Why I Criticize the High School Affiliated to Renmin University of China

Yang Dongping

Some people do not understand that why I criticize the High School Affiliated to Renmin University of China (HSARUC), and they even guess that perhaps some personal grudge exists. This is not true. As a matter of fact, I never ever prejudice against such key schools. Moreover, I graduated from Shanghai High School, one of well-known key schools.

I am a researcher on educational public policy and educational equality. Apart from rural education and education of children of migrant workers, I also pay close eyes on issues of compulsory education in big cities, including fierce school choice competition, Mathematical Olympiad Competition training, examination-oriented education and so forth. These are not only issues that mostly complained by the public, but also issues that are key to the balanced development and improvement of compulsory education in China. So it is necessary for us to study the case of HSARUC. It is well-known to all that every year, HSARUC’s enrollment rate to Tsinghua University and Peking University is several times of that of other key schools. The number of students entering Tsinghua and Beijing University is about 160 this year. However, about ten years ago, HSARUC had similar reputation compared with other key schools, and the Tsinghua Beijing University enrollment rate was far below that of the Beijing No. Four Middle School. Then, what is the secret for the dramatic development of HSARUC?

In the late of 1990s, in order to maintain the order and principles of compulsory education, National Ministry of Education required that all the exemplary high schools should be independent from junior high schools. However, HSARUC and other five high schools filed application to maintain the junior high school section in their schools to meet the need of educational experiment. This was the start of the ‘nightmare’. HSARUC established Renhua School, which took the lead in providing the Mathematical Olympiad Competition training for primary school students. In that school, students started to take weekly examinations from the third grade. Students who ranked low in the exams were washed out and only those with high scores got the opportunity to enroll in the junior high school. This ‘education model’ was copied

* Source: Yang Dongping’s blog. Yang Dongping 杨东平, the Director of the 21st Century Education Research Institute.
by other key schools and the Mathematical Olympiad Competition training for primary school students, the pre-selection class, and the school-selection fees are becoming more and more popular. The influence of HSARUC was expanded from Haidian District to the whole Beijing City, and even throughout the nation.

Nowadays, high schools in most places like Shanghai, Jiangsu Province and Zhejiang Province still follow the rule that exemplary high schools should not have junior high school sections and take this as the precondition of exemplary high school evaluation. But most of the key high schools in Beijing, such as the No. Four Middle School and No. Eight Middle School, resumed their previously canceled junior high school sections in order to compete with HSARUC. This resulted in the establishment of a batch of key junior high schools, which should be a part of the compulsory education. This is the reason for the heated competition of junior high school enrollment in Beijing.

The first step to evaluate a school's value and functions is to distinguish between compulsory education and non-compulsory education. This is because compulsory education should be the fundamental public service funded by the nation. Everyone should enjoy equal education opportunity, without the burden of going through the selection, elimination and competition processes. If HSARUC only had the high school section, it might be a very outstanding school. But the fact is that it also has a junior high school section, whose enrollment is highly selective. This violates *the Compulsory Education Act*. Then, how could we justify its legal status as a public school?

HSARUC is a typical example of a kind of schools. It is not difficult to gather all resources on building a few very outstanding “super schools” in any places in China. Yet the establishment of such ‘super schools’ is becoming a worried phenomenon. These key schools are not respectable because their achievements are based on special favorable policies, which enable them to recruit the best teachers in the area and enroll the students with best text scores. Their fame is brought by the good students. The outstanding achievements of these schools are at the cost of decreasing resources for other schools in the area, which harms the local educational ecology and violates students' educational interests as a whole. For example, in some area, we have seen a phenomenon called “Shortage of Educational Resources in County Schools”. What's worse, key schools in Beijing not only enjoy all kinds of privileges in Beijing, but also tries to hire highest-ranking teachers and senior teachers in other provinces. How many efforts do those provinces take to cultivate the good teachers? Isn't it fair to say that these key schools are benefiting themselves at the expense of the others by all means? Won't these behaviors further widen the educational disparity? Shall we still call these schools exemplary schools serving public interest?

Therefore, the meaning of building one single school with great achievements is very limited. In a seminar we held years ago, Liu Pengzhi, the head master of HSARUC, presented accomplishments of the school, saying that the school offered over ten foreign languages courses, including Spanish, Italian and so on. But headmasters from