

Analysis of Educational Anxiety under the “Double Reduction” Policy in the Context of “Involution”

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Abstract: Originally unique to the economic domain, the phenomenon of “involution” has extended its reach into the realm of education with the development of the times. In China, the manifestation of “involution” in education has emerged as a significant driver of educational anxiety, mainly drawing widespread attention at the compulsory education stage. The Chinese central government introduced the “Double Reduction” Policy in July 2021 to mitigate parental educational anxiety and foster a conducive educational ecosystem. This paper analyzes the “Double Reduction” policy from the perspective of “involution,” delving into the underlying rationale of “Double Reduction” as a means to alleviate educational anxiety. Furthermore, it scrutinizes the potential risks inherent in the “involution” of compulsory education and the escalation of educational anxiety in the post- “Double Reduction” era and provides some suggestions to mitigate these risks. The findings of this study not only serve as a catalyst for research into the “involution” of China’s compulsory education system but also present fresh insights into mitigating educational anxiety.

Keywords: involution, Double Reduction Policy, educational anxiety, China’s education

1. Introduction

The “Double Reduction” policy, issued jointly by the General Office of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of China and the General Office of the State Council on July 24, 2021, represents China’s primary strategy for combating the “involution” of compulsory education, the state-mandated education for all school-age children and adolescents between the ages of 6 and 15. This policy consists primarily of two key facets to enable students to refocus their learning within the school environment and fully leverage the school’s central role in student education. Firstly, it seeks to alleviate the academic burdens placed on students by comprehensively reducing the total homework workload and its duration, as well as diminishing the demands of extracurricular training. Secondly, it aims to alleviate the burden on parents, primarily through reductions in family education expenditures [1]. The effective implementation of the “Double Reduction” policy has led to a reduction in the academic workload on students and a decline in the enthusiasm for extracurricular training [2]. However, research conducted by Chen et al. suggests that parental education anxiety endures and continues to spread in localized contexts [3].

Currently, there is a scarcity of studies examining the existence and proliferation of educational anxiety in the post-“Double Reduction” era. Therefore, by critically assessing the current academic research on the effects of the “Double Reduction” policy on educational anxiety in China, this paper

aims to analyze the sources of anxiety in China's compulsory education from an "involution" perspective, comprehensively understand the underlying rationale behind the "Double Reduction" policy in mitigating educational anxiety, and delve into the additional risks confronting China's compulsory education in the post-"Double Reduction" era and the reasons for their emergence. Concurrently, this paper will provide practical strategies for averting the "involution" of compulsory education in the post-"Double Reduction" era to inspire further research on the "involution" of China's compulsory education system and the phenomenon of educational anxiety.

2. Meaning of "Involution"

The concept of "involution" was initially introduced by American anthropologist Clifford Geertz in his analysis of the economic development of the Javanese rural society. Geertz defined it as a phenomenon occurring when labor, due to limited capital and land resources, continues to be absorbed into agriculture for income, leading to internal refinement without increased productivity [4]. In China, "involution" is now used more broadly, detached from its original anthropological and sociological context, encompassing any excessive competitive societal phenomenon. This broader usage poses risks. In its original sociological context, the mitigation of "involution" often entailed transitioning from a natural economy to a market-driven one. However, numerous contemporary instances of "involution" are, paradoxically, byproducts of capitalist logic, notably exemplified in the realm of education strongly encourage authors to use this document for the preparation of the camera-ready [5]. Please follow the instructions closely in order to make the volume look as uniform as possible.

Scholars have proposed alternative definitions for educational involution. For instance, scholars from the Institute of Curriculum and Instruction, East China Normal University, define it as expanding education in quantity and scale without improved quality, leading to diminishing returns due to various investments in educational capital [6]. Analogous to the "theater effect," where the rising of front-row spectators (representing households with better access to more educational resources) induces a cascading effect compelling all spectators to stand. Despite the increased effort, the overall viewing experience (representing educational outcomes) has not improved. Anthropologist Xiang Biao further accentuates that education is not inherently market-oriented; instead, exams are typically set by the state or educational institutions. Nevertheless, education simulates market competition through mechanisms such as entrance examinations, thereby incentivizing participation. Due to the entrenched singular nature and formidable resistance to change within the value assessment system and competitive mechanisms, heightened competition ensues with an escalating number of participants [7]. Drawing from previous scholarship, this paper distills three pivotal characteristics emblematic of the "involution" phenomenon: 1. Excessive resource allocation leads to heightened refinement; 2. Breaking free from existing constraints is challenging; 3. Fierce internal competition prevails.

3. Causes of Educational Anxiety in Compulsory Education Through the Lens of "Involution"

Educational anxiety has pervaded Chinese society and is experienced by all educational participants, including students, parents, and teachers [2]. In this paper, educational anxiety refers to the phenomenon that parents and students are overly worried, apprehensive, or even fearful of the educational environment and educational outcomes, and based on such emotions, they implement excessive educational behaviors (e.g., participating in a variety of extracurricular tutorials), which further bring about their psychological pressures and illnesses. In recent years, the intensification of "involution" within compulsory education has accentuated educational anxiety, becoming an

enduring concern for students and parents [3]. Leveraging the foundational principles and characteristics of “involution,” this paper amalgamates existing literature to scrutinize the roots of educational anxiety across three dimensions: over-investment of educational resources, score-oriented value evaluation system, and parental parenting concepts influenced by traditional culture.

3.1. Over-investment of Educational Resources

The prolonged enforcement of China’s One-child policy during its formative years has engendered considerable familial expectations and investment in children’s education. Parents ardently strive to secure the finest education for their offspring and continue to allocate substantial resources to this endeavor. According to a comprehensive study presented in the “China’s Blue Book of Children,” approximately 60.4% of Chinese children between the ages of 3 and 15 engage in extracurricular education activities. Among these activities, academic tutoring consumes most of their time [8]. It is worth noting that there is a dearth of research demonstrating a decrease in family education expenditures for children due to the shift from China’s One-child policy to policies promoting higher birth rates. On the contrary, existing research suggests that many families are reluctant to have more children due to the substantial financial investment required to raise a child [9]. Concurrently, as society and the economy have steadily progressed, there has been a pursuit of elevated educational quality, differentiation, and personalization [6]. In response to parental demands, extracurricular training institutions have expanded their repertoire beyond conventional subjects like language, mathematics, and English and meticulously tailored their training programs to the nuances of each discipline. For instance, language training has recently been subdivided into discrete components such as writing and reading. While these specialized modules may seem comprehensive, they effectively serve as skills-oriented training tailored to examination requisites [6, 10]. This trajectory has inexorably pushed extracurricular subject training toward a path of “involution.” The ever-finer calibration of subject-specific training content and the heightened significance that parents attach to extracurricular instruction necessitate substantial financial and energy investments. However, the influx of capital and the relentless refinement of extracurricular training content have intensified the educational competition landscape. This has precipitated a vicious cycle wherein parents and children are ensnared, ultimately exacerbating educational anxiety. Rather than abating, this phenomenon has transformed into severe educational anxiety.

3.2. The Score-oriented Value Evaluation System

The issues prevailing within China’s current examination and assessment system can be delineated as follows: 1. An undue emphasis on examination scores while sidelining other forms of assessment, such as process evaluation and comprehensive appraisal, which can reveal students’ developmental potential. 2. A singular reliance on paper-and-pencil examinations constitutes the primary assessment method [11]. China employs a highly selective education system with a limited number of students reaching the apex of the educational hierarchy. Examinations play a pivotal role in determining student success. Upon entering the education system, students in China are immediately confronted with a barrage of examinations. With the rapid expansion of primary education enrollment and increased retention and progression rates, the demand for secondary education has surged. Consequently, governments in the region utilize examinations as gatekeepers for entry into educational institutions, indicators of academic achievements, and tools for quality control [12]. Furthermore, only those who excel in the Gaokao, the National College Entrance Examination, can gain admission to prestigious universities, secure desirable jobs, and access ideal career opportunities.

The pressures of advancing to higher education impact students, parents, and teachers. To alleviate the educational anxiety stemming from this academic rat race, students, parents, and teachers are

compelled to adopt strategies they perceive as effective in achieving higher scores. They transform the holistic educational objective of “moral, intellectual, physical, aesthetic, and labor” development into the practical goal of excelling in subject-specific examinations. Consequently, students engage in increasingly specialized and intensive extracurricular tutoring sessions [6]. Despite efforts, the situation remains unchanged, even with the issuance of the “Comprehensive Plan for Deepening Educational Evaluation Reform in the New Era” by the Central Committee of the Communist Party of China on October 13, 2020. The plan aimed to shift schools’ focus towards cultivating students’ essential skills, qualities, and value systems while introducing various assessment methods beyond paper-and-pencil tests [13]. Nonetheless, students continue to invest substantial time, energy, and financial resources in pursuit of marginal score improvements. Without these score increments, recognition remains elusive despite outstanding achievements in other areas, such as athletics, exceptional artistic talents, or remarkable social responsibility, thereby engendering immense pressure and anxiety [10].

3.3. “Jiwa” Parenting

The enduring Chinese adage “Diligence begets success” has profoundly shaped parental philosophies within China [14]. This age-old maxim has imbued Chinese families with a standardized parenting ethos rooted in the belief that education can alter an individual’s destiny. Within China’s fiercely competitive milieu, where quality educational resources and suitable employment opportunities are scarce, given its vast population, scholastic achievement and admission into prestigious universities have evolved into the primary metrics for evaluating talent. Parents’ fervent quest for top-tier resources and their enthusiastic embrace of after-school tutoring underscore their earnest desire to furnish their offspring with the finest life. This, in turn, accentuates the significance Chinese parents attach to power, social status, and societal acclaim.

Nowadays, the epoch of zealous Chinese parents collectively referred to as “Tiger Moms” has given way to a burgeoning parenting phenomenon known as “Jiwa.” Translated literally, “Jiwa” parenting means injecting chicken blood into children to incentivize their pursuit of academic excellence, originating from an unverified medical practice of injecting chicken blood into the human body to boost energy. Moreover, “Jiwa” denotes children participating in extracurricular courses and training. “Jiwa” parenting shares similarities with Tiger Moms and helicopter parenting but also exhibits significant differences. The essential of “Jiwa” parenting is the parents’ strong sense of moral responsibility to assist their children in achieving success and their heightened emphasis on their children’s academic development instead of the authoritarian and power-oriented approach. “Jiwa” parenting places immense pressure and anxiety on parents, as they feel compelled to motivate their children, even if they are unwilling, uninterested, or unhappy about it [15]. While in the past, the aspiration for children to achieve greatness was merely a natural inclination of being parents, today’s generation considers not engaging in “Jiwa” parenting as inadequate. “Jiwa” parenting signifies a refusal to accept mediocrity in children and is seen as standard practice for highly educated parents. Thus, more and more parents arrange numerous extracurricular tutoring sessions for their children, which, in turn, adds to their stress. However, it is essential to note that immersing oneself in intensive education, focusing resources and attention solely on one child, can make any academic underperformance by the child serve as a breaking point for parental emotions. After emotional breakdowns, it can be inferred that parents may resort to verbal or physical punishments towards their children, further exacerbating their educational anxiety and other negative emotions.

4. Analysis of the “Double Reduction” Policy in Alleviating Educational Anxiety

The “Double Reduction” policy places significant emphasis on four core areas: the comprehensive reduction of homework volume and duration, the enhancement of after-school services within schools, the regulation of extracurricular training, and the adjustment of evaluation standards [State Council]. These four focal points underscore China’s effort to mitigate the excessive allocation of educational resources, challenge the prevailing dominance of exam scores in student evaluations, and promote a shift in parenting philosophies.

4.1. Mitigating Over-investment in Educational Resources

The first strategic rationale behind the “Double Reduction” policy is to curtail excessive educational resource investment. First and foremost, the policy specifies that “the average completion time for written homework in grades three to six of primary school should not exceed 60 minutes, and the average completion time for written homework in junior high school should not exceed 90 minutes [1].” This regulation demonstrates the Chinese government’s commitment to substantially reducing the time allocated for homework, thereby preventing the over-allocation of time resources and consequent wastage. Moreover, the policy dictates, “Subject-based training institutions are strictly prohibited from going public for financing, and capitalization is strictly prohibited... Schools should enhance the quality of their after-school services and provide tutoring and assistance to students facing learning challenges [1].” These stipulations have effectively halted the unchecked expansion of subject-based extracurricular training institutions driven solely by profit motives. They have also been a cautionary measure for parents who uncritically embraced enrolling their children in extracurricular training. The government has successfully curbed the excessive infusion of family and societal capital into these institutions through rigorous oversight and evaluation of subject-based extracurricular training. By preempting extracurricular training organizations from manipulating public sentiment to induce excessive parental anxiety, which often results in substantial financial and temporal investments, and by promoting the utilization of on-campus resources, the policy has, to a certain degree, ameliorated educational anxiety.

4.2. Reducing the Weight of Exam Scores in Student Evaluation

The second strategic logic of the “Double Reduction” policy involves reforming student assessment standards. It aims to break the prevailing cycle of educational involution and steer compulsory education toward focusing on quality education rather than exam-oriented learning. The “Double Reduction” policy explicitly dictates that local governments and schools must vigorously transcend the predominant reliance on exam scores in educational evaluations. It emphasizes the need to reform student assessments, instill a scientific perspective on talent cultivation, and establish specific criteria for evaluating moral, artistic, physical, and vocational education. It also advocates the incorporation of comprehensive qualitative assessments into the criteria for student advancement and recognition [1]. Moreover, the “Double Reduction” policy underscores the imperative for educators to shift their teaching paradigms. Educators are encouraged to connect classroom content with real-world problems, enabling students to develop independent thought processes and knowledge systems through problem-solving in practical life scenarios. The policy discourages the mere immersion of students in abstract textbook knowledge or the reliance on rote memorization strategies to enhance problem-solving skills. Furthermore, schools are expected to enhance after-school services, allowing academically capable students to proactively engage in extracurricular activities, thereby promoting holistic student development in moral, intellectual, physical, artistic, and vocational aspects. Ideally, students and parents should no longer experience anxiety over minor variations in subject-specific exam scores, and they should be able to alleviate academic-related stress through participation in

diverse extracurricular activities. These requirements are pivotal in dismantling educational involution and alleviating educational anxiety.

4.3. Promoting a Shift in Current Parenting Philosophy

The “Double Reduction” policy’s third strategic rationale aims to establish a collaborative framework among government entities, educational institutions, and families, breaking the mold of conventional parenting models, especially the “Jiwa” parenting method, resulting in collectively mitigating the adverse effects of “involution.” As previously mentioned, the “Double Reduction” policy mandates enhanced governmental oversight of extracurricular training institutions to prevent the dissemination of misleading educational perceptions and the resultant anxiety among parents. This measure disabuses parents of the notion that their children’s prospects and parenting prowess hinge solely on enrollment in additional extracurricular classes. Furthermore, as an auxiliary measure within the “Double Reduction” policy framework, the “Notice on the Control of Advertising for Extracurricular Training,” jointly issued by regulatory bodies such as the State Administration for Market Regulation, specifies that local governments should promote correct parenting beliefs through various means, such as producing and disseminating public service advertisements, to alleviate parental anxiety [16].

The “Double Reduction” policy also underscores that schools’ provision of high-quality and diverse after-school services constitutes a pivotal means for parents to deviate from traditional parenting patterns. These services offer benefits on two fronts. Firstly, they allow parents to reevaluate the outcomes of extracurricular training by witnessing the positive impact of their children’s participation in after-school tutoring and consultation services, reduce parents’ overreliance on extracurricular training, and clarify the roles of both families and schools in the education process. Secondly, students’ involvement in practical activities during these after-school services helps parents identify their children’s unique interests and talents. Practical activities will encourage parents to explore alternative developmental pathways and prompt self-reflection on their parenting methods, fostering a deeper understanding of comprehensive assessment and holistic development. Ultimately, this empowers parents to provide more targeted educational guidance for their children, moving away from the relentless pursuit of high-quality educational resources emblematic of the “involution” phenomenon.

5. Potential Risks of Compulsory Education “Involution” and Escalation of Educational Anxiety in the Post-“Double Reduction” Era

Before implementing the “Double Reduction” policy, Chinese students and parents were trapped in a competitive educational landscape, necessitating the adoption of aggressive competitive strategies. The “Involution” of compulsory education should be considerably managed in the post- “Double Reduction” era, and its growth should be more equitable and balanced, as well as less stressful for all educational participants. However, empirical research suggests that parental anxiety does not appear to be subsiding uniformly but rather exhibits indications of intensification in certain facets [3, 17]. Inquiries such as “Will a reduction in homework and exams adversely affect children’s learning outcomes?” have proliferated across online platforms, engendering widespread discussions within parental circles. This section will elucidate three critical dimensions of unresolved issues stemming from the “Double Reduction” policy, which may potentially exacerbate the involution of compulsory education and propagate heightened educational anxiety.

5.1. Gap Between Targeted Tutoring Demand and Current School Education

China’s education quality, encompassing after-school services, remains insufficient in catering to parents’ requirements for tailored educational resources, thereby sustaining parental anxiety.

Preceding the introduction of the “Double Reduction” policy, parents confronted a quandary. Abstaining from extracurricular tutoring risked their children “falling behind” peers with enhanced prospects of securing admission to prestigious institutions. However, engaging in tutoring heightened their children’s learning pressure and escalated familial burdens. Subsequent to implementing the “Double Reduction” policy, parental anxiety endures. This is attributed to the mounting difficulty in satisfying genuine demands for targeted tutoring by parents and students, including the needs of students with learning difficulties to make up for the gap, the improvement requisites of average students, and the augmented knowledge requirements of exceptional students. Currently, school education predominantly focuses on ensuring the acquisition of fundamental knowledge and skills for the majority, rendering it arduous to furnish personalized education tailored to the diverse needs of students. Additionally, it is worth noting that there’s no clear evidence that most schools have adopted diverse student assessment standards, indicating that exam scores still significantly influence students’ academic progression [6]. If school education, as the supply-side entity, cannot adequately address the multifaceted “demand-related anxieties” of parents, it may inadvertently precipitate a predilection for “crisis intervention” and thereby exacerbate educational involution. For instance, many parents are already apprehensive that their children might become casualties of the policy. Consequently, they contemplate resorting to measures such as “crowdfunding for private tutoring” and “one-on-one” tutoring to compensate for the diminishing opportunities in extracurricular tutoring stemming from the “Double Reduction” policy [3]. Parents and students who cannot find acceptable options may be anxious after discovering that nearby students have accessed tutoring through alternative channels. Although it would appear that students can “get back to the same starting line” after rectifying extracurricular tutoring institutions, this is not the case.

5.2. The Difficult-to-govern Chaos of Tutoring

The “Double Reduction” policy seeks to address the disarray in extracurricular tutoring, curtail the uncontrolled expansion of capital in this domain, and restore the educational system to its fundamental purpose of nurturing individuals. Nevertheless, the veiled rectification efforts motivated by profit-seeking capital continue to disrupt the educational landscape by creating alternative forms of tutoring, such as one-on-one private tutoring and online pre-recorded classes. Due to their small scale and heightened concealment, monitoring and regulation have become more challenging compared to the period preceding the “Double Reduction” policy’s implementation [6]. Despite the policy’s constraints on advertising by education and training institutions, many extracurricular training centers still attract new clients by relying on the patronage of existing customers and word-of-mouth referrals based on their past reputation [18].

Furthermore, numerous extracurricular institutions adhere to the “Double Reduction” policy’s directives by recruiting teachers skilled in physical education, self-management, literary literacy, humanistic aesthetics, scientific thinking, and more. They actively explore and expand their offerings to encompass courses in subject-specific literacy like classical literature and comprehensive skills such as time management, programming, and physical education. Some institutions have even initiated tutoring programs for parents, such as “How to help junior high school children complete their English homework” [18]. The developmental trajectory of these emerging extracurricular training centers remains uncertain. They may evolve along a standardized path, eventually maturing into professional, effective, and dependable complements of formal education. Alternatively, they may inadvertently contribute to the proliferation of educational anxiety and further exacerbate the involution of holistic developmental education.

5.3. Risks of Promoting Inequality in Compulsory Education

As previously discussed, the “Double Reduction” policy restricts subject-specific extracurricular training while permitting non-subject-related training. Non-subject tutoring may increasingly become the legal and overt norm. It is plausible to anticipate that parents with ample resources will not only continue subject-based training through various veiled avenues but also upscale their investments in non-subject tutoring within legal bounds. Those lacking the resources for subject-based tutoring may attempt to enhance their children’s competitiveness by enrolling them in additional non-subject training programs. Consequently, parents and students lacking the financial means to engage in any form of extracurricular tutoring may experience heightened anxiety due to the pressures associated with accessing higher education. In other words, the “Double Reduction” policy could fail to effectively regulate the refinement and over-investment of educational resources, exacerbating educational anxiety and widening educational disparities.

In addition, it is important to note that participation in non-subject training within extracurricular services may exacerbate disparities in the availability of such services between urban and rural areas and across different regions. This discrepancy has repercussions on the equity of compulsory education. For instance, less developed regions may offer rudimentary extracurricular services, primarily focused on assisting students with homework and addressing their queries. In contrast, economically prosperous areas can harness their abundant cultural resources and advanced technological capabilities to introduce diverse extracurricular services. As a result, these disparities in service offerings may contribute to heightened educational inequality.

6. Suggestions to Alleviate the “Involution” of Compulsory Education and Educational Anxiety in China

Building upon the above discussion, this paper outlines strategies for mitigating the intensification of involution and educational anxiety in compulsory education in the post- “Double Reduction” era through four directions.

6.1. Advancing the Implementation of Comprehensive Assessment

Research suggests that exams do not necessarily induce excessive pressure and anxiety [6]. Instead, the misuse and overuse of exam results (scores) within the current school education system, such as ranking and accountability based on scores, are the direct causes of the involution of compulsory education. Diminishing the weight of scores in entrance exams and expediting the establishing of a comprehensive quality assessment system oriented towards holistic education can help all educational participants understand the relationship between exam scores and student development. While the “Double Reduction” policy has created specific conditions for alleviating burdens and anxieties for parents and students from external environmental and policy perspectives, breaking cognitive barriers is necessary for students and parents to fundamentally alleviate their educational anxiety. Specifically, parental concern should extend beyond academic achievements to encompass their children’s personal growth, including but not limited to exploring interests and hobbies. Furthermore, the government should introduce more policy guidelines for teacher training and assessment reforms, helping educators reduce the comparative aspect of exam scores and their role in evaluating learning capabilities. This includes a gradual improvement of moral education assessment, reinforcement of physical education assessment, enhancement of aesthetic education assessment, and strengthening of vocational education assessment. These measures will allow students and parents to better understand students’ inherent developmental potential and alleviate anxiety.

6.2. Enhancing the Quality of After-school Services

Elevating the quality of after-school school services is a paramount measure in alleviating parental anxiety. Schools can opt for a modular teaching approach in these services, wherein subject teachers and curriculum content remain consistent, enabling students to select classes tailored to their capabilities and interests. This approach accommodates various needs, whether it's remediation, enrichment beyond the textbooks, or nurturing artistic talents. Only by relocating the educational epicenter back within the school premises can the adverse impacts stemming from external tutoring institutions, which are challenging to regulate comprehensively, be fundamentally reduced. Ideally, the national government should provide unified paradigms and requirements for after-school services provided by schools and try to avoid differences in quality among schools due to differences in school type and geographical location.

6.3. Strengthening the Regulation of Extracurricular Tutoring Institutions

The government should find ways to harness the power of public oversight, establish a reward system for reporting, and legally combat disguised subject-specific tutoring practices. Strict regulations and incentive policies should be implemented to facilitate the legitimate transformation of extracurricular training institutions, preventing the emergence of more unmonitored underground training markets. Simultaneously, the government should enhance public opinion guidance and undertake proactive publicity and public education efforts to prevent irrational “non-subject tutoring frenzies” from occurring.

6.4. Mitigating the Pervasive Competitive Culture

Ingrained in Chinese culture, elements like the aspiration for children to attain success, the reverence for diligence over innate talent, and the belief in education as the paramount avenue for social progress have long shaped parental expectations. While these cultural underpinnings underscore Chinese society's reverence for knowledge and learning, regrettably, they taint the essence of education with competitive and utilitarian undertones. These profoundly entrenched cultural paradigms subtly influence contemporary parental competitiveness and anxiety. Hence, an imperative need arises to recalibrate the public discourse, diminishing the prominence of this competitive culture and proactively fostering a fresh ethos centered on “harnessing individual talents to the fullest.” Media outlets must actively shoulder their social responsibilities, recognizing that excessive promotion of “top scorers in college entrance examinations” and “prodigies progressing from junior college to bachelor's degrees” intensifies educational anxiety. Moreover, the sensationalization of “Jiwa” starkly contradicts the principles of quality education. Simultaneously, a novel cultural perspective must be propagated: education should no longer be perceived as “remedying weaknesses” by homogenizing disparities but should be seen as an avenue to “amplify strengths” while ensuring that gaps in deficiencies are addressed. This perspective entails an increased emphasis on recognizing students' distinctive intellectual strengths and their personalized development. Eventually, with concerted efforts from all quarters of society, compulsory education can provide tailored guidance and empower students to select a developmental trajectory more aligned with their inherent proclivities, ultimately realizing the proverbial adage, “There are three hundred and sixty trades, and every trade has its leading master.”

7. Conclusions

The “involution” within China's compulsory education system has significantly contributed to rising educational anxiety among students and parents. In recognition of the adverse effects of this

phenomenon, the Chinese central government responded strategically by implementing the “Double Reduction” Policy. This paper has comprehensively analyzed the “Double Reduction” policy within the context of “involution,” shedding light on its underlying motivations and associated risks. The examination has revealed three primary causes of educational anxiety in China’s compulsory education: excessive allocation of educational resources, a score-centric value assessment system, and the widespread adoption of the “Jiwa” parenting approach. Furthermore, this essay has elucidated how the “Double Reduction” policy addresses these concerns effectively.

Additionally, the paper has delved into potential post- “Double Reduction” era risks, encompassing the disparity in targeted tutoring demand, the chaos surrounding tutoring services, and the exacerbation of educational inequality. To counteract the “involution” of compulsory education and alleviate educational anxiety in China, this paper has proposed strategies such as advancing comprehensive assessment, elevating the quality of after-school services, reinforcing the oversight of extracurricular tutoring institutions, and diminishing the prevailing competitive culture.

Looking ahead, educators, policymakers, and the public must sustain their focus on educational anxiety. Given the absence of research on post- “Double Reduction” policy-era educational anxiety, this paper hopes it can serve as a catalyst, inspiring further attention, research, and program development to address this critical issue.

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