position" (the mentioned universities are usually regarded as the top five universities in China) (Bothwell, 2016). Parents know that they cannot change the preference to top-ranking universities in the job market, so the only thing they could do is to send their children to the best university and so the children can attain a better job and advance their career. Parents always want to give the best to their children, so the claims here make use of this thought and attract potential customers. However, the description of "top" and "best" will add much pressure on students. It is not wrong to climb up to the summit but the summit is different from person to person. When making efforts to get to the best, parents should also tell children that there are still alternatives to success and a good future apart from the success in academic achievement.

The model of success is fixed in China: being admitted by a top university and obtaining a good job in the tall office building. According to *China Daily* (2016), one of the interviewees Song said, "we hope to do office work as many of the Shanghai young people do, which will be an absolute advantage no matter whether we want to find a spouse here or at home" (p. 1). Even though the salary of a blue-collar worker is now competitive in some areas in China, people used to regard blue-collar work as not as honourable because of the heavy workload of blue-collar

workers in China (Huang, 2011). However, blue-collar jobs are developing rapidly and their social position is increasing in contemporary Chinese society (China Daily, 2016). The lack of blue-collar labour in some big cities such as Shenzhen, Shanghai, Beijing and Guangdong has increased the income level of blue-collar workers in recent years.

Apart from the social position and income level, does higher education fit everyone? This may be a good question for the young generation in China. In contemporary society, students are influenced by the cultural value in China that white collar or knowledge workers have. As Loo (2017) notes, "creative knowledge workers use a combination of creative applications to perform their functions/roles in the knowledge economy including anticipatory imagination, problem solving, seeking and generating ideas and aesthetic sensibilities" (p. 138). However, jobs such as knowledge workers may not fit every single person. The work conditions and industry structures change from time to time and new types of professions may appear (Švarc, 2015). As a result, the profession of knowledge worker may not be the only honourable job type and should not be the only choice of future career.

Category 3: Power of Authority

School H: "the number of students from our school admitted by top senior high school ranked 1st in the consecutive 10 years" (also in category 4).

School J: "Tutor A: 100% of his students have made progress; 93% have been admitted by top 100 universities; tutor B: 85% of her students have been admitted by top 100 universities" (also in category 4).

School P: "Do you know that best tutors/teachers have been tutors/teachers of your peers? Hurry up or you will miss the best teachers!" (also in category 5).

Claim J and P emphasizes the importance of star tutors as a kind of authority. Parents trust star tutors because they think star tutors are experts of test preparation and are more likely to help their children to increase test scores. The description " top high school or universities" adds credits to these shadow schools that shows their service could help students to be admitted by famous schools or universities that are confirmed by authority. School H implies that their reputation has been earned for a long time and the quality is widely recognized by the society, which also increase the creditability of their claims.

School J and P introduce star tutors and imply that learning from the best tutors could greatly improve students' test scores. However, having a good tutor is not the only factor that affects the effectiveness of tutoring. Some researchers inferred other determinants of the effectiveness of shadow schools. Ho and Kwong (2008) found that at earlier stages of learning, memorization had a small but positive relationship to private tutoring while advanced learning techniques such as persistence and self-control did not turn out to be significant. Although HEE and NCEE examined students' ability and potential in academic learning, most of the questions within the examinations are made to test basic knowledge (Wang, 2013; Yao et al., 2010). Students with lower achievements at public schools may expect that repeating knowledge taught in public schools in their shadow school could help them obtain more marks on basic questions in exams. Dawson (2012) and Byun (2014) emphasized that especially in East Asian countries such as China, Japan and South Korea where Confucian values are popular, the total load of study and anxiety about high-stake exams also has an impact on the test scores. Some researchers found that test anxiety increased with the approaching of exam dates (Lotz & Sparfeldt, 2017; Reeve, Bonaccio & Charles, 2008). Reeve, Bonaccio and Charles (2008) investigated one hundred and four undergraduate psychology students from a Southeastern university of the

United States and found that test anxiety would affect the test scores of students. The aim of the test and the level of self-confidence were the two most important aspects in terms of test anxiety. We can see that test anxiety could be one of the determinants that have an impact on students' performance in exams.

Recommendation 4: Choose shadow schools based on your own needs. With the increase of income level in China, more and more people have sufficient budget for the investment on shadow schools and private tutoring. However, a student may not need tutoring in all the subjects but just need instruction in certain subjects. Some parents think that even if students are "good" at some subjects, taking these classes in shadow schools is helpful to consolidate what they learned at school and prepare for the exams. Furthermore, a large number of parents try to avoid any activities irrelevant to learning for their children: "Yang and I met at this precise moment, after his Sunday-morning practice test, because it was the only free time he had all week—a single three-hour reprieve" said Brook Larmer (2014, December 31) from his interview with a Chinese student Yang who was preparing for NCEE. As introduced in the former section, *Qin* (diligence) is an important value throughout the Chinese history and in the textbooks used from primary school to university. Chinese people describe themselves as diligent and consistent. Parents believe that the diligence of learning will pay back and could make up for the lack of talent. This also reflects that parents usually lack confidence about the academic abilities of their children, because they wish their children to learn after school; even though these students actually could do the review and preview themselves parents still believe it is more secure to send them to shadow schools. Now from the studies we know that learning in shadow schools of different subjects may have various levels of effectiveness. As a result, there is no need to push children towards sitting in the shadow school for a whole day. The time spent on the transit to

the shadow school together with the learning in the shadow school may lead to the exhaustion of children and then they will feel tired in the mainstream school learning, which is definitely not the original intention of parents. Top shadow schools usually have branches in various locations. Students could choose the appropriate location as needed. Generally, star tutors or good tutoring resources are distributed in downtown areas. Parents should balance the efficiency of tutoring and the time spent on transit. Additionally, shadow schools may not clearly demonstrate how star tutors or tutoring resources are distributed on their claims. They claim they have a number of star tutors but these resources may be located at one location, which will be inappropriate for students with traffic inconvenience.

Category 3: Commitment and consistency

School J: "Tutor A: 100% of his students have made progress; 93% have been admitted by top 100 universities; tutor B: 85% of her students have been admitted by top 100 universities."

School K: "*Baofenban* (sign contracts with us that if your child does not reach a certain score in the exam after taking our course, we will return 2/3 of the tuition fee.)."

School L: "You only need 30% of the regular tuition fee but reach 80% efficiency of regular classes; if not satisfied, you will get 50% refund of tuition fee."

In this category, claims are made to indicate their honest attempt to understand customers' needs (fewer tutoring hours and less tuition fee). School J proposes the reputation of good tutors to attract customers. This claim fits the category of consistency because parents believe the tutors could provide continuous high-quality tutoring based on their past experience, School K and L make the refund commitment in writing and then customers are likely to honour such commitment.

The claims made by school K and L intend to attract customers with the lower prices of their tutoring. Generally, customers would like to pay less but get better products since shadow education is one type of business. Could “cheaper” tutoring buy higher scores? Does huge investment ensure better academic performance? The relationship between expenditure on shadow schools and the effectiveness of shadow education is also the focus of many researchers studying shadow education (Burch, 2009; Chu, 2015; Deng & Xue, 2014; Forsey, 2013). Zhang and Xie (2015) examined the relationship among family background, shadow education and educational attainment. By analyzing the standardized tests’ (word test and math test) results from 14,798 households in the 2010 China Family Panel Studies, the findings demonstrated that the growing spending on shadow schools had a positive link to mathematics performance but there was still not a causal relationship between private tutoring and children’s mathematics performance. After controlling the variable of family background in terms of parents’ income level, such positive influence declined. Sohn et al. (2010) reached the same conclusion in South Korea. The researchers examined various determinants for the effectiveness of shadow education. Among the eleven examined studies, six of them showed a positive relationship between expenditures on private tutoring and educational performance, though the correlation also declined when considering the variable of parents’ income level. However, another study from South Korea found evidence that supported the positive effects of private tutoring on the improvement of test scores. After tracking the results of the Korean Education and Employment Panel longitudinal study from 1,752 students, Kang (2009) found a small but positive influence between investment in shadow schools and the improvement of test scores in public schools.

Some studies reached the conclusion that expenditure of paid private tutoring only partly functioned to improve educational attainments (Buchmann, et sl., 2010; Kim, Paik & Ihm, 2016).

Kim, Paik and Ihm (2016) divided the participants of the study into male/female groups and low/high achievers to further explore the effectiveness in English and mathematics. Based on the Seoul Education Longitudinal Study of 2010 (2,943 cases were analyzed in this research), the findings showed that the overall effects of private tutoring expenditure on mathematics test scores was only significant in the female group (0.1% significance level) and the effects declined with the increase of students' achievements in school. The effectiveness was even smaller within the group of low achievers. Since the participants of school L definitely include both genders, this study reduces the credit of this claim saying that the saving of spending on shadow school could be effective to every student.

These claims could also be compared with claims made by some shadow schools (such as school X) who promote that "smaller size, more expensive but more efficient." Research shows that the expense of private tutoring cannot ensure the improvement of test scores and there is only a slightly positive link between the investment in private tutoring and the improvement of test scores in high-stake exams, but such association is inconsistent and small (Deng & Xue, 2014; Zhao, 2015). Xue and Zhang (2016) also found that the difference of class size did not result in big differences in test results, so the smaller class size did not ensure higher effectiveness of private tutoring.

We can see from the above discussion that the conclusion whether the expenditure on shadow schools is effective to improve test scores is inconsistent among all the studies. The claims from schools K and L could only be considered partly valid.

Recommendation 5: How to deal with "*Baofenban.*" To further analyze the claim made by school K, *Baofenban* is a general technique from new shadow schools to attract more students in the shadow education market in China. Some even do better deals and claim that if one student

could not reach a certain mark after attending the tutoring classes, they would refund the entire tuition fee. This kind of deal seems to be really appealing for those who have limited budget for education investment. However, parents and students may be ashamed and unhappy that students' test scores are not improved so they are reluctant to claim the refund. Besides, shadow schools may not directly return tuition fees to students, but give coupons or free classes with the same tuition fees to students. As introduced in the former sections, Confucian values have a dominant influence in contemporary Chinese society. The expectation of success in academic performance and career leads to another result that people are ashamed of failure and do not want to lose face ("Latent Rule of *Baofenban*," 2017). An anonymous user from the online forum *Zhihu* indicated that, "I felt unhappy when I found there was no improvement of my test scores and I thought it was because of my laziness so I was ashamed to go back to the shadow school and asked for the return of tuition fee" ("Latent Rule of *Baofenban*," 2017, p.1). As a result, even shadow schools sign the contract with students to ensure their academic success, because of being afraid of losing face, a number of students may feel ashamed and would not come back to take the refund. Besides, the refund is usually explained in different ways (China Society of Education, 2016): parents pay for the tuition fee but the refund is not exactly the tuition fee but may be changed to the same amount of cash coupon or voucher of the shadow school, which means that you could take the same course without the payment but you could not directly get your money back. Thus, parents and students should pay attention to these kinds of claims; this could be a good alternative for those who do not want to make huge investment on shadow schools. Although the tutoring is not effective because the test score is not improved, at least students can take free courses and have the second opportunity to improve test scores through the tutoring from this shadow school. However, this does not apply to every student. If students rush to improve test

scores or are high-achievers, then free classes are not useful to them because it is hard for shadow schools to secure a higher score for high-achieving students.

Another situation may happen that even though students who signed *Baofenban* contract with shadow schools have not reached the test score or improvement of academic performance that was promised in the contract, students and parents may also think that shadow schools are good and partly helpful so they do not care about getting the tuition fee back. According to de Castro and de Guzman (2014), students' satisfaction with private tutoring is linked to various aspects. The researchers analyzed surveys from 959 Filipino university students to see whether the satisfaction with private tutoring would be related to gender, sibling size, students' attitude towards private tutoring, and personal problems with academic performance, quality of public schooling. They found that the satisfaction with shadow education was mainly led by students' personal academic problems and the quality of public schooling. From this point, we can see that although the test scores are not improved, parents and students may be satisfied with other conditions of shadow schools, including surroundings, the attitude of tutors and still think the service of tutoring is not bad or a waste of time. It is hard to say this is not the right attitude because students may feel the improvement of learning habits or other aspects. But it should be carefully considered that whether a shadow school with good service attitude equals to an effective shadow school.

Category 5: Scarcity and Category 6: Fear Appeal

School O: "Do you want your children fallen behind by their peers at the start line of preparing for college entrance exam?"

School P: "Do you know that best tutors/teachers have been tutors/teachers of your peers? Hurry up or your children will miss the best teachers!"

Compared to former categories, the claims made by school O and P are both written in the form of an interrogative sentence. The two claims also are written specifically to parents so they are discussed together even though they are not in the same category. School O arouses fear from parents to promote their service, emphasizing the fear from the competition with peers. School P identified the scarcity of their school: the number of best tutors in their school is limited and scarce so that parents need to sign up fast.

In these two categories, shadow schools focus on parents who actually pay for the tuition fee and lead their children to attend these classes in China, because students younger than sixteen are not allowed to do any jobs in China, including both part-time and full-time ones.

These two claims also imply the importance of star tutors (also called *Mingshi* in China) of shadow schools. The appearance of more and more star tutors also arouses the research interests of many scholars (Lai, 2009; Zhang & Bray; 2015). Zhang and Bray conducted research on shadow education in Chongqing, China, including 860 Grade 9 students and their parents. A large number of parents and students trust mainstream school teachers as tutors in shadow schools and think that these teachers know the latest trends of HEE and NCEE, and meanwhile they are experienced giving relevant classes. The surveys in this research demonstrated that 91.9% of those who received private tutoring in shadow schools attended classes from tutors of public schools. The responses from surveyed parents and students revealed the popularity of *Mingshi* and the situation is based on parents' and students' perception that these star tutors were authoritative about test preparation. Lai (2009) also mentioned the popularity of star tutors in her research based on the longitudinal studies in 12 cities, provinces and municipalities in China that even after daytime public school teachers were prohibited from giving paid tutoring, it was hard to monitor because students who received this tutoring would not admit it because they also

knew it was not allowed. However, there is no research specifically on whether star tutors are more effective to improve students' academic attainment. On the other hand, it may not be necessary to examine this because star tutors earn their reputation from their regular job: some star tutors come from key high schools and teachers admitted by key high schools are considered better than teachers from other schools; since teachers give classes by subject and most of the test preparation is for HEE and NCEE, they would know the test results of their public school students, so it is easy to see the introduction of a *Mingshi* such as "The average score of class A instructed by teacher X was 135 out of 150 in mathematics, ranking the first of the whole municipality" ("*Mingshi* created a miracle again" 2014, September 22, p.1). The popularity of *Mingshi* may be due to the fact that *Mingshi* earn credits and reputation from their public schooling job.

Hence, star tutors are regarded as educational experts for test preparation in the shadow education market. Thus, this is also a persuasive communication technique that makes use of the influence of the authority to add more credits to the claims. Here star tutors function as the authority and these tutors even look more attractive than shadow schools, so for some parents and students, they choose tutors instead of schools. Parents may think it is wiser to invest money in star tutors who have owned the reputation than in other regular tutors. Actually, some star tutors are not only experienced in tutoring but also authoritative because they were once members of the exam design committee of certain subjects in HEE or NCEE (China Society of Education, 2016). Although the regulation states that "the exam designer or the member from the exam design committee is not allowed to reveal their attendance of exam designing within 5 years" (Sina, 2016 December 30), once beyond the time limit, these tutors then will be warmly welcomed by all the shadow schools and promoted as star tutors. However, the number of this

kind of star tutor is extremely limited so it is not likely that they will spend most of the time on tutoring in one single shadow school for a long time: “Most of star tutors work part-time in shadow schools and will give part-time tutoring for a number of schools during one day” said teacher Li in an interview by Sina (Sina, 2016, December 30).

Recommendation 6: Students should take the initiative of learning and choosing proper shadow schools. In China, parents are usually dominant in the family because children are considered immature and irresponsible. Chen (2016) describes that “Chinese parents both in China and abroad, are more controlling but less responsive than are European American parents… Scholars related this peculiar Chinese authoritarian parenting style to filial piety, hierarchy and family harmony” (p. 24). When parents tell their children that “you need to go to the shadow school,” children may complain and feel unhappy, but finally they will go and attend classes. Parents believe they know children better than the children know themselves in terms of their learning, because they know academic performance such as test scores and on-class performance from tutors. Cheung and Pomerantz (2011) also found that authoritarian parenting in China was positively associated with children’s engagement in learning but did not provide a positive emotional function. Parents expect the improvement of children’s test scores and other academic achievements. However, based on the fact that a class usually consists of more than 40 students in public schools in China, it is hard for teachers to focus on every single student, except if a student is extremely outstanding or poor. The reasons behind the ups and downs of academic performance are complicated and may not only be owing to lack of diligence or attention to class. In many cases parents usually make the decision whether their kids should go to shadow schools according to their current test scores. However, students know themselves better in terms of their learning in schools and should learn to take responsibility for themselves. Parents should

have deep communication with their children in terms of private tutoring and respect their opinions. If students do feel they need help in certain subjects, then they will concentrate more on classes and spare time to review those strong subjects at home.

Recommendation 7: Collect more information on star tutors before paying the tuition fee and choosing shadow schools. Star tutors are assumed to be effective so they are very popular in the shadow education market, the tutoring fee is relatively higher than general and it is hard to book classes with these tutors. However, star tutors do not fit every student. Generally, star tutors will not give small classes (one-on-one or students fewer than 5) in shadow schools because they will be reluctant to spend time on specific students because one-on-one tutoring is usually much more expensive than group tutoring (Kedmey, 2013). These tutors always take part-time paid tutoring in various schools so they will not even have time to answer questions after private classes (Zhang & Bray, 2013). For students who lack concentration in class, learning in a large class is no different from learning in public school. These students could not focus on learning, and even star tutors could not help them because star tutors are usually good at teaching test preparation skills but not improving students' concentration on classes (Skinner et al., 2009). A star tutor is a good option for students with good attention to class yet still requiring improvement in their learning skills. Students with troubles of learning focus may fit more with small classes where the number of students is limited and the teacher will spend more time on each one. Parents do not need to chase for star tutors but focus on the true needs of children.

A general recommendation for choosing from all the above types of shadow schools is: Take your time. Students usually choose test-preparation shadow schools at the last year of junior high school or senior high school. Some may start earlier from the previous summer; some may start later at the last half year. No matter when students start, it is essential that parents and

students make the careful consideration before paying the tuition fee. Whether small classes or big classes, parents and students expect the tutoring to improve marks in HEE or NCEE. Thus, parents could carefully collect enough information to analyze shadow schools and their claims from the experience of previous students, online comments or other aspects. It may take a bit of time but it will be useful to make choices and thus hopefully benefit students. Many shadow schools now have probation classes—students could take one or two free classes to see whether they like the style of tutors and the content of tutoring. Parents will also have opportunity to communicate with tutors and obtain more information on the classes and tutors. If they are not satisfied, they do not need to pay the tuition fee but continue to look for better options.

Conclusion

Considering the cultural background of Chinese society and the admission policy of senior high school and higher education, the shadow education market will continue to expand (China Society of Education, 2016). Owing to such popularity, this Project does not focus on criticizing or analyzing whether shadow education should exist, but exploring how to review the claims (as advertisements) made by shadow schools and thus help students benefit from such investment. After reviewing these claims targeting test preparation for HEE and NCEE, the examination demonstrates that claims made by these schools are designed to catch one's eye first and most of them are not valid enough to be the determining factor in choosing a school. The major concern is that parents and students are attracted but confused about these claims. These claims cover different aspects of tutoring, including expense, tutoring hours, subjects, parenting and star tutors. The consideration of shadow schools should be a comprehensive review but not just be decided by one indicator. Before making decisions, parents and students should be clear that the claims are made to attract students and do business, thus a set of marketing skills and

persuasive communication techniques will be applied to build these claims. Since parents decide to make an investment in private tutoring, what they and children want is to improve academic performance as soon as possible and as much as possible. No matter how shadow schools function, parents and students should bear in mind that private tutoring, as shown, is individual for every single student. Thus, experiences that are suitable for some students may not be a good option for others. Furthermore, it is the students who attend shadow schools and intend to improve their own academic performance, so their comments and attitude should not be neglected.

The project analyzes the claims in detail and further provides recommendations. In the first category, shadow schools focus on how they could help to improve marks or grades of academic performance and high-stake exams. Parents should consider the selection of shadow schools from various perspectives: the length of total tutoring, the class size of tutoring and strength as well as weakness in these schools. In the second category, these schools introduce the results of their tutoring in exams—high possibility of being admitted by top high schools or universities. However, parents and students should know that schools only demonstrate the best results and performance to the public while hiding unsuccessful cases. On the other hand, some schools may set the criteria for the enrolled students; if they only admit students with high achievement at school, it is less likely that they will have low performance in HEE or NCEE (Lei & He, 2011; Li, 2014). If a student has low academic achievement at public school, tutoring designed for high-achievers will not be a good option. In the third category, shadow schools attract customers by stating that they cost less but have higher efficiency to improve test scores. A common type of similar marketing is *Baofenban*. Shadow schools usually attract low achievers to sign the contract of *Baofenban* that once students are not able to reach a certain score after

tutoring parents could get the return of tuition fee (usually ranging from 80%-100%). However, it is not easy to get the return of tuition fee since neither parent wants to lose their face or have the schools transfer the return of money into a discount coupon for their future service. In the fourth category, shadow schools emphasize the easiness for students with fewer tutoring hours but higher test scores. It is attractive for students because they may spare less effort but still get high scores in exams. Students should notice that the high intensity of tutoring may cause the mounting pressure and an imbalance of life and learning. Getting a high score in a short term will be highly demanding and challenging for students because this requires the total focus on learning in a short term. For some students, such intense tutoring may trigger their potential for learning. However, this may not be suitable for everyone. As a result, students should know exactly their strong subjects and weak subjects, and then express their needs directly to their parents. In the last category, shadow schools try to convince parents of the fear of competition of students and the highly welcomed star tutors. However, tutors from the shadow schools will not all be star tutors. The star tutors shadow schools use for marketing may not be the tutor for your child. Parents should look for tutoring based on the weakness of students but not only focus on star tutors.

The shadow education market in China will continue to expand (China Society of Education, 2016; Sohu, 2015). This is not only owing to the continuous need of increasing test scores in HEE and NCEE, but may be further affected by the implementation of new government policies (Zhang & Bray, 2017). The long-enforced “one child” policy (also called “family planning policy”: “Article 18: the state stabilizes the existing birth policies, encourages citizens to marry and bear a child at a late age and advocates that one wife bear only one child…”) (Standing Committee of the National People’s Congress, 2002, pp.1) in China has been amended

in 2015 that “The state advocates one couple having two children” (Standing Committee of the National People’s Congress, 2015, pp.1). With the growth of population, the number of future students will rise greatly and thus the potential growth of shadow schools is also expected. When there are two children in one family, the consideration of shadow education should be more careful because of the high tuition fee of private tutoring.

Although the project aims to analyze claims made by shadow schools in Shanghai, China, it could also be helpful for researching shadow schools in other countries and regions throughout the world. In terms of the development of the shadow education market, cram school has been a remarkable phenomenon in South Korea and Japan (Bray & Lykins, 2012; Byun, 2014; Choi & Park, 2016). In these two countries, students also need to take national college entrance exams if they want to be admitted by postsecondary institutions (Bray & Lykins, 2012). In Korea, shadow education has great influence on students to prepare for the national college entrance exam. According to Korea Statistical Information Service (2015), 81.1% of primary school students, 69.1% of junior high school students and 56.2% of senior high school students participated in paid private tutoring in 2014. Shadow education is also notable in Japan: Japanese students from all ages extensively participate in shadow schools (Entrich, 2015). Shadow education in Japan is divided into academic-oriented education (called “*juku*” in Japanese) and non-academic oriented (Dierkes, 2010). According to the Yano Research Institute, the total investment in shadow education industry in Japan reached 2.46 trillion Yen (around 33 billion CAD) in 2012 and *juku* alone accounted for almost 40% in the total market (938 billion Yen). Thus, for most students and parents, the choice of shadow school may be as important as the choice of public schooling. Considering such a big shadow market, shadow schools also make claims or use other ways of

marketing to attract potential students. The recommendations and analysis from this project could be referred to the selection of shadow schools in these regions.

In addition to East Asia, shadow education also exists and develops in many regions (Bray, 2006; Buchmann, et al., 2010) and there are also studies on regional shadow education, such as in India (Banerjee et al., 2007), Vietnam (Dang, 2007; Dang & Rogers, 2008), Turkey (Berberoglu & Tansel, 2014), Mediterranean (Bray, Mazawi & Sultana, 2013), Kenya in Africa (Buchmann, 2002), Australia (Forsey, 2013), Russia (Loyalka & Zakharov, 2016) and so on. In the above countries, most of them have some conditions in common: some of them have high-stakes exam such as national college entrance exam (e.g., Russia, Turkey and Brazil); in other countries the quality of public schooling is struggling or not consistently stable so students and families turn to private tutoring for help as a remedy for public schooling (e.g., Vietnam, India) (Bray & Lykins, 2012). The rate of investment on shadow education may not as high as countries such as China, Japan and Korea. Hence, the project could help those who cannot decide whether to invest in shadow school education to better understand the claims made by shadow schools. For those who have decided to pay the tuition fee but are confused about the selection, the above recommendations help them to get out of the traps set by shadow schools and choose the most suitable type of tutoring.

Finally, the list of all the above recommendations are collected:

Recommendation 1 for parents and students: Considering the cost of shadow schools, small class size is the most expensive but it does not equal the “best” or the “most efficient” tutoring.

Recommendation 2: Parents should first figure out what their children need.

Recommendation 3: Do not get lost with these attractive descriptions.

Recommendation 4: Choose shadow schools based on your own needs.

Recommendation 5: "*Baofenban*" is not the assurance of your academic success and should be properly treated.

Recommendation 6: Students themselves should take the initiative of learning and choosing proper shadow schools.

Recommendation 7: Collect more information on star tutors before paying the tuition fee and choosing shadow schools.

Recommendation 8: Take your time choosing a shadow school.

The choice of the above recommendations always comes down to individual needs and consumers need to remember that at best, these schools do not make a huge difference so all factors must be considered to get the best returns for investment.

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