

MANAGING INSTITUTIONS:  
SURVIVAL OF *MINBAN* SECONDARY  
SCHOOLS IN MAINLAND CHINA

WANG YING

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY  
CITY UNIVERSITY OF HONG KONG

SEPTEMBER 2010

CITY UNIVERSITY OF HONG KONG

香港城市大學

MANAGING INSTITUTIONS:  
SURVIVAL OF *MINBAN* SECONDARY SCHOOLS IN  
MAINLAND CHINA

運籌制度：中國大陸民辦中學的生存

Submitted to

Department of Applied Social studies

應用社會科學系

in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements

for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy

哲學博士學位

By

WANG Ying

王穎

September 2010

二零一零年九月

## ABSTRACT

*Minban* education has already established its position in China's education system. Diversification, uneven development across regions, market-oriented, coexistence and confusion of multiple ownerships are its major features. However, there is still limited systematic study on its operation.

The emergence of *minban* schools represents the parents and students' need for alternative education. The external demands from these stakeholders, as well as from the government, constitute the institutional environment impelling the survival and development of *minban* schools. At the same time, the individual schools themselves are also responding to and shaping the institutional environment.

This study adopts the ideas of new institutionalism to analyze *minban* schools as a form of organization, and its interaction with the institutions. The study of institutions includes the regulative, normative and cognitive dimensions. This study aims to explore the new features of the evolving educational institutional environment and the strategies that *minban* schools adopt to manage the institutions in this environment.

Qualitative research methodology - multiple case study - was adopted. As observed in the new educational institutional environment, there are four types of *minban* schools: the converted *minban* school, the affiliated *minban* school, the private capital invested *minban* school and the

international *minban* school. A total of eight *minban* secondary schools in Taiyuan and Shenzhen were chosen to represent these diverse types of *minban* schools. Data collection methods such as archival review, field participant observation and in-depth interview, were adopted to collect data.

The study showed that the reemergence of market and its principles, the decentralization of government and segmentation of its power and authority, the bureaucratic profession coupled with the consumerist profession of teachers, and the investment-oriented and 'education-as-consumption' culture engendered an increasingly multiple institutional environment for *minban* schools. Different types of *minban* schools co-existed, with each type of school occupying their own unique location in the continuum from 'domesticated' and 'public', to 'wild' and 'private'.

Differential locations reflected the 'differential order' of different types of *minban* schools in this institutional environment. The converted *minban* school, the affiliated *minban* school, the private capital invested *minban* school, and the international *minban* school were located, in order, according to their distance from the government and public system. Such hierarchical arrangement of *minban* schools took shape according to the bureaucratic arrangement of the government's regulative institution. Concurrently, the normative and cognitive institutions also contributed to shape the boundary of order: maintaining and/or changing the boundary and arrangement of differential order.

The study argued that the institutions influence the differential order of *minban* schools and through this, delimit the strategies that each school, as an organization within the institutional environment, selected to cope with the institutions. These strategies could be categorized as 'capitalize', 'advocacy', 'avoidance', and 'isolation'. During the process of interaction between organizations and institutions, the boundaries of differential order changed, and at the same time the components of institutions are interpreted and re-interpreted, which in turn adjusted the room for organization's autonomy.

*Minban* schools have greater freedom from regulatory control, and within, different types of schools will have different extent of freedom enjoyed. according to their differential order. However, they all actively derived strategies to manage institutions in order to expand their autonomy. In this process, resources, protection and support (gained from trust), received from the local governments and parents, were mobilized for their own pursuits.

This study confirmed that, alongside the increasing number of *minban* schools, the demands from these new types of organizations and the parents' increasing engagement in education, were meaningful in cultivating a primitive form of civil society. However, the function of *minban* schools proposed by the government seemed more of a myth than reality. They could not lead to a substantial improvement of the educational system. The government still maintained substantial control

on *minban* schools through the power vested upon them by the bureaucratic structure, and re-penetrated into the new institutional environment via new forms of regulation and governance.

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

<b>CHAPTER 1 INTRODUCTION.....</b>	<b>1</b>
1.1 <i>MINBAN</i> EDUCATION IN CONTEMPORARY CHINA.....	1
1.2 DEFINITION OF KEY CONCEPTS.....	7
1.2.1 <i>Minban secondary school</i> .....	7
1.2.2 <i>Institution</i> .....	10
1.3 STRUCTURE OF THE THESIS.....	12
<b>CHAPTER 2 THE THEORY OF NEW INSTITUTIONALISM.....</b>	<b>13</b>
2.1 NEW INSTITUTIONALISM.....	13
2.2 COMPARING OLD AND NEW INSTITUTIONALISM.....	16
2.3 NEW INSTITUTIONALISM IN ORGANIZATION: THE THEORETICAL CYCLE.....	22
2.3.1 <i>Institutions influencing organizations</i> .....	24
2.3.2 <i>Organizations response to institutions</i> .....	33
2.3.3 <i>Summary</i> .....	38
2.4 NEW INSTITUTIONALISM IN THE STUDY OF EDUCATION.....	40
2.5 SUMMARY.....	47
<b>CHAPTER 3 POLICIES OF <i>MINBAN</i> EDUCATION IN CHINA.....</b>	<b>49</b>
3.1 DISRUPTION OF <i>MINBAN</i> SCHOOLS: 1949-1977.....	51
3.2 RE-EMERGENCE OF <i>MINBAN</i> SCHOOLS: 1978-1991.....	52
3.3 DEVELOPMENT OF <i>MINBAN</i> EDUCATION: 1992--1996.....	57
3.4 NORMALIZATION OF <i>MINBAN</i> EDUCATION: 1997 -2001.....	62
3.5 LEGALIZED-REGRESSION OF <i>MINBAN</i> SCHOOL: 2002 ONWARDS.....	69
3.6 SUMMARY.....	74
<b>CHAPTER 4 THE INSTITUTIONAL ENVIRONMENT OF <i>MINBAN</i> EDUCATION IN CHINA.....</b>	<b>76</b>
4.1 <i>MINBAN</i> : REALITY OR MYTH.....	76
4.2 CONTROLLED DECENTRALIZATION OF GOVERNMENT.....	80
4.2.1 <i>Decentralization from central to local governments</i> .....	82
4.2.2 <i>Decentralization from public to private</i> .....	91
4.2.3 <i>Governance in controlled-decentralization</i> .....	93
4.3 PROFESSION INFLUENCED BY BUREAUCRACY AND CONSUMER.....	99
4.3.1 <i>Profession influenced by bureaucracy and bureaucratic practice</i> .....	100
4.3.2 <i>Profession influenced by market</i> .....	103
4.3.3 <i>Summary</i> .....	106

4.4 THE NEW INVESTMENT-FAMILISM OF CONSUMER CHOICE.....	107
4.5 SUMMARY .....	115
<b>CHAPTER 5 RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY .....</b>	<b>118</b>
5.1 METHODOLOGY .....	118
5.2 DATA COLLECTION METHODS.....	119
5.3 SAMPLE AND SAMPLING METHODS.....	122
5.4 FIELDWORK PROCEDURE .....	129
<b>CHAPTER 6 LOCAL INSTITUTIONAL ENVIRONMENT OF TAIYUAN AND SHENZHEN .....</b>	<b>133</b>
6.1 THE PROFILES OF TAIYUAN AND SHENZHEN.....	133
6.1.1 <i>Introduction of Taiyuan and its educational background</i> .....	133
6.1.2 <i>Introduction of Shenzhen and its educational background</i> .....	137
6.2 LOCAL REGULATIONS OF MINBAN EDUCATION IN TAIYUAN AND SHENZHEN .....	143
6.2.1 <i>Local regulations of minban education in Taiyuan</i> .....	143
6.2.2 <i>Local regulations of minban education in Shenzhen</i> .....	158
6.3 COMPARING TAIYUAN AND SHENZHEN .....	170
6.4 EDUCATION CONSUMERS IN TAIYUAN AND SHENZHEN .....	182
6.5 CONCLUSION.....	184
<b>CHAPTER 7 LOCAL INSTITUTIONAL ENVIRONMENT OF MINBAN SCHOOL CASES .....</b>	<b>187</b>
7.1 INTERNATIONAL SCHOOL.....	188
7.1.1 <i>School C</i> .....	188
7.1.2 <i>Summary</i> .....	199
7.2 PRIVATE CAPITAL INVESTED MINBAN SCHOOL.....	201
7.2.1 <i>School M</i> .....	201
7.2.2 <i>School X</i> .....	213
7.2.3 <i>Summary</i> .....	224
7.3 AFFILIATED MINBAN SCHOOLS.....	226
7.3.1 <i>School D</i> .....	226
7.3.2 <i>School Q</i> .....	233
7.3.3 <i>School Y</i> .....	247
7.3.4 <i>Summary</i> .....	258
7.4 CONVERTED MINBAN SCHOOL .....	260
7.4.1 <i>School S</i> .....	260



7.4.2 School F .....	269
7.4.3 Summary .....	282
7.5 CLASSIFICATION OF MINBAN SCHOOLS.....	287
<b>CHAPTER 8 MANAGING INSTITUTIONS OF MINBAN SCHOOLS IN TAIYUAN AND SHENZHEN .....</b>	<b>291</b>
8.1 INTERNATIONAL SCHOOL.....	299
8.1.1 <i>Strategies of international school</i> .....	299
8.1.2 <i>Isolating institution</i> .....	309
8.2 PRIVATE CAPITAL INVESTED MINBAN SCHOOL.....	312
8.2.1 <i>Strategies of private capital invested minban school</i> .....	312
8.2.2 <i>Avoiding institution</i> .....	326
8.3 AFFILIATED MINBAN SCHOOL.....	328
8.3.1 <i>Strategies of affiliated minban school</i> .....	329
8.3.2 <i>Advocating institution</i> .....	340
8.4 CONVERTED MINBAN SCHOOL .....	342
8.4.1 <i>Strategies of converted minban school</i> .....	344
8.4.2 <i>Capitalizing institution</i> .....	352
8.5 COMPARING FOUR TYPES OF SCHOOLS AND CORRESPONDING STRATEGIES ..	355
<b>CHAPTER 9 CONCLUSION .....</b>	<b>360</b>
9.1 FEATURES OF THE NEW EDUCATIONAL INSTITUTIONAL ENVIRONMENT .....	361
9.2 DIFFERENTIAL ORDER ( <i>CHAXU GEJU</i> ) OF MINBAN SCHOOLS.....	363
9.3 TYPOLOGIES OF STRATEGIES IN MANAGING INSTITUTIONS.....	372
9.4 THE FUNCTION OF MINBAN SCHOOLS IN CHINA.....	374
9.5 CONTRIBUTION OF THE RESEARCH .....	376
9.6 LIMITATIONS AND FURTHER RESEARCH AGENDA .....	379
<b>REFERENCES .....</b>	<b>382</b>
<b>APPENDIX 1 LOCATIONS OF RESEARCH CASES IN TAIYUAN AND SHENZHEN.....</b>	<b>406</b>
<b>APPENDIX 2 CODE OF SCHOOL CASES' DOCUMENTS .....</b>	<b>407</b>

## LIST OF TABLES

Table 1.1: Development of <i>minban</i> schools (1994-2007) .....	2
Table 1.2: Statistics on secondary schools, students and graduates by types of operators (2007) .....	3
Table 2.1: Comparison of approaches .....	20
Table 2.2: Three pillars of institutions .....	31
Table 3.1: Statistics on <i>minban</i> secondary education (1994-1996) .....	62
Table 3.2: Statistics on <i>minban</i> secondary education (1997-2001) .....	68
Table 3.3: Statistics on <i>minban</i> secondary education (2002-2007) .....	74
Table 4.1: Comparing old and new features of the institutional environment.....	116
Table 5.1: Complete list of EID of provinces and municipalities (2003) .....	124
Table 5.2: The EDI of Guangdong and Shanxi .....	125
Table 5.3: The categories of cases .....	127
Table 5.4: Profile of the selected cases .....	128
Table 5.5: Interviewees of research .....	131
Table 6.1: Statistics of secondary school in Taiyuan .....	135
Table 6.2: Number of school by level and type in Shenzhen (1985-2007).....	140
Table 6.3: Statistics of <i>minban</i> secondary schools in Taiyuan .....	145
Table 6.4: Comparing between Taiyuan and Shenzhen .....	175
Table 6.5: Income of Taiyuan and Shenzhen (1989-2007).....	184
Table 7.1: The tuition fees and value of scholarships at School M (2008) .....	202
Table 7.2: Revenue of School M (2003 & 2004).....	204
Table 7.3: The tuition fees and value of scholarships at School X (2008) .....	215
Table 7.4: Scholarships for returning students at School X (2008) .....	216
Table 7.5: Revenue of School X.....	216
Table 7.6: Timetable of School X in the winter semester (Monday to Friday) .....	221
Table 7.7: The tuition fees at School D .....	228
Table 7.8: The Revenues of School Q (2007 & 2008) .....	240
Table 7.9: The timetable for student recruitment (grade 7) to School Q in 2009 .....	242

Table 7.10: Tuition fees of School Y (2009).....	249
Table 7.11: Four stages of converted school experimentation .....	286
Table 8.1: Contextual and institutional sources of change agents .....	294
Table 8.2: Typologies of <i>minban</i> schools and local institutional environments .....	296
Table 9.1: The roles defined by local governments .....	367
Table 9.2: The extent of local government control.....	368

## LIST OF FIGURES

Figure 2.1: The framework of new institutionalism.....	24
Figure 3.1: Annual growth rate of <i>minban</i> secondary schools .....	50
Figure 4.1: Framework of research .....	117
Figure 6.1: Location of Taiyuan Municipality within Shanxi .....	134
Figure 6.2: Location of Shenzhen within Guangdong .....	138
Figure 6.3: Resident Population in Shenzhen (1979-2007) .....	139
Figure 8.1: Modes of control and modal teacher types.....	293
Figure 8.2: The promotion path of teacher in School Y .....	335
Figure 9.1: The differential order of <i>minban</i> schools .....	371