

MASTER'S THESIS

A study of social capital and educational achievement of rural students in China

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Against All the Odds:

A Study of Social Capital and Educational Achievement of Rural Students in

China

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Abstract

The current study addresses the issue of educational stratification in China. One of the theoretical frameworks of studying educational stratification process is the social capital theory. This line of studies takes the view that social capital can enhance academic performance of students from disadvantaged groups if they are able to get access to social capital from family, school or community. The current study applies this framework to study the educational achievement of rural students in China. Using the data from 11 in-depth interviews with students who currently study at Peking University or Tsinghua University, and who come from rural area in China, the current study has clearly revealed the power of social capital in the process of educational attainment process. The rural students in the study have all faced tremendous difficulties, due to their disadvantaged social origin. However, they never faced these difficulties alone. Throughout their journey from a small village to one of the best universities in China, they were supported by various members of their social networks, and their amazing achievement in the end is nothing but a collective achievement. Both family and school are vital sources of social capital in their educational attainment process. The study sheds light on the role of social capital for instrumental actions, and on the educational attainment process of the disadvantaged youth in general.

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